

INSPECTION REPORT

COLOMA CONVENT GIRLS' SCHOOL

Upper Shirley Road, Croydon

LEA area: Surrey

Unique reference number: 101823

Headteacher: Mrs Maureen Martin

Reporting inspector: Mrs Sylvia Richardson
1038

Dates of inspection: 1 - 4 October 2001

Inspection number: 189643

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils:	11 to 18 years
Gender of pupils:	Girls
School address:	Upper Shirley Road, Croydon, Surrey
Postcode:	CR9 5AS
Telephone number:	020 8654 6228
Fax number:	020 8656 6485
Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs Anne Jackson
Date of previous inspection:	7 October 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities (sixth form)	Aspect responsibilities (sixth form)
1038	Mrs Sylvia Richardson	Registered inspector	Equal opportunities Special educational needs English as an additional language	What sort of school is it? How high are standards? The school's results and achievements How well are students taught? How well is the school led and managed? What should the school do to improve further?
9958	Mr Tim Page	Lay inspector		How high are standards? Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development How well does the school care for its students? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
2396	Mr Michael Davidson	Sixth form co-ordinator	Biology Chemistry	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to students?
13734	Mr Harold Davies	Team inspector	Geography Law Religious education	
12331	Ms Vera Grigg	Team inspector	Art Design and technology	
22458	Mr Gilbert McGinn	Team inspector	History Business education Economics	
29896	Ms Shan Mullett	Team inspector	Mathematics	
13054	Mr Michael Pennington	Team inspector	French	
18950	Ms Carmen Rodney	Team inspector	English	
15472	Mr Paul Andrews	Team inspector	Music	

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Coloma Convent Girls' School is an 11 to 18 comprehensive school with 932 girls on roll, 250 of whom are in the sixth form. About seventeen per cent of the pupils and students come from ethnic minority groups and, although some of these have English as an additional language, none is at an early stage of learning English. Attainment on entry is currently above average, with a below average number of pupils on the register of special educational needs. Only a very small number of pupils has a statement of special educational need and these are for reasons of a medical nature. Very few pupils are eligible for free school meals.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Coloma is a very effective school, in many respects excellent. It adds very considerably to pupils' and students' academic progress throughout their time in the school, and many achieve much more than might have been expected. Standards are high and, as a result of girls' excellent motivation and consistently good teaching, girls achieve very well academically and personally. Leadership is excellent and the school is very well managed. Teachers and pupils and students are dedicated to the school. It provides very good value for money.

What the school does well

- The ethos of the school is outstanding. The excellent attitudes and the shared commitment of staff and pupils and students combine to promote both high academic success and personal achievement.
- Teaching is consistently good or better. Many lessons are very well taught and there is some outstanding teaching.
- The extra-curricular activities are very good. Performances in music are excellent, with respect both to the high level of participation and to musicianship.
- The leadership provided by the headteacher is excellent. Her leadership team supports her extremely well.
- The school welcomes well-researched change that meets pupils' and students' needs, and finds innovative ways to implement changes well.

What could be improved

- The school does not systematically set targets related to the National Curriculum and sixth form course requirements, to help more pupils and students to attain the highest grades.
- The full potential of information and communication technology (ICT) is not exploited in all subjects, although there are some very good examples of ICT support for learning, particularly in geography.
- Unsatisfactory accommodation affects the quality of sixth form art and graphics work, and provision for physical education throughout the school.

NB All of the above are already contained within the school's current development plan.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in 1996. Since then, when the school was praised for its high standards, leadership and most areas of provision, it has improved further. Improvement has been very good. Examination and test results have steadily improved at the ages of 14, 16 and 18 and standards in most subjects are above or well above the national average. With no loss of depth, the curriculum has been broadened for fourteen to sixteen year olds, and in the sixth form with the introduction of vocational courses and a wider range of subjects. Subject team leaders are now more involved in management, and in monitoring and promoting good teaching. Although at the time of the last inspection much teaching was good, it was no better than sound in the sixth form. Teaching is now consistently good throughout the main school, and four out of every five lessons seen during the inspection were good or very good. All is at least satisfactory. In the sixth form, teaching is now

consistently good, with well over three-quarters good or very good. The very small number of weaknesses identified related in the main to short-term teaching contracts.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	Compared with				Key	
	all schools			similar schools		
					well above average	A
	1998	1999	2000	2000	above average average	B C
GCSE examinations	A*	A*	A	A	below average well below average	D E
A-levels/AS-levels	C	B	B	N/a		

Coloma Convent Girls' School is a high performing school with attainment that is well above average in most subjects and at least above average in almost all. Standards at the ages of 14 and 16 are similar in test and examination results; by the age of 14, pupils' standards in English are in the top five per cent of performance in the country and warrant an A* grading. Standards in mathematics and science are well above the national average. The pace of improvement over the last three years has been better than the national trend of improvement in GCSE; attainment in all subjects is above or well above the national averages. The school's performance, when judged against similar schools, is also well above average. In 2000 and 2001, the school exceeded its targets for 14, 16 and 18 year olds by a significant margin. Work seen during the inspection was above average in all subjects in the main school, and well above average in many subjects, particularly in English, science, music and German. In the sixth form, it was well above average in several subjects, notably German, history, music, biology, geography and English literature. The girls' more broadly based achievement, which is very high, is more than just in examination and test results. It was evident in the concert and plays during the inspection, in displays of art work, readings of their own poems in assembly and in attendance at extra-curricular activities.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Excellent. The girls show a high level of commitment to the school and work very hard. Their impressive maturity supports their learning.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Excellent. Pupils and students support each other's learning through their excellent behaviour.
Personal development and relationships	Excellent. Relationships between teachers and pupils and students and between the girls themselves are supportive and the girls develop a strong sense of personal direction and respect.
Attendance	Good. In many year groups, attendance is well above average and it is above average in the remainder.

The girls' excellent attitudes are underpinned by their commitment to their faith and to the school. Those students who enter at the start of the sixth form, who are of many faiths, integrate well with their peers and all show high levels of mutual respect and an appreciation of religious and cultural diversity. All pupils and students are keen and eager to come to school, with many arriving an hour or more before school starts, to enjoy each other's company, work and talk to teaching and non-teaching staff. There is a very high uptake of extra-curricular activities. Pupils and students show

high levels of self-motivation, self-help and mutual support. They work impressively hard in an atmosphere free from harassment, ageism, sexism or racism.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

Teaching by the school's permanent staff is consistently good; much is very good and there are examples of excellence. Teaching is characterised by high expectations of what the girls can achieve. In many subjects there is very good use of questioning to help girls to learn well. English teaching pays close attention to developing literacy and communications skills. In mathematics, there is very good planning of what the pupils and students should learn. The teaching of numeracy is good in geography and there are good examples of the development of aspects of numeracy in science and in English, but this is not planned in a co-ordinated way for 11 to 14 year old pupils. The development of skills in using computers (ICT) is very good in geography, but is not sufficiently developed elsewhere. With these exceptions, the school meets the needs of all its pupils very well and girls with special educational needs make good progress, at least in line with their peers. Girls who have English as an additional language are making very good progress.

Other strengths of the teaching include very good relationships between teachers and pupils and students, excellent subject knowledge, good integration of homework into learning, lessons which challenge the girls to develop and use skills of enquiry and problem solving. Virtually all teachers choose their teaching methods and materials well. Areas to improve include the occasional tendency not to give girls enough time to explore the problem, and to probe through close questioning what they need to do to achieve a desired effect. A significant minority of girls is inclined to be too dependent upon their teachers, reducing the quality of research and investigation. Learning is characterised by sustained concentration and effort; the girls work very hard. They show great interest in their work, apply their general knowledge well to new situations and they are attentive listeners. The girls are very well organised for lessons and take great pride in their work.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Meets all statutory requirements. There is an excellent extra-curricular programme and many appropriate visits, journeys and speakers enrich lessons. The introduction of vocational courses for 14 to 16 year olds (Key Stage 4) and the sixth form has broadened the curriculum choices available to meet girls' needs.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. Pupils with statements are very well supported. Class teachers know their pupils and students well and support them well, with the result that girls make good progress.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very well supported. Provision in all areas is excellent.

How well the school cares for its pupils	The level of care for pupils is outstanding. Girls are all well known to their teachers and are confident in their support. Teachers and pupils and students all know how the robust support systems available work.
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The curriculum is broad and allows for a very wide range of interests. The extra-curricular provision is outstanding and take-up is high, despite the long distances some girls live from the school. The introduction of new courses since the last inspection is a major improvement. The accommodation creates some movement problems, which the school has not yet fully addressed, although it has them in hand.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The leadership provided by the headteacher is excellent. She has a very clear vision of how to maintain the strengths of the school and yet is open to developments which will benefit learning. She is very well supported by an able and dedicated leadership team.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	All statutory responsibilities are fulfilled. Governors support the school with the strongest commitment to its values, mission and ethos.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Evaluation and monitoring are good. Senior managers and heads of department are aware of the needs of the school and most provide clear plans for managing change.
The strategic use of resources	Very good. Available resources are very well used. Long-term planning has focused spending on key priorities and new resources are well used. Several departments, though, are still awaiting the ICT resources they need.

Timely recruitment of well-qualified teachers has become more difficult in the last two years, but the school has managed in most cases to recruit appropriate staff to join its well qualified and talented team. Accommodation has improved as a result of the completion of an excellent sixth form centre. Learning resources in terms of classroom materials are good, though some departments have not yet taken advantage of access to computer facilities, training and investment. The school's leadership and management are focused and efficient and achieve very good value in its deployment of resources.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school has high expectations of what pupils and students can achieve. • Behaviour is good. • The school is well managed and led. • It helps their daughters to mature and be responsible. • Teaching is good. • There is a good range of activities outside lessons. • Parents feel comfortable with asking the school about questions or problems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The amount of homework is not right. • They are not well informed about progress. • The school does not work closely enough with parents.

NB The number of parents expressing any concerns or areas they would like to see improved through the medium of the questionnaire, as listed above, or at the parents meeting was very small indeed – about 3% of those who responded.

Over 150 parents attended the pre-inspection parents' meeting and 300 returned a questionnaire, and they were overwhelmingly in support of the school. The inspection team concurred with the parents in their positive response to the school and its provision. Inspectors felt that homework was well integrated into the class work and that information to parents is very good and contact with parents excellent – significantly exceeding the access and contact generally made.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form has grown significantly since the time of the last inspection and there are now 250 students on roll. Entry to the sixth form is on the basis of GCSE successes, and most students have achieved at least 5 GCSE passes at the higher grades of A* to C by the age of 16. There is a small number of students on the register of special educational needs. Between 80% and 85% of Year 11 students stay on into the school's own sixth form. Students transferring from other schools fill the remainder of the sixth form places. The retention rate for the sixth form is very high – very few students fail to complete their courses.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is very good. It is very cost-effective and does not draw down any subsidy from the main school. Standards are above average and, in many subjects, they are well above average. Achievement is good and broadly based. Improvement over time is good. The quality of teaching and learning is consistently good and often very good. The leadership and management of the sixth form are excellent. The sixth form meets the needs of students very well. It is a happy place in which service, personal development and academic study are well integrated.

Strengths

- Overall, teaching is consistently good; in two-fifths of lessons seen, it was very good, resulting in very good learning and well above average standards.
- Students' commitment to their studies and to the life of the school is outstanding.
- The curriculum is very good, with an especially rich opportunity for learning beyond the classroom.
- There is outstanding provision for students' personal development and welfare.
- The leadership of the sixth form is excellent.
- The school is very open to receiving students from outside into the sixth form from multi-faith backgrounds and integrates them well.

What could be improved

- Key skills, particularly in numeracy and the use of computers, as the school intends in its planning documents.
- Individual student target-setting, particularly to assist the highest attaining students.
- Accommodation for art, graphics and physical education.
- Standards in business and economics.

NB These items are all already contained within the school's current development plan.

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
English	Very good: standards are high and results improved between 2000 and 2001.

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	Good: students are achieving well as a result of good teaching, but there is insufficient opportunity for them to develop reasoning skills and creative thinking in mathematics.
History	Very good: standards are very high, especially at the higher grades of A and B at A level.
Geography	Very good: students are achieving well and attaining high standards as a result of enthusiastic and authoritative teaching and very good provision of resources and teaching plans.
Chemistry	Good: good teaching and the well-planned curriculum enable students to achieve as well as expected from their GCSE results.
Biology	Very good: very much good teaching and students' own motivation lead to very high standards in this popular subject.
French	Good: results are above average and coursework is strong. Good teaching enables students to achieve as expected, and well in Year 12.
Business	Satisfactory: teaching is satisfactory and students' achievement is also satisfactory.
Economics	Satisfactory: teaching and learning are satisfactory.
Art	Good: teaching is at least good, and standards are good due to the commitment of the teachers, which leads to a high degree of creativity.
Design and Technology (graphics)	Satisfactory: teaching, often good, results in good achievement by students. Standards are satisfactory.
Music	Excellent: there is an outstanding range of musical opportunities. Standards are very high. Leadership and teaching (including that by peripatetic teachers) in music are excellent.
Law	Good: students have made a good start to this course since its inception in September.

Other subjects visited include:

- Media studies, where there is effective teaching and learning, which provides students with a good understanding of how media works
- Sociology, which provides good support for students in planning research projects
- Physics, where improved accommodation and ICT resources, together with the appointment of a new head of department, provide the foundation for the necessary improvement
- Physical Education at A level, which is providing a rigorous programme for a small number of students
- ICT, where good facilities are well used to advance students' ability to analyse and deliver high quality coursework on complex projects
- Health and Social Care, which is well taught and offers a wide range of experiences and access to career opportunities for students
- Psychology, where much teaching is satisfactory but where some students experience unsatisfactory teaching in part of the course and do not make enough progress
- German, which is very well taught and in which standards are high and overall provision is very good. Standards in Year 13 are well above average. In class, encouraged to be

adventurous in their speaking, they apply vocabulary specific to the topic in sustained conversation with each other. The high level of motivation helps to sustain the challenging pace of the teaching and so maximise class time.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Very well: regular feedback from teachers helps students understand how well they are doing and how to improve.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Excellent leadership ensures that students achieve well and reach well above average standards. They consistently receive good or very good teaching. A deputy head has responsibility for ensuring the quality of students' experience. She discharges these responsibilities with great skill. Students from different backgrounds, different ethnic groups and with varied success at GCSE all integrate successfully into the sixth form.

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 choice of courses allows them to follow a programme suited to their talents and career aspirations. They are helped and encouraged to study and research topics independently. Teachers are accessible to help them if they have difficulties with their work. They are well taught and challenged to do their best in almost all of their subjects and courses. The school listens and responds to the views of its sixth form students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The advice available from the school and/or careers advisers on what they should do after they leave school. The advice they were given about what they should do in the sixth form. The information they are given about their progress in relation to the qualifications they hope to get. Outside their main subjects, the school does not provide a good range of worthwhile activities and enrichment courses.

NB Inspectors agree with students' positive response to the school.

Measures have already been put in place, prior to this inspection and questionnaire, to improve procedures for individual guidance on what to do when students leave school. The information and feedback about their work and progress is helpful and informative in most subjects. The school provides an unusually rich extra-curricular provision of very high quality, and therefore the inspectors do not agree with sixth form students' views on this matter.

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

The ethos of the school is outstanding. The excellent attitudes and the shared commitment of staff and pupils combine to promote both high academic success and personal achievement.

1. The ethos of Coloma Convent Girls' School can be characterised by enjoyment in study and fellowship. Pupils and students are keen and eager to learn, arrive early and spend their time before school profitably, comparing work, practising musical instruments, conversing and reading. Throughout the day, they continue to work hard and show interest and enthusiasm for their lessons. They are well organised and arrive prepared for each session with the appropriate books and equipment. Homework is well and carefully done. All of this is in response to the school's clearly stated expectation that pupils and students will give of their best at all times. The staff in their own daily routines reinforce this message.
2. Pupils and students have many opportunities to take responsibility for the decisions and directions of the school. The School Council and the various committees on which pupils and students serve are well organised and well led by elected representatives of the student body. The work of these groups acquires added significance because the headteacher and senior staff listen carefully to pupils' and students' views and respond to them. A good example was seen in the first meeting since elections to the School Council, where the headteacher reported on work done during the summer holidays in response to concerns raised in June and July by students. A further good example was seen during the preparations for Charities Week, when pupils and students organised themselves very well and very enthusiastically to raise money for their chosen charity. They inform themselves well about the issues with which the charity has to deal, and work effectively with staff to mount activities. Despite the effort involved, their lessons and homework in no way suffer.
3. There is much mutual support. Girls help each other in lessons and share their learning. Group work is frequently very productive and always very purposeful. Sixth formers have a key role in supporting learning amongst the eleven and twelve year old pupils who may find learning more difficult. They perform these duties sympathetically, reliably and at a consistently high standard, which both parents and younger pupils appreciate.

Teaching is consistently good. Many lessons are very well taught and there is some outstanding teaching

4. The quality of teaching which pupils and students experience is consistently at least good. This is a key factor in their high attainment and in their commitment to the school. In Years 7 and 8, all lessons seen were taught well. They were at least satisfactory and often good in Years 9, 10 and 11 and almost all were good in Years 12 and 13. The very small number of lessons which were not satisfactory were taught by teachers who were either not familiar with the school, or were not familiar with the subject matter. Many lessons were good or very good; in total, four out of every five lessons seen were well taught. Over one third of the lessons seen during the inspection were very well taught and many of these had excellent features. Occasional lessons, spread through the school, were outstanding.
5. The key characteristics of the good and very good teaching include:
 - authoritative teaching, especially in the sixth form, based on a scholarly depth of subject expertise;
 - clear expression in lessons of what the pupils and students are meant to learn by the end of the lesson or unit of work;
 - very good use of time: no time was wasted in lessons seen, and activities were planned well to make sure that each one contributed to the learning in hand appropriately;
 - homework which was regularly set and marked, with good feedback to pupils and students;

- very good planning of appropriate activities, many of which involve students in responding to considerable challenge.
6. Lessons are well prepared and generally well resourced. Teachers break down new learning, as in the step-by-step approach in a Year 12 biology lesson, where the teacher's very good use of questioning and imaginative methods created high quality learning in a very enjoyable context.
 7. Examples of such lessons include a Year 13 history lesson on the Night of the Long Knives. There, students' involvement in the different activities planned resulted in very strong gains in knowledge and understanding of the topic. Their skills of analysis, interpretation, presentation and discussion all improved.
 8. Other examples of very well taught lessons started with a review of work to date, which served to reinforce learning, solve problems and assist students to cope with difficult work. One such took place in a Year 13 GNVQ lesson in Health and Social Care, where the teacher planned to acknowledge some potential learning problems and provide the girls with the tools to deal with them. She reinforced their understanding of ethical issues particularly well, which also helped them to make mature judgements about the learning that they faced. A very well taught lesson in art in Year 13 managed to build up and absorb students' interest, and then use very well designed and probing questions which caused students to reflect on the composition of the painting they were studying.
 9. In Year 11, a drama lesson made both practical and scholarly links to Stanislav's theory on physicality and acting. This stimulated interest and resulted in excellent co-operation and understanding of the skills the girls needed. A lower attaining Year 11 group in English responded just as well to the teacher's high expectations when they drew conclusions about behaviour patterns described in a poem from the examination anthology. In a Year 8 geography lesson on land use, very good teaching enabled all pupils to participate effectively in discussion prior to making very good notes for themselves.
 10. Learning is mainly very good due to good or very good teaching. However, some sixth form students are sometimes insufficiently independent, and expect their teacher to provide all the answers. This happened on occasions even in A level music in very well taught lessons, for example, when students had some difficulty in applying their learning on four-part harmonies. They lacked the confidence to develop their own critical and self-evaluative discussions which limited their depth of analysis and ability to compare different harmonies.
 11. A very small number of lessons had weaknesses because they lacked the structure and rigour of the rest. There were deficiencies in three lessons, resulting from short-term arrangements for teaching where recruitment difficulties had been a factor. These were largely overcome by the students' willingness to study at home and to undertake significant extra reading. The school's arrangements also managed to compensate for the difficulty, with the result that standards are not affected.

The extra-curricular activities are very good. Performances in music are excellent and there is a very high level of participation.

12. During the inspection, a full-scale evening concert occurred with at least two hundred parents present and many members of the governing body. The standard of performance was high. In keeping with the encouragement to all girls to participate, some of the performances were of relative newcomers to their instrument, and there were several opportunities for pupils to join in large-scale choral presentations. A valuable feature of this celebration of achievement was the opportunity for sixth form students to play music which they had composed.

13. A lunchtime production of part of 'The House of Bernarda Alba' by Garcia Lorca was also seen. This was produced and presented by Year 13 students to assist Year 12 students to understand the quality of work they have to produce for their A2 examination in drama. Such assistance not only motivates others but enables the school to celebrate achievement and thereby raise standards.
14. The sports programme and its wide range of successes is also a feature of the extra-curricular opportunities which motivate girls and sustain their involvement in fitness related activity. Despite limited facilities on site, the school manages to sustain a very rich range of sports, which is extremely well supported. The number of girls regularly participating in some form of competitive sport is very high. In inter-school competition, the various teams perform very well.

The leadership by the headteacher is excellent. Her leadership team supports her extremely well.

15. The influence of the headteacher is felt throughout the school. Governors, teachers, parents, pupils and students speak of her with great respect and admiration, and her organisation and strong sense of direction continue to drive up standards and develop the school well. The leadership team is efficient and thoughtful, supporting the head's vision for the school very well. The roles of the senior team are clearly defined and well known by parents, pupils and students, and all teachers. Each offers very effective support to pupils and students. This has been achieved without the leadership team losing contact with the classroom and their own roles in setting clear expectations for the quality of teaching.
16. The headteacher is very clear in providing a sense of direction to the school. She has a long-term vision, which is clearly articulated in a simple and straightforward school development plan. The head insists upon the same standards of courtesy and hard work from all adults in the school as are expected from pupils and students. She promotes reflection, and this was very well illustrated in a brief talk she gave to pupils and students and their parents and guests attending an evening concert, three weeks after the September 11th terrorist assaults in New York. This tone is an important reason underlying the civilised atmosphere of the school.
17. Close attention to the detail of management and organisation result in smooth administration and support for the professional functions of teachers and managers. The school is very well organised and its administrative staff are efficient and welcoming. The school has made some important organisational changes in recent years in its determination to obtain best value for its pupils. The combination of:
 - innovation in curriculum,
 - improved standards,
 - consistently good teaching,
 - creative deployment of resources,
 - the promotion of excellent attitudes to hard work and study,
 - a satisfying and enjoyable ethos,
 results in the judgement that the school gives very good value for money.
18. In the last five years, as a result of efforts made following the last inspection, curriculum has broadened, numbers in the sixth form have grown and the school has been successful in gaining national recognition for its work. During this time, despite many changes, including the smooth introduction of AS levels in the sixth form, standards have continued to rise, problems with accommodation have in the main been resolved, and plans are in hand to complete the range of improvements needed.
19. Governors' role in supporting a strategic overview of the direction for the school is a developing feature of the school. They prize, in particular, the ethos of the school and make clear that they expect it to be a priority. They are active in supporting links with the LEA, central government and local consultative structures to promote the school's interests.

The school welcomes well-researched change that meets pupils' and students' needs, and finds innovative ways to implement changes well.

20. This is not a school which feels the need to be the first to undertake untried change, but it welcomes those changes which it can see will benefit pupils and students. For example, the school is using the National Literacy Strategy well with Year 7 pupils and plans for Years 8 and 9 are being systematically re-written to improve literacy skills further.
21. The introduction of a broadened sixth form curriculum is another good example of such careful preparation, for example, in connection with the use of distance learning on two new courses. In order to ensure that students cope well with such a method of teaching and learning, the courses are being closely monitored by the head of sixth form. One deputy and the assistant head are participating as learners in the other. By so doing, the school undertakes change and develops opportunities for learning which involve no risk to students.
22. The school has taken full advantage of opportunities to increase and develop its teaching force by opening its doors to graduates wishing to enter the profession and has supported them well. They now make a significant contribution to the life of the school.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED?

The school does not systematically set targets related to the National Curriculum and sixth form course requirements, to help more pupils and students attain the highest grades.

23. Although there is clear evidence that almost all girls know what to do to improve their work, and the quality of feedback in the classroom and on written work is good, there is still room for subject teachers to formalise their target-setting. With the most able pupils, there is on occasion in class a tendency for them to be satisfied with good attainment when they could achieve more. There is still room for more target-setting for the sixth form students of highest academic potential in history, business education and economics, science and mathematics.

The full potential of information and communication technology (ICT) is not exploited in all subjects, although there are some very good examples of ICT support for learning.

24. There is good support for ICT in geography, and computers are very well used to support learning and the development of key geographical skills. However, this very good picture is not replicated elsewhere, with the exception of GNVQ programmes in ICT, where students are very well supported to reach high standards.
25. Although the school has invested considerable sums to provide appropriate and up-to-date hardware and software, and a good training programme for teachers is underway, a significant minority of departments have not yet taken advantage of the school's facilities. This is particularly noticeable in business education and economics, where the use of computers is to be expected. Where sixth form students of these subjects make use of computers, they largely do so in their own time in school or at home. The few students without home computers may therefore be disadvantaged.

Unsatisfactory accommodation affects the quality of sixth form art and graphics provision, and provision for physical education throughout the school.

26. Much has been done to improve the quality of accommodation in the school since the time of the last inspection. The new sixth form centre is a huge asset to the school and provides an excellent working environment for students. However, there is still a need for more individual quiet study space for pupils and students, and the quality of provision available in art, graphics

and physical education subjects is unsatisfactory. The library lacks the space needed to provide a learning resource for a sixth form of this size.

27. The work of the art department is curtailed by the quality of accommodation and its capacity to undertake with students larger scale pieces of work is limited. The conditions within which work is completed in the art studio and in the graphics workshop, with the risk of leaks, are demotivating. The range of activities which the school can provide in physical education is similarly curtailed by the lack of space. In poor weather, there is little opportunity for pupils and students to undertake appropriately demanding physical activity.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

28. In order to continue to develop this very good school and maintain its high standards in the future, the school should consider:
- (1) assisting students to gain the highest grades in their tests and examinations by setting targets which relate to the requirements of their courses and maintain a high level of challenge at the upper end of the ability range; (see paragraphs: 23, 48, 146)
 - (2) ensuring that all staff undertake appropriate training to develop their own levels of competence and confidence in using ICT as a tool for learning, and then have use of up-to-date hardware and software as appropriate for their subjects; (see paragraphs: 24, 25, 34, 40, 69, 73, 77, 94, 97, 101, 104, 113, 164)
 - (3) reviewing the efforts which have already been made to obtain better accommodation for art and design and physical education and developing new action plans for both. (see paragraphs: 26, 27, 64, 116)

Sixth form

- (1) Develop and co-ordinate the work on Key Skills, as envisaged in the school's planning documents, and ensure that all teachers contribute to the teaching of literacy, numeracy and ICT in the sixth form. (see paragraphs: 34)
- (2) Institute target-setting, particularly to assist higher attaining students to extend themselves, by providing them with short, medium and long-term challenging goals. (see paragraphs: 48, 72)
- (3) Proceed with plans to improve accommodation for art and physical education in particular. (see paragraph: 94, 116)
- (4) Raise standards in business and economics by ensuring that the same consistency of good teaching, which characterises the vast majority of sixth form teaching, is evident in these subjects. (see paragraphs: 96, 98, 102, 106)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	35
	Sixth form	61
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		47

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 7 – 11							
Number	2	11	16	6	0	0	0
Percentage	5.7	31.4	45.7	17.1	0	0	0
Sixth form							
Number	1	23	24	10	2	1	0
Percentage	1.6	37.7	39.3	16.4	3.3	1.6	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 – 11 and the sixth form as each lesson can represent between 1.6 and almost 3 percentage points.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	682	250
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	15	N/a

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	4	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	38	7

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	143

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	4

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	5.1
National comparative data	7.7

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.1
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)

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	0	127	127

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	0	0	0
	Girls	126	117	114
	Total	126	117	114
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	99 (98)	92 (93)	90 (89)
	National	63 (63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	93 (66)	79 (71)	61 (57)
	National	28 (28)	42 (38)	30 (23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	0	0	0
	Girls	120	115	123
	Total	120	115	123
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	94 (98)	91 (92)	97 (86)
	National	64 (64)	66 (64)	62 (60)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	71 (76)	72 (69)	63 (52)
	National	31 (31)	39 (37)	29 (28)

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
	2000	0	126	126

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	0	0	0
	Girls	103	126	126
	Total	103	126	126
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	82.6 (84)	100 (98)	100 (98)
	National	47.4 (46.6)	90.6 (90.9)	95.6 (95.8)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	56.5 (55)
	National	38.4 (38)

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

Vocational qualifications	Number	% success rate	
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	15	100
	National		N/a

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	0	99	99

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	0	17.9	17.9 (17.8)	0	4.3	4.3 (5.4)
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.

Vocational qualifications	Number	% success rate	
Number in their final year of studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	12	75
	National		N/a

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	14
Black – African heritage	28
Black – other	15
Indian	34
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	1
Chinese	2
White	740
Any other minority ethnic group	59

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)	57.3
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.3

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	8
Total aggregate hours worked per week	144

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	76.9
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	26.9
Key Stage 4	22

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000-2001
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	£
Total income	2,522,810
Total expenditure	2,499,073
Expenditure per pupil	2,786.03
Balance brought forward from previous year	45,264
Balance carried forward to next year	69,001

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	12.65
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	16.85

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	2
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	1
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	1

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	600
Number of questionnaires returned	300

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	61	32	5	1	0
My child is making good progress in school.	65	28	4	1	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	69	29	1	0	0
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	49	39	7	2	2
The teaching is good.	57	38	2	0	1
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	51	36	8	2	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	64	30	5	0	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	85	14	0	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	58	32	7	1	1
The school is well led and managed.	76	22	1	0	1
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	71	25	1	0	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	60	34	5	0	1

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

29. Overall, the results at AS and A level in the subjects inspected are well above average. Results vary between subjects. Students reached very high standards in A level biology in 2000, and high standards in geography. Standards were above average in art and design, French, history, mathematics and music. Average standards were achieved in A level chemistry and English literature. The A level results for 2001 give a similar picture, with improvement in chemistry and English literature. The new AS courses were examined for the first time in 2001. With the exception of French, graphics and mathematics, at least half the students taking each of the subjects inspected achieved a grade A or B. It was a much higher proportion than this in biology and geography. In all the subjects selected for a focused inspection, students from different ethnic backgrounds achieved equally well. With few exceptions, students reached the standards expected from their GCSE results, and occasionally exceeded them. The rate of progress is not as marked in the sixth form as it is lower down the school. Here, very good teaching and pupils' own hard work led to rapid progress to reach well above average standards at GCSE. From this very secure foundation, and with continued overall very good teaching, students achieve well in the sixth form and maintain high standards.
30. Over the past six years, there has been a rising trend in the standards reached at the school by Year 13 students. In 1996, 33 per cent of subject entries led to grades A or B, and 88 per cent grades A to E. In 2001, the figures were 44 per cent and 94 per cent respectively. Results have varied a little between these two dates, but the proportion of the two top A level grades has never been below 43 per cent and the overall pass rate no lower than 92 per cent. These results are a clear indicator of the effectiveness of the school's leadership and management through its impact on improving the quality of teaching of students in the sixth form. The school does not formally set targets for AS and A level. Its focus has been on working with individual students to encourage each to achieve as well as she can. Generally, this strategy is successful, though more precision is needed for the highest attaining students in a few subjects, to assist them to achieve at their best.
31. The great majority of students who begin their sixth form studies at the school complete them. A small number of students choose a one-year course in Year 12, just 6 per cent of the cohort in 2000. In that year, 97 per cent of the students who started their Year 13 studies completed them, though the corresponding figure for the previous year was 90 per cent but 96 per cent in 1998. The course completion rate is good overall and is excellent in many subjects, such as biology.
32. Standards seen during the inspection, both in lessons and from examination of students' files, are in line with those achieved in the most recent examinations. A high proportion of students is working at levels which point towards achievement of above or well above average examination standards in most subjects. In subjects which did not fare so well in 2001, better standards now are being reached in Year 12, for example in French and mathematics, but there is no evidence of better than average standards in business studies and economics. Standards in the other subjects inspected continue to be above average or better.
33. Students from minority ethnic groups in Years 12 and 13 are as hard working and keen as are students generally at the school and also are achieving well. Taking account of their GCSE results, which are rarely less than grade C for each of the subjects studied in the sixth form, and are often higher than this, students are achieving at the expected levels. Targets for examination grades are not formally set, though students and their teachers both know what can and should be achieved.

34. In 2000, the school decided to teach the key skills of communication, use of number and of information and communication technology (ICT) entirely through the AS and A level subjects. This strategy was not successful. Three-quarters of Year 12 reached the expected Level 3 in communication, but only 10 per cent in use of ICT. Two-thirds of the small number entered for the numeracy reached the Level 3 standard. The school has taken stock of these disappointing results and has decided on a different approach, to be started later in the autumn term, which will involve specific key skills lessons. However, most subjects continue to make a useful contribution, especially to communication skills and, to a lesser extent, use of number. Use of ICT is the weakest skill area and has little impact on students' progress in most of the subjects inspected fully. Geography is a notable exception to this.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

35. Attitudes are excellent. Students are confident and articulate, and have high self-esteem by the time that they enter the sixth form. They have a strong desire to develop to their full potential, and this is achieved in a selfless way. Whilst the new sixth form centre, and the non-uniform dress code enhance their individuality, they remain fully involved in the life of the school, make a positive contribution, and present excellent role models. Sixth form students take an active part in many activities, diligently carry out their responsibilities as house officials and committee members, and comment that it is important to have the opportunity "to give something back to the school". Students show that they can be trusted to manage themselves; they are caring and courteous, and are proud of their school. They treat their new accommodation with respect.
36. Students form constructive relationships amongst themselves, and with their teachers and other adults. New entrants to the sixth form are readily accepted, even though they may have different religions, customs, and beliefs. There is an excellent rapport with teachers that sustains an on-going dialogue, which allows views to be openly expressed and suggestions to be taken up. There is a purposeful and well-focused learning environment and community spirit, which implicitly and effectively denies any kind of oppressive or racist behaviour.
37. Examples of students' excellent attitudes to work include their capacity to undertake independent research alongside taught lessons in the sixth form computer suite, being well prepared for lessons, and always striving to do their best. Students display a very positive approach to learning, they have a good attendance record, are punctual, and use their non-contact time productively.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

38. Teaching is predominantly good with very good features in many lessons. Forty per cent of all lessons seen in the sixth form were very good overall. The very small number of unsatisfactory lessons occurred in circumstances which are unusual for the school and do not detract from the good picture described above.
39. Lessons in the sixth form are generally characterised by:
- Very good planning to address individual needs
 - Very good relationships between teachers and students, which encourage students to be open about their work and any problems they may be encountering
 - Very good use of questioning to elicit students' responses and deepen their ability to analyse and probe evidence and new material
 - The teachers' extensive subject expertise and scholarship
 - Development of discussion skills
 - Very good pupil management
 - Critical thinking (in the very best lessons)
 - Intellectual challenge in many lessons
 - Good and well chosen resources
 - Good use of time.
40. Where there are weaknesses, they are these:

- Teachers do not plan sufficiently to develop students' skills in using the computers to promote and deepen their learning
 - The passivity of a minority of students is not always challenged
 - In some subjects, especially mathematics, there is a lack of planned enquiry e.g. in saying 'What if?'
41. The best teaching, which is very well planned and engages pupils in discussion and debate, provides powerful intellectual challenge. There were many good examples during the inspection.
42. In some lessons which are otherwise very good, too much is left to the teacher, with the result that students accept what is offered and learn from it, but do not question their materials or their own work sufficiently. Even in music, which is very well taught and a strength of the school, there are occasions when students are not sufficiently enabled to develop a more analytical approach to the subject.

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

43. The sixth form curriculum plan is effective in providing each potential student with a wide range of choices. There is no built-in bar to particular groupings of subjects, hence the vast majority of students follow programmes which fully reflect their interests. The range is also evident in the introduction since the time of the last inspection of a range of accreditation routes including the General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) in Health and Social Care and in information and communication technology (ICT). In 1996, the school was asked to review the range of levels as well as the range of courses and subjects available. It has done this very successfully and the curriculum is now very broad and relevant to students' needs. The range of AS and A2 options is particularly impressive, including all the 'traditional' sixth form courses, and in addition, subjects such as economics, business, law and psychology. The school has been forward-looking in its careful introduction of distance learning programmes in law and critical thinking, and the monitoring and evaluation of these courses is most diligent. This is a good example of how the school rejects the untried for its own sake, but welcomes well-researched change in its methods and provision.
44. In addition to their academic studies, students all follow a course in religious education, thus fulfilling the statutory requirements for sixth form curriculum. They also participate in an impressive range of sporting and fitness activities, which include class time and out-of-class activities. The school has taken the decision to enhance in-class provision by buying in instructors for taught classes in, for example, aerobics, self-defence, salsa, yoga, trampolining and badminton, in addition to the team sports played every Wednesday afternoon. The range and quality of out-of-class activities, for which the school has won an enviable local reputation, demonstrate teachers' and students' commitments to sport and fitness. Parental support is helpful and enables the school to travel some distance for 'away' matches, for example in lacrosse, in which the school excels. Feedback from sixth form students about these sporting and fitness opportunities is very good – they describe the various clubs available as 'excellent'.
45. The sixth form curriculum is also enhanced by its personal, social and health education curriculum (PSHE). This programme is comprehensive and well-organised. Students speak well of the provision of day-long events which include the introduction of outside expertise to cover from all angles issues such as HIV/Aids, substance misuse, citizenship and how systems, including the courts, operate in matters to do with children and The Children Act.
46. A minority of students is less positive about the careers education and guidance programme, but their concern is focused on the need for them to be proactive themselves. This reflects the school's open approach to careers education and most students understand this. The quality of the careers' library is inadequate, however, in its provision and space to assure all students easy access to the range of materials they need when they need them.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

Assessment

47. The school's assessment of students' academic performance is effective and contributes to their good achievement. However, it is not always consistent across the subject range. These judgements are based on a large survey of students' written work conducted during the inspection and on lesson observations. The school is aware of this deficiency and individual departments are already preparing action plans to deal with this. For example, the mathematics department intends to introduce tests and a common marking scheme shortly, recognising that its current practice needs revision.
48. Students' work is regularly marked with helpful comments included. In English, for example, the teachers' commentaries are very full. Much classroom feedback reinforces written comments, and all contribute to students' ability to assess their own performance. Short-term target-setting has not yet been fully developed as an assessment tool, or to fully challenge the highest attaining students. In many lessons, however, good verbal feedback gives students the opportunity to assess their progress accurately in relation to the requirements of their courses, but this is not consistent across all subjects, and does not provide adequate focus on the requirements of the highest grades.

Advice, support and guidance

49. The school has very good procedures for ensuring students' safety and welfare. There is a clear line of responsibility established, and regular checks of the premises and equipment are undertaken. Visiting speakers talk to students about a variety of issues including childcare, drugs, and HIV/Aids so that they have an informed perspective on many of the critical and sensitive issues which can arise outside school. Pastoral support is particularly effective because there are many points of contact between staff and students, and an interactive personal, health, and social education (PHSE) curriculum which is delivered by form tutors.
50. Between eighty and eighty-five per cent of students stay on in the sixth form and most continue into higher education. Careers advice is widely available and forms an important part of the school's PHSE curriculum. The school intentionally guides students to make informed choices, and encourages them to research career and subject options, rather than direct them towards specific career paths. The school does not channel students, and a strength of its approach is the fact that subject options for the sixth form are completely open. This is appropriate provision, although some of the students who completed the pre-inspection questionnaire felt that more should be done for them.
51. There is an effective induction programme after the GCSE examinations in Year 11 that prepares students well for sixth form work, and informs them of the progression to jobs and higher education. Preparatory work for AS courses, for example in geography, during the summer holidays is another example of the ways in which the school provides guidance for students which is supportive to their learning, development of self-discipline and introduces them to independent study. Students are given some flexibility to change their courses in the first half of their first term in Year 12 in the light of experience.
52. Students acknowledge the very full and constructive advice given to them in relation to their choice of courses and higher education destinations by a knowledgeable team of senior staff and tutors. This is soundly researched and complemented by visiting university speakers and others, visits to careers conventions, and focused presentations on topics such as study skills. Public examination results indicate that the support given to students is pitched at a level that ensures a very good level of achievement.

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

53. Parents' views of the school are very positive. All parents agree that the school sets high expectations, none disagree that behaviour is good, and very few doubt that the school is well led and managed, and that their children are helped to become mature and responsible. In no instance did more than one in ten parents disagree with any of the points raised by the parents' pre-inspection questionnaire. The most notable, but still a small minority, area of concern relates to parents being informed about their children's progress. Inspectors agree that the quality of reporting in pupils' annual reports is sometimes inconsistent but, overall, conclude that the school works closely, and effectively, with parents.
54. Parents were satisfied with the regularity and appropriateness of parents' evenings, and felt that the work set to be done at home was well pitched. Those who attended the pre-inspection parents' meeting were full of praise for the ease with which they can make contact with the school and seek its help and advice. They also praised the school for the wide range of opportunities for students to demonstrate their care for their community, and said that this added to the richness of their daughters' school lives and their growing maturity.
55. Students' views of the school are very positive overall. The school selected a sample of students for interview, and others held informal conversations with inspectors, so that their views could be considered. In addition, all Year 13 students were given the opportunity to return a pre-inspection questionnaire. The scale of students' concerns apparent in their questionnaires, which mostly relate to careers advice, was clarified in interviews. Appropriately, because most students go on to higher education, careers information is widely available but the school takes care to leave options open. Students are particularly positive about the choice of courses that is available to suit their talents and career aspirations, the help and encouragement given towards independent study, and the accessibility of teachers to help overcome difficulties.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

Leadership and management

56. The school is very well led. The headteacher provides excellent leadership at all levels, in staffing, curriculum, finance, management and administration and ethos. Governors and parents value her approach, particularly in terms of maintaining the ethos of the school, developing it and broadening its remit. She provides clear curriculum leadership and sets the tone of high expectations which characterises the school. The aims of the school are very clearly stated and imbue the teachers' and students' work. Teachers and students share a capacity and a will to ensure that the school continues to succeed.
57. The leadership style adopted by the headteacher is one of personal care for the individual, that the sum of the parts makes a greater whole. Consequently, she knows pupils and students very well, checks upon their progress and involves parents very fully in managing any problems which arise. This high level of contact is achieved by dint of very close attention to detail and high quality support from her leadership team, who provide the headteacher with very good management and monitoring information.
58. Staff with delegated management responsibilities, for example, the leadership team and key heads of departments, fulfil their roles very well. In some cases, for example in the leadership and management of the sixth form, leadership of subjects such as English, biology, geography and music, the commitment of staff is excellent. They make a huge contribution to the effectiveness of the school and to the standards students achieve.
59. Although recruitment problems have become more noticeable in recent years, and the school is spending a significantly increased amount of money and time on the recruitment process, it has succeeded in making many very good appointments. Some parents were concerned about the level of turnover of staff, but all of this results from the natural process of change and is not a cause of concern. It has not damaged the ethos or standards of the school, as very good replacement appointments have been made.

60. Governors are very supportive of the school and help in many ways to ensure it retains its ethos and its commitment to quality. They keep a close eye on standards and review the work of the school regularly. They are also effective in supporting development and change, challenging the head and staff to achieve best value and research all change thoroughly. In recent years, governors have taken on a closer monitoring role in relation to subjects, and this link is developing well. Governors fulfil all their statutory duties well and maintain their interest in the school's planning. They are rightly reducing their involvement in unnecessary detail in order to take a more strategic, long-term overview. This is assisted by their very good knowledge of the school, which helps them to help to shape its directions.
61. Performance management is in place throughout the school, and forms an integral part of the head's strategic quality assurance role. Staff have been well trained for their monitoring roles and most are implementing them with care. Professional development opportunities are well planned, but subject to tight controls so that training for the future does not overtake the routines and daily needs of the school. Non-teaching staff perform an invaluable service and aid the smooth running of the school significantly.
62. The school has a simple and direct development plan, which addresses the school's needs without complication. It contains almost all of the matters identified in this inspection as needing to be in receipt of attention.
63. Learning resources have improved significantly since the time of the last inspection and most classrooms are well equipped and book and audio-visual resources are good. However, some teachers are not yet making use of the excellent ICT facilities which have been installed, and further investment, which is pending, depends upon their planning.
64. Accommodation has improved greatly since the last inspection. The addition of a new sixth form centre with excellent facilities has made a great deal of difference to the ambience of the school and its grounds. Most departments have been moved into suites of rooms to enable teachers to concentrate their resources and make better use of them. Further work is planned to provide improved design and technology facilities which will not only enable the provision of a better curriculum 11-16, but provide opportunities for greater specialism in the sixth form. Accommodation in art, graphics and physical education is still not adequate for the size of school or for the curriculum aspirations of the teachers and pupils and students. The space available for art is insufficient to enable the development of large three-dimensional pieces which require extended time for completion. The area available for independent work is insufficient. The graphics room is subject to water ingress and surfaces are often damp. The space for indoor physical and fitness education is limited, hence the programme is frequently disrupted by adverse weather conditions.

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

In the inspection, thirteen 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
BIOLOGY	5	80	53	0	6	1.6	1
CHEMISTRY	1	-	47	-	6	-	0.9
MATHEMATICS	1	-	63	-	17	3	1.6
MUSIC	2	50	87	-	30	0.5	2.4
PHYSICS	9	78	53	11	8	1.7	1
RELIGIOUS STUDIES	14	100	76	29	19	3.3	2

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
ART AND DESIGN	8	100	96	38	45	6.8	6.4
BIOLOGY	27	100	88	70	34	7.8	5.3
CHEMISTRY	9	78	89	33	42	5.6	5.9
COMMUNICATION STUDIES	21	100	93	30	30	6	5.4
ENGLISH LITERATURE	33	91	96	30	36	5.4	5.9
FRENCH	5	100	91	40	39	6	5.7
GEOGRAPHY	9	100	92	67	37	7.7	5.7
GERMAN	10	100	92	80	41	8.2	5.9
HISTORY	14	93	89	29	34	5.6	5.4
MATHEMATICS	23	91	89	48	45	6.4	6
MUSIC	11	100	93	36	35	6.7	5.7
OTHER LANGUAGES	4	100	94	100	59	9.3	7
PHYSICS	2	100	88	50	41	7	5.7
RELIGIOUS STUDIES	3	100	91	33	35	6.7	5.6
SOCIOLOGY	13	100	88	69	37	7.5	5.5
SPANISH	3	100	90	67	40	8	5.8
SPORTS/PE STUDIES	6	100	91	33	25	5.3	5

Intermediate vocational qualifications

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		% gaining distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Business	8	88		25		0	
ICT Part 1	17	100		40		6	
ICT Part 1 Foundation	2	100		50		0	

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- Teaching is good; lessons are well planned and this, together with a good awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of individual students, enables teachers to focus on specific individual needs.
- Students show an interest in their work, maintain their concentration and work at a good pace.
- Good use is made of homework which is set regularly and thoroughly marked to assist the consolidation of learning.
- The subject is well led and the new head of department has already identified areas for development.

Areas for improvement

- Standards in algebraic manipulation are not high enough.
- Students are not given sufficient opportunity to develop their reasoning and creative thinking skills.
- Periodic assessment is not sufficiently consistent and target-setting has not been developed as a tool.
- The use of information and communication technology (ICT) is not sufficiently developed.

65. The GCE A level results in 2000 were above the national average with 48% at the highest grades of A and B. Very few students did not complete the course. With the exception of 2001 the results in recent years have been in line with, or better than, national averages. In 2001 the results in A and AS levels were not quite as good and were below the national average. Of the 22 students studying A level almost 91% achieved a pass grade but the proportion of students achieving an A grade was significantly below the national average. In the AS examinations one third of the students failed to achieve a pass grade and the number achieving an A grade was slightly below the national average. (These comparators are subject to verification when national data is published.) In relation to their GCSE results they did less well than expected. More than half the students opted not to continue with their study of mathematics beyond AS level.

66. Overall, the standards of work of current students are good and Year 13 students of all abilities and backgrounds are achieving at a satisfactory level at this stage in their course. In the lessons seen students were consolidating their learning of basic principles and were able to apply them to problem solving such as in their application of integration to find areas under a

curve. Most students show good understanding of the work covered in lessons but their progress in applying their knowledge is impeded through poor skills with algebra. For example, lack of proficiency in rearranging formulae prevented students from successfully completing questions on the conservation of momentum and the law of restitution without assistance from the teacher.

67. Students in Year 12 are at an early stage in their course but are achieving well. For example, in statistics they are able to interpret histograms and are at ease with the concept of frequency density. Students are confident in calculating the standard deviation for grouped data and able to assess the likely accuracy of their answer. Most areas of the work are tackled with confidence but one area of weakness is algebra. In a lesson on constant acceleration formulae only the higher attaining pupils were able to re-arrange the formulae without assistance from the teacher. Lack of confidence with, and mastery of, algebra were also evident in a lesson that required students to factorise a quadratic expression, a skill required for GCSE mathematics. Overall, all students, including those from ethnic minorities, are making good progress.
68. Mathematics in the sixth form was not fully reported in the last inspection report. Overall, since that time the school has maintained, and in the year 2000 improved, its standards in comparison with national averages. Students continue to make good progress and the teaching is still good, although the proportion of students studying mathematics has reduced. In the year 2000/2001 the school did experience significant turbulence in staffing but these issues have now been resolved. Access to information technology equipment is still problematic and is not integrated into the mathematics curriculum.
69. Teaching is good overall; lessons are well planned and good use is made of questions to develop students' understanding of principles. Good subject knowledge, clear explanations and targeted individual support, help all students to gain a greater understanding of the concepts. In the best lessons students are encouraged to think for themselves and make the intuitive leap necessary to solve a problem. The lesson on calculating standard deviations in Year 12, for example, required students to connect their previous learning with a new formula and they all successfully made the connection without assistance from the teacher. This degree of challenge is currently lacking in most lessons. Slow pace, unclear explanations and insufficient time to find a solution unaided are examples of contributory factors in the small number of lessons that are less successful.
70. Students learn well. They are attentive and sustain their interest and concentration throughout the lesson. They are supportive of each other and work productively and at a good pace. In lessons they use their time well and take notes for future reference. Generally, however, they do not ask questions that show they are capable of inferring, anticipating consequences or hypothesising. These skills are underdeveloped and lessons currently provide insufficient opportunities for the development of deduction, anticipation and the application of imagination to mathematical problems.
71. The current procedures for monitoring students' progress are satisfactory. Good use is made of homework, which is regularly marked, and clear indications are given of how to improve. The department does not yet have a supply of end of unit tests for use by all teachers and this results in a lack of consistency in the assessment of progress over time. Currently, insufficient use is made of data to set targets and monitor student progress during the course. Although students have a general impression of how well they are progressing there is a lack of specific focus on individual learning goals.
72. The very recently appointed head of department has identified the immediate priorities for development within the department. She is currently providing good leadership and is committed to building upon the strengths of the department and to improving standards further. The immediate plans focus upon the development of a bank of tests for use in the sixth form that will ensure a consistent approach to the assessment of learning. The expansion of schemes of work to give a more focused and uniform direction to the work in all key stages is planned for the medium term. Completion of the Key Stage 3 audit and increased use of information communication technology within the department have also been highlighted for

attention. Monitoring of teaching and learning has commenced with the collection of work for scrutiny and in the future this will be extended to include classroom observation. Target-setting has yet to be developed within the department as a tool for using information about prior attainment to set well-grounded expectations for students.

Sciences

73. The focus during the inspection was on biology and chemistry. Physics was sampled, in addition. Only two students took A level physics in 2000 and both gained a higher grade. The subject was more popular in 2001, with seven entries for the A level examination. Again all students passed, with three achieving one of the two highest grades. For the AS examination, the eight entries resulted in seven passes, but just two higher grades. Physics has been the least successful of the three sciences, especially in recruiting students to the course. A new subject team leader has just taken up appointment and quickly is getting to grips with what could be done to raise the profile of physics. Standards in the work seen during the inspection are average and indicate sound progress since students started their AS or A2 programmes.

Biology

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

Strengths

- Students achieve high standards in their lessons, coursework and examinations.
- The quality of teaching, which is very good overall, results in very good learning.
- Students show high levels of interest and work hard.
- A good range of resources and the field trip give students many first hand learning experiences.
- The leadership and management of the subject has resulted in consistently high standards.

Areas for improvement

- More use of information and communication technology (ICT).

74. In 2000, a large number of students sat the A level examination, leading to very high results compared to all students nationally: two-thirds of the students at the school gained the top two grades and all who sat the examination passed. Compared with their GCSE results in science (double award), this shows good achievement, and is in line with the high marks gained in the biology part of that examination. For a slightly smaller number of students in 2001, though again biology was one of the most popular subjects, the A level result was equally good. A large group of students sat the AS examination, with seven out of every ten achieving one of the two top grades, and all passed. The results for both examinations indicate good achievement compared to the position previously reached by these students in GCSE science, and in line with standards in the biology part of that examination. This is generally students' most successful aspect of science at GCSE.
75. Students in the present Year 13, building on their very good results from the AS level examination, and having started A2 studies soon after completing those examinations, continue to work at well above average levels. They show a generally very well developed understanding of such topics as photosynthesis and genetics. Students are avid listeners and are eager to get to grips with challenging work. Year 12 students were in their first few weeks of their AS level course at the time of the inspection. They are approaching their new studies seriously and are working at an above average standard. They have arrived at their present studies with a lot of confidence arising from strong GCSE performance and are ready to grapple with such complex topics as the three-dimensional structure of proteins. They have remembered what they have learnt at GCSE and readily make connections between that and new learning.

76. Students in both Year 12 and 13 who are capable of reaching the highest grades, as well as those who are working at more average standards, achieve well, as teaching engages them all successfully in learning, as is the case with students from minority ethnic groups. Students who begin biology in the sixth form complete their studies almost without exception. They have a clear understanding of the grades they are capable of achieving, though they are not formally set targets. Biology makes a good contribution to students' key skills in communication and use of number, but less so for information and communication technology (ICT). The department does what it can with the ICT resources it has, but they are insufficient for the use of ICT to make a significant contribution to standards in biology.
77. Most of the teaching seen was very good, with some excellent features. This consistent quality of teaching, together with students' own very good attitudes and hard work, are the main reasons why they learn and achieve well. Teachers are very knowledgeable and give clear explanations of complex concepts, such as the intricate structure of proteins or the detailed chemistry of photosynthesis. Just occasionally, some uncertainty about an aspect of biology that requires understanding of physics, resulted in students' questions not being addressed as authoritatively as was generally the case. Overall, however, teaching stretches students' thinking and they are challenged to learn and apply new concepts at a fast rate.
78. Excellent relationships meant that lessons focused fully on learning in a very pleasant atmosphere. Time was very well used, with very effective technician support ensuring that resources were ready to hand. Some first rate resources, such as a TV-linked microscope, made explanations of new topics absolutely clear, as with some details of cell structure. This is an excellent use of information technology. Expectations are high and considerable demands are made of students and they rise to the challenge. They listen intently during teaching and are prepared to make a very good intellectual effort to learn.
79. Students take notes diligently during lessons and have organised very good working folders of their notes, assignments, fieldwork projects, tests, printed notes and past examination questions. Together with their textbooks, use of these folders places students in a strong position for continuing progress. This written work contributes well to their communication skills. Marking is thorough and includes helpful feedback to students on what they could do to improve. Similarly, the use of number in such work as botanical surveys from their residential field work, contributes effectively to the development of students' numeracy skills. Less effective in biology is the use of ICT. Some use is made of word processing and research, but lack of resources means that ICT is not sufficiently integrated into the learning process.
80. The leadership and management of biology are excellent: examination results have been well above the national average since the previous inspection. In the last five years, just one entry to A level has resulted in failure and at least two-thirds of students reached the two highest grades during these years. The team leader for biology sets very high standards and leads a team of teachers and technicians striving for excellence. The subject is popular at the school and it makes a very significant contribution to its learning-focused ethos. Improvement has been good since the previous inspection.

Chemistry

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

Strengths

- Good teaching enables students to achieve top grades.
- The well-planned curriculum and helpful guidance for students enable them to plan by knowing when each part will be taught.
- The sound progress made by students leads to standards in line with expectations based on GCSE performance in chemistry.
- Students bring very positive attitudes to their studies.

Areas for improvement

- More use of information and communication technology (ICT).

81. The 2000 A level results were broadly in line with the position found nationally. Compared with the students' GCSE science results, especially the chemistry part of that examination, the A level achievement was much as expected. A larger group of students sat the A level examination in 2001 and gained a much higher proportion of top grades than in 2000. Just over half obtained one of the two top grades, and all but one passed. This compares very favourably with the national picture of 2000. The 2001 results in the AS examination were similar to those for A level, except that all students passed. Compared with their GCSE results for the chemistry part of double award science, students' success in the 2001 A level and AS results again were in line with expectation. Almost all students who start a sixth form chemistry course complete it. Results have varied quite markedly during the last three years for which there are national comparisons – from well below, to well above, to in line with national averages.
82. Work seen during the inspection, in lessons and students' folders, indicates a similar standard to that shown in recent examinations. The most able Year 13 students are confidently progressing in understanding topics such as the graphical representation of the different orders of reactions. Students of more average ability work hard to try to grasp the concepts, which they might have found easier with clearer teaching of the significance of these categories of chemical reactions. Students in Year 12 have made a good start to their AS level studies. They are achieving satisfactorily, for example in the use of the flame tests and spectroscopy to identify elements. They want to learn, do all that is expected of them during lessons, though some are reluctant to contribute during question and answer sessions. As a result, they miss some opportunities to develop their understanding and to share difficulties they are experiencing. Students in both year groups listen intently during lessons and readily do all that is asked of them. They bring very positive attitudes to their study of chemistry.
83. Students generally are achieving at least satisfactorily, though some of those who are working at the lower pass levels sometimes do not progress as far as they could as they are reluctant to express their lack of understanding. Questions during teaching do not always expose their difficulties so that they can be addressed. Students from minority ethnic groups progress as well as do other students. The written work produced to meet course requirements makes a useful contribution to the development of students' communication skills. The calculations students frequently make in chemistry support the continuing development of numeracy skills.
84. Teaching seen during the inspection was good, as was students' learning. Teaching is based on generally secure knowledge of the AS and A2 courses so that lessons were well matched to syllabus requirements. Explanations of new work during teaching were mainly clear. Further explanations for individual students were readily provided. Occasionally, however, the significance of the next stage of learning was not spelt out clearly enough so that students could understand its relevance beyond the classroom, for example the identification of elements using the flame test. Excellent relationships and the careful preparation of resources for students' use meant that learning proceeded without any loss of time. Technician support was very effective.
85. Some good questioning helped students to consolidate previous work and to deepen their understanding of new material, though it did not always succeed in revealing the difficulties a few students were experiencing in really getting to grips with more difficult ideas, such as orders of reaction. These students were slow to ask for further clarification when they needed it. Effective use is made of written communication and the use of number in the teaching and learning of chemistry. Teachers do as much as they can with ICT, given the limited resources they have available.
86. Students' files consist of well-organised notes of their own making, exercises, past papers and printed notes. Written assignments have been done thoroughly and number work is well set out. No use of ICT was seen in the files examined. Each section of the file is prefaced by a very helpful synopsis of the topic, giving a breakdown of details to be studied and when, together with textbook references and practical activities. This synopsis gives students very

clear guidance on the route through the course and it enables them to plan their personal study. These files and textbooks provide very sound bases for that study so that students can prepare for the next stage in the chemistry programme, should they wish.

87. Leadership and management are good. The team leader for chemistry is working hard to promote the subject and to raise standards - the 2001 results show what can be done. Concern about storage of chemicals was raised with the school - it took immediate action to address points raised. Improvement has been satisfactory since the previous inspection.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

Design and technology - graphics

Overall, the quality of provision in design and technology - graphics is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- Teaching is consistently satisfactory and often good and it motivates students to achieve a good level of skill.

Areas for improvement

- The accommodation is poor, with damp affecting the surfaces.
- There has been insufficient take-up of full GCSE courses to run them, which would encourage more students to take the AS courses in design technology and assist in raising standards.

88. The provision in design technology is only in the area of graphics, which caters for nine students following the AS and A level courses.
89. The most recent AS examinations were below the national average, although all students attained a pass. This was the first time that the course had been taken, and these students are now embarking on the first Advanced level graphics course. The retention rate is excellent, with all students continuing the course. Achievement of students is good. Not all took the short course GCSE in graphics, the full course not being offered.
90. It was not possible to give an overall judgement on students taking the AS course, as only one student was observed, and work completed was not available. Observation of A level students in lessons, and an analysis of work seen, shows that overall standards achieved match the course expectations. Students have sound drawing skills, and this was seen when they were drawing cycloids, which requires a high level of precision. Their understanding of CAD/CAM is sound, and they are secure in their knowledge and application of them. Their understanding of task analysis through comprehensive research is good, and from this they form a clear design specification. Students use ICT with confidence, in the form of research, spreadsheets and for the layout of their work.
91. The standard of teaching is at least satisfactory and often good, with one in three lessons very good. Teachers have good subject knowledge, which is used to extend students' understanding. This was seen when the illusion of circular movement appearing to go backwards was explained, for example the use of a flange on a train wheel. Relationships are good, the less confident students are encouraged, and the more able fully extended. Independent learning is promoted, and students achieve this through research and analysis of products. They are also encouraged to experiment, and this was seen when they extended the drawing to include a trochoid. This leads to good learning by all students. The very good lesson had pace, so that students were moved on rapidly in their learning. The enthusiasm of the teacher motivated students confidently to tackle a difficult task.

92. Students enjoy graphics, and therefore make every effort to learn and to improve. They are ready to ask for assistance, and take care to achieve high standards of presentation. They work hard, for example, when a student conducted a questionnaire, and transferred the data in a very short time. They look beyond the theoretical aspects of graphics to its practical application, for example, a project planned is to design chairs for a local restaurant.
93. The department is well led by a dedicated teacher who is determined to raise the status of design technology. The graphics room does not provide the stimulating environment that would contribute to this. However, a new block is planned.

BUSINESS

Business Studies

Overall, the quality of provision in business studies is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- Standards are above average at A level.
- Students are well motivated and have a good attitude to work.
- The numbers taking the subject in the sixth form have significantly increased.
- Teachers are enthusiastic, have a very good knowledge of the subject and very good relationships with students.

Areas for improvement

- There are inconsistencies in the quality of teaching which are having an effect on the quality of learning.
- Monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning are inadequately developed so that the best practice is not being shared.
- Computers are not used enough to develop students' skills.
- There is insufficient lack of contact with local businesses to enhance the curriculum and provide more stimulus and resources for the students.

94. Until 2000, the school provided Advanced GNVQ Business Studies for small numbers of students. In 2001, students were examined for the first time in AS and GCE Advanced levels in the subject. In 2000, standards in the Advanced GNVQ were broadly in line with the national average with three students achieving distinctions, one a merit, three passes and 1 uncertificated result, after being below average in the previous two years. This was satisfactory achievement compared with their GCSE examination results. In 2001, the proportion of students attaining A-B grades at AS was above average and in line at A to E. This achievement was just satisfactory compared with their very good GCSE results in the subject in 2000. GCE Advanced level results in 2001 were broadly in line with those nationally for 2000 at the higher grades and just below at grades A to E. This was satisfactory achievement compared with their GCSE results. Nearly three-quarters of those taking the AS course have gone on to A level.
95. Standards in work seen are in line with the national average. This represents satisfactory achievement compared with their attainment at the beginning of Year 12. Students generally have a satisfactory knowledge and understanding of most technical terms and concepts in business. Year 13 students have a good grasp of the main authorities on motivation in management, such as McGregor. However, lower attaining students in Year 13 were unsure how to recognise a profit or loss in profit/loss accounting, which they would be expected to understand in Year 12. Nearly all students have at good literacy skills: they are able to select and record relevant information well; they have good skills of listening, reading and speaking, with clear expression and confidence. This is encouraged by the good questioning techniques used in the best-taught lessons. Higher attaining students in Year 13 write at length with precise relevance, fluency and well supported analytical arguments. Skills of extended writing and analysis are less well developed in middle and lower attainers, especially in Year 12. There are weaknesses in structuring paragraphs and in their written expression unless teachers regularly check them. There is often a tendency to retell the data provide rather than evaluate

it critically. This can occur when the teacher provides inadequate time and challenge for students to solve problems by themselves.

96. Skills in the use of information and communications technology are far less developed, as few opportunities are given, for example, to use Power Point in making presentations and using spreadsheets for balance sheets. There is a problem of access to computers, but the department is aware of the priority that needs to be given to this aspect of skill development.
97. Teaching is satisfactory overall, and occasionally good. It is never unsatisfactory. This is not as good as at the time of the last inspection, when all the teaching was good. Many of the strengths identified then are still evident. Teachers have a very good subject knowledge, which is mostly used well to plan lessons and answer questions effectively. They mark thoroughly, with helpful guidance on content and analysis, though deficiencies in essay writing and note making are not always checked. Very good working relationships with the students exist, often based on humour. The most effective lessons also have a lively pace and deadlines for completing tasks.
98. However, there is not consistency of good practice. When lessons are not so well planned, the teacher talks for too long and there is an insufficient variety of stimulating tasks, which involve the students in enquiry and analytical work on their own. Teaching methods do not always help the students' learning to advance. Hand-written information and work sheets are occasionally used in a subject which should be more computer based. Students found the writing up on the board of a profit and loss account more time consuming and more difficult to understand than a prepared, printed sheet or overhead projector slide. Questioning is generally used well to check students' understanding, but not all are included and targeted. The complex business concepts are not always adequately reinforced by rigorous and regular reviews at the beginning and end of lessons.
99. The good attitude of the students to work helps to make learning at least satisfactory. They are usually well motivated, listen attentively and work keenly throughout the lesson. They co-operate very well with the teacher and with each other. They are capable of studying well by themselves, although opportunities for independent and challenging enquiry work are not consistently provided. Most students take great pride in their work and files are well organised, but occasionally work by lower attainers is incomplete, for instance the business plans in Year 12. Students' attention falters when the pace of the lesson is slow or they are inadequately involved in the lesson, as occurred with Year 13 students studying profit and loss accounts when the teacher spoke for too long.
100. The subject co-ordinator displays a number of strengths of leadership and management. There is a strong commitment to improvement. High standards and expectations are set, as shown by the co-ordinator's outstanding GCSE results in the subject, which provide a strong basis for sixth form work. These have encouraged students to take up the subject at AS and A level and numbers have significantly increased. Assessment procedures are good, although students are not yet clearly informed of their predicted grades. However, regular and formalised monitoring of teaching through classroom observation is undeveloped so that inconsistencies in the quality of teaching exist. The co-ordinator's lack of sixth form teaching because of her commitments elsewhere is making monitoring of standards and teaching more difficult. Information and communications technology is not adequately integrated into the teaching plans so that students' skills are not being promoted. The local business community is also not being used nearly enough as a resource to enliven the subject with visits or to bring into the school experts from trade and industry to broaden the curriculum offered to students.

Economics

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

Strengths

- Standards are above average at AS level.
- Students are well motivated and have a good attitude to work.
- Teachers are enthusiastic, have a very good knowledge of the subject and very good relationships with students.

Areas for improvement

- The quality of teaching is not consistently high; this is affecting the quality of learning.
- Teaching and learning are inadequately monitored so that the best practice is not being shared.
- Information and communications technology is not used sufficiently to develop students' skills.

101. There were no entries for either the AS or GCE A level examinations in 2000. A level results in 1998 and 1999 were below average from a small number of candidates, although students did better in the subject than in their other examination subjects. In 2001, the proportion of students attaining A-B grades at AS was above average and in line at A-E. This achievement was just satisfactory compared with their good GCSE results in 2000. There were no entries for GCE Advanced level in 2000. A high proportion of those taking the AS examination have stayed on to take A level in Year 13.
102. Standards in work seen are in line with the national average. Most students have a good knowledge and understanding of economic terms and concepts, although lower attainers in Year 12 had difficulties with price elasticity and Year 13 students were insecure in their grasp of cost theory. Nearly all students have good literacy skills: they make thorough and relevant notes; they read and speak clearly and confidently, with the higher attaining students using critical analysis well. For example, Year 13 students accurately analysed bar graphs and pie charts on factors influencing the labour supply in order to make an articulate presentation to the class. Skills of interpreting statistics and graphs were being developed. Higher attaining students in Year 13 write fluently at length with well supported, analytical arguments and good analysis of data. Skills of paragraph construction and analysis are less well developed in middle and lower attainers, especially in Year 12, if the normally thorough marking is not consistently applied. It can occur when the teacher provides inadequate time and challenge for students to analyse problems by themselves.
103. The department does not make sufficient use of information technology in its work. Work on spreadsheets is therefore not as advanced as it should be.
104. Teaching is satisfactory overall and occasionally good. It is never unsatisfactory. The teaching has much strength. There is regular and thorough marking, with helpful guidance on how to improve, though deficiencies in essay writing and note-making are not always checked as carefully. Classes are managed very well and relationships with the students are also very good. Very good subject knowledge is used well to answer questions and to support weaker students, for instance, when the teacher gave much individual help to Year 13 students struggling to understand the complexities of the theory of costs. The most effective lessons also have a lively pace and deadlines for completing tasks.
105. However, there are deficiencies in the teaching which bring inconsistency of quality. When lessons are not so well planned, there is a limited variety of activities to challenge the students and to develop their analytical skills; their understanding is inadequately consolidated with review sessions at the end of the lessons or the beginning of the next. For example, Year 13 students gained much from presenting their interpretations of factors affecting the supply of labour. However, the teacher moved them on to a new topic without sufficiently reinforcing their learning by challenging them to prioritise the factors or reflect back on the effectiveness of their presentations.
106. The students' learning is promoted by their good attitude to work. They listen well to instructions and each other and usually work enthusiastically throughout the lesson when

activities are stimulating. They have a strong determination to succeed, as was shown by Year 13 students when they tenaciously stuck to the task of solving difficult questions relating to cost theory. They co-operate very well with the teacher and with each other in group work. They study well by themselves, although opportunities for independent and challenging enquiry work are not consistently provided. Students take much pride in their work and their files are complete and well organised.

107. The subject co-ordinator sets high expectations for the subject and is committed to improving standards. This is helping to increase the numbers studying AS and A level. Assessment procedures are good, although students are not yet clearly informed of their predicted grades. Schemes of work provide good guidance for teaching. However, there are areas for improvement. Information and communications technology is not adequately integrated into the teaching so that students' computer skills are not being fully developed. Regular, systematic monitoring of teaching through classroom observation is not yet in place so that there are still inconsistencies in the quality of teaching. The co-ordinator's lack of sixth form teaching because of her commitments elsewhere is making monitoring of standards and teaching more difficult. Economics, as with business studies, would benefit from far closer ties with the local businesses to further stimulate the students' interest and to provide another source of information.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

108. The inspection focused on music, art and design and graphics. A range of extra-curricular activities were visited. In music and drama, in addition, inspectors attended:
- rehearsals of the choirs, instrumental groups and instrumental lessons,
 - an evening concert for parents of 20th and 21st century music, which included students' own compositions,
 - a lunchtime presentation by the Year 13 A level drama group of Garcia Lorca's 'The House of Bernarda Alba', a presentation organised to familiarise Year 12 with elements of the A level course.

Art and Design

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

Strengths

- The quality of teaching motivates students and encourages independent learning.
- Visits enhance the curriculum and widen students' experiences of art and design.

Areas for improvement

- There is insufficient dedicated studio space for students to continue to work independently and to leave work in hand out, which would assist in raising standards further.

109. The provision in art caters for twenty-eight students following AS and Advanced level courses. Entry into the AS course is normally for students with at least a B grade in GCSE, but those with different qualifications have successfully joined the course.
110. All students who took the A level examination gained an E grade or above in 2000 or the most recent examinations, which is a good result. However, the numbers gaining the high grades of A/B was below the national average. The AS level examination results were very good, and 80 per cent of students gained A/B grades. The retention rate in art is excellent, with all students completing the course.

111. Observation of students in lessons, and an analysis of samples of their work, show that standards are above the national expectation in the A level classes, and are better than the recent results. Students' sketchbooks from the St. Ives' visit show a high level of drawing and observational skills, for example, in their work on the Barbara Hepworth museum. From this visit, students developed their interests, which they supplemented with very good research. They took the opportunity to visit art galleries when on holiday, such as the Salvador Dali exhibition in Florida. The level of creativity amongst these students is very high, and they display this through three-dimensional work, including a bust where the head is a covered spring, and an abstract painting based on the work of Bridget Riley.
112. Students who have recently started the AS course show variations in the quality of their artwork, with some achieving at a high level. Overall, standards are good. This was seen in their still life preparation for printing. The majority represents line and form to a good level, with a sound understanding of composition. Students use the Internet for their comprehensive research, but do not use computers specifically to produce artwork. Where there was good use of the computer, such as in preparing an exploded photograph, students used these skills outside the classroom. All students achieve well in art, and some make significant progress in results achieved in examinations. This is due to the good quality of teaching.
113. The quality of teaching is never less than good, with one in three lessons very good. New skills are very thoroughly taught, for example when printing was introduced. The demonstration was detailed, and gave confidence to students to explore the new medium. This enabled students to learn quickly, and to go further than the techniques taught. Teachers encourage this independent learning, and this is seen in the amount of research that they undertake, and the divergent lines of interest that they follow. Teachers constantly check on all students, and question them to make them think. For example, a student was asked how she would create the illusion of space when drawing a wicker basket. Skilful questioning about the composition of pictures led students to the understanding that Cézanne had hidden reality in the painting studied. The students explained how their eye had been led to focal points, and their involvement ensured good learning. Students are moved on in their learning by being given a clear time to complete a task, and when waiting, encouraged to tackle another task. The ends of lessons are very well used, with an examination of completed work used to develop students' critical faculties. However, students were not always involved in the introduction to the lesson. Encouraging their observations to enhance their involvement and understanding of the topic is insufficiently done.
114. The department is very well led and managed. The excellent visit to St. Ives is very well timed to form a bridge between the AS and Advanced level courses, and the venue is ideal to excite students about art, and widen their experiences. This significantly contributes to students' learning and the growth of their creativity. Students are encouraged to attend life classes and the courses at the London Institute, which further widens their experiences. There is good assessment of students, and they know the areas in which they should improve. There has been an improvement since the time of the last report in students' confidence to experiment, though not in ceramics, the development of which would enhance the range of media used.
115. The last report focused on the lack of studio space for post-16 students. This has not been fully dealt with yet, although it features in the school's development plan. Students find it difficult to transport half completed work to and from home. Provision of such an area could assist in raising standards further.

Music

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

Strengths

- The department offers an outstanding range of musical opportunities.
- Examination results are very good.
- Instrumental music examination results are very good.
- Performance standards are high, sometimes reaching national levels of excellence.
- Teachers' expectations and students' aspirations are very high.
- The quality of teaching is very good and sometimes inspirational.
- There is very good instrumental teaching.
- Students make a valuable contribution to the excellent work of the department by training and directing musical ensembles.

Areas for improvement

- The students' confidence to form their own musical opinions, challenge their teachers and debate musical issues.
- Students' skills in composition, which at present are less highly developed than their performance skills.

116. Since the last inspection there has been very good progress. Strong, effective leadership by the inspired and expert new head of department, supported by very good teamwork from teachers and an outstandingly positive school ethos, have enabled the department to maintain its very high standards and further to develop this centre of musical excellence.
117. Music is a popular subject choice, and students obtain high grades at AS and A level. Their results in music compare favourably with those for other subjects. Many students take instrumental lessons, and their Associated Board examination results are very good; each year many students enter for higher grades (grades 6 to 8), and several pass grade 8 with distinction.
118. More than half of the entire student population chooses to be involved in some of the many musical extra-curricular activities. The very high performance standards across a wide range of these activities provide students with an invaluable, transforming experience of individual and collective high achievement – a vision of what is possible. For some this has a powerfully beneficial “transfer effect” upon their self-esteem, their motivation and their expectations in areas of achievement other than music.
119. Students respond with delight to the head of department's inspired choral teaching and direction. They sing naturally, making a rich and often beautiful sound. In a lunchtime rehearsal, the senior choir's superb performance of the “Sussex Carol”, involving over 100 students, combined advanced technical accomplishment with sensitive phrasing and dynamic control. This was a performance that carried the listener onto a higher plane, beyond school and beyond the local concerns of the everyday.
120. The range of musical opportunities includes thirty student concerts every year, and amongst those some highly ambitious projects such as the recent performance of Britten's War Requiem and the annual Christmas concert in the Fairfield Hall. Fourteen visiting teachers provide instrumental and voice lessons and assist with the many instrumental ensembles, small and large. There are several school choirs and regular opportunities for the performance of sacred music. Enormous dedication from the head of department and her staff, assisted by sixth form music students, underpins this extraordinary programme.
121. The department's very good and sometimes excellent teaching is characterised by highly supportive relationships with students, a very high level of challenge, great enjoyment of learning, a wide range of teaching strategies and a fast, invigorating pace. Students are given extensive opportunities to take an active part in learning, by, for example, performing on their own instruments the music of different styles. Year 12 students sight-read through Gabrieli's “In

Ecclesiis" on flutes, piano and voice, making a note of the characteristics of early Baroque music as they progressed through the piece.

122. Although students are in most respects very good learners, there is a tendency for them to be passive and for their passivity as learners to impede their progress at the highest performance levels and in their musical compositions. The head of department is aware that the department needs, in order further to improve, to find ways of enabling students to compose with more confidence and more skill. Closely associated with this is the need for them further to develop their critical skills, to formulate, explore and debate musical opinions and comfortably to challenge the opinions of others, including their teachers. To achieve this, some elements of the teaching will need to be adapted to encourage students, and especially younger pupils, to investigate and explore, and to apply and test out their musical knowledge to a significantly greater extent than in the past. This represents something of an ethos shift for the school, and as such would be best approached through the performance management system, involving other departments as well as the music department.

HUMANITIES

123. The current provision for geography caters for some thirty-five students studying AS and A level geography. Eleven geography lessons were seen in the sixth form.

Geography

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

Strengths

- The commitment, enthusiasm and subject knowledge of teachers.
- The very high standards achieved by students on both the AS and A level courses.
- The quality of departmental organisation and leadership.
- The development of computer, literacy and numerical skills as aids to learning geography.
- Very positive attitudes to work and interest in the subject shown by the girls.
- The emphasis on the development of independent learning and research skills.

Areas for improvement

- The extension of monitoring and evaluation of teaching to share good practice and raise standards even further.
- The wide use of short-term targets, particularly as a regular part of week-by-week assessment.

124. Standards overall are well above average. In 2000, GCE A level results were well above average. All students who took the examination gained a pass grade and two-thirds of a small cohort of six gained the highest grades, A and B. Average points scored per student were also well above the national average. When results are compared with predicted grades at the start of the course, students achieved well. Results have shown an upward trend over recent years, improving significantly since the time of the last report, when they were judged to be slightly above the national average.

125. The students entered for AS level in 2001 gained excellent results, with 17 gaining the highest A and B grades. Out of this number, 13 were awarded an A grade. This represents a significant level of achievement, as 19 out of the 20 students in the group exceeded expectations based upon GCSE performance. There are currently no national comparative figures, but this represents a very high standard. Eighteen girls have continued into the A2 course. Retention rates over recent years have been high. At A level, students also achieved well and 3 girls out of the 5 entered attained A and B grades. They also achieved well in relation to expected grades. In both AS and A level students gained their highest grades in geography.

126. The observation of students in lessons and analysis of their work confirms standards achieved by students currently studying on AS and A level courses to be well above the average.

Standards are significantly better than at the time of the last inspection. They are achieving in line with expectations based on their GCSE and AS performance.

127. Students show very good knowledge and understanding of topics both within physical and human geography. They work confidently on their own, collect data from a variety of sources and analyse and evaluate it effectively. They display very good practical skills and computers are used very well to analyse data and present findings. They use graphical and statistical methods very effectively, for example, in the study of beach profiles and in the study of population growth and change.
128. Overall teaching is very good. Lessons are extremely well planned and structured. The very good range of resources is used appropriately to develop learning. Teachers have totally secure subject knowledge, together with an enthusiasm for the subject, which they transmit to students. While the quality of marking on the environmental unit is excellent, the use of written short-term targets to assist girls to improve is frequently missing in other aspects of the courses. Teachers have very high expectations, which helps students to appreciate the importance of accurate definitions and careful analysis of information, enabling them to describe and explain geographical patterns and processes extremely well. Case studies are used effectively to challenge and engage students' minds and develop their independent learning and thinking skills.
129. Students learn very well. They are extremely well motivated and respond positively to the teaching they receive. Most students talk confidently and knowledgeably on aspects of the course they have studied. A good example was seen in a Year 13 lesson, on the identification of the human and physical factors determining population density in different regions of the world. There is a growth in geographical maturity in written work as they progress through the two years in the sixth form. They display very good independent research skills and have bridged the gap between the more structured context of GCSE and the freer demands and expectations of A level and higher education.
130. Work in this subject is very well managed and organised. The comprehensive written units of work and the use of up-to-date materials and case studies contribute significantly to teaching and learning. Resources are very good and are used in a most effective manner to enable students to achieve very high standards. The guidance given on teaching and learning styles is impressive. The teachers work extremely well as a team. Extension of formal monitoring and observation of teaching and learning would help to raise standards even further and enable the sharing of very good practice to take place. The wider use of regular written short-term targets to assist students correct weaknesses and misconceptions would also be beneficial. There is very clear, effective and focused subject leadership.

History

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

Strengths

- Standards at A level have improved since the last inspection.
- Students achieve very well and often exceed their targets.
- Very good teaching encourages very good learning, especially in giving pupils the skills and confidence to work effectively by themselves.
- Students are very well motivated and work very well with each other and the teacher.
- The subject is well led and managed; this promotes high standards and the subject's growing popularity.

Areas for improvement

- Lower attaining pupils on the AS course do not acquire skills of analysis and effective extended writing as rapidly as might be expected.
- Computers are not used systematically and regularly to promote learning and recording.

131. In the GCE A level examinations in 2000, students attained in line with the national average in both A and B grades and A to E grades. More than half the students entered achieved as expected and did as well in history as in their other subjects. This was not as high as in the previous two years, when A level standards were well above average. This was mostly due to marking problems with one of the examination papers, which the school challenged unsuccessfully. However, the 2001 results are significantly better than the previous year. All students gained a pass grade and the proportion achieving the highest grades was well above the national average for 2000. This is higher than at the time of the last inspection.
132. AS results for 2001 are also well above national results for 2000, especially at A grade where the school achieved almost twice the national average. All students entered passed and nearly two-thirds did better than predictions based on their GCSE results. Only a very small number from the large AS group of 29 has not stayed on to study the subject at A2 level, many of these because it was their fourth subject which they were intending to drop anyway.
133. Standards in work seen are well above the national average. In Year 13 students are achieving very well in relation to predictions based on their GCSE results. They have a good understanding of the main concepts and make links well between periods and countries under study. Skills of note making and recording are well developed, using the good range of sources available. This has been promoted by the teachers' strong emphasis on enquiry work and their encouragement of students to work constructively on their own. This was seen in a Year 13 lesson when students worked in pairs to present their interpretations of the Night of the Long Knives in Nazi Germany, some using lively role-play to convey their ideas. Students displayed evidence of wide reading and confidence and fluency in expressing their views.
134. More able students have mature skills of analysing and evaluating key issues. They discuss complex ideas with considerable insight and write well-structured analytical essays with relevant supporting evidence. This has been promoted by the high expectations set by the teachers and their very thorough marking, which gives detailed guidance on how to improve.
135. Less able students have also benefited from this help, although their skills of analysis and interpretation of sources is less well developed. They also have some initial difficulty in Year 12 structuring essays with clear introductions and writing analytically rather than descriptively. Teachers are addressing these deficiencies well. For instance, two lessons were dedicated to organising the first essay of the new AS group on the strengths and weaknesses of Liberal Italy before 1914. AS students are attaining well and above expectations for those just embarking on the course, including a student with special educational needs who worked enthusiastically and effectively in making detailed and relevant notes. Overall, literacy skills of writing, speaking and reading are of a high standard. Skills in the use of information and communications technology are far less developed, as few opportunities are given, for example to use Power Point in organising presentations.
136. Teaching overall is very good. It is never unsatisfactory. This is an improvement on the last inspection when most of the teaching was considered good. Consequently students learn very well. Teachers use their very good knowledge of the subject to plan lessons which offer stimulating activities based on the students' own enquiry. Adequate time is given to make this independent study productive and beneficial in developing students' research skills. This is a definite strength of the teaching. Where teaching is most effective, time is used well in setting deadlines and summing up the outcomes of the lesson at the end. Tasks frequently make challenging demands on their skills of analysis to stretch their thinking. Year 13 students, for example, had to write and deliver speeches as if they were Gladstone and Disraeli, expressing different views on the 1867 Reform Bill. There were clear gains in their knowledge and understanding, while their speaking and analytical skills were strongly reinforced. They also knew clearly their predicted A level grade and what they had to do to achieve it.

137. This good learning is also promoted by the very good relationship with the students, based on the teachers' readiness to give time to monitoring and guiding the students' progress. Consequently, students are highly motivated and work well by themselves. Their attitude to work is very good and, at times, in Year 13, excellent when they put much energy into challenging enquiry tasks. They use time well and are very productive in their work. They are very ready to offer answers, to ask pertinent questions and to join in group and class discussion. However, some lower attaining students in Year 12 can be reticent unless drawn in by the teacher. There is a strong desire to do well and consequently they set themselves high standards in the presentation and quality of their work.
138. The effective leadership and management of the subject also promote the good teaching and learning. Schemes of work are clear and challenging in their tasks. The wide range of resources provides the students with much stimulus and support for detailed, private study. The well supported, annual sixth form trip to Berlin and Prague, also provides an imaginative, additional resource for the study of Nazi Germany. The setting of specific targets for students after assessments provides well focused direction for improvement, to which the students readily respond. Effective monitoring through mutual classroom observations and regular review meetings ensures a consistency of standards. In this way the best teaching techniques in the department are disseminated. There is a strongly shared commitment to improvement by all staff, promoted by the co-ordinator's lively enthusiasm. This has helped to make history very popular in the sixth form, with significantly increased uptake at both AS and A levels.

Law

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

Strengths

- Careful planning by the school to establish this innovative and interesting curriculum development.
- Well planned course materials, fully meeting the requirements of the A level examination syllabus.
- Well qualified tutoring, displaying secure subject knowledge and understanding.
- Enthusiasm and interest shown by students.

Areas for improvement

- Planning opportunities for students to discuss and debate legal issues.
- Building up resource base to stimulate students' legal knowledge and providing research materials for supportive self-study.
- The provision of regular opportunities for visits to the Courts and ensuring that speakers are brought into school to enable students to see legal practice applied and raise awareness of legal skills and procedures.
- Ensuring that students are kept up-to-date with changes and developments in the law.

139. This innovative and interesting curriculum development, using video conferencing and distant learning, only started in September and is currently in its infancy. The headteacher and deputy head have undertaken a great deal of careful planning and consideration. It has created a great deal of interest from students and currently 18 have enrolled on this AS course. Students have the opportunity to proceed on to A2 next year.
140. There have been so few lessons so far it is therefore difficult to reach valid judgements on standards. From the evidence of one video-conference lesson and the scrutiny of all the students this term, the following judgements can be made. Students are enthusiastic about this new approach to learning. After some understandable apprehension and nervousness they now display increasing confidence. This was seen in the distance learning session observed. All the students achieved above average points at GCSE and work seen and responses given in the lesson suggest that they are achieving well so far.
141. Students were very attentive and responded well to the tutor's questions. A good rapport is developing between the students and the tutor. The lesson was effective in developing

students' knowledge and understanding of the course manual tasks, statutory instruments and case law in the introductory unit. They showed a sound understanding of the effects of decisions of the European Court of Justice on English courts.

142. From the examination of completed work, it is evident that students display at least satisfactory and sometimes good knowledge and understanding of the hierarchy of the courts and the concept of judicial precedent. They also understand that the decisions of the superior courts are binding on lower courts. Essays on the origin of equity and equitable remedies show sound understanding and the ability to use the course manual effectively. Note taking skills are developing in a satisfactory way but attention needs to be given by some to the building up of a base of well written notes upon which future revision and decision making on tasks and cases studies can be made. Some notes tend to be scruffy and limited to annotations of the work manual. This is not a sound basis for revision.
143. Teaching by distance learning video conferencing is well planned and the tutor is secure in his knowledge and understanding of the course and the subject. Clear explanations are provided to the tasks and students' questions, building up their knowledge and understanding. Liaison between the tutor, the students and the school link teacher is developing well.
144. Resources are being built up in the form of texts, journals and periodicals, to provide students with a research base. Visits to the local central library would help widen this base. Contacts have been made with parents and relatives of staff who have legal experience and expertise. Speakers coming into school will provide the necessary experience of the real legal world and enable students to relate theory to practice. Visits to the courts will need to be planned with the same aim in mind. Students have been allocated study time in addition to their sixty-minute video conferencing sessions. This important time needs to be monitored and evaluated to ensure that self-supported study and research are regularly carried out. Students must also be encouraged to keep up to date with cases, changes in the law and developments in other legal matters. In this way they will build up a portfolio of knowledge which will be a valuable resource for their examinations.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

145. In addition to the wide range of lessons seen, inspectors also:
 - attended a drama production of 'The House of Bernarda Alba;'
 - heard pupils read their own poetry in assembly.

English

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

Strengths

- Standards are good with sustained improvement and the 2001 results are resoundingly good.
- Teaching is consistently good; students are intellectually challenged as teachers pass on their subject expertise.
- The teaching of literary criticism is a strength and students have a sound grasp of studying literature from different periods and cultures.
- Students receive quality support throughout the AS and A2 course, which they recognise and value.
- Out of class opportunities for learning are very good.
- The subject is strongly led and well managed. There is a shared commitment to improvement.

Areas for improvement

- A minority of students is passive in oral work, and even though they are brought into discussion, they do not readily volunteer a response.
- Target setting to raise standards even further.

146. This is a highly effective department and over the last three years the number of students choosing to study A level literature has risen tremendously. At present, over half the sixth form choose it as an option. The growth in size is reflected in the year on year improvement in the examination results.
147. The GCE A level examination results in 2000 were in line with the national average. The average points score was not significantly different from the national average. The number of students gaining the higher grades A and B was lower than in 1999 when the results were above average. Despite the dip in 2000, provisional grades in 2001 showed a significant rise in the number of students gaining A and B grades. Altogether, 45 per cent gained the higher grades and only one student achieved a grade E. The three students who did not gain a grade were not definite candidates and their entry affected the otherwise good results. Students did better than expected and the retention rate is excellent.
148. In the new AS examination, students' provisional results showed a substantial performance with 50 per cent gaining the higher grades A and B. All students gained a grade within the A to D range. The department does well by its students and the AS results are a resounding success. Students did better than expected and 57 per cent surpassed the predicted grades.
149. In Years 12 and 13, students' attainment in all areas of the curriculum was good, especially in reading and interpreting literary texts. Year 12 students enjoy speaking and listening and most make significant contributions to oral work. They express their viewpoints succinctly, show sophistication in their use and command of the language and are prepared to express their ideas; necessary skills for meeting the requirements of the assessment objectives in the examination. They understand how to initiate and sustain discussion. By Year 13, students have developed in greater depth the skills of speculation and forming hypotheses as seen in their work on early ballads. Explaining and illustrating their views with evidence are prominent features during discussion on literary texts in both Years 12 and 13. There are, however, a small number of passive students who contribute very little unless they are drawn into the discussion.
150. Although Year 12 students are in the first term of the AS course, they read analytically. From the start, students establish a high standard in critical reading. They read quickly and perceptively as seen in the Year 12 lessons where they analysed the traditional ballads 'Two Corbies' and 'Three Ravens'. In this lesson, students responded critically to the use of language. They talked with ease and understanding about the symbolic images as they formed and developed their hypotheses. By Year 13, they have a good grasp of the structure and form of poetry. During the inspection, their study and interpretation of sonnet form and ballads showed a clear understanding of how writers use specific features to express meanings. High attaining students have a secure knowledge and understanding of texts. They explore texts with ease giving personal and alternative interpretations in which they can identify the implicit meanings. In contrast, average attaining students do not always sustain their interpretation even though they can give a personal response and a reasonably well-constructed answer.
151. All students read widely around texts, researching into the historical, social, political and cultural backgrounds of the texts they are studying. For example, they can form sound judgements about Friel's *Translations* based on their research work on Greek tales and the history of Northern Ireland. Similarly, they reach good levels of understanding based on their well organised annotations and research notes which they use to analyse texts.
152. Students' write effectively and their achievement is good. Planning is thorough, as is their detailed comprehension work. They produce well-structured essays, draw on a wide vocabulary and use technical literary terms well when conveying their response to literary

works. The high attaining students write effectively showing skilful control and great confidence when expressing their ideas. They weave background information to enhance their personal response and quotations are carefully selected and analysed. The average attaining students give a good overview but some do not take sufficient care when editing their work and, as a result, there are errors in their use of language structure.

153. Students apply themselves to their studies showing high levels of motivation and perseverance. They are not daunted by the challenges; rather, they work collaboratively in a free and relaxed environment, which affords them the opportunity to be opinionated at will. They are bright, alert and exude a lot of confidence as they take responsibility for managing and completing their work. They are very positive about the subject and value the support of their teachers.
154. Teaching is consistently good with some very good and excellent features. Teachers know their subject very well and adopt a scholarly approach to prepare and deliver intellectually challenging lessons. They provide a wealth of information on the background of literary texts and use this information to assist students in interpreting texts. For instance, in an exceptionally good lesson on ballads, students were continuously bombarded with an array of the rich literary heritage so that they could make connections and understand the content, form and structure of ballads. Teaching is committed to students using a range of knowledge and skills, so planning for progress, which is always very good, identifies specific and substantial learning outcomes.
155. The use of talk is central to all lessons as teachers extend students' communication skills and encourage them to adopt a critical approach. The skills of intellectual enquiry through research, effective questioning and assessment are used in lessons. Expectations are high and teachers support independent learning: this is promoted through the creative writing of ballads, using information technology and secondary source material to research into the background of texts and the induction programme, which encourages personal writing, and review of texts. Marking is thorough and assesses strengths and areas for improvement.
156. The subject is well managed and strongly led. The department is well established and continues to enjoy a high level of success amidst the shared commitment to high standards and the strong determination to teach students to love literature as serious critics and reviewers aiming for a high standard. Planning for success is at the heart of the department's work and careful deliberation takes place before decisions are made. For instance, the needs of students and staff were analysed before selecting the most appropriate course. The department monitors students' achievement with half termly tests and maintains very good links with the sixth form tutors and parents to ensure that they are not behind with their work. There is good use of assessment to inform planning for the new course and students receive helpful individual feedback.
157. Two of the major strengths of the department include, first, the excellent contributions it makes to cultivating students' personal development. For example, students are guided to become involved deeply in using their creative and thinking skills to work on the school magazine, take part in debates and be reflective when discussing poetry in a way which increases their spiritual, cultural and social awareness. Second, there is the experience and length of service which most of the teachers bring to the subject. The transition to the sixth form is consolidated and reflected in the induction work and day-to-day teaching and learning. Learning resources are adequate, as is the accommodation. The department has devised its own 'buy and sell' scheme to ensure that all students have full access to the examination texts. The department provides very good value for its students.

French

Overall, the quality of provision in French is **good**. The focus of the inspection was on French, but German was also sampled.

Strengths

- In Year 12, standards are well above average in all skills (speaking and listening, reading and writing), and students achieve well.
- Coursework is strong.
- Much teaching is good. Teachers are excellent linguists.
- Lessons are well structured with a range of challenging activities.
- Marking and assessment of students' work is good and they are given good feedback on how to improve it and raise their standards.

Areas for improvement

- Oral work in Year 13 is below the standard expected at this age and stage of the course. Students lack ideas and confidence and use too much English.
- In a minority of lessons, teaching needs to develop more effective strategies for independence.
- The school does not have a link with a French school. Students in Year 13 have not spent a period of work experience in France and have little recent first-hand experience of the country.
- There is not enough planned use of ICT to enrich learning and help to raise standards.

158. The GCE A level examination results this summer were the best since 1998, and were above average, with over half the 11 students gaining grades A and B. Over the previous two years, numbers of entries were disappointingly low and no student gained an A grade. In relation to their GCSE results, however, students have consistently achieved as expected. In the current Year 13 the four students gained average results in their recent AS examination, all achieving their potential at grade C, and are now embarked on their A level studies. After recent fluctuations in the take-up of French in the sixth form, signs are now more encouraging. Currently there are 16 students in Year 12 on the AS level course, all with either A or A* grades at GCSE, all but two A*. They are making good progress.
159. Standards in the current Year 13 are just above average overall. In relation to their previous examination results, the students' achievement is satisfactory in writing and aural comprehension. The sample of their earlier work from Year 12 shows that, following the closely structured support of their teachers, they have learnt over the year to write confidently. They can argue two sides of a social or moral issue and express a personal view, for example in pieces on drug abuse and the decriminalisation of cannabis. They have successfully assimilated topic vocabulary and phrases into their essays which show an increasingly coherent and logical organisation of ideas.
160. Standards of oral work, however, are below average for this stage of the course. The students do not communicate readily in French, and are too reliant on the teachers for their ideas. They make good progress in lessons where the teacher uses suitable strategies to help them. In two observed lessons they showed little independence, reluctant to contribute to discussion or to paraphrase. In another, by contrast, supported by tape transcripts and key words and phrases, they spoke more confidently, taking turns leading the class in preparation for their oral presentations on poverty and the homeless.
161. Attainment in Year 12, on the other hand, is well above average. Students are only a month into their AS level course, but are making good progress from their excellent GCSE results and are achieving well. They are making the transition to advanced work successfully, consolidating their previous learning well and making new progress in understanding and expressing more complex ideas. Prompted by tape extracts and their own notes they can sustain a conversation, for example, on the French press and newspaper-reading habits. They can express personal views and give reasons, quickly learning and applying new vocabulary. They link their ideas together with conjunctions, adding gesture to support their polished and rhythmic intonation.
162. Teaching is good overall, and often very good but it is sometimes no better than satisfactory when students in each year are allowed to lapse into English. The teachers' command of the language is excellent and in the most effective lessons they use this to set appropriately high expectations of students' listening and speaking. These lessons are prepared thoroughly with an appropriate range of activities designed to develop understanding and skills in sequence. For instance, in the Year 12 lesson on the press and in a Year 13 lesson on poverty the

teachers had prepared excellent materials to aid discussion as a preparation for writing. These involved all students and offered the necessary help with paraphrase and accuracy of expression. Marking and assessment are thorough, with full diagnostic comment, and students are well informed of their standards and how to improve. Where teaching and learning need to be sharper, tasks are sometimes a little too unstructured, and need to be supported by strategies which require the students to speak more independently and with each other.

163. Students in Year 13 are not independent enough in French. One factor is that none of the group has recent first-hand experience of France or the culture, and the school has no formal links with the country. Students access some authentic texts from the press and media, including video and the Internet, but there is still insufficient use of ICT.
164. Leadership and management of the department are good. The newly appointed head of modern foreign languages has a clear set of development priorities, although only in post for a few weeks at the time of the inspection.