

INSPECTION REPORT

READING SCHOOL

Reading

LEA area: Reading

Unique reference number: 110097

Headteacher: Mr A Linnell

Reporting inspector: Mr D Driscoll
11933

Dates of inspection: 5th – 7th November 2001

Inspection number: 189360

Short inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Selective
School category:	Foundation
Age range of pupils:	11 to 18
Gender of pupils:	Boys
School address:	Reading School Erleigh Road Reading
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Dr P C H Mitchell
Date of previous inspection:	October 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities (sixth form)	Aspect responsibilities (sixth form)
11933	David Driscoll	Registered inspector		The school's results and students' achievements. How well are students taught? What sort of school is it? Leadership and management.
9086	Rosalie Watkins	Lay inspector		Students' attitudes, values and personal development. How well does the school work in partnership with parents? How well does the school care for its students?
12499	Marie Durkin	Team inspector	English	
19596	Bernard Treacy	Team inspector	Theatre studies English as an additional language Equality of opportunity	
4145	Christine Harrison	Team inspector	Physics	
22411	Anne Axon	Team inspector	Mathematics	
10297	David Cox	Team inspector	Design and technology	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to students?
15462	Cliff Blakemore	Team inspector	Economics Geography	
15832	John Vanstone	Team inspector	History	

20729	James Berry	Team inspector	Biology Chemistry	
21975	Ann King	Team inspector	French	
18846	Phillip Priest	Team inspector	Music	
18462	Bernard Jones	Team inspector	Physical education	

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Reading School is an average sized grammar school educating boys between the ages of 11 and 18. The number on roll has been rising steadily since the school was last inspected and now stands at 841, including 76 boarders. There are 249 students in the sixth form. The school is very popular and there are more parents wishing to send their sons to the school than there are places available. The school draws its pupils from a wide area around Reading. Boys are selected on the basis of their performance in an entrance examination and their attainment on entry to the school is very high. Most of the pupils who are boarders go home at weekends but a few pupils stay for the full term. The great majority of pupils are white, but there are significant proportions of pupils from Indian, Pakistani and Chinese backgrounds as well as small numbers of pupils from a very wide range of ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is higher than in most schools but almost all are fluent in English. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is well below average. There are two pupils with statements of special educational needs: one who is visually impaired and one with specific learning difficulties. Overall, the socio-economic circumstances of the pupils are very high in national terms.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is an excellent school where pupils of all backgrounds achieve standards by the end of Year 11 that are very much higher than would be expected given their attainment on entry to the school. Standards are very high throughout the school as a result of excellent teaching in the main school and very good teaching in the sixth form. The quality of leadership and management provided by the headteacher is outstanding. The school provides very good value for money. The boarding facility is entirely self-funded and provides outstanding value for money.

What the school does well

- Standards of work are very high throughout the school and examination results place the school in the top five per cent of schools nationally.
- Pupils in Years 7 to 11 achieve exceptionally well as a result of teaching that meets perfectly the needs of high attaining boys.
- Pupils' and students' attitudes to learning are outstanding.
- The school goes to exceptional lengths to broaden and enrich the education of all pupils and students.
- The outstanding leadership and management provided by the headteacher are ensuring that the already very high standards are improving at a rate that is faster than the national average.

What could be improved

- Pupils in Years 7 to 9 do not receive a sufficiently broad education in design and technology.
- The teaching in the sixth form, although very good, is not as good as that in Years 7 to 11.

The areas for improvement will form the basis of the governors' action plan.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made excellent progress since it was last inspected in 1996. Results in the national tests at the end of Year 9 and at GCSE level have improved at a rate that is above the national average, despite already being very high in 1996. Results at A level have improved at a similar rate to the national average. The teaching has improved as a result of the comprehensive systems that the school has for monitoring and supporting teaching. The weaknesses identified in the previous report have all been tackled with a single-minded determination by the headteacher and, as a result, all have been rectified.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by pupils at the end of Year 11 and sixth form students at the end of Year 13 based on average point scores in GCSE and A level/AS level examinations.

Performance in:	compared with			
	All schools			similar schools
	1999	2000	2001	2001
GCSE examinations	A*	A*	A*	A*
A levels/AS levels	A*	A*	N/A	

Key

very high A*

well above average A

above average B

average C

below average D

well below average E

Results in the national tests at the end of Year 9, the GCSE examinations and the A level examinations were all very high and place the school in the top five per cent of schools nationally. The national test results and GCSE results are in the top five per cent for selective schools, while the A level results are well above the average for all schools and colleges including independent schools. The results in Year 9 are very much higher than would usually be expected given the pupils' performance in the national tests when they were in Year 6. The same is true for the pupils' results at GCSE level, even when their very high attainment in Year 9 is taken into account. These very high standards occur in all subjects and achievement is excellent in Years 7 to 11. Standards in literacy and numeracy are exceptionally high. Results in both the national tests and GCSE examinations are rising at a rate that is above the national average.

National comparisons for A level results in 2001 were not available at the time of writing. The achievement in the sixth form is very good. Standards are very high in all subjects except biology, chemistry, design and technology, French, history and music where standards are well above average. Standards in the key skills of communication, application of number and information technology are very high. Results have risen at a rate that is similar to the national average.

Throughout the school there is no difference in the rate of progress made by pupils and students from different ethnic backgrounds or those who have special educational needs.

The school is too cautious in setting its targets for GCSE and has exceeded the targets for 2000 and 2001.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Excellent. Pupils and students demonstrate a great thirst for knowledge. Their keenness is demonstrated by the way that they arrive early at lessons and their involvement in a very wide range of activities.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Outstandingly good. Pupils and students are exceptionally well mannered. Behaviour in lessons is exemplary and there are no exclusions.
Personal development and relationships	Excellent. Pupils and students readily support one another. They become mature young adults at an early age and frequently engage in an exceptional level of academic discussion.
Attendance	Excellent. The attendance rate is very high and there are no unauthorised absences.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Years 7 – 9	Years 10 – 11	Years 12 – 13
Quality of teaching	Excellent	Excellent	Very good

Inspectors make judgements about teaching in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. 'Satisfactory' means that the teaching is adequate and strengths outweigh weaknesses.

The teaching in English, mathematics and science is excellent in Years 7 to 11 and leads to pupils from all backgrounds learning exceptionally well and making remarkable gains in knowledge, skills and understanding. Throughout Years 7 to 11, teachers are adept at using methods that meet the needs of high attaining boys particularly well. The school has placed a strong emphasis on improving standards in literacy and numeracy and the relevant skills are taught extremely well.

The teaching in Years 12 and 13 is very good and students learn very well. Teachers have an excellent knowledge of the subjects that they teach and make use of the students' willingness to learn and to work on their own initiative by setting extremely demanding homework. The difference in quality between the teaching in the sixth form and the main school is a result of too heavy a reliance, by some teachers, on a lecturing style of approach that fails to involve students and take full advantage of their excellent attitudes to learning. Nevertheless, teaching is very good in all subjects except biology, chemistry, design and technology, economics and geography, where it is good.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Very good in Years 7 to 11 and excellent in the sixth form. The range of subjects studied is exceptionally wide throughout the school and the programme of enrichment in the sixth form is outstanding. The school makes very good provision for pupils who are particularly gifted and talented. The breadth of experience is too narrow in design and technology in Years 7 to 9 and there is no work experience in Years 10 and 11.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Excellent. The small numbers of pupils with special educational needs mean that staff find it easy to provide them with highly effective support.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Excellent. Most pupils who speak English as an additional language are totally fluent in English and make the same excellent progress as other pupils. The very small number who are not fluent receive individual attention and make excellent progress.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural, development	Very good. The school makes very good provision for pupils' moral social and cultural development and satisfactory provision for pupils' spiritual development.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school has satisfactory arrangements for ensuring the health and safety of its pupils.

The opportunities for extra-curricular activities are excellent, with all staff taking at least one club or other activity. The curriculum for design and technology does not meet statutory requirements in Years 7 to 9 as pupils are not given the opportunity to work with food or textiles. The school does not contact a parent soon enough if their son does not arrive at school. The provision made for students who are boarders is exceptionally good and they receive a high degree of care.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Excellent. The outstanding leadership provided by the headteacher is ensuring that this is a school with a total absence of complacency about its already high standards. As a result, standards are rising rapidly.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Very good. The governors play a strong part in leading the school forward. They have an excellent knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Statutory requirements are not met in respect of design and technology and the provision of a daily act of collective worship.

The school's evaluation of its performance	Excellent. The senior managers monitor teaching through a comprehensive programme of classroom observations. Each subject is kept under constant review so that strengths are recognised and any weaknesses are quickly identified and tackled.
The strategic use of resources	Excellent. All spending, including that in individual departments, is clearly linked to the school's priorities. The use made of the special grant for being part of the national piloting of the Year 7 to 9 curriculum has been used exceptionally well to raise standards.

Teachers are very well matched, through their qualifications and experience, to the demands of the curriculum in the sixth form. The school has sufficient rooms for its students and the level of resourcing is very good. The management of the sixth form is good; high standards are being maintained but the analysis of examination data to show whether the school is adding value is not as good as that in Years 7 to 11. At present, the monitoring of the progress made by pupils from different ethnic backgrounds is carried out by sampling only, but the process is being expanded to include all pupils and students. Throughout the school, major decisions are carefully thought through and implications considered. However, there is not enough consultation with parents over important changes.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
Parents are very happy with almost all aspects of the school's work. All parents responding to the questionnaire felt that expectations were high.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The range of extra-curricular activities. • Consultation with parents over important matters.

The inspection team agrees completely with parents' positive views. The team disagrees over the range of extra-curricular activities, which is excellent. However, the team agrees that the school does need to take greater account of parents' views when taking major decisions.

ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM

READING SCHOOL

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form is larger than in most other schools and is growing in size. There are currently 249 male students in the sixth form, all of whom are studying for AS or A levels. Very few students leave the school at the end of Year 11, but around 20 join from other schools each year. The composition of the sixth form therefore matches that of the main school in terms of ethnic groupings and students' socio-economic backgrounds. All students entering the sixth form need a minimum of six GCSEs at grades A* to C, including B grades in the subjects that they intend to study (grade A in the case of mathematics). All students exceed these requirements and attainment on entry is therefore very high.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The school makes excellent provision for its students. Standards are very high and students are achieving very well. The quality of teaching is very good, resulting in students making exceptional gains in knowledge, skills and understanding. Standards, that were already very high at the time of the previous inspection, have improved at a rate similar to the national average. The school makes excellent provision for meeting the wider needs of students through its extensive programme of enrichment. The leadership and management of the sixth form are good and its cost effectiveness is very good.

Strengths

- Students have excellent attitudes to learning.
- Standards are very high and examination results are in the top five per cent nationally.
- The school makes exceptionally good provision to enrich the curriculum for all its students.

What could be improved

- The teaching, although very good, is not as good as that in Years 7 to 11.
- More use could be made of examination data to analyse the performance of individual subjects.

The areas for improvement will form the basis of the governors' action plan. Strengths and areas for improvement in individual subjects are identified in the sections on individual subjects in the full report.

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

The table below shows overall judgements about the provision in the subjects and courses that were inspected in the sixth form. Judgements are based mainly on the quality of teaching and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects in the sixth form were inspected.

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	Excellent. Students achieve very well as a result of very good teaching. The curriculum is excellent.

Chemistry	Good. Students achieve very well as a result of good teaching combined with the students' excellent work ethos.
Biology	Good. Students achieve well as a result of good teaching and the students' very good attitudes to learning.
Physics	Very good. Students achieve very well as a result of very good teaching.
Design and technology	Good. Students achieve well as a result of good teaching.
Economics	Good. Students achieve well as a result of good teaching.
Physical education	Very good. Students achieve very well as a result of very good teaching.
Music	Very good. Students achieve very well as a result of very good teaching.
Theatre studies	Very good. Students achieve very well as a result of very good teaching.
Geography	Good. Students achieve well as a result of good teaching.
History	Very good. Students achieve very well as a result of very good teaching.
English	Very good. Students achieve very well as a result of very good teaching.
French	Very good. Students achieve very well as a result of very good teaching.

In other subjects, work was sampled. In an excellent lesson in Latin, the standards were very high. Standards were also very high in a government and politics lesson where the teaching was very good. Teaching was very good in a religious education lesson that formed part of the general studies course; standards were well above average. Standards in an art lesson and in a classical civilisation lesson were above average. The teaching was good in art, but the rather mundane nature of the teaching in the classical civilisation lesson resulted in only satisfactory learning.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Very good. Students are provided with excellent guidance on their academic studies and future opportunities. The assessment of students is very good and good use is made of the information gained to help the individual student.

Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Good. The financial planning and the monitoring of teaching are excellent. The heads of subjects and the head of sixth form do not make enough use of examination data to identify strengths and weaknesses within subjects. The school ensures that all students have the same opportunities as their peers.
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STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The teaching, especially the expectations that teachers have of their students. • The standards that are achieved. • The confidence they have in gaining the qualifications that they will need for their future careers. • The availability and responsiveness of teachers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The quality of advice on careers. • The arrangements for assessing their work.

The team supports students' positive views of the sixth form, but disagrees with the negative views. The questionnaire had been sent out and the results collated before some students had received the first part of their careers education and before the first of the six-weekly reports. In the meeting with the registered inspector during the inspection, the students expressed no concerns over these aspects.

COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

Inspectors make judgements about provision in subjects and courses, and about leadership and management, in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. Excellent and very good are equivalent to the judgement "outstanding" in further education and sixth form college reports; poor and very poor are equivalent to "very weak".

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Standards of work are very high throughout the school and examination results place the school in the top five per cent of schools nationally.

1. The standards of work are very high throughout school. In Years 7 to 9 the standards in English, mathematics and science are all very high and results in the national tests are not only in the top five per cent nationally for all schools, but are also in the top five per cent of all grammar schools. The GCSE results were very high in all subjects except classical civilisation where they were above average. The overall results place the school in the top five per cent of grammar schools and of all schools nationally, and this takes no account of the results in additional mathematics because the qualification falls part way between GCSE and A level. This year the school received a national award for excellence.
2. Pupils read widely with terrific understanding of the text. In a Year 7 class for example, a pupil recognised a paraphrasing of a Keats' poem in a text he was reading, although he was not sure from which of two poems it was drawn! Standards of writing are also well above average. Pupils write fluently with excellent expression, although this is not always matched by the neatness of the handwriting. Standards of numeracy are quite outstanding throughout the school. The unnecessary use of calculators is strongly discouraged and this has led to pupils carrying out mental arithmetic of a demanding nature with relative ease. Many students study for the certificate in additional mathematics alongside their GCSE in Year 11. The standards in mathematics are so high that the school has been forced to apply more rigorous criteria for those wishing to study the subject in the sixth form. All students wishing to study the subject at A level must have at least a grade A in mathematics at GCSE level and the great majority of students in the sixth form study mathematics.
3. Practical skills that require elements of research, synthesis and evaluation are quite exceptional. In a Year 11 lesson in physics where pupils were carrying out their own investigations into the best potential difference for a heating element, for example, the pupils worked with an intense concentration, taking appropriate notes and checking their readings as a matter of course. They were quick to spot any slight anomalies and immediately repeated the experiment to ensure that their results were accurate. Many found ways of ensuring greater consistency between results, by, for example, clamping the heating element in the water so that the position was constant, without any prompting from the teacher.
4. Results in the sixth form place the school in the top five per cent of schools nationally and are well above the national average for all schools, including colleges and independent schools. This takes no account of the results of special papers, which are not included in national comparisons, as they are above the standard of A level. Over the last four years, results in almost all subjects have been at least well above average and most have been in the top five per cent nationally. In the most recent results the proportion of students gaining the higher grades of A and B was much higher than the average for grammar schools nationally in all subjects except geography and history where the proportions were above average. The standards of work seen during the inspection confirmed the very high standards shown by the examination results. Standards were either well above average or very high in all subjects, even for those students who are studying the subject for the first time, such as those studying government and politics, and who have been following the course

for only a few weeks. Standards in the key skills of communication, application of number and information technology are very high.

5. Parents and students alike recognise the high standards in the school. Parents, for example, praised the standards in every subject, by name, in the meeting with the registered inspector.

Pupils in Years 7 to 11 achieve exceptionally well as a result of teaching that meets perfectly the needs of high attaining boys.

6. Despite the very high standards of attainment of the pupils when they enter the school, the results in the national tests at the end of Year 9 are still much better than would usually be expected. For example, around 30 per cent of all pupils reach level 8 in English by the end of Year 9 when the national average, given their levels of attainment when they were in Year 6, is four per cent. A similar situation exists at GCSE level where pupils gained results that were much better than expected compared with the pupils' attainment in Year 9.
7. The reason for this very high level of achievement is the outstanding quality of the teaching that is quite perfect for high attaining boys. The starting point for the excellence in teaching is the teachers' knowledge of their subjects. All staff are very well qualified and so can deal with the sometimes extremely demanding questions asked by the pupils, such as the finer points of Greek grammar explained in a Year 11 lesson to pupils who were translating directly from the Greek without any reference to notes. Teachers also appreciate that the pupils will very quickly become bored if they are not stimulated intellectually and involved in the lesson. Lessons are planned to be very challenging and this continues into homework. Some parents were concerned that some homework is too difficult in Year 7, particularly in mathematics, but this is a deliberate policy on the part of the mathematics department in particular. The idea is that the setting of such tasks prepares pupils for the rigours that lie ahead, and the approach is entirely successful. The course is planned in such a way that the very highest attainers will be stretched but some of the lowest attainers may fail to get the correct answers. The teachers ensure that, for these pupils, the content is taught again and so all pupils become secure in their understanding. By Year 9, for example, the homework includes AS level questions for the highest attainers.
8. One or two parents felt that there should be more repetitive homework, so that pupils were practising a technique that they had learnt in school by working through problems at home. The teachers realise, however, that such an approach is not necessary, as pupils only have to be taught something once and the knowledge and understanding they gain will stick. This was evident in an excellent Year 9 chemistry lesson on the preparation of salts where pupils were simply told to write word and formula equations for the reactions without any help from the teacher, the point being that they had carried out similar tasks before and so would be able to do this one. The lesson was also exceptional for demonstrating the high expectations that teachers have of pupils' practical skills as the experiment involved a neutralisation technique that required a particularly cautious approach and deft touch on the part of pupils.
9. Having to teach a concept only once means that a huge amount of work can be covered in a single lesson so that the lesson time is used exceptionally well. Teachers appreciate, however, that the context of the lesson and the variation in the activities are also extremely important when taking account of the needs of the boys. In drama, for example, the pupils were really excited when they found that they were to be studying stage fighting. This was because it was a topic they found interesting

and also meant that no boy had to play a female role. In an art lesson the teacher had planned a variety of activities that fully involved the pupils in different ways. The lesson started with pupils evaluating the work produced by other members of the group. Pupils explained to their peers what they thought worked well and how the work could be improved. In this way the pupils were learning to evaluate and also to pick up new ideas about how their own work could be improved. The teacher then moved on to a computer presentation on the pupils' next project. This was to be a still life project, but one with a difference. After drawing a still life, the boys were to take a digital photograph of their work and then use computer-based image manipulation to develop the piece in the styles of different artists. The change in the levels of interest of the pupils between the time they thought they were just 'drawing a picture' to their realisation that they were going to use the computers was quite dramatic. Throughout the lesson the pupils were actively engaged, responding to the teacher's questions and posing their own, as well as telling the teacher where they had seen examples of a particular artist's work and how they felt about it. The homework for the lesson was then posted on the school's website so that all the research required could be carried out outside lesson time.

10. The result of this high quality teaching is an excellent pace of learning on the part of all pupils. The school is careful to take account of any particular needs, such as those of the pupils with special educational needs. There are very few such pupils, which allows teachers to focus on the individual. A pupil with visual impairment, for example, produces graphs on much larger paper so that he can see the overall patterns and evaluate the results. In this way, all pupils, regardless of background or ethnic grouping, make excellent progress.

Pupils' and students' attitudes to learning are outstanding.

11. Pupils and students have enquiring minds and actively seek to improve their standard of work. In many of the lessons, pupils' and students' attitudes were excellent. They want to learn, and enter into a genuine partnership with their teachers to do so. They listen to their teachers, and to each other, responsibly and maturely in all lessons. They contribute very well, and show respect for others in their relationships in lessons. Pupils and students form very constructive relationships with one another and with teachers and other adults in the school. When evaluating the work of another pupil, for example, care was taken to express criticism in a way that would help the pupil to improve and, as a result, the pupil felt encouraged to improve his work.
12. One of the most notable features of pupils' and students' attitudes to learning is the way in which they discuss their work. They constantly seek for meaning, and the fact that they are surrounded by other high attaining pupils, with whom they have developed excellent relationships, means that they can help one another. In a Year 11 physics lesson, the pupils were developing a way of measuring the thickness of paper using a light bulb and a light detector. All pupils had realised that they needed to reduce the ambient light level and so had put tubes of black paper between the lamp and detector. Two pupils, without any prompting, became engrossed in a discussion as to whether the length of tube was significant. One pupil argued the case that it was, because "...the amount of light reaching the detector is inversely proportional to the distance between the source and the detector." The other argued that this was not so, as "...the law only applied to open situations where there was scatter and that the tube compensated for this." The discussion continued for a short time with points being made about the colour of the paper and rates of absorption and reflection. Throughout there was a genuine interest on the part of each pupil in the other's viewpoint and a desire to learn from each other.

13. Pupils and students behave extremely well in lessons and around the school; there have been no exclusions since the headteacher arrived five years ago. Around the school pupils are very sensible in the way that they behave and respond to each other. They respect the rules, and show a high level of responsibility. Students in Years 12 and 13 act most responsibly. They follow the rules concerning use of time for private study, and they do not waste their time. Attendance is extremely high in the sixth form. Students have a strong sense of purpose and want to achieve high standards. In discussions with students in the sixth form, they explained that they viewed their time of A level study as an investment in their own future. They therefore wished to gain the best return on their investment and the way to do this was to experience high quality teaching and to work to the best of their ability. Year 12 and 13 students contribute very well to community service. Overall, students have very positive attitudes to their work and develop well as independent learners. They have high expectations of their teachers and are confident enough to express their displeasure if the standard of teaching does not meet their needs.

The school goes to exceptional lengths to broaden and enrich the education of all pupils and students.

14. The school provides an excellent range of opportunities for all aspects of pupils' and students' personal development. However, the atmosphere within the school, and the high quality of relationships throughout, have an even greater impact on pupils' and students' development into capable young adults. Staff provide excellent role models, notably in terms of their integrity, high expectations and respect for students. However, the sixth form students, being closer in age, have an even more important part to play in providing an example for younger pupils. Older students play a very active role in the school; they take on many duties, including those of prefects. To all their duties, they bring a sense of responsibility, good humour and commitment to the school.
15. There are high aspirations, tremendous vitality and great determination to succeed on the part of staff, pupils and students alike. The management of the school underpins these features by immaculate, detailed organisation and, above all, care for, and sensitivity to, the needs of each individual student. A very strong feature of the school is the way in which it encourages and manages the social development of the students. There are many opportunities for students to work together both in school and on external visits. Staff give freely of their time to support pupils and students who were experience difficulties with work; there is a strong bond between teachers and their charges.
16. Curricular arrangements for GCSE and in the sixth form are excellent with a broad range of learning opportunities being offered. Pupils and students are offered considerable choice in their subject options and some very careful timetabling enables the great majority of students to have their first choice of subjects. This is brought about by asking pupils and students which subjects they want to study before the option booklets are produced so that the number of clashes, that would mean a particular combination of subjects could not be studied, are kept to an absolute minimum. The extent to which the school's curriculum goes beyond the usual lessons is excellent. Students all join the combined cadet force or carry out service to the community or follow a course leading to the Sports Leaders Award. The range of extra-curricular activities is outstanding. All teachers are responsible for at least one club or activity and all activities are open to every pupil and student.

17. The opportunities for the pupils' social, moral and cultural development are very good. The inclusive nature of the school is a valuable asset. The rich ethnic mix ensures that pupils work in groups that contain pupils from a wide range of different ethnic groups. Hence, they learn about different cultures and come to respect different points of view. This serves as excellent preparation for life after school. The range of trips and visits is extremely wide with trips to many countries available as well as activities such as observing the work of parliamentary select committees and visiting universities. These all serve as social experiences that develop students' confidence and self-reliance.

The outstanding leadership and management provided by the headteacher are ensuring that the already very high standards are improving at a rate that is faster than the national average.

18. Since the arrival of the headteacher some five years ago the results in the national tests at the end of Year 9 and in the GCSE examinations have risen at a rate that is above the national average. This is despite results already being very high when the headteacher joined the school. This improvement is a result of outstanding leadership and management.
19. The headteacher has instilled an ethos of always striving to improve that permeates the school. For example, despite high standards, the school has placed considerable emphasis on improving the provision for literacy and numeracy skills in Years 7 to 9. This has resulted in improved standards of attainment and has had a knock-on effect in other subjects. The way that the new approaches have been implemented typifies the excellent planning in the school. Every year there is a rigorous review of performance for each subject and this leads to targets being drawn up both for the whole school and for individual subjects. Each target has clear criteria so that success, or otherwise, can be measured and the level of planning for meeting the targets is particularly detailed. The way in which the weaknesses identified in the previous inspection have been tackled has been exemplary and all have been converted into strengths.
20. The monitoring of teaching, managed by the second master, is exceptional in both its breadth and detail. All staff have been trained to observe lessons so that they can both carry out monitoring but also understand the features of high quality lessons. All teachers are monitored regularly and frequently. They receive detailed feedback on their lessons with points for improvement where necessary. Where significant weaknesses are found the teacher is supported and receives more frequent monitoring. Through these systems the quality of teaching has improved from the time of the previous inspection; there is now no teaching that is less than satisfactory and the proportion of lessons found to be very good or excellent is much higher.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Pupils in Years 7 to 9 do not receive a sufficiently broad education in design and technology.

21. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 do not have access to the food and textiles aspects of the National Curriculum for design and technology and therefore the school does not meet statutory requirements. While there is no significant impact on standards, students' understanding of these important aspects of design and technology is limited. Students have only a narrow knowledge and understanding of the food and textiles industries. This was evident in a Year 13 lesson when a student wanted to

use textiles in his project work and had very little idea of the working properties of his chosen materials.

The teaching in the sixth form, although very good, is not as good as that in Years 7 to 11.

22. The quality of teaching in the sixth form is very good, but there is not the degree of excellence that is common in the lower school. The reasons for the difference in quality are linked to the effectiveness of the teaching methods applied in the sixth form.
23. In Years 7 to 11, activities are changed on a frequent basis in lessons so that pupils are constantly active in one way or another. In discussion with sixth form students, the first point that they made about lessons that were less effective was that they were expected to spend long periods in silence either just listening or taking notes. They much preferred the lessons where they were involved in debate and discussions with the teachers and other students. This certainly happens in the main school and continues into the sixth form in some subjects. However, in subjects such as geography and economics for example, the level of students' involvement in lessons is much lower in the sixth form than it is in the main school. In these subjects a lecturing style is employed and students are often so busy taking notes that they get little opportunity to ask questions or debate. In one outstanding physics lesson it was shown that a lecturing style does not necessarily mean inactivity on the part of students. This lesson, on electromagnetic induction, was more like a Christmas lecture from the Royal Society, with carefully planned demonstrations and use of models that positively demanded that students questioned what they were observing. As a result, students learnt much more in this lesson than they did in other lessons where they were less involved.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

24. To raise even further the standards of work and the quality of education provided, the governors and senior managers should:

- (1) Ensure that all pupils have the opportunity to work with food and/or textiles in Years 7 to 9.
- (2) Ensure that students in the sixth form are more actively involved in lessons where the approach is of a lecturing nature.

Sixth form

- (1) Analyse AS and A level results in greater depth in order to gain a more accurate picture of students' achievements in individual subjects and teaching groups.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	38
	Sixth form	62
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		59

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 7 – 11							
Number	13	6	16	3	0	0	0
Percentage	34	16	42	8	0	0	0
Sixth form							
Number	8	29	17	8	0	0	0
Percentage	13	47	27	13	0	0	0

The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching. Care should be taken when interpreting the percentages for Years 7 - 9 and the sixth form as each lesson represents more than two percentage points and one percentage point respectively.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7-Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	592	249
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	1	0

Special educational needs	Y7-Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	2	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	9	7

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	64

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	1
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	3

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	3.1
National comparative data	7.7

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.0
National comparative data	1.1

Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 (Year 9)

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2001	122	0	122

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	122	122	122
	Girls	N/a	N/a	N/a
	Total	122	122	122
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	100 (100)	100 (100)	100 (100)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	100 (100)	100 (100)	100 (100)
	National	32 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	122	122	122
	Girls	N/a	N/a	N/a
	Total	122	122	122
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	100 (92)	100 (100)	100 (100)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	100 (100)	100 (100)	100 (100)
	National	31 (31)	42 (39)	33 (29)

Percentages in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 (Year 11)

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	124	0	124

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	123	124	124
	Girls	0	0	0
	Total	123	124	124
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	99 (100)	100 (100)	100 (100)
	National	47 (47)	89 (91)	95 (96)

Percentages in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	79 (79)
	National	38 (38)

Figures in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

Attainment at the end of the sixth form (Year 13)

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	98	0	98

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	24.8	N/a	24.8 (28.4)	N/a	N/a	N/a
National	17.7	18.6	18.2 (17.9)	2.6	2.9	2.7 (2.8)

Figures in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	5
Black – African heritage	3
Black – other	1
Indian	45
Pakistani	15
Bangladeshi	1
Chinese	20
White	726
Any other minority ethnic group	25

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	0	0
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

This table gives the number of exclusions, which may be different from the number of pupils excluded.

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	54.8
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	15.34

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	9
Total aggregate hours worked per week	258

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	68
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	25
Key Stage 4	21

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000/2001
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	£
Total income	2958209
Total expenditure	2926708
Expenditure per pupil	3509
Balance brought forward from previous year	77864
Balance carried forward to next year	109365

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	20
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	26

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	0.36
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	1.0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	841
Number of questionnaires returned	227

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	55	41	2	1	0
My child is making good progress in school.	67	28	3	0	2
Behaviour in the school is good.	41	48	6	1	4
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	38	53	6	1	1
The teaching is good.	53	39	4	0	4
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	52	37	5	3	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	56	36	7	2	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	83	16	0	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	34	44	13	3	4
The school is well led and managed.	64	29	4	0	3
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	57	36	4	0	1
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	43	40	13	1	4

Other issues raised by parents

Several parents commented on the lack of consultation with parents over the changes in the length of the school week.

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

25. Standards in the sixth form are very high and students are achieving very well given their levels of attainment on entry to the sixth form. It is extremely rare for a student to fail to complete a course of study.
26. Examination results were very high in 2000, the most recent year for which national comparisons are available, and placed the school in the top five per cent of schools nationally. Results were well above the average for all schools and colleges, including independent schools. Results in 2001 A level examinations were an improvement on the previous year and were the second highest in the school's history. Results in the new AS level examinations appear to continue the trend of very high standards, although there are no national figures as yet with which to compare the school's results. Overall, results have improved at a rate that is similar to the national trend since the school was last inspected. However, the results are set to rise significantly next year as the curriculum has been broadened and most students are now studying for an extra A level. This was a target in the school's development plan aimed at improving the achievement of the great majority of students and the target has been met most successfully. The 2001 A level results showed that students achieved appropriately for their GCSE results, but the addition of the extra subject has led to improved achievement for all students.
27. Results in the 2000 A level examinations were very high in all subjects except biology, design and technology, French, history and music, where they were well above average and chemistry where they were average. Results in 2001 improved in mathematics, chemistry, biology and design and technology. The improvement in chemistry was most dramatic with standards rising to the high levels of all other years. Results were maintained in most other subjects, although there were small declines in economics, geography and physics. There are no national figures on the new AS level examinations as yet but the results appear to continue the high standards of previous years with the exception of design and technology where results were disappointing.
28. Students obtain better results in English, geography and mathematics than in the other subjects that they study, but there are no subjects that are significantly worse than others.
29. The standards of work seen during the inspection confirm the very high standards suggested by the examination results. Standards are well above average in biology, chemistry, design and technology, French, history and music and very high in all other subjects. Students are achieving very well in all subjects except design and technology, economics and geography where achievement is good. The school is careful to monitor the progress of individual students and this is ensuring that all students, regardless of ethnic background, attainment on entry to the sixth form or special educational needs, are making very good progress towards their personal targets.
30. Standards in the key skills of communication, use of number and information technology are all very high. Students are very articulate and particularly widely read. Their writing pays excellent attention to grammar and punctuation, but there are

occasional errors in spelling that remain uncorrected. Students are adept at using computers for research purposes and for improving the quality of their work.

31. There is a very small number of students in the sixth form who speak English as an additional language or who have special educational needs. These students make the same very good progress as others because of the individual attention that they receive.
32. The very good levels of achievement are a result of the high expectations that teachers have of the workload that students can handle. Many of the students expect to study medicine or veterinary science at university and the high standards attained in the school ensure that they are extremely well placed to meet their aspirations. Over half the students go on to study medicine or veterinary science and a fifth obtain places at Oxford or Cambridge.
33. The very high standards evident at the time of the previous inspection have been maintained.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

34. Sixth form students show outstandingly good attitudes to learning and to the wider opportunities offered by the school. They show a notably mature response in lessons, as at the time of the previous inspection. Students are very highly motivated to make progress and to excel in their examination results. In addition, they show an impressive level of maturity in their co-operation with others and in the contribution that they make to the life of the wider school community.
35. In lessons, a high level of concentration and great willingness to take an active part are apparent in response to the very good teaching that students experience. They are most alert and involved as learners when teaching is at its very best. In a physics lesson about electromagnetic induction for instance, Year 13 students were fascinated and totally involved as they considered a succession of new effects demonstrated by the teacher, and afterwards showed impressive independence as they made high quality notes on their own. Similarly in an art lesson, students worked with evident enjoyment. They appreciated the help and resources available but at the same time demonstrated a strong sense of responsibility for their own development that contributed to their high attainment. For example, they discussed their work with fellow students and were quick to provide positive criticism of each other's work. Frequently students contribute to each other's learning by their confident and coherent comments in discussion and by their ability to make relevant references to previous work. When there is less opportunity for them to make their own contribution to activities or discussions, and the sense of excitement and enjoyment in learning is less evident, they still work hard. They are well able to identify the features that they find the most stimulating in lessons, but readily adapt to different styles of teaching, never neglecting an opportunity to learn. They listen carefully and take notes industriously for an extended period if this is required. Straying attention is never a problem. Those drawn from minority ethnic backgrounds are fully integrated into the school community and show the same strong focus on learning as others.
36. In response to their teachers' expectations, students show good skills for organising their own learning and make full use of their study periods. Their willingness and capability to persevere without any direct input from teachers is evident in the homework that equips them to make an effective contribution in subsequent lessons.

37. Other aspects of personal development are also exceptionally good in the sixth form, in response to the high expectations and the opportunities that they experience. As at the previous inspection, sixth form students make an important contribution to life of the whole school community through the responsibilities they accept. They show mature confidence and able application of skills in a range of voluntary duties. For instance through the house system they make a very important contribution to the breadth of experience for younger year groups, by organising a wide range of extra-curricular opportunities ranging from sports teams to musical competitions and general knowledge quizzes. They also take responsibility for supporting the learning of others; for instance, a group of volunteers are trained as mentors and organise sessions for a number of Year 7 and 8 pupils outside lesson times to extend their literacy skills and to prompt more effective self-organisation. Those among the boarders similarly contribute to the organisation and social life of their boarding houses. Students also contribute to the wider community, with many undertaking regular placements to help in primary schools, for instance with reading or with sport.
38. Pupils' and students' very pleasant and civilised relationships with others extend fully to their consideration of others' feelings and ideas. For instance in a Year 12 general studies lesson, students very capably led and managed their own discussion about a sense of wonder at the universe. After discussion in twos and threes, students confidently advanced their own ideas about religious and scientific views of creation, and were also ready to hear and consider others' viewpoints.
39. Attendance in the sixth form is excellent, reflecting students' high motivation to learn, their respect for the school's high expectations regarding their regular presence, and also the pastoral support that is extended to any student whose attendance begins to slip. Full attendance occurs in many lessons. As at the previous inspection the attendance of sixth form students contributes to their success. It helps to underpin the excellent progress they make.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

40. The quality of teaching is very good. This results in all students, regardless of their background, learning and achieving very well. All lessons observed were at least satisfactory and three out of every five were either very good or outstanding.
41. Teaching is very good in all subjects except biology, chemistry, design and technology, economics and geography where it is good.
42. The greatest strength of the teaching is the teachers' knowledge and understanding of the subject. All teachers are very well qualified and this is very necessary given the demands of the students. The very high attainment of the students places two different pressures on the teachers. Firstly they need to plan lessons that stretch already very high attainers and secondly they must be able to answer the often very demanding questions that students pose in lessons. Teachers meet these twin demands very well. Most lessons are very well planned to cover lots of work in a short time. In geography, for example, students consolidated their knowledge from GCSE, learnt about new features of a river valley and applied them to a new situation in one short lesson. Teachers set exceptionally demanding questions for students to consider, and use these very well to assess the students' understanding of the topic. Students work extremely hard in lessons and show a very high degree of interest in their work. They are determined to learn and often ask searching questions. Teachers are quick to respond to these and almost always can provide answers off the top of

their heads. The very best teaching follows up the answer with a question to the student to develop the issue still further.

43. Most teachers employ techniques that are entirely appropriate to very high attaining boys, but this is an area where there is still scope for improvement as, overall, the teaching methods are good rather than very good or excellent. The difference lies in the lecturing style, adopted by some teachers, where the student is expected to sit and listen and take notes rather than playing any active part in lessons. The students do this extremely well and maintain their concentration throughout. However, they do not learn as much in these lessons as they do in others. Two science lectures, one in biology and the other in physics, best illustrate the contrast. In the physics lesson, the lecture was interactive; students were given metal rods to examine and asked to suggest differences. The teacher then carried out demonstrations and asked students why the materials had behaved differently, allowing them to discuss their ideas. The students quickly appreciated the differences and gained new knowledge of electromagnetism through their debates and through having their questions answered. In the biology lesson, students simply took notes on DNA and built some models. They did not get the same opportunities to discuss their work or to ask questions and so did not learn as much. This level of inactivity does not occur lower down the school and is the main reason for the difference in quality between the sixth form and other years.
44. In design and technology, the teaching is good but imposes a tight structure on the way that students work, so they have little opportunity to demonstrate real flair and imagination in their design.
45. The very small numbers of students with special educational needs or who are not fluent in English receive individual support from teachers and so are able to make the same very good progress as all other students. The very highest attainers, including those who are particularly gifted and talented, make very good progress because of the special provision made for them. This provision includes an extra A level in mathematics, entry for S level examinations, high quality individual tuition in music and access to top-level competition in sport. In some cases, such as economics, the very highest attainers do better than others because some of the questions posed are too difficult for relatively lower attaining students.
46. The school makes no specific provision for teaching the key skills of communication, use of number and information technology in the sixth form. However, teachers place great emphasis on these aspects. For example, students are expected not to use calculators as a matter of course and staff and students always use the technical vocabulary of the subject alike. Excellent use is made of homework so that the teachers' time is maximised in lessons. There is a good variation in the types of tasks that are set, such as research, analysing data and answering examination-type questions, and teachers expect students to use computers as a matter of course.
47. Overall, the very good quality of teaching apparent at the time of the previous inspection has been maintained.

HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO STUDENTS?

48. Curricular arrangements in the sixth form are excellent with a broad range of learning opportunities being offered. There is an extensive and growing range of AS and A level courses. The school has taken full account of opportunities that exist in other local schools and colleges and has concentrated on providing academic subjects aimed specifically at very high attainers. Statutory requirements are met well.
49. Students are offered considerable choice in their subject options and some very careful and innovative timetabling enables students to have their first choice of subjects. The opportunities for students to exercise choice are further increased by the provision of 'further mathematics' for gifted and talented students. The school's commitment to inclusiveness is demonstrated by the flexible entrance requirements for courses and the quality of advice that students are offered in Year 11 in preparation for the sixth form, and the support provided each summer following the publication of GCSE results. Such excellent advice, including that on careers, enables the school to succeed in matching the students' requirements to the courses being offered. The school is rightly proud of its success in providing students with the courses of their choice.
50. A further excellent feature of the school's curriculum is the strong and developing partnerships that have been established with the community. During 'service to the community', many students work with local primary schools on a wide range of projects. Within the wider community the school's very well managed work experience programme provides work placements as far afield as Finland.
51. The school's also makes excellent provision to provide a curriculum that goes beyond the academic for students. Students have the opportunity to join the combined cadet force, carry out service to the community or follow a course leading to the Sports Leaders Award. Students tackle key skills as well as involving themselves in various school and community based projects. Such schemes are successful in helping students to develop responsibility and other skills. The curriculum is also successful in offering a variety of other opportunities ranging from sport to music and drama.
52. The opportunities for the social, moral and cultural development are very good. The inclusive nature of the sixth form is a valuable asset for all the students. The wide range of trips and visits is an enriching, social experience that develops students' confidence and self-reliance. Within many subjects the emphasis on paired and group work enables students to learn from each other and to develop their social skills. Students are provided with forums to consider ethical issues surrounding genetic engineering and there is discussion of environmental issues such as energy conservation. Students receive advice on such topics as drug and alcohol abuse, the law and relationships. In art, excellent opportunities exist for students to visit exhibitions and galleries in London. The school provides a wide range of opportunities for students to reflect different cultures in their work. In geography and history, students have the opportunity to study the cultures of a range of countries. Around the school there are many images that reflect the cultural diversity of Britain today. Opportunities for spiritual development are satisfactory. There is no daily act of collective worship and opportunities for reflection in form time are often wasted. However, spiritual aspects are considered in many subjects in the sixth form and form a core part of the general studies course.

53. The breadth and variety of the curriculum means that suitable provision is made for all, including those students with special education needs.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

Assessment

54. At the time of the last inspection the procedures for assessing students' attainment and analysing their results in public examinations were good overall. Good progress has been made with assessment in Years 12 and 13 since then.
55. The monitoring of the students' academic performance is very good. The arrangements for assessing students' attainments are clear, frequent and manageable. A good range of information from these assessments is used well to identify students who might be under-performing, and appropriate strategies are put into place, such as setting targets or requiring attendance at extra classes.
56. The use of assessment to track the progress of individual students, and to diagnose and provide for individual learning needs, is good. Subject departments gather a wide range of information about the attainment and progress of each student in their subject. Most departments use these data in a methodical way to analyse the needs of an individual and to plan their teaching strategies. Some subjects shine in this area. The work carried out by the mathematics department and in theatre studies is quite exceptional in its detail and the way that even the smallest fault is pointed out in order that the student may learn from their mistakes. This is playing a very significant part in these subjects, where standards are among the highest in the school. All procedures to assess the students' work and ensure that all marking is to the same standard are appropriately tied in closely with AS and A level examination board requirements, and students have thus a clear idea of how they are progressing in terms of these examinations.
57. Students are well involved and consulted about their performance, and are clear about what they need to do to improve, not least because the teachers know their students well, and have fostered excellent relationships with them. The school encourages self-assessment by requiring students to make a written contribution to each of their subject reports with an evaluation of their own performance, their perceptions of the course, and the ways in which they intend to improve their work. This is an effective strategy that heightens the students' awareness of how well they are doing, and helps them to identify, and commit themselves to, appropriate future action.
58. Parents and students are kept informed of assessments through an annual written report and a parents' evening as well as grade reports every six weeks. The format and content of annual reports are good, pitched in order to be helpful to both students and their parents. They include a clear indication of how the student is progressing with each course and there are instances of very good use of subject-specific detail. Occasionally though, comments pick up on points about the student's attitude, which though entirely relevant, are pursued to the extent that any information about what he can or cannot do in the subject is excluded. The way that students are able to be present at the annual consultations between their parents and teachers adds to the usefulness of these occasions.

Advice, support and guidance

59. The school supports students' pastoral and personal needs to excellent effect. Induction to the sixth form is highly successful. It starts during Year 11, when students are informed of the provision offered. Staff take due care to help them consider whether this will meet their needs or whether some other post-16 route is their best option. The school makes every effort to offer students their preferred subject combinations if they choose to join the sixth form, and this is an important factor in the very low dropout rate from courses. Teachers fully inform those joining from other schools about the academic and pastoral provision and tutors pay special attention to monitoring how they settle in, both academically and socially, during their first weeks at the school.
60. The pastoral system, in which tutors play a key role, is well organised; tutors know the needs and capabilities of students well. This is helped by the way groups are organised, with teachers often taking students for one of their courses in addition to being their tutor. Tutors and subject teachers are readily available if students need extra help or guidance over either academic or personal concerns. Outside agencies are consulted appropriately and involved when, occasionally, this is relevant to a student's needs. Students expressing a view rate highly the accessibility of extra help from teachers. As well as day-to-day support, there is a system of formal educational and personal support. Tutors hold individual discussions with students at regular intervals, about the subject grades awarded to them through the year. Students are encouraged and helped to increase taking responsibility for their own learning. The success of this is very evident in the perceptive comments they add to their own annual reports. In these self-assessments, students are clear about what they know and about their aims and strategies for further improvement.
61. The general studies programme and assemblies also contribute to the support extended to students. The careers programme included in the general studies course is an excellent match to their needs and aspirations. For instance, as well as full guidance over completing university applications, there is very relevant and effective help to boost understanding of how best to present oneself at an interview. There is good liaison with the careers service, with individual interviews provided by the careers officer for each Year 12 student.
62. Students' high motivation to meet the school's academic and wider expectations means that any deviation from the expected high standards of self-discipline is almost unknown. However, the pastoral system is geared to respond effectively if this ever becomes necessary. Any cause for concern about attendance or punctuality is quickly followed up. There is good liaison with parents over any cause for anxiety that arises. Satisfactory attention is paid to maintaining a safe working environment for students. Formal risk assessments, lacking at the previous inspection, are in place though as yet there is no regular cycle for reviewing and updating these.
63. The boarding houses are run very well, with due regard to the legal obligations regarding such provision. There are suitable rules and routines to aid their effective functioning but at the same time they provide a caring and welcoming environment. Good induction is organised for newcomers, including any who join for the first time as sixth form students. Sixth form students are given freedom appropriate to their age and capacity for responsibility, but within a good, amicable framework of supervision. There are well-established routines to support students in completing homework. For those completing research tasks, there is access to the school library for an hour after school each afternoon. A limited number of computers are available within the

houses for students to use, though they often prefer to use their own machines. Leisure activities are well provided for, both in the evenings and at weekends. Staff are readily available to provide first aid and there is easy access to a local doctor if further medical attention is needed.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS AND STUDENTS?

64. As at the previous inspection, parents are very positive in their views of the school's provision, and have a particularly high regard for the high expectations of teachers and the good progress their sons make.
65. Parents continue to make a very significant contribution to school finances and social life by organising very successful events. Currently these bring in over £10,000 a year. The sixth form gains special benefits through the work of the Parents' Education and Careers Committee, which organises valuable support for the careers programme. This committee plays a substantial part in providing placements for the Year 12 work experience week and helps to fund the annual Challenge of Management business exercise day that is organised for Year 12 students in conjunction with another school. In addition, it gives important assistance with the mock interviews offered to Year 13 students as part of their preparation for the university admissions process and leads to them being well prepared for life after school.
66. The sixth form handbook provides both students and their parents with a full picture of the breadth of provision, organisation and expectations for Years 12 and 13 students. In addition, there is a well-organised supply of information about whole-school matters. Much key information is circulated in an annual package and other relevant material, for instance newsletters from the headteacher and the full and informative governors' annual report, is sent to parents during the year. While the school welcomes parents' views and is receptive to them, a small minority of parents feel the school could work more closely with them. This is justifiable in so far as there is scope for more formal consultation with parents about decisions affecting themselves and the students, such as suggested changes to the shape of the school week.
67. Students, like their parents, are very enthusiastic about the provision offered by the school. They are very appreciative of the very good teaching that helps them gain excellent examination results. They rate highly aspects that they see as particularly boosting their progress, such as the quality of teaching and the level of challenge. In giving their views, they are perceptive, linking the very best teaching to particular features such as teachers' infectious enthusiasm, expressed through a rapid sequence of focused activities. They draw a contrast with those few lessons that they find less inspiring, when they are occupied with monotonous copying for example or when discipline is looser, so that a sense of shared purpose is not so highly developed. They greatly appreciate the way that teachers respond readily to any requests for extra help or support with work. Their views regarding the quality of advice about their future careers options vary widely, from extremely positive to rather negative. Most of those expressing views were satisfied with this provision. The date of the inspection and the timing of teaching the careers programme to different groups of sixth form students have to be taken into account in considering these views. A parallel situation exists regarding diverging views expressed by students about the usefulness of the information gained from assessing their work as opinions were sought just before reports of subject grades, the first in a regular sequence throughout the year, were issued to students.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

Leadership and management

68. The sixth form is led and managed well. The head of sixth form ensures that there is a clear focus on raising standards and a very good commitment to providing a high quality education to all students. The heads of subjects who, on the whole, perform their duties well, support him.
69. The governors carry out their role extremely well. Governors carry out all their responsibilities and ensure that the school meets all of its legal requirements in the sixth form, with the exception of providing a daily act of collective worship. Governors are exceptionally well informed and can discuss the details of the school's performance without reference to any notes. This depth of knowledge allows them to ask searching questions and make the correct decisions about the school's future.
70. The systems for monitoring teaching are excellent. There are frequent and regular observations of teachers in the classroom, which provide a thorough analysis of strengths and weaknesses in teaching. The results feed in to the very good systems for providing professional development, which take full account of the needs of the school, subject and individual teacher. The result is a very good quality of teaching throughout the sixth form.
71. The systems for analysing students' performance and linking the results to the performance of teachers are satisfactory. The school compares each student's performance against the prediction from the teacher. This provides some useful information but has its flaws. For example, it takes no account of the national differences in results between subjects and it is very difficult to tell if the reasons for any differences are down to the students' performance or the original estimate made by the teacher. The result is that the school is not getting as accurate a picture of achievement in the sixth form as it compiles lower down the school.
72. Financial planning is excellent. The funds that the school receives for the sixth form are all spent on the students and none are used to subsidise other areas of the school, nor are funds from other areas used to subsidise the sixth form. All spending must be justified to the headteacher and this ensures, for example, that where new courses are set up the resources match the needs of the students. This approach, together with careful consideration of the cost implications of spending decisions, ensures that the school is very cost effective. However, the school is not seeking sufficiently to gain parents' and students' views on the education that the school is providing and so cannot take these views into account when planning for the future.

Resources

73. The school has sufficient accommodation for its needs. Teachers are very well qualified to meet the demands of the high attaining students and are deployed well; all of them teach their first subject. The excellent financial planning has led to the school being very well resourced, with no weaknesses of any significance in any area. The library is appropriate for a school of this size, both in terms of size and resources that are available. Some students complain about not being able to talk in the library, but others point out that they are there to work in silence and not to disturb others.

PART E: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

In the inspection, 13 subjects and courses were inspected and are reported on in detail. Work in other subjects and courses was sampled and contributed to the overall picture of teaching and learning in the school.

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2000.

GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	14	93	63	14	17	2.1	1.6
Art and design	2	100	80	0	18	2.5	2.0

GCE A level and AVCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	87	100	89	76	45	8.3	6.0
Chemistry	33	82	89	52	42	5.7	5.9
Biology	43	95	88	49	34	6.7	5.3
Physics	26	100	88	73	41	8.1	5.7
Design and technology	14	100	92	86	29	8.1	5.4
Economics	19	100	88	84	36	8.8	5.4
Computer studies	1	100	85	0	23	6.0	4.6
Art and design	4	100	96	100	45	8.0	6.4
Music	5	100	93	100	35	9.2	5.7
Classical civilisation	2	100	94	100	46	10.0	6.4
Geography	14	100	92	71	37	8.1	5.7
History	19	95	89	53	34	6.6	5.4
English literature	23	100	96	70	36	8.2	5.9
French	10	100	91	60	39	7.6	5.7
German	3	100	92	67	41	7.3	5.9
Other languages	1	100	94	100	59	10.0	7.1

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

The focus was on mathematics, biology, chemistry and physics.

Mathematics

Overall, the quality of provision in mathematics is **excellent**.

Strengths

- Standards and examination results are very high.
- Achievement is much better than usually seen because the teaching is very good.
- The excellent level of knowledge and understanding of the teachers leads to very demanding work that stimulates the students.
- The subject is very well led, ensuring that standards continue to improve.

There are no areas for improvement.

74. The great majority of students in the sixth form study mathematics and it is very rare for a student not to complete the course. The school offers mathematics at AS level and A level. The highest attaining students also study further mathematics at A level.
75. In the 2000 examination, results were very high in A level mathematics and in further mathematics; results were well above average at AS level. There was an improvement in results in 2001 at both levels. Results are in the top five per cent of schools nationally. All students who took the examination gained a pass grade and the proportion gaining grades A and B was very high. The students' performance in mathematics has been better than in most of their other subjects for at least the last three years.
76. The standards of work seen in Year 13 are very high, which represents a very good level of achievement given the students' attainment at the start of the course. One in six of all students take further mathematics and a significant majority of those students achieve very high grades. Students' responses to their teachers' questions show a very high level and depth of understanding. In a further mathematics lesson, they successfully applied the skills they had acquired in differentiation and were able to progress quickly to understanding and solving first order linear differential equations. In another lesson in mathematics, students showed a very good understanding of algorithms and were able to discuss the effect of non-Eulerian graphs. Standards in Year 12 are also very high. Students' achievement is very good given their attainment on joining the sixth form. Students are successfully extending their GCSE work into new areas, for example in the lesson where they were applying skills in plotting linear graphs to solving linear programming problems and finding integer solutions. They present their findings coherently when discussing them with each other. In mechanics, their excellent understanding and recall of the trigonometrical rules allow them to find the resultant of forces remarkably quickly and accurately.
77. Teaching is very good overall and students from all ethnic backgrounds learn very well as a result. The best feature of the teaching is the outstanding knowledge and understanding of teachers. This is used to excellent effect when questioning the students, but is even more evident when the teacher answers questions asked by the

students. The students are very demanding in their quest for knowledge and explanation, but the teachers' understanding of the subject is such that they can explain principles straight off the top of their head. The explanations are so clear, and the students so quick to learn, that only one explanation is ever needed. This also promotes the students' confidence in and respect for their teachers.

78. Students respond well to the challenging level of work and this enhances their learning. They have a mature approach to mathematics and are highly motivated. Consequently they put in a high level of intellectual effort and acquire new knowledge expeditiously. Students are very attentive in lessons and show a keen interest in the subject. The teachers conduct lessons at a very stimulating pace, resulting in very rapid gains in knowledge, skills and understanding. They are alert throughout the lesson and a very high level of concentration is maintained. They participate very well in discussions, responding to questions and making suggestions in articulate and advanced ways.
79. Excellent use is made of homework to consolidate and extend work that is introduced in the lesson. This homework is often used as a starting point for the following lesson, so that students can be supported with any problems. Teachers also use their knowledge to set exceptionally demanding work for homework, and they do not accept failure. For example, in a lesson on second order differentials, exceptionally challenging questions were set for homework. The teacher went over examples in the next lesson, rather than the original questions, and then asked students to try the questions again for homework. The day-to-day marking and assessment of students' work are good. Students are encouraged to take responsibility for marking their own work which leads to a better understanding of where they are making mistakes and what they need to do to improve. There is a good programme of regular formal assessments that allows teachers to see how students are progressing over time so that they can give effective support for those experiencing difficulties.
80. The very good teaching and learning is the result of the subject having a very high quality of leadership and management with an excellent perception of what is needed for students to succeed at a high level in mathematics, regardless of their background. There is a strong commitment by the whole team to improving standards by raising achievement for all students. The wide range of topics within the mathematics curriculum provides students with excellent opportunities to study new areas of the subject ensuring that interest and motivation is maintained and extended. The systems for monitoring and evaluation are effective in ensuring very good teaching. The professional development of staff contributes very well to their effectiveness; it is planned well to address even the smallest of weaknesses and has been a significant factor in raising attainment. There are very good procedures for assessing the students' performance as they progress through the sixth form. The information from assessments is used effectively to place students in classes according to their levels of attainment and to influence the planning of the curriculum.
81. Improvement since the previous inspection has been excellent. The quality of teaching has improved and the already very high results have improved still further.

Biology

Overall, the quality of provision in biology is **good**.

Strengths

- Students are achieving very well as a result of good teaching and the students' very good attitudes.
- A stimulating range of visits to lectures and places of biological interest helps to bring the subject to life.

Areas for improvement

- More use of out of lesson time by students to prepare and note work that requires little input from the teacher.
- The more universal involvement of students in the formulation and the development of ideas.

82. Biology is offered at both AS and A level. Large numbers of students study the subject.
83. The A level examination results in 2000 were well above the national average. The proportions gaining grades A or B and A to E were both well above average and students gained some of their best results in biology. The results in 2001 improved upon those from 2000. The achievement of these students relative to their GCSE grades was very good. In recent years high standards have been maintained. Results in the AS examination suggest that the high standards of the A level are being maintained on this new course. The numbers entering the sixth form biology course are rising and very few students ever fail to complete the course.
84. The standards of work for the present Year 13 students are well above average and they are achieving very well given their standards at the start of the course. Students have a deep understanding of the topics they have studied. For example, students are able not only to understand the concept of the generation and propagation of an action potential, but also to discuss, using basic principles, why it should be the shape that it is with considerable success. Students in Year 12 are only a short distance into their course and most are achieving very well: they have adapted to the greater intellectual demands placed on them by sixth form work. The well above average standards of these students were well demonstrated by a group studying protein synthesis, who showed a perceptive understanding of the sequence and nature of the events involved from transcription to translation.
85. The quality of teaching is good and results in good learning for all students. Lessons are planned carefully and organised with timings to deliver definite objectives; this results in good learning at a good pace. Most lessons begin with the teacher checking and reinforcing what was learned last time to provide a suitable starting point, although not all lessons leave enough time to consolidate the new learning at the end. The teachers' knowledge of the subject is very good and used well to enable them to provide interesting lessons, taught to high levels and with broad perspectives. Most lessons proceed at a brisk pace and in all lessons the students' knowledge is regularly checked by means of well-placed questions, and reinforced if necessary. In the best lessons the students' ideas are sought and then they are encouraged to develop them by means of skilfully posed questions. This makes students think, maintains their interest and aids remembering. Such was a lesson on action potentials in which ideas were drawn from students by the teacher who then oversaw their development by injecting well-focused questions, rather than explaining in detail what happened and why.
86. Where lessons are less stimulating the lesson is more of a lecture, which is carefully noted down by the students and punctuated by questions to check their understanding. Some activities require little input from the teacher and could be more

usefully completed out of lesson time and then checked later; time freed up in this way would be better used to increase the small amount of practical work being done. Whilst students are encouraged to become independent learners, they do not receive enough guidance in this area. Some information and communication technology is used in the laboratories, but this is an area that is ripe for further development. Suitably challenging homework is set frequently and it provides a useful extension to the learning. There are regular assessments, using old examination questions, and most students are aware of the quality of their work in relation to examination grades.

87. The attitude of the students to learning is very good. The students work hard and are keen to learn. Learning is greatly helped by their good relations with teachers, which result in a productive two-way traffic when they do not understand. Teachers are always willing to offer personal help if asked. In almost all classes the learning environment is positive and productive. Students make effective use of the good teaching to secure a thorough understanding, and they direct questions at teachers when they have a problem. Nevertheless, there is a need for them to more actively question the data that is being presented to them so as to reap maximum benefit from the very strong subject knowledge of their teachers and gain to the fullest extent in interest and understanding.
88. The subject is managed well and there is a good academic atmosphere. The knowledge of the teachers is effectively utilised to present the course in the most effective way. The curriculum is very good; it is planned to provide sufficient depth for students to access the highest grades and is enhanced by visits to a number of university lectures and one involving a parliamentary scientific committee. There are also discussions on the topical aspects of biology and medical science for prospective medical students and the University of Nottingham 'Med link' course is attended by some. The resources are good as is the accommodation. Progress has been good in maintaining high standards.

Chemistry

Overall, the quality of provision in chemistry is **good**.

Strengths

- Good teaching by well-qualified teachers promotes the good learning.
- A good and productive relationship with the students catalyses the good learning.

Areas for improvement

- A more universal involvement of students in the formulation and development of ideas to strengthen their intellectual capacity.

89. Chemistry is offered at both AS and A level. Large numbers of students study the subject.
90. Results in the 2000 A level examination were average. The proportion gaining grades A or B was above average but the proportion gaining grades A to E was below average. This was not as good as in the preceding year when standards were well above the average and in 2001 results rose again to a level similar to those in 1999. Apart from in 2000, standards over recent years have been well above average. Results in the new AS examination suggest that the high standards of the A level are being maintained on this course. Numbers taking chemistry in the sixth form are rising and very few students ever fail to complete the course.

91. The standards of work in the current Year 13 are well above average and they are achieving very well. They have a very good understanding of the topics they have studied. For example, students working on transition elements showed a deep understanding of the different oxidation states. They explained why they existed in terms of electronic configuration and discussed aspects such as disproportionation. Students in Year 12 are just a few weeks into their course. They are successfully building on their GCSE knowledge and are already working to a high standard. For example, in a lesson on intermolecular forces they showed an understanding of Van der Waals forces in terms of temporary and induced dipoles, which they then related to the boiling points of alkanes. Practical skills are very high in both years.
92. Teaching is good and the students from all ethnic backgrounds learn well as a result. Teachers have an excellent subject knowledge, which they use effectively to develop interest and to give perspective. Usually the knowledge from the previous lesson is rehearsed to establish a suitable starting point, but less often is what has been learned brought together and checked at the end. Strong features of the teaching are the clear explanations and the logical development of ideas, punctuated at intervals by questions to test understanding and correct misunderstandings before continuing. This process governs the pace of the lesson, ensuring that all students gain an appropriately sophisticated knowledge of the subject matter. There is a good mixture of practical and theory, which helps to bring the subject to life. Lessons are well thought out to enable students to obtain definite objectives. However, in some practical sessions, whilst all students understand what they are doing and how to do it, some do not know why they are carrying out the work because the teacher has not made the reason clear. In the best lessons the students are stimulated to generate ideas, which they are then helped to expand by carefully crafted questions from the teacher. Some lessons are less successful; these tend to be more akin to lectures, with students only participating by answering factual questions at intervals. Nevertheless, students copy down notes accurately and can readily demonstrate that they understand them, although they are not as good as might be expected at applying them to related topics. Good homework, which is demanding and often requires research, is usually set. The department makes good use of information and communication technology in the laboratories. The assessment by teachers provides students with a good indication of their standards in relation to AS and A level grades.
93. The students' attitudes are very good and play a large part in the very good levels of achievement. They take their tasks seriously and work hard at them. Good relations enhance the learning with teachers. This has meant that students are not afraid to ask when they do not understand. Their willingness to listen and to work hard, together with the good relationships, generates a pleasant but purposeful working environment from which all benefit. Many make good use of the Internet, but they need more advice on how to become effective independent learners. While most have a good spirit of enquiry and are keen to learn not only what happens, but also how and why, the learning of a minority is at times rather restricted because they content themselves with merely learning the facts.
94. The department is managed well; this, together with the good teaching, has promoted the good learning. The curriculum is well organised and presented in such a way as to give access to the highest grades. It is enhanced by visits to universities for lectures, but at present there are no industrial visits. The resources are good. The high standards seen in the previous inspection have been maintained.

Physics

Overall, the quality of provision in physics is **very good**.

Strengths

- A level results were very high in 2000.
- Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and share their enjoyment of the subject with students.
- Students take a very active role in lessons, posing their own questions in order to confirm and extend their understanding.
- The organisation of practical work is exemplary, enabling students to work quickly and derive maximum benefit from a wide variety of activities.

Areas for improvement

- A few students did not achieve quite as well as they should have done, given their very successful work in experiments throughout the year, in the AS practical examination in 2001.

95. The school offers courses at AS and A level and regularly enters students for S level papers. Around 50 students take up the subject in Year 12, making physics one of the four most popular subjects in the school. It is very rare for a student not to complete a course.
96. The A level results in 2000 were very high compared with the national average. They were not quite as good in 2001 but were still well above the likely national average. In both years, all students gained pass grades. The proportion of students gaining the highest grades A and B was very high in 2000. Even in relation to their very good GCSE results, students achieved very well and did much better than might be expected. The results in the new AS level examinations indicate that very high attainment in recent A level courses is being maintained. However, a few students did not do as well as expected in the practical examination and the department is rightly considering a change to more continuous assessment of practical skills through the year.
97. The standards of work seen during the inspection are very high in both Year 12 and Year 13. Students' knowledge and understanding of topics they have studied earlier in the course are very secure. Students in Year 13 are particularly skilful in making their own detailed notes on a new topic; their ability to work independently is much more highly developed than in most A level physics groups. Students in both Year 12 and Year 13 have very good speaking and literacy skills and express their understanding clearly and in detail when answering spoken or written questions. Their numeracy skills are excellent and they use calculators efficiently so that numerical calculations are almost always correct. Students are very proficient in using information and communication technology; they use spreadsheets and graph packages most effectively to process and display their results. They have excellent practical skills and usually present their results carefully and understand the sources of error in their experiments. However, there are a few students in Year 13 who are slightly relaxed in their attitudes to work and still make unnecessary careless mistakes when writing up experiments. Such errors, including the failure to record repeated results or not giving units for results, do not reflect any lack of understanding but do, if repeated in examinations, lose marks.
98. Students in Year 12 have completed only half a term of the AS course but already their standard of work is far above the average for students following this course. All students who were in this school in Years 10 and 11 enter Year 12 with the very secure foundation of having gained high grades in the separate subject GCSE

physics course. This enables students to move quickly and easily on to Year 12 topics and they can, when necessary, undertake for themselves a quick review of the basic ideas from Year 11 and start to apply them in more demanding examples. For students entering the school in Year 12 with a background in double award science, the transition is more demanding but they enjoy the challenge and receive the extra support they need.

99. Teaching is very good overall and students learn very quickly as a result. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and a genuine enthusiasm for physics. Students respond very positively and pose questions of their own to ensure that they fully understand what is being taught. An excellent atmosphere for learning is well established. Teachers present information quickly and clearly and students are expected to be alert and analytical in their response. Teachers use ambitious strategies, including introducing incorrect statements into their explanations and expecting students to spot the mistakes and disagree. Such are the listening and thinking skills of these students that they recognise and challenge these testing statements. The discussion that follows is very valuable in consolidating students' understanding.
100. There are occasional examples of excellent teaching. In a Year 13 lesson, students were challenged by a series of quick, exciting demonstrations of the effects of voltages induced by a changing magnetic field. Their concentration on these experiments was intense and the teacher led them swiftly on to an understanding of the laws governing these effects and the applications, including the bicycle dynamo. Their understanding was secured further because they were required to write their own summary, within clear guidelines, of the whole introduction to the topic.
101. The department makes use of occasional lessons for students to catch up with writing accounts of their practical work. Students in these lessons receive valuable individual advice and encouragement in order to raise the standards of their written work. They learn quickly and make good progress but the pace of learning is not as fast in these lessons as it is in others, largely because the students gradually slow down when working alone on a single task for an extended period.
102. Practical sessions are very well planned and organised. Students are provided with excellent practical handbooks and the activities are prepared and maintained by a technician who is extremely efficient and energetic. The result is that students work quickly through a variety of interesting and valuable projects, extending both their practical skills and their appreciation of how physical principles can be applied in real situations.
103. The leadership and management of the subject are very good. Monitoring of teaching and learning is very effective and the head of department is well informed about his department and the quality of teaching and learning within it. The department does not, at present, analyse its assessment data in order to estimate the progress made by individual students. Such an analysis would not be as revealing as it usually is because most students have high GCSE grades when they begin the course. Nevertheless, the calculations would be valuable in providing additional information about the relative progress of different groups of students and showing where further improvements could be made.
104. There has been very good progress in physics since the time of the previous inspection. At that time, A level results were above the national average. They are now

very high. Weaknesses in accommodation, identified in the previous inspection, have been overcome.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

The focus was on design and technology.

Design and technology

Overall, the quality of provision in design and technology is **good**.

Strengths

- In 2000, the proportion of students obtaining grades A or B at A level was very high and all students gained at least a pass.
- Analytical skills are exceptionally high and students manipulate data with ease.
- Students are very mature in their approach to work and have very positive attitudes towards the subject.

Areas for development

- The 2001 AS level results were disappointing; very few students gained grades A or B.
- Students' sketching is broadly average and lacks imagination and creativity.
- Teachers do not always provide a range of activities and this leads to students not working as hard as they could.

105. Design and technology is offered at both AS and A level. The subject attracts between 14 and 20 students each year and all students complete their course of study.
106. Results in the 2000 GCE A level examinations were well above the national average. The proportion of students obtaining grades A or B was very high compared to the national average and all students gained at least a pass. Students gained some of their best results in design and technology. Results at A level have improved since the last inspection and the 2001 results show further improvement. The 2001 AS level results were disappointing with very few students obtaining A or B grades.
107. In the work seen during the inspection the standards that students attain by the end of Year 12 are above average and this represents a satisfactory level of achievement. By the end of Year 13 standards are well above average and this represents good achievement. In Year 12 students have a sound grasp of the design process and use this effectively to guide their project work. Most have a good knowledge and understanding of terminology although some students are unclear when describing what a specification is in terms of design. Students' work is well organised so that their folders show a clear development of their work. Students use charts well to plot the progress of their work. Oral skills are of a very high order and students describe their work in great detail. The key skill of communication is again of a very high order, although students' sketching is broadly average and lacks imagination and creativity.
108. In Year 13 standards are well above average. Students continue to develop their understanding of design and manufacturing processes. They compare, in detail, different industrial manufacturing practices such as vacuum forming and injection moulding and are quick to spot the advantages that one has over the other in a given set of circumstances. Students use computers confidently and they use computer-aided design equipment well. Analytical skills are exceptionally high and students manipulate data with ease. Students' skills of sketching are at a similar level as that seen in Year 12. Most are very good at annotating their projects although a small

minority does this in a superficial way that does not provide enough detail to be of any real use when referring back to them. Students from minority ethnic backgrounds progress at the same rate as other students.

109. The quality of teaching and learning in Years 12 and 13 is good. Teachers have a very good knowledge of their subject, particularly in terms of the examination syllabus. In a Year 12 lesson the teacher ran a tutorial and provided guidance for each student on what the examiner will be looking for in the different areas of a project. Students learn quickly and they often set the pace of the lesson. They make good gains in their knowledge and understanding of the subject. Teachers made good use of humour to motivate and encourage students so that a good learning environment is created and there is mutual trust and respect between the students and the teachers. The strategies used by teachers are satisfactory although there are occasions when the pace of the lesson falls away because the teacher does not do enough to move the lesson on. In the same way, teachers do not always provide a range of activities and this leads to students losing concentration although their learning is not drastically disrupted. This was seen in a Year 13 lesson when the teacher worked with individual students whilst other students quietly chatted away, and not always about their work. Much of the work is too heavily structured by the teacher and this is stifling creativity. Students are very mature in their approach to work and have very positive attitudes towards the subject, but there is not always a sense of enjoyment.
110. The subject is well resourced although access to systems and control facilities is limited and restricts project work. Assessment procedures are good and informative; positive and constructive feedback is provided on the coursework of each student. The guidance that students receive prior to embarking on the course is good. The subject is well managed, with particularly good systems for monitoring the work of the department.
111. The subject has made good progress since the previous inspection. The quality of teaching has improved and examination results at A level are continuing to improve.

BUSINESS

The focus was on economics.

Economics

Overall, the quality of provision in economics is **good**.

Strengths

- The GCE A level results have been consistently very high over several years.
- The quality of teaching is good and this results in students achieving well.
- The students' very good attitudes to learning make a significant contribution to the good progress that they make in the subject.

Areas for improvement

- Not enough use is made of information and communication technology.
- Students are not engaged sufficiently in discussion.

112. Economics is offered at both AS and A level. The subject attracts around 20 students each year and it is very rare for a student not to complete the course of study.
113. Results in the 2000 A level examination were very high in relation to the national average with all students passing, most at grade A. The results have been maintained

at a high level for the last four years and the proportion of students achieving the highest grade has increased over this period. Results in 2001 were slightly lower than those in 2000. The results in the new AS level examinations appear to continue the trend of high standards.

114. In work seen during the inspection, students' attainment is very high and students are achieving well. Students have very good knowledge of a wide range of economics terms like 'fixed and variable costs' and use them very well in explanations. In a Year 12 lesson for example, students knew how firms make decisions about pricing structures and productivity and understood the principles about the links between business costs and profitability. Students accurately carry out calculations about the costs at different levels of production and use the information to make deductions. Students' written work is of a very high standard. In Year 13 for example, under test conditions, most students wrote confidently and lucidly about transport issues in cities. They knew about the effect of road tolls on different sectors of the community and the impact on trade and the environment. The very highest attainers developed answers fully and made judgements about the effect of pricing policies on demand and the need for a coherent transport policy. Occasionally progress is slower than expected because students focus their minds on the theoretical study of the firm and do not consistently relate their knowledge and understanding to business applications.
115. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers' knowledge and understanding of the subject are excellent and, combined with the clarity of explanation, result in students making consistently learning well. In a Year 13 lesson on 'perfect competition' students listened carefully to the teacher's explanations and made very good progress in improving their understanding of the relation of price and profits of products under different market conditions. Students make good progress in developing a foundation of knowledge that is subsequently built on. Challenges are consistently set for students and most respond very well by reaching the high standard expected. The very highest attainers listen carefully to explanations and are able to follow and assimilate well the knowledge that the teacher imparts without the need for regular reinforcement or clarification. As a result the pace of progress that they make is excellent. Other students, however, need additional support but are too passive in discussions and the pace of progress they make is not as good. Although most students have good computer skills, they do not use information and communication technology enough for research and development of assignments in the subject.
116. The curriculum provided for both AS and A level is very good and the teachers have responded well by adapting their planning to meet the new requirements. This has improved the challenges set for students. Arrangements for assessing students' attainment and progress are very good. Teachers know the students well and regularly give guidance on progress. The assessment of work informs well about strengths and weaknesses and how to improve, but the use of assessment to monitor and set performance targets is under-developed.
117. The leadership and management of the subject are good. Regular support is given to newly qualified teachers and this is having a good impact on raising the quality of teaching overall. There are very good systems for monitoring teaching. The work of the subject is reviewed annually and plans for developments are clear. The subject has made very good progress since the last inspection. The very high standards have been maintained, resources have improved and accommodation is much improved.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

The focus was on physical education.

Physical education

Overall, the quality of provision in physical education is **very good**.

Strengths

- Very good quality teaching by a team of teachers who are well qualified, enthusiastic and keen to make this new course succeed.
- A group of high attaining students who are well motivated and attain very high standards.
- Students who have excellent attitudes towards their studies.

Areas for improvement

- The further development of the use of information and communication technology to enhance students' study skills.

118. There are no students taking the A level course in Year 13. In Year 12 there are 11 students taking the AS course. The school is teaching this course for the first time this year.
119. All students have made a very good start to this new course. The students are a very high attaining group with excellent levels of literacy. Nearly all took physical education at GCSE level and obtained very good results in their examination. They are achieving very well on this course. Students use technical language accurately. For example, when considering the social basis for sport and recreation, students were able to refer knowledgeably to the Olympic movement as re-created by Baron Pierre de Coubertin. In debating gender as an issue in sport, they were able to discuss the place of women in society at that time in order to contrast it with modern times. Students present their work very well. They make a clear distinction between taking notes about the course that are to be used for their own information and presenting work to be assessed. Note taking is effective and shows a clear understanding, for example in describing human information processing systems when analysing how individuals acquire sporting skills. In presenting essays, students show that they are able to go beyond description and take information from several sources to argue a convincing case.
120. In their practical studies, students attain standards that are well above average in a variety of sporting activities. For example, in establishing physical fitness indices, they show high levels of fitness and very good achievement. Overall, the students taking the AS course are attaining standards that are very high compared to the average. Standards in their essays and their projects involving extended writing are very high. In their oral work, students' answers are usually accurate, but they do not use the same extensive vocabulary that they use in their written work. Their practical work too shows high levels of attainment and a commitment to improve further.
121. All students in the sixth form have a weekly practical physical education lesson as part of their enrichment studies. There is a good choice of activities and these sessions are well attended. Students in Year 12 study for the Community Sports Leader Award and are making good progress in this course. In Year 13 this type of work is continued as students undertake community service as part of their sixth form studies. Sixth form students are also active participants in the wide range of high

quality sporting competitions both within the school and when competing in the wider arena.

122. The quality of teaching is very good and leads to very good learning. This is shown particularly clearly in students' written work, which is extensive and always appropriate for its purpose. Teachers outline what is to be covered at the start of the lesson and this gives a clear direction to students about what they are to learn and the contribution they will need to make. Teachers are very observant and are quick to note if students' concentration wanes or if they become so engrossed in debating an issue that they forget to make notes for later use. For example in a lesson on gender issues in sport, the group became very involved and keen to add their own examples to a debate about the role of women in sport today. A timely reminder from the teacher ensured that the core of the argument was rehearsed and supporting notes made about social stratification and stereotyping.
123. Teachers have a very good depth of subject knowledge and they prepare their work thoroughly. This, allied to a very well researched understanding of the requirements of the examination syllabus, ensures that potentially wide-ranging topics are made manageable and students are kept well informed about what they must do in order to succeed in their examination. Teachers' very good depth of knowledge also allows a degree of flexibility to make the topic under discussion interesting and well illustrated from areas within the students' own sphere of interest and knowledge. For example, in considering how memory is central to performance in sporting activity, students were required to undertake paired activities that engaged them and clarified the complex concepts of sensory information storage.
124. Teachers have high expectations about the quality of students' responses, particularly in their written work. They lead by example as seen in the excellent use of information and communication technology for a presentation in a theory lesson. The positive approach taken to marking work reinforces students' efforts and helps them to improve further, and needs to be extended to raising expectations about students' responses when answering questions. Teachers manage class discussion well to ensure all students are involved and interested and all are encouraged to make a positive contribution. However, while they usually express themselves well, students do not use the same breadth of technical vocabulary that is evident in their written work. Assessment of students' practical and theory work is undertaken very effectively. This is of clear benefit in setting targets for improvement and supplementing the good guidance given to students in selecting their areas to study.
125. The consistently very good quality of teaching has resulted in students' making very good progress. As well as increasing their knowledge and understanding in the subject area, students are given very good opportunities to extend their skills in researching information and becoming more independent as learners. There was some evidence in students' work and lessons of the use of information and communication technology to encourage independent study and research, but this is not yet a strong feature of the course. Students show excellent attitudes towards their work. They are keen to debate current topics of wider interest in sport, such as gender stereotyping and they are keen to participate fully in demanding practical activities, such as fitness testing. They take part in a wide range of extra-curricular activities that are of a high quality and of great benefit in enhancing students' understanding of sports performance.
126. Resources are satisfactory. The indoor accommodation is very constrained. However, good course planning, that includes the careful selection of activities to be

examined, ensures that the department's strengths in teaching practical work are exploited and best use is made of the facilities. The leadership and management are very good. Monitoring and evaluation of the standards students achieve and the quality of teaching they receive are good, and systems and strategies are being developed further to ensure that these areas receive sufficient attention as the examination course progresses.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

127. The focus was on music and theatre studies, but art and design was also sampled. In art and design, examination results were well above average in 2000 and students achieved very well. One lesson was observed and the teaching was good. The teacher's good knowledge of fine art and photography, combined with an understanding of the particular needs of individual students, allowed all students to make good progress on their practical work.

Music

Overall, the quality of provision in music is **very good**.

Strengths

- Teaching is very good and students achieve very well.
- Standards of instrumental playing are very high.
- Extra-curricular work supports learning well.

Areas for improvement

- Provision for computer-aided work in school is inadequate.
- The chosen course and available resources limit students' perception of music.

128. The school offers music at A level. Very few students study the subject but all complete their course. Unusually, there is no Year 12 group currently. It is anticipated that this gap will be temporary.
129. Results are consistently well above the national average, with all students gaining grades A or B. All four current students were awarded A grades at AS level in Year 12.
130. Standards are well above average and students are achieving very well. Students show very good musicianship through sight-singing, one to a part, and aural awareness. They engage in harmonic analysis fluently for their stage of learning, for example of a chorale by J.S. Bach, using technical vocabulary. Their general knowledge of music is sufficient to appreciate references to, for example, the Kings Singers and Joshua Rifkin. All are exponents of more than one instrument, at grade eight level of the Associated Board or beyond. Essays on historical analysis are presented to a high level of discursive literacy. Research for these includes some from Internet sites as well as books but information is usually digested well. Such essays are word-processed and incorporate computer-aided music notation as examples. Work to develop compositions uses keyboards with headphones at least to check results, but shows the ability of some students to conceive musical ideas silently at first. However, compositions tend to be pastiche of a narrow area of western art music, reflecting the similarly limited range of music experienced through learning in other parts of the course, and there is little use of information and communication technology in composing music.

131. Teaching is very good and leads to very good learning. The subject knowledge and musical skill of the newly appointed teacher are more than equal to the task presented by the chosen syllabus. Excellent relationships with students have developed very quickly. They are creating a buoyant atmosphere. Strategies to promote learning are appropriate and effective, for example asking students to think what pitch note might be missing in identifying an 'incomplete' chord in functional harmony. Teaching demonstrates high expectations of work in and between lessons and a brisk pace. Time is used well so as to provide oral feedback to individuals, using the piano. During these sessions, targets are negotiated for the forthcoming week's practical work so that students know exactly what they have to do. Many of these targets are extremely demanding and fit well with the high attainment of the students. Written work receives detailed marking, including encouraging comments and hints on how to improve still further. Instrumental teachers, paid direct by parents, understand well their responsibility for preparing students. Students' learning from ensemble rehearsal and performance, both choral and instrumental, benefits from the involvement of other sixth form students who do not study music and from pupils across the rest of the school. However, there is not enough use of examples of the music studied in different contexts and sonorities.
132. Progress has been good in maintaining high standards. Accommodation is no longer a factor limiting progress as it was at the previous inspection, though there are deficiencies in resources. Students and teachers alike do not have enough access to computers with programs that aid composition, not just notation. The scope of music studied, while suiting well the past traditions of the school, is too narrow, with insufficient reference to any music of the past century or that beyond Europe. Now under new management, music is poised to broaden its appeal through the development of schemes and resources to embrace recent and world-wide music, while still being able to maintain the high standards reached through its established traditions.

Theatre studies

Overall, the quality of provision in theatre studies is **very good**.

Strengths

- Examination results are very high.
- Students have an excellent understanding of how to apply theories about acting to practical situations.
- Teachers work very closely with each other, and with students, resulting in the requirements of the course being shared and well understood.
- An excellent use of assessment information to determine what and how students will be taught.

Areas for improvement

- Students do not develop the breadth of interest in the subject to the extent that might be expected.

133. The number of pupils taking the subject has increased and has steadied at about ten students each year. To date, no pupils have either dropped the subject or failed to obtain a pass grade in it.
134. Results at A level in 2000 were very high. All students passed the subject and the proportion gaining grades A or B was very high. The first group of pupils to be examined in the subject was in 1998 and since then results have improved. In 2001 the first

group of students obtained AS levels. Although it is not possible to make a comparison with national results at this stage, results obtained appear to be excellent.

135. Evidence gathered during the inspection indicates that examination results accurately reflect the standards being currently attained in the school. When pupils' prior attainment is taken into account, their achievement is very good.
136. Students have an excellent understanding of theories about acting, particularly those of Stanislavsky and Brecht. They are able to use these theories to guide their own acting, to help them evaluate the work of others and to be self-critical. In a Year 12 lesson, for example, students successfully explored how an actor's proximity to others was an important factor in expressing particular moods. In a Year 13 class pupils showed a high level of insight as to how the contradictions in characters might be communicated. In all the practical work seen students displayed excellent communication skills. The quality of their speech, their awareness of how to use the acting space to advantage and the quality of their non-verbal communication, such as facial expression, meant they held the attention of the audience very well. When evaluating the performances of others, students display insight and tact. Written work is of a very high standard, being well reasoned and often showing originality.
137. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. The teachers who share the sixth form classes work very closely with each other, and indeed with students as well, so that all the work is co-ordinated well and students feel the course is coherent and enables them to progress. Students have a very good understanding of their own learning. Teachers possess an excellent subject knowledge, as was seen in the way in which theories on acting were explained to students and in the discussion of particular texts. They also have an excellent understanding of the practicalities of producing and directing plays. The consequence is that students engage with what they read and act out at a high intellectual level, and they enjoy rigorous discussion with others. The planning of lessons is excellent. Teachers take into account how well students have understood what was covered in earlier lessons so as to remedy any deficiencies of understanding, as was seen in a Year 13 lesson which re-visited aspects of Brecht. Lessons include variety, give ample opportunities for students to be actively involved in the work and are conducted at a brisk pace. All the time available is used to full advantage. The department is active in encouraging students to broaden their interest in the subject beyond the classroom by, for example, organising visits to theatres. Even so, students do not use their initiative to explore the subject as fully as might be expected.
138. Leadership and management of the department are very good. Resources are deployed efficiently and effectively. Students are provided with very good support and guidance on a range of relevant matters, ranging from the opportunities available to become involved with local groups to university courses. The arrangements for assessing students' progress, and using this to determine what and how they will be taught, are excellent.
139. At the time of the last inspection, students' attainment was excellent and this remains the case. The quality of the accommodation has improved significantly. Overall, improvement has been good.

HUMANITIES

140. The focus was on geography and history, but classical civilisation, Latin, religious education and government and politics were also sampled. The teaching in the Latin

lesson was excellent. The lesson had been very well planned to include a series of activities that became progressively more demanding and made the students work really hard. The teacher's excellent knowledge of the subject was used to balance perfectly the support for students and the need to challenge their intellect. In the very good lesson on government and politics, the teacher's extensive experience of examining the subject was used to excellent effect to ensure that all students gained a very good understanding of what was needed to answer specific types of questions. Examination results in classical civilisation were very high in 2000, but only two students studied the subject. The lesson observed was satisfactory and the teacher clearly had a good knowledge of the subject. Some gains in understanding were made by students, but the lesson was rather mundane with little opportunity for the students to take part or to really stretch their intellectual capabilities. The religious education lesson was part of the general studies programme and was very good. The outstanding feature of this lesson was that it was taught by two students who led a high level discussion on the origins of the universe and the sense of wonder that it can promote. The sheer quality of the academic nature of the discussion was quite breathtaking.

Geography

Overall, the quality of provision in geography is **good**.

Strengths

- The very high standards in the A level examination over recent years.
- The quality of teaching is good and results in students achieving well.
- The curriculum is very good and enriched through fieldwork study.

Areas for improvement

- There are not enough opportunities in lessons for students to discuss topics in depth.

141. The school offers geography at AS and A level. A relatively small number of students study the subject and all complete their course.
142. Results in the 2000 A level examination were very high in comparison with the national average and very high results have been maintained since the last inspection. All students passed and the great majority gained grades A or B. Students' results in geography have been better than most other subjects that they studied for at least the last three years, although they declined a little in 2001. Results in the 2001 AS level examination appear to continue the trend of very good results.
143. In the work seen during the inspection students' attainment is very high in both Year 12 and Year 13. This represents good achievement given their attainment at the start of the courses. Most students are very secure in their knowledge of the topics they have studied and analytical skills are of a very high standard. In work about the River Loddon, for example, students collected data, carried out mathematical calculations and wrote detailed analyses of the results. They use an extensive range of subject-specific terms such as 'push' and 'pull' factors about population movement, and are able to graph and analyse population 'pyramids'. Students have good skills associated with using maps and they apply them well in assignments. They are extremely competent in applying the key skills of communication, numeracy and information technology and this is reflected in the very high quality of work produced. Students' writing is of a very high standard, particularly when it is re-drafted and word-processed to improve the presentation. They listen carefully to explanations and speak confidently, but the standard of answers is not as high as it should be because

most students do not provide explanations of any real length or depth when discussing topics in a lesson.

144. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers' knowledge and understanding of topics are excellent. Teachers are well prepared for the curriculum changes introduced nationally and give clear guidance to students how best to respond to the new challenges, and this promotes students' self-confidence. Students' attitudes to learning are good. They work well independently, take their work seriously and as a result good progress is made. The planning of lessons is very good. Teachers build on earlier work and prepare students well for the next stage of learning. Students in Year 12, for example, used computers very well to make calculations about rainfall studies in Cardiff. They consolidated the techniques learned in Years 10 and 11 and practised skills in preparation for individual coursework assignments in Year 12. Students in Year 13 made good progress in a lesson about river processes when they built on understanding gained at GCSE level and applied their knowledge to learning about features of the Wye valley. Occasionally, however, a minority make slower progress than they should due to weakness in recalling work covered earlier. The very highest attainers make excellent progress because they are able to respond very well to the more teacher-dominated teaching styles in some lessons. They understand the issues without the regular need for clarification or reinforcement. The minority of students however, need additional support and are not challenged enough to discuss topics fully and consequently do not always make progress at the same rate as the higher attainers.
145. The curriculum is very good and supported well through fieldwork and visits. Work is regularly assessed and students are well informed about how well they are doing, but the use of national data to set target grades and monitor progress is not established practice; this reduces the information teachers have in measuring the progress made.
146. The leadership and management of the subject are very good. The monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning is well established and has resulted in improvement in teaching. Development planning is detailed with priorities for future developments linked clearly to expected costs and outcomes. The work of the department is reviewed annually and monitored by the senior management.
147. The subject has made very good progress since the last inspection. The high standards at A level previously reported have been maintained and the department has made significant improvements in the resources for learning. The department has been re-located in new purpose-built accommodation and this provides a positive learning environment.

History

Overall, the quality of provision in history is **very good**.

Strengths

- Results are well above average and students achieve very well.
- Students discuss complex concepts confidently in written answers to demanding questions.
- Teaching is very good. Building upon their impressive subject knowledge, teachers make lesson aims clear and help students to develop mature understanding and excellent historical skills.
- Students are highly self-motivated and co-operate extremely well in groups.

Areas for improvement

- There are not enough opportunities for students to lead discussions in Year 13.
- The monitoring and evaluation of student progress are insufficiently based upon systematic analysis of their prior attainment.

148. History is offered at AS and A level. Around 20 students study the subject each year and all complete their studies.
149. The examination results in 2000 were well above the national average. Almost all students gained a pass grade and the proportion gaining grades A or B was well above average. This outcome maintained the upward trend of results over the last four years. While national comparisons for 2001 are not currently available, the high standard of examination results in history was maintained.
150. The standards of work of students currently studying the subject in Year 13 are well above average. Their very good understanding of the topics that they study is evident in the considered oral answers they give to probing questions asked by teachers in lessons. So, for instance, they compared confidently the views of a number of historians on the role of the Parliaments of Elizabeth I, and used these to give their own opinions about the degree of conflict, or of consent, there was between crown and parliament. Students of the very highest levels of attainment successfully employ such skills in their writing, as in essays that interpreted successfully the nature of the administrative and governmental reforms of Thomas Cromwell. Relatively lower attaining students failed to include the amount of relevant supporting detail to carry a sustained argument.
151. In Year 12 also, students produce oral and written work of a very high standard. This was demonstrated when small groups made presentations, about Henry VII and various aspects of his administration, that were based on detailed and conscientious preparation. Each group reached valid conclusions that were explained with a confidence and fluency that were of a high standard, to the great benefit of their listeners. Further evidence of the thoroughness of their preparation was provided by the high quality of the answers given to the teacher's follow-up questions. Students write convincingly and fluently, employing a very good range of appropriate vocabulary. The great majority of highest attaining students analyse effectively the questions set and select relevant evidence with which to support their arguments, as in work to account for Henry VII's seizure of the throne. This piece of work revealed how students of relatively lower attainment rely more on narrative than analysis and exploration of the issues posed by the question, resulting in less convincing answers.
152. Teaching is very good on both courses and it promotes very good learning. The basis of this high quality is the deep knowledge and understanding that teachers have of the subject, and the clarity with which they organise the work to be done. This is evident in the easy and confident manner with which they interact with students in lessons, using telling questions to establish the degree to which students have mastered the topic, and responding informatively to questions asked of them. Very good guidance is also given on the techniques central to high quality essay writing, as in a lesson on Elizabethan Parliaments. Consistent with this level of guidance is the marking of assignments in which teachers give clear indications of the strengths and weaknesses so that students know how to improve their work. The consequent respect that students have for their teachers is displayed in their responses in class, and in the high regard they have for the quality of tuition provided when asked for their views. The range of learning strategies employed in Year 13 is, however, limited, and

excessive emphasis was placed on a lecturing style in lessons seen, to the detriment of allowing students to play a full part in discussions.

153. Students are highly motivated and are very good independent learners. Their reading is wide and perceptive and they communicate their well-founded views exceptionally well in both their oral and written work. Higher attaining students, in particular, understand the crucial importance of analysing evidence and being selective of what is relevant to include in support of their arguments. Thus, as in a lesson in Year 12, they offer convincing opinions about such complex issues as the relative importance to the success of Henry VII's reign, of his reforms to law and order, or of his financial acumen.
154. The high standards of education in the subject are under-pinned by the shared commitment of teachers to ongoing improvement. Good leadership is rooted in informal, but effective, consultation and collaboration with a team that has a good mix of both experienced and recently qualified teachers. There is, however, room for improvement in the clarity with which student progress is measured against their prior attainment, so that targets for future attainment are more obviously shared and validated.
155. The subject has made very good progress since the previous inspection. Very good standards of teaching and learning have been maintained. Examination results are well above average and still improving.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus of the inspection was English and French.

English

Overall, the quality of provision in English is **very good**.

Strengths

- The brisk pace in the many very good lessons clearly motivates students and they complete a large amount of work.
- High expectations create an undergraduate atmosphere and an intellectual response from the students.
- The very good leadership of the subject provides a clear vision for staff and students that reflect the school's aims.

Areas for improvement

- A few lessons are not as well paced as the very good lessons and questions are not as probing as they might be.

156. English literature and the combined English language and literature are offered at AS and A level. Around 25 students study the subject each year and all complete their course.
157. Results in the 2000 A level English literature examinations were very high in comparison with the national average. All students passed and the great majority gained grades A or B. Students have gained better results in English than they did in most other subjects for at least the last three years. Results in 2001 are similar to those in 2000. Results in the new AS examinations appear to continue the trend of very high attainment.

158. In the work seen during the inspection students' attainment is very high in both Year 12 and Year 13. This represents a very good level of achievement. Students who are very high attainers and those with special educational needs make the same very good progress as all other students because their needs are recognised and acted upon. All students have an excellent knowledge and understanding of their work and clearly relish the subject. Their oral skills are good in classroom discussion and only falter when the teacher's questions are misunderstood and there is insufficient time for reflection. Students make valid and cogent observations and use technical vocabulary in their writing. Extended writing is a strong feature of the students' work and their independent research skills are well developed. They read widely and choose challenging texts. Students make sophisticated inferences from texts and sustain detailed textual analysis. Many students make very good use of information and communication technology to aid the presentation of their work.
159. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. In the very best lessons there is a brisk pace, pupils are clearly motivated and a large amount of work is completed. Students enjoy their work with each other and their teacher in an atmosphere of achievement and respect. In a very good Year 12 lesson, analysing children's literature, students spoke confidently and accurately placing 'Alice in Wonderland' in a historical setting and developed their thinking to examine the role of women in Victorian Britain. This was just one aspect of a lesson that combined vigorous and rigorous teaching to further the learning of the students. A very good lesson in Year 13 on 'The Rivals' was very well prepared, using a methodical approach to ensure that students covered all aspects of form and structure to shape meanings. The teacher's dramatic rendering of the comic characters brought to life the humour of the play and deepened students' understanding. A comparison to more recent stereotypes highlighted Sheridan's use of satire and illuminated modern prejudices. High expectations created an undergraduate atmosphere and an intellectual response from the students. In a satisfactory lesson students learnt less because of a more pedestrian pace and less skilful probing of students' knowledge. The teacher's questions were above the students' heads and so needless explanations were required. The department makes very good use of information gained from assessment to plan the curriculum, hence the introduction of English language to build on the students' skills. The study of historical and multi-cultural texts deepens students' understanding of literature and life. Sensitive planning of lessons ensures that all students are given the opportunity to air their views in an atmosphere of mutual respect. Very good relationships are evident and students respond positively to their teacher and each other.
160. The very strong leadership of the department provides a clear vision for staff and students that reflects the school's aims. Teachers are mutually supportive and respect each other and the students. Teachers share the preparation of schemes of work, which encourages equality for the students, and the development of staff. A mutual observation of lessons is developing teaching and learning styles and classroom management, and maximising the learning of students. Teachers are aware of the particular needs of male students and plan work accordingly. The department selects texts and plans lessons in order to improve male students' results.
161. Progress since the last inspection has been very good. Very high standards have been maintained and teaching has improved.

French

Overall, the quality of provision in French is **very good**.

Strengths

- Students are highly motivated and involved, and display very positive attitudes to learning foreign languages.
- Teaching is very good overall. At its best it is excellent, with well-structured lessons incorporating a variety of challenging tasks which ensure that the students are working to capacity.
- Levels of attainment in A level examinations over the last three years have been very high.
- Standards of written work are very high.

Areas for improvement

- Schemes of work are insufficiently detailed to ensure equal coverage of all linguistic skills or to support the effective monitoring of the students' progress across all aspects of their work and, as a result, oral skills are not as good as others.

162. French is offered at AS and A level. Relatively small numbers opt to study French. It is very rare for a student not to complete the course.
163. Results at A level are very high, taken over the three years 1998 – 2000. Results in 2000 are slightly lower, but still well above average. A relatively low number of students take French at A level, but all candidates over the past three years have obtained a pass grade, and most have gained A or B grades. In 2001, the results obtained at AS and A level suggest that these high standards are being maintained.
164. The standards of work of current AS and A level students are well above average and this represents a very good level of achievement. In Year 13 the students read authentic French texts with a very good level of understanding, and write in French with a high degree of fluency. Their written work, especially their topic work, shows clear structure, logical presentation of ideas and intelligent development of argument. The highest attainers demonstrate competent, idiomatic use of both specific and more general vocabulary in their topic work, and write with good grammatical control. The students' listening skills are very well developed, enabling them to understand with relative ease authentic, idiomatic French. Speaking is not as well developed as reading, writing and listening. Year 13 students showed an ability in some of their lessons to converse effectively, fluently and spontaneously in French, but in other lessons they appeared reluctant to give more than a brief response, and rarely used the language for their routine needs in the lesson. Despite their facility with written French, they did not speak at length using more complex language, or to be able to advance and defend a point of view in French.
165. Students in Year 12 write fluently and competently, making few serious errors. They are beginning to use the more sophisticated language required at this level, although, at this early stage in the transition from GCSE to AS work, they are not yet attempting more complex sentence patterns spontaneously. They speak clearly in French, with expression, and most of them with good accents. They read aloud fluently with obvious understanding.
166. The quality of the teaching is very good overall. The teachers have excellent subject knowledge and linguistic competence, and use the language confidently to very good effect to give the students contact with authentic, idiomatic French, and, in the most successful lessons, to generate oral work. The students thus continually acquire new language, and are encouraged to deepen their understanding and to expand their

linguistic competence. The lessons are usually well structured to engage the students' attention. Examples include a Year 12 lesson which began with a good, brisk brain-storming activity in the foreign language and a Year 13 lesson which was very well planned, with high quality, well-constructed resource materials which made the students work very hard and think deeply about the meaning of a French text. In the occasional lesson where the lesson planning is not detailed enough to introduce a variety of activities, such as group and pair work, the students are not actively involved in and through the foreign language, and consequently the teacher works harder than the students do. The work offers plenty of intellectual challenge, and the teachers' expectations of what the students can achieve are generally high, so that they work with great concentration, showing a high level of interest in their work, and applying a good measure of intellectual effort. Expectations of what the students might achieve orally are not high enough in some lessons; this is where the teacher allows the students to be lazy and to give only minimal responses, with the result that their oral skills are not developed sufficiently well, particularly as regards arguing a case in spoken French. Assessment is used in lessons to spot students who might not understand, and to take appropriate action, although teachers do not always ensure that quieter students are fully engaged. Homework is used effectively to encourage and enable the students to reinforce and extend what is learned in the lessons, and students in both years appear to make good use of their private study time.

167. There is a well-planned schedule of topics to be covered over both the courses. The lack of a detailed, coherent scheme of work, which makes explicit the linguistic and other skills to be developed in each unit, means that some skills, such as higher level oral skills, are often neglected. The department uses assessment well to record attainment. The use of assessment information to track progress and to cater more specifically for students' individual learning needs is not as well developed. The teachers show a high level of commitment to their students, who can rely on their French teachers to give them good support and guidance throughout their studies, and to contribute to the school's advice on relevant career routes. Monitoring of teaching and learning in the modern languages department takes place as part of wider school review arrangements, but monitoring is not focused specifically on the sixth form. With no regular formal monitoring of teaching and learning in Years 12 and 13, and no detailed scheme of work, regular evaluation and review of sixth form teaching and learning are not assured.
168. There are very good opportunities for the students to extend and deepen their knowledge of the French language and their cultural understanding through work placements arranged through the exchange school in Compiègne. Resources are chosen well, and draw on a range of sources, including video, audio, satellite and the Internet. The students are further supported in their independent learning by very good library facilities. The French language assistante is very well used to provide further valuable opportunities for the students to work with a native speaker, although not all students have equal access to working with her.
169. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. Standards of attainment have risen, and the provision of resources has improved. Departmental documentation and schemes of work, both highlighted as relative weaknesses at the time of the last inspection, still need further development.