

INSPECTION REPORT

SPONNE SCHOOL

Towcester

LEA area: Northamptonshire

Unique reference number: 122051

Headteacher: Mr Ian Brown

Reporting inspector: Mr Ross Maden

2793

Dates of inspection: 6th – 8th November 2001

Inspection number: 189685

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: Community

Age range of pupils: 11 to 18

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Brackey Road
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Appropriate authority: The Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Mr Edward Craven

Date of previous inspection: 30th September 1996

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Sponne School is a comprehensive school educating boys and girls in the age range of 11-18. There are 1289 pupils in the school which is above the national average for secondary schools. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is three per cent which is below the national average. There are nine pupils for whom English is an additional language which is well below the national average and only three are at the early stages of learning English. The percentage of pupils on the school's special educational need register is broadly in line with national figures but the percentage of pupils with statements of special educational needs is below the national average. The attainment on entry to the school is above the national averages. The socio-economic data for the wards the school serves indicate that on average the percentage of adults with higher education is above the national average as is the percentage of children living in high social class households. The school was awarded Technology College status in 1999 and Sportsmark in 2001.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

The overall effectiveness of the school is good. The school achieves high standards in most areas of its work. In Years 7 to 9 pupils make at least satisfactory achievement over time and in Years 10 and 11 achievement over time is good. Pupils have good attitudes to school. Overall teaching is good. The school has developed a broad and balanced curriculum for pupils aged 11 to 16 and the range of courses at sixth form level is designed to meet the needs of its students. There are satisfactory care and guidance arrangements for pupils and the partnership between parents and the school is good. The school has made good progress since the last inspection. The leadership and management of the school are good. In relation to the level of funding the school receives, the school is providing good value for money.

What the school does well

- Achieves examination results at GCSE which are well above the national average.
- Teaching overall is good.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are very positive.
- Relationships within the school are very good.
- The learning resource centre is well resourced to support independent learning.
- The provision for extra-curricular music is very good.

What could be improved

- The use of assessment data to set targets for pupils.
- The access to reliable computers and not all subjects are using information and communication technology (ICT) to support teaching and learning.
- The use of form tutor periods.
- Some areas of accommodation.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made good improvement since it was last inspected in October 1996. There has been an increase in the number of pupils and students in the school. GCSE results have improved significantly since the last inspection. Results in the national tests for pupils aged 14 have also improved since the last inspection. Governors have made good progress in tackling the key issues identified in the last inspection report. Effective changes have been made to the quality of reports for parents. Curriculum planning is improved. The provision for ICT has been considerably improved though there are still weaknesses in reliability of

computers. The roles of the senior management team have been effectively reviewed. The use of registration time still remains a weakness and although some progress has been made in the use of data, further development is needed in using this information to set targets for individual pupils as this still remains a weakness.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			Similar* schools
	1999	2000	2001	2001
GCSE examinations	A	A	A	B
A-levels/AS-levels	B	D	C	

Key

well above average A

above average B

average C

below average D

well below average E

* Based on the number of pupils eligible for free school meals.

Pupils' results in national tests at age 14 in the year 2000 were close to the national average in English, above for mathematics and well above for science. When compared to schools with pupils of a similar background in 2000, pupils in this school achieve results at Level 5 and above which were well below for English and mathematics and close to the average in science. However, results for 2001 show a significant increase in the proportion of pupils reaching Level 5 and above and Level 6 and above for English and mathematics. There is no significant difference between the performance of girls and boys.

In the 2000 GCSE examinations, the proportions of pupils gaining five or more A*-C grades, five A*-G grades and one A*-G were well above the national averages. When compared to similar schools, results in 2000 were above average for the proportion of pupils gaining 5 A*-C grades and well above the proportion of pupils gaining 5 grades A*-G and 1 A*-G. In 2001 the proportion of pupils gaining 5 GCSE grades A*-C, 5 A*-G and 1A*-G was just below the proportion gained in 2000. Results for boys and for girls in 2000 were well above the national average. Analysis of the results for individual subjects in 2000 indicates that there were better results in business education, science, design and technology, English language and literature, geography, and mathematics. Results for art and design and German were relatively weaker than the results gained by pupils in their other subjects. The school's analysis of the 2001 GCSE results for A*-C shows good pass rates in music, geography, history, design and technology and business studies.

Most pupils are managing at least satisfactory achievement in Years 7 to 9 in relation to their standards, as judged by Key Stage 2 test results, when they entered the school. In the work seen pupils were achieving above average standards. In Years 10 and 11 most pupils achieved well. As a result of the good relationships between pupils and their teachers pupils are confident in answering and asking questions in lessons. Their oral skills are confident and articulate. Pupils' reading and writing skills are good. Presentation of work is good. Pupils' numeracy skills are good. The challenging targets set for 2001 were not met. Sixty eight per cent of pupils were targeted to reach 5 grades A*-C but only 61 per cent reached this figure. Ninety nine per cent reached the agreed target of one grade A*-G. The target for the average points score was 50 and results showed that the figure achieved was 48.5.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Most pupils have good attitudes to learning. They enjoy lessons and are generally keen to contribute and express their opinions
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Overall behaviour is good. It is very good in lessons. In the narrow corridors and cramped public spaces behaviour is good and pupils are very tolerant of these poor conditions.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships in the school are very good, based on mutual respect and a liking for each other. Pupils are responsible citizens and raise significant funds for those in need.
Attendance	Pupils' attendance is very good and well above national averages. Unauthorised absence is low.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Years 7 – 9	Years 10 – 11	Years 12 – 13
Quality of teaching	Good	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 is good overall. At the time of the last inspection there were very few unsatisfactory lessons and this remains the case in this inspection with only 3 unsatisfactory lessons (all in the sixth form) out of the 102 lessons observed. At the time of the last inspection less than one lesson in ten was judged to be very good or excellent. This has improved to nearly a third of lessons.

The teaching of the basic skills of literacy and numeracy is good. The quality of teaching of mathematics and science is good. English teaching is satisfactory.

Strengths of teaching include effective planning of lessons and very good management of pupils. The use of homework is good and appropriate for the age of pupils. Marking of pupils' work is good with most teachers indicating how their work could be improved. Not all subjects, including English, are making full use of ICT to support teaching and learning.

The quality of pupils' learning matches the good standards of teaching. Most pupils work hard and the pace of working is good by older pupils. Pupils concentrate well and most show very good interest in their lessons. They respond well to the opportunities for working independently. Occasionally in some science and English lessons there is some over-reliance by pupils on their teachers. Pupils with special educational needs learn effectively and are well supported by learning support assistants.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum reflecting the demands of the National Curriculum. The provision for extra-curricular activities is good for sporting, musical and for additional voluntary lessons after school for older pupils. Limited opportunities are provided for pupils to follow vocational courses in Years 10 and 11.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	The provision for pupils with special educational needs is good. These pupils are effectively supported by well qualified learning support assistants and these pupils are making good progress.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	There are three pupils who are at the early stages of learning English. They are well supported and are making very good progress.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Overall the provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. The provision for moral and social development is good.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school cares well for its pupils. Child protection and health and safety procedures are appropriate. Any incidents of bullying are taken seriously and staff are supportive and helpful to any pupils who feel under pressure.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The leadership and management provided by the headteacher is good. He is well supported by his senior and middle managers.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governors are knowledgeable, experienced and supportive of the school. Students are not receiving their entitlement to religious education and not all pupils receive a daily act of collective worship. The statutory requirement for all subjects to use ICT to support teaching and learning is not being met.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The monitoring and evaluation of the work of the school is satisfactory. There is a lot of data on school performance and some of it is used to set targets for improvement by individual pupils, but not as systematically as it could be.
The strategic use of resources	The school is well resourced. The amount of money spent on learning resources is well above the national average. The school provides good value for money and the 'principles of best value' are adopted when spending finances. Funds received from specific grants are effectively spent on the purposes they were intended.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Their child is making good progress• The school expects children to work hard and achieve his or her best• The school is well led and managed• There is good teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Being kept well informed about their child's progress• The school working more closely with parents• The provision of extra-curricular activities• The amount of homework set for pupils• Behaviour of pupils in the school

Inspectors agree with parents on the issues which please parents most. Inspectors judge that parents are kept well informed about their child's progress and that there are sufficient opportunities provided by the school for parents to work closely with the school. Inspectors judge that the range of extra-curricular opportunities are good and that the amount of homework set is appropriate for the age of pupils in the school. The behaviour of pupils in lessons is judged by inspectors to be very good and good around the school.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form consists of 206 students and is larger than average. There are more female than male students on roll. Many students have backgrounds of social and economic advantage. An above average percentage of Year 11 students continue with their education full time at age 16, many of them in the school's sixth form. Students are provided with a good range of advanced courses in the sixth form, including some advanced vocational courses, and key skills. A large majority of students go on to higher education.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The school provides effectively and efficiently for the needs of its sixth formers. There is some underachievement by pupils who enter the sixth form with medium and lower range GCSE point scores. Students become responsible young adults with mature attitudes and good relationships while in the sixth form. Students effectively extend their knowledge and understanding of their subjects as a result of good teaching. The leadership and management of the sixth form are good and improving. The main strengths and areas that could be improved are:

Strengths

- Teaching is good and enables students to learn from the subject expertise of teachers.
- Standards in mathematics are well above average.
- Students have good relationships with their peers and with the staff.
- The introduction of the new AS-level courses has been managed well, and students have achieved good results, enabling them to continue their chosen subjects to A-level successfully.

What could be improved

- ICT equipment within the school is not as reliable as it should be.
- Data is not used systematically or effectively to track the relative progress of individuals or groups of students, and to inform remedial actions as required.
- The teaching of computer studies is unsatisfactory.
- The quality of the teaching accommodation is markedly variable.

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.

Subject area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	Provision is very good. The subject's performance is monitored very closely, resulting in very good teaching and learning. Well above average standards are being maintained as student numbers rise.
Chemistry	Provision is satisfactory. Standards are close to the national average. Teaching and learning are good, although there is a need to ensure that the various needs of students of different ability are fully met.
Subject area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment

Biology	Provision is good. Standards achieved are above average, and result from good teaching, particularly planning and the effective use of resources
Business studies	Provision is good. Standards achieved are above average, and result from good teaching, particularly planning and the effective use of resources
Information and communication technology	Provision for computer studies is unsatisfactory. Standards are below average as a result of unsatisfactory teaching. Student progress is further adversely affected by the unreliability of the computer network.
Physical education	Provision is good. Most students now achieve standards which are higher than would normally be expected. The quality of teaching is very good. Students are fully engaged in the subject and learn well.
Health and social care	Provision is good. This is a new curriculum offer. Standards at AS-level are below average. Teaching is always satisfactory or better, and course content is good and well planned. Some students lack underpinning knowledge and full commitment to the subject.
Art and design	Provision is good. Standards and student attainment are both good. Teaching overall is good. In the best instances, expert knowledge and commitment ensures that student's understanding is secure.
Music	Provision is good. Standards reflect students' prior attainment. Teaching is always at least good. In all lessons, high quality of performance makes a significant impact on student learning.
Geography	Provision is satisfactory. Recent A-level standards are well below average. Effective leadership has improved standards significantly since September 2000. AS-level standards are much improved. Student attainment in lessons is average. Teaching is satisfactory with some good features. Well planned field work contributes to student learning.
History	Provision is good. Standards in Year 13 are above average. Teaching is good overall and often very good. Very good marking helps students identify their strengths and weaknesses.
Psychology	Provision in psychology is good. Students achieve well and reach standards which match the average. Teaching is good and at times very good. Leadership and management are good.
English Literature	Provision is good. Standards are average, and reflect students' prior attainment. Teaching overall is good, in the best cases underpinned by subject expertise, planning and preparation.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Students receive helpful guidance when choosing their courses, and induction into the sixth form is good. Students are well supported pastorally, and their progress is monitored. They receive adequate guidance concerning their options upon completion of their sixth form courses.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Leadership and management are good overall. The management of the sixth form is good. There is a developing strategic vision for the sixth form, which should ensure that standards of work and results are more closely analysed, and that findings will inform future decisions. Provision overall is of a good quality and students enjoy equal access to all courses. There are significant weaknesses in the monitoring of students' achievement, and the tracking of student progress.

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"> • Good quality teaching which challenges them to learn successfully • The range of courses available meets their needs • Teachers provide individual help and support when needed • The information about the sixth form was helpful and allowed them to make appropriate choices • The holistic sixth form experience. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to the available ICT resources. • Their involvement in decision making involving them and their sixth form • The range of enrichment provision outside their main learning areas • Social area is limited.

The inspection team largely agrees with the students' views. Teaching is good, and teachers are very willing to provide extra help and guidance when it is required or needed. There is a wide range of courses, both vocational and academic, which allows student choices and preferences to be met. Course option choices were made on an informed basis. The students settle in well and they act in a very responsible manner. There is a very positive overall atmosphere. The extensive ICT facilities which the school possesses are unreliable and leads to some restrictions for use by students. Many felt that they were not consulted when changes to the sixth form common room were made, and that their opinions, when sought, often went unheeded. The sixth form common room, previously regarded as a social area, has recently been re-designated as a sixth form study area.

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 school achieves examination results at GCSE which are well above the national average

1. Pupils enter the school with above the national average levels of attainment. They make satisfactory progress in Years 7 – 9 but make good progress in Years 10 and 11. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more GCSE grades A*-C was well above the average in 2000 and in the previous three years. Not only do able pupils do well but the proportion of pupils gaining five GCSE grades A*-G was also well above the national average. Similarly the proportion of pupils gaining one GCSE A*-G grade is well above the national average reflecting the good progress made by pupils with special educational needs in the school.

2. GCSE results have improved dramatically throughout the 1990s and for the last three years over 60 per cent of pupils have obtained five or more passes at A*-C. The school recognises that the underperformance of boys at GCSE is of particular concern. This was especially evident in 2001 and in particular the results in modern foreign languages.

3. When the 2001 results are compared with similar schools based on the number of pupils eligible for free school meals the proportion of pupils gaining five grades A*-C was below average. The proportion of pupils gaining five GCSE grades A*-G was average and above average for one A*-G. The average points score was above average.

4. Subject relative performance indicators indicate that results for 2000 show good results for business education, music, geography, drama and history, design and technology, Results for art and design and German are poor. The school's analysis of the 2001 results indicate good performance in music, drama, geography, history, art and design, English language and literature, design and technology, business education and ICT.

Teaching overall is good

5. At the time of the last inspection the school had a very high number of lessons that were judged to be satisfactory or better when compared to the national average. However the proportion of lessons that were judged to be very good or excellent was relatively low.

6. In the most recent inspection no lessons were judged to be unsatisfactory in the main school and the proportion of lessons judged to be excellent or very good was nearly a third. Seven out of every ten lessons observed were judged to be good or better.

7. It is this consistency of at least satisfactory and often good teaching across the school, which is a strength. There is a consistency in the management of the school's behaviour policy. For example in a Year 9 physical education lesson there was very good class management based on very high expectations for good behaviour and quality of performance. Pupils commented that the behaviour of pupils was not always good especially when the normal timetabled teacher was not teaching the class.

8. Teachers' knowledge and understanding is good. In a Year 11 mathematics lesson the very good subject knowledge provided exactly the right emphasis in the definition of gradient and intercept so that pupils could find the equation of a straight line from a given drawing. Teachers' planning is good and in the main match tasks to meet pupils' needs. However, there is a weakness in not using the information on pupils' prior attainment to identify tasks to meet individual pupil's needs. Teachers have appropriate expectations of

their pupils which results in a good pace to lessons. Most parents have confidence that the school sets high expectations for pupils to work hard. In most lessons the consistent quality of good teaching leads to good learning by pupils. Pupils clearly enjoy most lessons and work hard. Their levels of concentration are good and they are interested in their lessons and are encouraged to ask questions or respond to teacher's questioning during lessons.

Pupils' attitudes to learning are very positive

9. In all of the lessons observed, in the main school, inspectors judged that the quality of pupils' attitudes to learning was at least satisfactory in every lesson. In four out of every five lessons pupils' attitudes were judged good and in nearly four out of every ten lessons pupils' attitudes were judged to be very good or excellent.

10. Most pupils have good attitudes to learning. They enjoy lessons and are generally keen to contribute and express their opinions. Pupils will help each other quite naturally in class. For example, in a Year 7 German lesson pupils helped each other to compile graphs about their birthdays with those who knew exactly what they were doing helping those who needed advice with the layout.

11. Pupils are polite and friendly; they are willing to talk about their work to visitors. They take pride in their efforts, clearly shown when younger pupils spoke about the model dolphins and elephants made in wood in design and technology lessons.

12. In a Year 11 physics lessons pupils demonstrated good listening skills. They were largely self-motivated able pupils with a good positive interest in science and mature approach to work. In a Year 11 art and design lesson pupils were able to express their ideas to a group and other members of the group were respecting these views. A pupil in a Year 9 mathematics lesson stated that 'I enjoy mathematics work this year as it is more of a challenge – last year we repeated things'. In a Year 10 history lesson attitudes and behaviour were very good throughout the lesson and pupils were keen to ask questions. A lower attaining group in a Year 9 science lesson was motivated and working hard due to a lively enthusiastic, energetic teacher.

Relationships within the school are very good

13. One of the strengths of the school is the high quality of relationships within the school. Pupils clearly like and respect their teachers and in turn most teachers respect the pupils they teach. The relationships between pupils and pupils are very good. For example, pupils can leave their bags unattended, safe in the knowledge that no other pupil will cause damage. In moving between classrooms, in very narrow corridors, most pupils are mature and respectful of the needs of other pupils.

The learning resources centre is well resourced to support independent learning

14. The learning resource centre provides a welcoming and stimulating environment through its thoughtfully planned layout and good use of display. The space has been well planned to provide both browsing and study areas sited appropriately within the resource centre. The librarian maintains a large and attractive wall display, which acts as a good focus point for displaying students work, book promotion and information and photographs of special events, such as book weeks.

15. The learning resource centre is heavily used at break and lunchtime. Some pupils come in before school and many pupils use the centre until its closing time at 17:00 hrs.

16. An important feature of the work of the centre is the use teachers make in allowing pupils during lessons to undertake individual research to support their studies.

The provision for extra-curricular music is very good

17. The music department provides an unusually rich array of high-quality extra-curricular activities which significantly enhance the educational experience of pupils. Over 350 pupils regularly participate in activities ranging from concert band to string orchestra, with many notable successes in performance at both local and national level. The 'Big Band' has reached the finals of the 'Music for Youth' festival at the Queen Elizabeth's Hall, London. The concert band has enjoyed successful tours of Italy and Austria. Numerous groups participate regularly in well-attended concerts in school and the local community, including: brass band, choir, jazz ensemble. A major musical production is staged annually. Recent successes have been 'Grease' and 'West Side Story'. Pupils are highly committed to performance and a striking feature of many ensembles is the successful social interaction amongst pupils across all years of the school.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

The use of assessment data to set targets for pupils

18. There is no shortage of monitoring data on pupils' achievement within the school. Detailed analysis is made of the National Curriculum test results for pupils aged 14. There is a similar analysis made of GCSE results and AS and A-level results. Performance by individual and groups of pupils in examination results is carefully monitored.

19. However, there is a weakness in that pupils' performance in their Key Stage 2 test results at age 11 is not used to set targets for pupils to reach by the age of 14. When there is a wide range of abilities within teaching groups there is lack of using pupils' prior attainment to identify teaching and learning methods which match the needs of individual pupils. Similarly in Years 10 and 11 Key Stage 3 data is used to set targets for individual pupils but not as systematically as it should be and it is not communicated to all students as much as it should be. The lack of consistency in using data to set targets for pupils has an impact on the standards pupils reach. Accurate target setting enables teachers to ensure that the tasks set fully match the needs of pupils.

The access to reliable computers

20. Since the last inspection considerable resources have been dedicated to improving the number of computers within the school and the school is generously resourced in terms of the ratio of computers to pupils. However, a common complaint from pupils and students was over the unreliability of the systems to support the computers. The system can be slow, machines sometimes crash, and this does not encourage pupils and teachers to use the school's computers.

21. Although the school has a good provision of networked computers, the unreliability of this system has an impact on pupils' progress. Terminals are very slow to start, losing learning time. On occasions, students are unable to access the Internet. Many students use e-mail for transferring work between home and school. When Internet access is unavailable, they cannot access their latest work. One student could not work on the part of his project he was wishing to develop because of a fault on the computer system.

22. Many pupils have access to computers at home and for those who do not have a computer at home or wish to use the school's computers the learning resource centre is open until 17:00 hrs. each evening. Many pupils take advantage of this opportunity.

23. The demand for reliable computers is increasing as more and more teachers are using ICT to support teaching and learning as required by the demands of the National Curriculum.

The use of form tutor periods

24. Each day pupils spend 15 minutes either in assembly or with their tutor groups. Pupils attending assemblies receive well-planned programmes of good quality which during the inspection week included pupils playing music and reading war poems as part of the theme on 'Remembrance'. Pupils had the opportunity to reflect on the readings and showed their appreciation of the musicians. To ensure that assemblies start on time many pupils arrive early. They sat in silence and concentrated throughout the assemblies.

25. In contrast for those who spent the 15 minute period in their tutor groups much of the time was wasted. There was often no planned activity and pupils were allowed to sit and chat to their friends. As pupils only receive one period of personal and social education a fortnight the opportunity is missed to use the tutor time to extend and develop the personal and social education programme.

Some areas of accommodation need improvement

26. Since the time of the last inspection the school has continued to be popular and over-subscribed. There are now more than 100 extra pupils in the school than there was at the time of the last inspection but improvements in accommodation have not kept pace with increasing numbers of pupils and students.

27. Many parts of the school have modern and attractive facilities, such as the design and technology areas and the learning resource centre. Accommodation for the increasing numbers of pupils taking music is cramped. Accommodation for art and design, a concern at the time of the last inspection, remains a weakness. These inadequacies are affecting standards. There is now a stark contrast between the modern parts of the building with the older parts of the school with its narrow and shabby corridors, small classrooms, poor toilet facilities and inadequate locker areas. English classrooms located in the older part of the school are small and restrict the teaching methods that teachers can use which in turn has an impact on pupils' standards.

28. Lack of outdoor and all weather courts restrict opportunities within the physical education curriculum.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

29. In order to raise standards even higher the governors, headteacher and teaching staff should:

- (1) Improve the use of monitoring data to set targets for pupils' improvement.
(Paragraphs: 18-19)
- (2) Improve the reliability of computer systems to:
 - Increasing pupils' access to computers
 - Ensuring that all teachers have access to computers to support their teaching and learning.(Paragraphs: 20-23)
- (3) Ensure that form tutor periods are effectively used.
(Paragraphs: 24-25)
- (4) Improve the quantity and quality of accommodation by working with the local education authority to identify a planned programme to match the accommodation needs of the school with the increased numbers of pupils.
(Paragraphs: 26-28)

Sixth form

- (1) Improve the reliability of ICT equipment by ensuring that appropriate levels of technical expertise are in place to support and maintain the ICT system and its peripherals.
(Paragraphs: 20-23, 55, 85)
- (2) Improve the systems to track the progress of individual and groups of students by:
 - Ensuring that all teachers use assessment data to identify targets for students to improve their work.
 - Using assessment information to plan lessons so that the tasks set match the needs of students.(Paragraphs: 47, 67, 119, 128, 137)
- (3) Improving the quality of teaching for computer studies.
(Paragraphs: 81-82)
- (4) Improving the quality of accommodation for teaching sixth form subjects.
(Paragraphs: 52, 53, 102, 107, 138)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 - 11	51
	Sixth form	51
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		28

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 7 - 11							
Number	0	15	21	15	0	0	0
Percentage	0	29.4	41.2	29.4	0	0	0
Sixth form							
Number	1	15	23	9	3	0	0
Percentage	2.0	29.4	45.1	17.6	5.9	0	0

The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching. Care should be taken when interpreting the percentages for Years 7 –11 and the sixth form as each lesson represents more than one percentage point.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1083	206
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	36	N/A

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	11	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	244	6

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	9

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	14
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	24

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	6.2
National comparative data	7.7

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.4
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
	2001	123	105	228

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	81	99	106
	Girls	90	89	93
	Total	171	198	199
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	75 (66)	82 (75)	87 (80)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	33 (24)	61 (56)	53 (55)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	87	101	106
	Girls	90	87	92
	Total	171	187	198
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	74 (76)	85 (76)	82 (73)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	31 (38)	66 (53)	46 (50)
	National	31 (31)	42 (39)	33 (29)

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	97	106	203

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	48	94	95
	Girls	74	101	106
	Total	122	195	201
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	60 (63)	96 (98)	99 (100)
	National	N/A (47.4)	N/A (90.6)	N/A (95.6)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score Per pupil	School	48.5 (49)
	National	N/A (38.4)

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
	2001	54	35	89

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	16.4	20.0	17.9 (14.8)	4.0	0	4.0
National	16.9 (17.7)	17.9 (18.6)	17.4 (18.2)	(2.6)	(2.9)	(2.7)

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	1
Black – other	5
Indian	3
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	4
Chinese	5
White	1150
Any other minority ethnic group	2

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	24	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)	79
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.3

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	18
Total aggregate hours worked per week	544

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	77.8
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y13

Key Stage 3	25
Key Stage 4	21

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000/2001
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	£
Total income	3 766 117
Total expenditure	3 550 822
Expenditure per pupil	2 752
Balance brought forward from previous year	NIL
Balance carried forward to next year	202 710

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	31.8
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	34.2

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	1.5
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1289
Number of questionnaires returned	529

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	26	58	10	5	2
My child is making good progress in school.	28	59	7	1	4
Behaviour in the school is good.	17	56	15	5	7
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	15	60	20	5	1
The teaching is good.	19	64	8	2	6
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	16	53	22	5	4
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	38	47	9	4	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	45	47	6	2	1
The school works closely with parents.	16	51	20	5	8
The school is well led and managed.	25	55	7	4	9
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	20	61	12	3	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	18	41	19	4	18

COMMENTARY: THE SIXTH FORM

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

30. Trends over time show the following: on completion of GCSE, students' attainment is well above the national average. The attainment of those students joining the sixth form is above the national average. The attainment of students leaving the sixth form is broadly in line with national average.

31. Performance data for the latest reporting year (2000), shows that attainment of all categories of students except those entered for Advanced GNVQs, was close to the national average. This was not unexpected, and reflects GCSE results from two years earlier.

32. An above average percentage of Year 11 students continue with full time education post-16, many of them in the school's sixth form. Attainment on entry into the sixth form is above the national average as measured by average students' points score. There is a good range of advanced courses at 16+, including some advanced vocational courses, and key skills. A large majority of students go on to higher education

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

33. Students have good attitudes to their education. They are confident and mature people who enjoy their learning. In lessons, most are happy to debate, argue their viewpoint, and listen to others with tolerance and respect. Relationships are good, and students and teachers generally enjoy each others company. They are happy with the good levels of personal support and the good teaching they receive. They are not satisfied with the quality of their accommodation, and the lack of social areas. They are also dissatisfied with the unreliability of the ICT facilities, their lack of involvement in the decision making process, and the range of extracurricular activities.

34. Inspectors agree with these views, but find the activities provided are satisfactory and similar to those in many other sixth forms. In addition, the sixth-form team has very recently canvassed student views on a range of issues, and is in the process of collating the results prior to publication. The school is receptive to greater involvement of students in decision-making.

35. The sixth form is a responsible group of citizens. Students raise considerable sums of money, both as a group and as individuals, for national and local charities. A highlight of the current sixth form calendar is a sponsored parachute jump. Sixth formers have productive contact with younger pupils and make a valuable contribution to the school community. As 'buddies' they link with younger pupils to provide help and support in the chosen subject area. They give first hand advice to Year 11 pupils about life in the sixth form, and what the different courses entail. Students represent the school on the local town youth council, and they attend some school governors' meetings to express their views. Students studying music play and sing in assemblies.

36. Attendance levels are good and there are effective structures in place to monitor attendance in both Year 12 and Year 13. Students' personal development is good, they enjoy sixth form life and nearly all complete the course they started.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

37. Teaching is good. In the 50 lessons seen in the sixth form during the inspection it was good or better in 38. In 15 it was very good and in one it was excellent. In other lessons teaching was satisfactory apart from in three where it was unsatisfactory.

38. Teaching is good in most subjects and it is very good in mathematics and physical education. However it is unsatisfactory in ICT.

39. Teachers' subject knowledge is good and used effectively to support students' learning through clear introductions and explanations. For instance, in a Year 12 history lesson, the very good subject knowledge of the teacher, and clear explanation successfully extended students' knowledge and understanding of the impact of Charles Booth' survey of London at the end of the 19th century. Good subject knowledge also underpins the thorough planning of lessons which often ensures good pace and challenge in the work. Students respond well to high levels of challenge. This was shown clearly in a Year 13 mathematics lesson where students made good progress in the application of the chain rule for differentiation, as a consequence of good challenge and limited time goals set for tasks. In this lesson and in many others, questioning was sharp and probing enabling students to extend their understanding. Sometimes however this is not the case, and while effective in checking understanding, there are times when questioning is not used well enough to challenge and develop students' thinking.

40. Overall learning is satisfactory. Discussion is a strong feature of the learning in many lessons. For instance, in a Year 13 English lesson, students' learning was significantly enhanced by discussion which encouraged the use of accurate and sophisticated expressions in exploring relationships between accent and dialect. On the other hand, there are lessons when opportunities for students to learn in this way, and to take initiative in their learning, are missed, and learning is too dependent on the teacher. This was evident in some psychology lessons which, while good overall, were inconsistent in the opportunities for students to take the lead in their learning.

41. Where teaching was unsatisfactory, which was found only in the subject of computer studies, this was largely because of a lack of clear focus and direction in the teaching which significantly hindered learning, and also from insufficiently rigorous assessment.

42. Teaching is very effective in promoting good classroom relationships which in turn foster a good learning atmosphere. For example, students thrive, in physical education lessons applying much physical effort. They perform well with enjoyment and enthusiasm in response to challenging and demanding tasks set in an environment of mutual respect and support.

43. Students' work is marked regularly and thoroughly, and comments help them to improve standards. Homework is used well to extend learning and to promote independent study skills.

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

44. The sixth form curriculum is good and offers a wide range of courses at AS and A-level, together with vocational courses at advanced and intermediate levels. It meets students' aspirations and is responsive to local economic imperatives. The above-average size of the sixth form enables the school to provide a wide range of subject combinations to meet students' needs effectively. The breadth of learning has been extended by the successful introduction of AS courses, with most students opting for four subjects and a few five subjects in their first year in the sixth form. The school is at an early stage in

implementing its plans for the teaching of key skills. An audit across the curriculum has identified how courses will contribute to the development of students' numeracy, communication and ICT skills. A series of 'drop in' lessons has recently been provided to complement this provision. The curriculum does not, however, meet the statutory requirements for religious education.

45. The personal, social and health education programme in the sixth form is appropriately focused on the need to prepare students for higher education and employment. The programme includes study skills, revision techniques, opportunities to research courses in higher education and support for university application. Students find the sessions dealing with the preparation for higher education useful.

46. There is a satisfactory range of extra-curricular activities and opportunities to take responsibility, which contribute well to students' personal development. There is a strong moral and social responsibility ethic. Students organise social events, including discos for younger pupils. They volunteer to help younger pupils through a 'buddy' scheme, paired reading, help with registration groups and in some lessons. They participate in theatre visits, the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme and in music and drama productions. Some work towards a sports leadership award. Although students have timetabled lessons of physical education, some students, especially girls, expressed disappointment with their limited access to extra-curricular sport.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

Assessment

47. Whilst the formative part of academic assessment is effectively in place the school is not monitoring the academic performance of students satisfactorily. There is a large amount of data available but it is not being targeted towards the effective monitoring of performance. There is no mechanism for measuring how well the sixth form adds value and comparing this with other institutions. As a result there is too little information for students, parents, and subject teachers. The academic assessment provision is not rigorous and systematic to ensure that students receive effective additional support throughout the duration of any academic course.

Advice, support and guidance

48. The provision for educational guidance is good. Pupils who intend to join the sixth form are provided with an advice booklet and an opportunity to attend open evenings and an exhibition of the work done in the sixth-form. They are encouraged to talk to Year 12 and 13 students to discuss the merits of each course. Pupils at Year 11 are also interviewed individually about their possibly options and the implications of choices made.

49. The sixth-form management team and tutors provide good personal support and guidance for students. In Year 12 students are interviewed in the Autumn Term and self-evaluate their progress and plan for the future. There is a combination of formal and informal settings in which students can discuss any academic issues or personal problems. Some members of staff are more effective than others in this respect but many have positive and supportive relationships with students.

50. The school provides good careers education and guidance for future courses, study or vocational opportunities. Students can make appointments with the local careers adviser and the sixth-form management team help students with higher education applications and give vocational advice.

51. The school provides effectively for the needs of its sixth formers. Students become sensible young adults with responsible attitudes and very good relationships while in the sixth-form. Students effectively extend their knowledge and understanding of their subjects from good teaching.

52. Health and safety requirements are met. The students are very considerate of each other given the narrow corridors and cramped conditions in the sixth-form study area.

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

53. The school works hard and effectively to keep parents involved in the learning process. Most parents feel that the school treats their concerns seriously, and reacts quickly to issues that arise. They feel comfortable about approaching the school, should that be necessary. The reports to home on students' achievement are felt to be good, with a self-evaluation section being particularly praised. Formal parents' meetings are timetabled well in advance, and parents know their appointment times. Teachers often know the students' parents well, and are able to make very pertinent observations about achievement at these meetings. Parents feel that some accommodation does not present the best environment for learning, and have been voicing the concern for some time. On the governing body, the positions of parent governor are filled. Several other governors also are parents of students in the school.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

Leadership and management

54. Management of the sixth form is good. Clear educational direction is provided. Standards are monitored, but there is very little tracking of individual students' achievement giving a lead to how provision may be improved. The governors have a good overview of the strengths of the sixth form, but they are less confident in identifying weaknesses. The professional development of staff is good, but additional opportunities would contribute to a further increase by effectiveness. Financial resources are not subsidised by any other area of the school and well support the educational priorities of the sixth form. The relatively new management team has set clear priorities for the continued development of the sixth form. The cost effectiveness of the sixth-form provision is satisfactory.

Resources

55. Sixth-form managers employ suitable strategies to best use and deploy resources. Although the school has a good provision of networked computers, the frequent unreliability of the system has an adverse impact on progress.

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

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

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2001.

GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art	9	89		11		2.4	
Biology	16	100		44		3.3	
Business studies	22	86		23		2.3	
Chemistry	11	100		36		3.2	
Computer Studies	17	82		18		2.0	
Design	12	92		42		2.9	
Economics	8	88		50		2.8	
English	14	93		21		2.5	
English literature	9	89		33		2.7	
French	5	60		0		1.2	
Geography	24	100		42		3.0	
German	4	75		25		2.3	
Graphics	11	82		9		1.9	
Health and Social Care	7	100		0		2.9	
History	22	96		55		3.4	
Mathematics	31	90		29		2.7	
Further mathematics	1	100		100		5.0	
Media Studies	8	100		63		3.5	
Music	4	100		75		4.0	
Physical education	12	100		42		2.8	
Photography	12	100		50		3.1	
Physics	19	89		37		2.8	
Psychology	41	93		24		2.7	
Religious studies	2	100		100		4.0	
Sociology	19	100		58		3.5	
Textiles	5	100		20		2.6	

Theatre Studies	10	100		10		2.6	
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GCE A level and AVCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	13	100	87	46	43	6.8	5.80
Chemistry	12	83	90	33	43	5.3	5.90
Biology	9	100	88	22	34	4.7	5.25
Computer Studies	18	100	N/A	39	N/A	5.6	N/A
Physical education	2	50	93	0	25	1.0	N/A
Health and social care	2	1 dist.	N/A	1 merit	N/A	14.0	N/A
Art and design	19	100	96	47	46	9.5	6.57
Music	5	100	93	20	35	4.8	5.74
Geography	7	57	92	0	38	2.9	5.74
History	27	74	88	15	35	4.0	5.45
Psychology	15	87	N/A	20	N/A	4.3	N/A
English	16	100	95	31	37	6.4	5.91

Intermediate vocational qualifications

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		%gaining distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Business	7	100	N/A	14	N/A	14	N/A

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

The focus of the inspection was on biology, chemistry and mathematics. In chemistry four lessons were observed. Teaching is good and achievement is satisfactory. Standards match the national average. In biology four lessons were observed. Teaching is good and achievement is good. Standards are above the national average. In mathematics five lessons were observed. Teaching is very good and achievement is good. Standards are well above the national average.

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- The number of A-level students has doubled in the last four years.
- Standards are well above average and all students gain a pass grade.
- Teaching is very good and this promotes very good learning and motivates students to achieve well.
- The performance of the subject is well monitored.

Areas for improvement

- A-level students do not have sufficient opportunities to make extended oral contributions in lessons.

56. The inspection covered modules in statistics and pure mathematics. Mechanics was not inspected as its teaching comes later in the school year. Combinations of these modules lead to qualifications in A/S and A-level mathematics, A/S and A-level further mathematics.

57. The mathematics department has done increasingly well for its students in recent years. The number of students in each year group has risen from sixteen in 1997 to thirty-one this year. Results show that all students earned a pass grade at A-level in the last four years. The proportion of students with the higher A/B grades was well above average prior to 2000 when results dipped to match the national average. This was because the students concerned had a significantly lower standard on entry to their course in 1998. Their achievement was good. Standards rose in 2001 to previous levels.

58. The standard of work seen in the inspection is well above average, in line with the results of 2001. Male and female students do equally well. They have a good understanding of mathematics and relate past work to new learning well, through the good planning in the teaching. They were able to use approximations to $\sin x$ and $\cos x$ for small angles to the differentiation of $\sin x$ and $\cos x$ from first principles. They were able to learn how to use one advance from their knowledge of another. Statistics course work is well above average because it is monitored well by the teachers.

59. Teaching is very good overall and student's learning is very good as a result. It is best when the good teaching methods ensure extended whole group discussion, centred on problem-solving, with the teacher ensuring that progress towards a solution is being made. Students' learning is not as effective in the absence of these discussions. The use of computers in the teaching of trigonometry provides a good visual impact to learning, enhanced by the quality of the explanations, in the teaching of measures of angle, for example, as a result of very good subject knowledge. Challenges to students' learning from the nature of the problems set in lessons become very good challenges by the quality and use of short, sharp questions as seen in the teaching of differentiation. This is why the teaching is very good. An increased use of mental work in the teaching would eliminate the need to recap elementary knowledge such as simple ratios etc. Students work well together and this helps their learning. They know what to do to improve and can, and do, obtain extra help outside lessons when they perceive the need. The marking of students' work is good.

60. The department is managed very well. The teachers work hard and well as a team, with the consistency of approach seen in the inspection following the very good monitoring of the subject's performance. The department makes very good use of its assessment information, allowing for a flexible and excellent approach to the courses that students can study. They get very good advice. Some students improve their year 12 module grades

significantly in Year 13. The innovative approach to the focus on attainment in the main school is one reason for the growth in sixth-form numbers. The quality of the teaching is another. Mathematics is a strength of the sixth form

Chemistry

Overall, the quality of provision in chemistry is satisfactory.

Strengths

- Teaching and learning is good; lessons are well structured and the teachers' good knowledge and understanding of chemistry enables them to motivate students well.
- Students enjoy chemistry, they have a positive and responsible attitude to their work.

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Areas for improvement

- There are insufficient opportunities for a variety of activities within lessons to meet the needs of students of differing abilities.
- The use of assessment data to monitor student progress and to help students to improve their work is at an early stage of development.

61. Standards of work seen during the inspection are average. Overall, students make satisfactory progress in chemistry but some students underachieve in relation to their prior GCSE performance.

62. The A-level examination results have varied from year to year. In 2000, the results were close to the national average. The percentage pass rate was above the national average and the percentage of higher grades A and B was just below the national average. The percentage pass rate fell in 2001. Year 12 students achieved a 100 per cent pass rate in the AS examination in 2001. These results for this new course are very encouraging.

63. Students in Year 12 are at an early stage of their course. Good teaching supports students, boosting their confidence, which enables them to adjust successfully to the standard of work required. In a Year 12 lesson, students were practising gas volume calculations, using the concept of molar volume. The very good relationship between the teacher and students and the encouraging supportive manner of the teacher meant that the students gained confidence in their own ability and experienced success in a carefully structured lesson. Their learning was good. In another Year 12 lesson students used counters and dice to investigate the random nature of molecular mixing in liquids. Through this practical activity, they gained a good understanding of entropy and of the differences in magnitude of the entropy of solids, liquids, and gases. However, average and low-attaining students had difficulties in explaining this in their own words in precise enough language. More enrichment activities involving problem solving and the application of knowledge to new situations would provide more challenge for the higher-attaining students.

64. Carefully structured teaching builds on previous knowledge enabling students to develop their understanding of chemical concepts and their knowledge of the contribution chemistry makes to society. By Year 13, students' experimental skills are good. In a lesson where students were investigating the affect of concentration on reaction rate, they demonstrated good manipulative skills and made accurate measurements. Students are able to interpret the information obtained from an experiment and recognise patterns and trends. In another lesson students were introduced to the importance of ionic precipitation in pigment preparation. Students were able to identify functional groups in organic pigments and to recognise that a conjugated system is related to the presence of colour. They revised ionic precipitation and practised writing ionic equations. Some students initially were confused by the similar names of some compounds and a few students had difficulty in remembering

ionic charges from their GCSE work. The teacher recognised their problems and supported student revision in a clear and concise way. Consequently, students efficiently regained their familiarity with this topic and quickly made progress.

65. The teaching seen was consistently good, and this resulted in good learning. A key strength of the teaching is the teachers' good knowledge and understanding of chemistry shown in clear exposition and skilful questioning. The very good relationship between teachers and students engenders a positive attitude and interest in chemistry. Teachers are encouraging and supportive, making good use of praise to boost students' confidence. Written work is marked in detail and students are shown where there are inaccuracies and where their answers lack depth. The teaching methods seen during the inspection involved whole-class teaching and were teacher dominated with insufficient opportunities for students to progress at different rates dependent on their abilities. Teachers' expectations are generally appropriately high but in some lessons tasks are the same for students of all attainment levels so that higher-attaining students are not challenged sufficiently and, in consequence, make less progress. The pace in some lessons lacked focus so that students were not working as productively as they might.

66. Students have good listening skills and sustain concentration well. Skills of writing notes and of personal research develop steadily through the sixth-form years. Students' work is well organised and presented in the large majority of cases. They are co-operative and support each other well in group work. However, they lack confidence in their own ability and are not very responsive when answering teachers' questions or in asking questions themselves. More opportunities for students to actively discuss and debate topics would increase their scientific curiosity and enhance their learning.

67. The subject co-ordinator is new to the school, but has already established a clear lead in the development of the subject. Target setting, focussed on specific learning goals produced from the diagnostic use of assessment data, is being developed. This will make it easier to monitor students' progress and to help students improve their work. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory.

Biology

Overall, the quality of provision in biology is good.

Strengths

- A strong team of committed teachers who communicate well and share a wide range of teaching strategies.
- Good resources and accommodation.
- Very good practical coursework.

Areas for improvement

- Enhance students' learning by allowing them more opportunities to use ICT.
- To add contributions for cultural, multicultural and spiritual education to the social and moral issues already included in the schemes of work.

68. The GCE A-level examination results in 2000 were good and 88 per cent of the students achieved a pass and 44 per cent achieved a higher grade of A or B. The proportion of students achieving grades A to E is in line with the national average while the percentage of students achieving a higher grade is well above the national figure of 33 per cent. The results are in line with those of similar schools. More female students study A-level biology than male students and their results have been consistently higher since the previous inspection. The number of students has increased since the previous inspection, and there

has been a trend of improvement in standards. In 2001 fewer candidates sat the A-level examination, but there was a 100 per cent pass. In the new AS level examination taken at the end of Year 12 in 2001, all the students achieved a grade, with 50 per cent achieving either a grade A or B.

69. The standards of work seen during the inspection are above average, and many Year 13 students achieve a level higher than their GCSE results predict. Achievement, therefore, is good. Effective teaching challenges all prior attainers and questions are aimed at the gifted students as well as the average ones. Learning is focused during lessons because of the perseverance and concentration of the students and the effective methods used by the teachers. In a theory lesson on the biochemistry of respiration, students of all prior attainment understood the mechanisms that release energy. High attainers know that glycolysis occurs in the cytoplasm of cells, but that reactions confined to mitochondria. A significant majority have good recall of prior knowledge and use it well in unfamiliar situations. Scrutiny of their coursework shows it to be good with attention to detail. They have very good listening skills and can discuss their current work confidently. The department effectively monitors their progress in key skills, which are audited and well documented.

70. Students in Year 12 have successfully bridged the gap from GCSE to AS level. They show a good knowledge of basic biochemistry and carry out an investigation to determine the level of sensitivity of a reagent used to detect glucose in solution. They handle the apparatus with confidence, tabulate the results and produce well-written reports. The students show a high degree of perseverance with this difficult investigation, and consolidate already existing skills. All students appear to have acquired the depth of knowledge expected at this stage of the AS course.

71. Learning is good as a result of good teaching, and the best learning occurs when the lessons are well planned and time and resources are used well. Teachers have a good knowledge of their subject and their expectations of pupils are high. Planning is very good and the objectives are generally shared with the students. A wide range of teaching strategies is used and these have improved since the previous inspection. The question and answer sessions at the start of lessons to recap previous work are a strength of teaching. This sets the pace of the lesson from the start with all students fully engaged. Teachers are enthusiastic about their subject, as are the students who have a very good attitude towards the learning of biology.

72. The students use different types of writing. They use short answers in tackling past papers for revision or homework, making notes during a lesson, copying notes from a board or overhead projector or writing up experiments. There are many opportunities for extended writing, particularly in writing up investigations. The quality of the presentation and content of these investigations have brought positive comments from the A-level examination board. Marking of students' work is very good. It is consistent across the department and there is good analysis in class following homework, allowing the students to see where there are errors and how they might improve. The comments on essays are specifically relevant to points which could be included to raise the attainment of students.

73. The students have very good listening and speaking skills. They work productively and persevere with tasks. They accept challenge as an everyday event. A majority can argue logically to put over a point. Relationships are very good. Students share ideas and respect one another's opinions. They discuss their current work confidently and have a good grasp of the specific terminology needed in this subject.

74. Students are expected to work on their own in study periods and do this in a mature way. They use their textbooks confidently and can extract information to supplement their notes. Many take advantage of the learning and research centre and book computers to word process their coursework. The use of ICT has improved since the previous inspection with word processing being the main use. Data-logging is used in a surface area to volume ratio experiment. PowerPoint presentation onto a large screen gives the students a good understanding of the transport system in flowering plants. However, the opportunities to use ICT are not used fully and there are many areas in the modular schemes of work where the use of ICT would enhance the learning of the students. Similarly, opportunities for discussion about cultural, multicultural and spiritual issues can be mapped into the modules. Social and moral issues are covered well within the subject. Students have the opportunity to develop their own social skills when Year 12 and Year 13 go together on a residential ecology field course.

75. The subject is well led and managed and this results in good teaching and learning. There is a commitment to maintain the high standards of recent years. The subject co-ordinator provides good support for the teachers of AS and A-level biology. Standards have improved since the previous inspection and the subject is popular with students. Teaching strategies have improved since the previous inspection and formal monthly meetings which are minuted, discuss biology throughout the school, and also issues arising from faculty meetings. Good leadership has led to good learning. The laboratories are spacious and well resourced, providing good areas for the students and teachers to work in. The department is well supported by dedicated technical staff.

BUSINESS

The focus of this inspection was on business education A-level; A-level economics and business Advanced VCE were also sampled. Economics and Advanced GNVQ business results for 2000 were average compared with all other subjects in the school. In business AVCE teaching was good, lesson planning was effective and relationships with the students were very good. The students in AVCE in the 2000 examinations produced their personal best results when compared to all other subjects they were studying. Very few students fail to continue with their courses from Years 12 to 13.

Business education

Overall, the quality of provision in business education is good.

Strengths

- The quality of teaching. Teachers have very good knowledge of the subject.
- Relationships between teachers and students are very good, providing a very good working atmosphere in lessons.
- The quality of the planning of the course content is very effective affording all students the opportunity to succeed.

Areas for improvement

- To develop strategies to engage the lower attaining students in order to enable them to make a greater contribution in lessons and develop independent learning skills.
- To develop effective industrial links in order to enhance the quality of teaching and learning.

76. Standards at present are average in A-level Business Studies. In 2000 the A-level business studies and the AS level results were average compared with other subjects within the A-level school curriculum. The standards reached by the current students in Year 13, as seen in lessons and in their written work, are often above average, which shows an improvement over the immediate past. When account is taken of the students' GCSE grades at the start of the course, this represents satisfactory achievement for the majority of students. In Year 12, students make good progress in understanding the central ideas of the subject, including those relating to the economic environment in which business operates. Students in Year 13 also progress well in their current work. Their portfolios are well organised providing evidence of good research skills and some analytical ability when dealing with hypothetical situations in business. In all lessons, but particularly in Year 13, there was evidence of students engaging in discussions on a range of issues which demonstrated well developed skills in promoting and supporting ideas and opinions. Many students are articulate and comfortable with their use and understanding of technical language. The majority of students in both years are generally adept in planning their own work when researching and completing assignments.

77. Overall the quality of teaching is good. Teaching was never less than satisfactory and on occasions very good. The teachers have a very good knowledge and understanding of the subject, fostering interest and understanding in the majority of students through carefully planned lessons. Relationships between the teachers and the students are very good promoting high levels of mutual respect and understanding. Overall the quality of learning is good. Lessons are invariably designed around current events in the business world. Examples include the impact of the return to operational status of Concorde on British Airways future viability, using a comparative analysis of the impact for stakeholders in four large organisations. Teaching strategies are carefully orchestrated to promote knowledge and understanding through whole class and small group activities. Expectations are high and therefore the work is challenging, allowing students to experience the complex nature of business. The quality of education is also supported through extra-curricular activities, for example, the Young Enterprise Scheme. As a consequence of the variety of learning experiences the coaching and development of key skills is well established.

78. The leadership and management are good. A clear vision exists relating to the present and future development of the subject. The teachers work as an effective team sharing ideas and monitoring all aspects of the work. The planning of the course content is detailed and effective. Student assessment is detailed and very effective, being used to influence the planning of lessons. Students have a clear understanding of their progress,

attainment and future expectations. Future development would be enhanced by the introduction of improved industrial links. Involving the local business community through the Education Business Partnership and the Chamber of Commerce would increase student perception of the business world. In addition, the provision of newspapers and periodicals would promote greater interest and understanding.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

The focus of work seen was on computer studies. No other subjects were seen or sampled.

Computer studies

Overall, the quality of provision in computer studies is unsatisfactory.

Strengths

- The knowledge and skills students possess at the start of Year 12 are good.
- Good links with the community, including local businesses support learning.
-

Areas for improvement

- Teaching does not ensure sufficient achievement is made by students.
- The computer network is unreliable.

79. As well as offering AS in Year 12 and A2 in Year 13, the school also allows students to take the AS course over two years. This is a good addition to provision, allowing students to develop their computing skills to examination level but limiting demands of time so that they can follow other courses. AS computing is a popular subject in Year 12. In 2001 over half of the students did not continue with the subject to A2.

80. In 2000 the results of the seven candidates were below the national average. The results of these students were comparable with their performance in other subjects. In 2001 all students passed at A-level with 39 per cent gaining the top grades A and B. In the AS examinations results were below the standard of other subjects in the school. Results have declined since the time of the last inspection.

81. Teaching of computer studies is unsatisfactory because the needs of students are not fully met. The school experienced difficulties in filling a vacant post for the subject. An unqualified teacher is currently involved in the delivery of AS and A2 courses. This is a temporary arrangement and the school has secured the services of a qualified teacher who will take up post in January 2002. For the current school year, students in Year 12 attend a local college of further education for part of the course.

82. Teaching does not make students sufficiently aware of the requirements of the examination and so students are uncertain as to what they should learn. Teaching demonstrates sufficient knowledge of computer systems but insufficient knowledge of appropriate teaching techniques. Lesson planning is ineffective because clear objectives are not established for each lesson and lesson content is insufficient. Poor use is made of time. The teacher often assists one student for very long periods of time whilst others await help or to be given the next task. Students are not given sufficient, accurate information about the progress they are making or the next steps for development because of a lack of teacher expertise and knowledge in this area. Consequently, learning and progress made in lessons are both unsatisfactory.

83. Although students start on their sixth-form studies with good levels of skills, they do not achieve to levels which are appropriate to the results they gained at GCSE. The

standards of work seen were below the national average. In Year 12, students are only a few weeks into their course. In work on databases, they were only a little way beyond the level they would have achieved at GCSE. They are set insufficient work in lessons. For example, a group only completed a report from a database using a 'wizard' in a sixty minute lesson.

84. Year 13 students can use programs such as databases well, being able to structure relational databases and consider user needs in designing forms for data entry. They use the internet well to support their studies. Students in Year 13 use good links with local companies or schools. for project work. They have visited and discussed their projects with people from these organisations. In several instances, the organisation plans to make use of the work the student is doing for their examination. This adds greatly to students' understanding of the development of applications. Students show good levels of understanding of the problems they are addressing. However, they are uncertain of what their documentation should contain. Another result of this uncertainty is that they spend time unproductively entering excessive amounts of data. Because students are not as aware as they should be what they need to include in the documentation for the examination projects, they do not maintain regular records of their work as it develops. For the same reason, they do not have a sound knowledge of the extent to which their work should be tested.

85. Although the school has a good provision of networked computers, the frequent unreliability of this system has an adverse impact on progress. Terminals are very slow to start, losing learning time. On occasions, students are unable to access the internet. As a result of the change to broadband internet the provider has been unable to provide a reliable service. Many students use e-mail for transferring work between home and school. When internet access is unavailable, they cannot access their latest work. One student could not work on the part of his project he was wishing to develop because of a fault on the computer system.

86. Students are rightly concerned that the present quality of teaching and hardware provision are adversely affecting the progress they are making. This reduces their enthusiasm for the subject and is particularly marked in Year 12.

87. The school currently has a temporary structure for the management of computer studies. Whilst this structure has imaginative ideas for the future and has taken certain actions deal with the weaknesses in teaching, it has not successfully overcome the current underperformance of students and so is unsatisfactory. Teaching is monitored by observation and through the work of students. Currently, very few girls take computer studies. Management has good ideas for tackling this problem, for example, by seeking to offer other sixth form courses in ICT.

88. Because the standards achieved by students and the quality of teaching have declined, there has been unsatisfactory improvement in computer studies since the last inspection. The school should take steps to ensure that in future the quality of provision for the subject does not suffer when a vacant post arises.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

The focus of the work seen was on physical education. No other subjects were seen or sampled.

Physical education

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

Strengths

- AS-level results are above average and students achieve well.
- Teaching at AS-level and A-level is good.
- The quality of relationships between students and teachers.
- The subject is well led and managed.

Areas for improvement

- Raising standards at A-level.
- Equity of staff deployment.

89. Results at A-level have declined in recent years and have become below the school average. There is compelling evidence that this trend has been reversed. The average point score of AS-level students in the subject exceeded their point score for all other subjects entered. Students produced both coursework and practical performances of a high standard. They have good levels of technical knowledge and theoretical understanding.

90. Current students in Year 13, all of whom have progressed from Year 12, are producing work which sustains their earlier profile, and are achieving above the level expected based on their GCSE grades. In all lessons, they met the challenges set by well planned and demanding teaching. Drawing on their secure knowledge and understanding of human movement, they are able to debate and exchange alternative views. They can analyse and evaluate their performances, suggest improvements, and refine the quality of the final outcomes. They show good skills as independent learners when carrying out research.

91. In Year 12, students are achieving better than expected. They show good levels of knowledge, understanding and skill, both theoretically and practically, as they move on successfully from GCSE work into new areas. They have a keen interest in health related fitness, and are fully conversant with the effects of exercise on the body. Students find the higher level work interesting and exciting. They take a full and active part in discussions, and have a good understanding of the technical vocabulary of the subject.

92. Teaching overall is good, and this encourages effective learning in students of all abilities. The best teaching is characterised by the clarity of its objectives, which consolidate and extend previous work, and by its good balance of skill learning and skill application. Teachers demonstrate very good subject knowledge in both their questioning and their exposition. Lessons are well planned, the work is detailed, progressive, and appropriately challenging. They have high expectations of their students in terms of work rate and quality of performance, both physical and mental. The students respond with confidence and trust to the demands of their teachers.

93. Students learn well. They have a good attitude to work, and respond well to the demanding challenges set by the teachers. Relationships between students are excellent, they respect each others' views, and they give mutual support and encouragement. They work well independently or co-operatively, and they are enthusiastic about their involvement in physical education. Most students are involved in the community sports leader award scheme. Most are fully committed to representing the school in competitive sporting fixtures, both team and individual. Several have gained representative honours in a range of activities.

94. The department is very well led and managed. The newly appointed head of faculty has brought fresh energy and vision, as well as a strong determination to raise standards, and to increase recruitment of students. He leads a small and dedicated team who are committed both to the subject and to the students. They are consistent in their challenge and their expectation of quality of outcome. The overall effectiveness of the department could be enhanced by the involvement of all specialist staff in teaching to A-level and AS level. Schemes of work are fully in place, assessments are regular and frequent and give students a clear picture of their progress. An ongoing programme of staff development linked to the monitoring of teaching is helping to secure higher standards. Facilities overall are good, though outdoor hard surface areas are currently lacking. Resources for teaching the subject are good.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

The focus of the work seen was on health and social care. No other subject was sampled or seen

Overall, the quality of provision in health and social care is good.

Strengths

- The relationships between students and their teachers
- The structure of the course is well planned including effective support materials.
- There is a clear and effective leadership and management of the subject.

Areas for improvements

- Students' skills of critical analysis and evaluation are not particularly well developed.

95. The course was offered for the first time in 2000. It was previously offered as a GNVQ qualification at intermediate and advanced level with significant success. Overall standards are average. AS – level results in 2000 were average compared with all other subjects in the school. Evidence based on a scrutiny of student portfolios including the centre-assessed assignments indicates that standards of achievement are improving. When consideration is given to the students' previous average points score in GCSE examinations their achievement by Year 13 is good. The majority of the present Year 12 students have made a good start to their course. It is evident from scrutiny of their work that Year 13 students understand the fundamental concepts of health and social care. The students appear to respond well to the consultative style of teaching. Their skills in critical analysis and evaluation although satisfactory, are not so well developed. Students' written work is generally well organised and presented.

96. Evidence based on limited classroom observation together with a scrutiny of work from both years would indicate that teaching is good. Primarily as a consequence of the combination of methodical planning, very good subject knowledge and strong teamwork. Theory and practice of health and social care are well related particularly in Year 13 enabling good learning. The enthusiasm of the teachers creates a positive environment for learning. The students are developing an appreciation of the impact of health and social care on

society. Students in Year 12 are allocated clients who they visit for short periods. The clients are pupils in local day nurseries or primary schools. The students have to develop some form of learning programme for the pupils based on health and social care issues. The students appreciate the freedom they are given to pursue independent study that is generally effective because of the clear structure of the experiences being offered. The majority of students are attentive, listen and show a positive attitude to their work. They are practised in discussion and, with few exceptions, contribute through effective encouragement. Communication skills are improved through the regular discussions that take place in lessons. Students speak highly of their supportive relationships with their teachers. Work is assessed regularly and students are given appropriate and constructive feedback. Student progress and attainment is carefully monitored by teachers and is used to influence future planning. Teachers are well qualified and have relevant specialist and vocational experience. Accommodation is satisfactory. There is a good range of resources available and students have access to computers. There is a good selection of books available both in the classrooms and in the school library.

97. Leadership and management are good. There is a clear vision and an appreciation of what is required to support the development of the subject and the attainment levels of the students. The staff within the department work as a very effective team which generates a very good atmosphere, which in turn has a positive effect upon the quality of teaching, and learning Knowledge gained regarding student progress and attainment is used effectively. Student academic records are comprehensive. High standards are promoted and expected and as a consequence student portfolios are well presented and well organised.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The focus was on art and design and music. Standards of teaching are good for music and AS-level results were well above average. In art and design, the focus was on fine art although photography was also sampled. Four lessons were observed and the overall standard of teaching was good. The AS examination results for Year 12 2000/2001 throughout the option range are in line with national averages.

Art and design

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

Strengths

- Teaching is well structured to meet the demands of the AS and AL courses.
- Students are very sensitive to each other's needs and work well together.
- There is strong encouragement from the teachers to enable students to see works of art at first hand.
- Life drawing classes are used well to develop drawing skills.

Areas for improvement

- The cramped studio spaces inhibit the production of large scale work.

98. The art and design options include fine art, textiles, photography, and graphics. A high proportion of students taking photography and textiles did significantly better in these subjects than their other AS subjects within the school.

99. The standard of learning is good. The students are interested in art and design and keen to discuss their work and ideas. In the lessons observed there was a high level of knowledge of a wide variety of artists. This has enriched the awareness of other cultures and social and moral issues. Visits to the Henry Moore Foundation have produced a wealth of constructive working drawings and photographs from which students are exploring materials and form. They were observed developing ideas towards producing a small sculpture that could *be photographed and* digitally enlarged to represent a large public work. A weekly life drawing class enables students to work directly from the figure in a lively and colourful way. Some of these drawings have led to more personal work with students exploring concepts such as 'loneliness' or 'the female form' in a successful and individual way. Students demonstrated a good understanding of the properties of light and its potential in relation to mood or self-expression. *ICT* is also used to facilitate research and provide source material. The students are encouraged to follow their own directions but the range and scale of work possible is restricted by the cramped conditions in many of the rooms. There is a lack of large experimental work and this is directly related to the lack of workspace in the sixth form area.

100. The standard of teaching is good. The teachers are adjusting well to the new demands of the AS and A-level requirements. There is a shared culture of setting high standards for the students and helping them *to* complete the course. In the lessons observed there was a strong emphasis on the thematic enquiry and contextual study components of the course. There is an understandable feeling and anxiety from the teachers that they must get it right at this stage *of a new examination specification*. The teachers are also aware that too much emphasis on study skills can inhibit spontaneous expression when more emphasis on practical work is required. The teachers demonstrate good knowledge of the process of making art and are skilled at helping students to arrive at creative solutions. They are well aware of where each student is in relation to the requirements of the course and do apply appropriate levels of pressure to help the students to complete tasks.

101. The overall level of attainment is good. The students enjoy the subject and all abilities share a learning together culture. They are sensitive to each other's needs and able to pool ideas. In the discussions observed they were able to talk about personal ideas in a supportive and sharing group. There are good relationships with the teachers and students have the confidence to disagree with teachers in discussion groups. The majority of students can work independently and use their time out of lessons constructively. They are clear about the requirements of the course and are for the most part able to plan and organise their work effectively.

102. The level of management is good with an emphasis on the value of teamwork. There are difficulties in that the subject is taught in two different areas of the school. There are few formal staff meetings but the team communicates well both in written form and informal meetings. The resources are adequate but the art rooms in the old part of the school are shabby and uninspiring areas to work in.

Music

Overall, the quality of provision in music is good.

Strengths

- Students' achievements are very good.
- Teaching is good.
- Students are highly motivated.

Areas for improvement

- The constraints of the accommodation.
- The limited number of adequate computers in the department.

103. The department has a good record of examination results over the past few years. Although the small size of cohorts negates national comparison, students uniformly achieve satisfactory standards. Several have proceeded to university to study music. Results achieved in the new AS level examination were very good, and higher than other subjects in the school. There is no variation in attainment between genders. Several students have gained full marks in the practical component of their examinations.

104. There has been a marked improvement in standards since the last inspection. The majority of sixth formers significantly build on their very good results achieved at GCSE level, where results are well above the national average. They perform on a range of instruments with considerable skill, confidence and refinement. Many have passed the highest national grade examinations on more than one instrument. In the lessons inspected students frequently made good use of their instruments to demonstrate technical details of the music they are studying, such as in ornamentation of late renaissance consort music. On the CDs made of student recitals the range of instrumental programmes is impressive and further reflects the confident and stylish playing evidenced in extra-curricular work, especially in concert band and string orchestra. Several students have achieved success as performers in festival work nationally, and have participated to a high level in county bands. Students' attainment in composition displays a wide range of techniques used with assurance; particularly commendable were a sonata for flute and piano, and a brass quartet. In both cases students possessed a mature grasp of style and genre. Other students produced imaginative vocal compositions in a popular idiom often using their own texts. In a lesson on popular music students demonstrated fluency in the use of technical detail on diatonic harmony and related issues of performance practice.

105. The overall standard of teaching was good. Students make quick progress and learn effectively because teachers have a secure knowledge of their subject, are expert performers and possess a detailed understanding of the examination syllabus. The discipline of high quality performance pervades the department, including the excellent quality of peripatetic instrumental teachers, and is the fundamental basis of all the teaching. In two of the lessons inspected learning was greatly enhanced by the unusual requirement made of students to perform the music which was to be analysed. In one lesson a late renaissance consort work was arranged for the range of modern orchestral instruments played by the students. In another lesson popular songs of the 1960s were performed prior to analytical work. In such ways students are able to see at first hand how aspects of harmony and the ornamentation of playing techniques are interwoven by composers. In one lesson students' understanding of the stylistic features of contrasting historical periods was imaginatively consolidated by the teacher's use of a set of crumhorns. Teachers' expectations are high and lessons move at a good pace. The ethos of performance ensures the highest levels of commitment from both teachers and students, and is notably reflected in the input all students make to the schools' excellent extra-curricular work. Relationships between staff and students are exemplary. A

good and rigorous programme of homework consolidates classwork. In a minority of lessons day-to-day planning is insufficiently detailed. In one composition lesson the teacher had not sufficiently annotated the variation features of a musical extract which was to be used as a stimulus for student discussion prior to their individual work, resulting in some lack of focus for the lesson.

106. All students are well motivated and thoroughly committed to the course. They are highly articulate and possess clear views on the quality of teaching they receive. Attitudes to the music department and the school are extremely positive. Whilst they are critical of some of the restraints of accommodation and ICT which impact on their work, they are very willing to work beyond the school day on their recitals and compositions. Their involvement in the rich array of extra-curricular music making provided by the department is most noteworthy. They give very generously of their time to both perform in, and help to run, numerous ensembles, and have shown considerable commitment to public performance in school, the local community and nationally where required.

107. The music department is very well organised and managed. Since her appointment in 1998 the head of department has made a significant impact on standards. There is a clear vision for the department and the subject across the school and wider community. The aim that all aspects of the department emanate from the highest standards of musical performance is laudable. Recent changes in the examination specification have been well understood and assimilated into the department's teaching methodology. There is a clearly planned strategy for development. In particular a variety of strategies have been attempted to tackle the problems of cramped accommodation and limited resources. However the increased numbers taking music at examination level, instrumental lessons and participating in extra-curricular music make management of the current department very demanding. With continued expansion and success on the current level further accommodation, resources and staffing will be essential.

HUMANITIES

The focus was on geography, history and psychology. Religious education is taught at GCE Advanced level but was not sampled. The statutory requirement for the provision of religious education for all students is not met. Provision is good in history and psychology, and it is satisfactory in geography. Provision in geography has improved significantly since the last inspection. Students achieve well in history and psychology. Their achievement in geography is satisfactory. Standards are above average in history, and average in psychology and geography. Teaching is good and often very good in history and psychology. In geography, it is satisfactory with some good features.

Geography

Overall, the quality of provision in geography is satisfactory

Strengths

- Good leadership is effective in raising standards.
- Residential fieldwork contributes well to students' learning.

Areas for improvement

- The challenge in the work set for higher-attaining students.
- The quality and depth of some students' written work.

108. Standards overall are average. Results in the GCE A-level examination were well below the national average in 2000 and the attainment of boys was particularly low. There has been some improvement in 2001, although results were still well below average. The good results at AS level in 2001 show a marked improvement, with 42 per cent awarded the highest grades, (A and B), and all students achieving a grade. The retention rate of students is very good; almost all complete the course.

109. The observation of students in lessons and an analysis of their work confirm that standards are average. The underachievement of previous years has been reversed and students now achieve satisfactorily. Students use a good range of techniques to collect and present information. Well-planned residential fieldwork contributes well to students' individual investigations and to their understanding of physical processes, such as coastal erosion and deposition. Higher-attaining students write clear, analytical accounts, but some written work lacks depth and data is not well used to support and exemplify answers.

110. Teaching is satisfactory with good features. Teachers generally have good subject knowledge so that explanations are clear and students tackle new work with a degree of confidence. Relationships in the classroom are good; teachers are approachable and generous with the help offered to individuals both in and outside lesson time. Lessons have a clear structure and tasks are varied. Marking is regular and written comments are generally helpful in showing how work could be improved. However, assessment is not yet used to set clear learning targets and to monitor their achievement. In the best lessons the work is challenging and well planned to meet students' needs. A lesson with Year 12 students on the causes and effects of changing sea levels, put appropriate emphasis on the interpretation of graphs and maps to improve students' use of data in their written work. Students' first-hand observations and experience of coastal fieldwork was effectively incorporated into the tasks. A less dynamic, but satisfactory lesson in Year 13 devoted too much time to lower level tasks, copying notes and a graph, so that the more demanding group work that followed was rushed and was not completed in the time available.

111. Geography makes a good contribution to the teaching of key skills. Students make effective use of statistical techniques to analyse data. For example, in one investigation Spearman's rank coefficient was used competently to compare size and roundness of pebbles in various locations on Chesil Beach. Many students make good use of computers to process primary data, to construct graphs and to improve the presentation of their investigations.

112. Students' attitudes to their work in geography are generally positive. They are attentive and contribute well to oral work. They use a range of resources effectively to research topics, including the Internet. Their positive attitudes contribute to their satisfactory achievement and learning. The relaxed attitude of a few, mainly boys, limits achievement in lessons.

113. Under the able leadership of the recently appointed head of department, standards in geography are improving. Numbers opting for the subject have increased and examination results have begun to improve. Modular schemes of work are being rewritten and provide detailed guidance for less experienced and non-specialist teachers. The positive ethos, good teamwork and supportive relationships have contributed to the improving standards in the subject.

History

Overall, the quality of provision in history is good.

Strengths

- Overall the quality of teaching is good, and often very good.
- Students have very positive attitudes to the subject.
- Introduction of new courses has been well managed and the first AS level results were above average.

Areas for improvement

- The progress of individual students is not tracked closely enough.
- Students do not have enough opportunities to use ICT to enhance their work in history.

114. A-level results at grades A and B were below the national average in 1999 and 2000. At grades A to E results were also below the national average in 1999 but were close to the national average in 2000. However, these results reflected the previous attainment of students and they usually achieved their predicted grades. A-level results in 2001 were disappointing and a number of students did not obtain their predicted grades. In contrast the 2001 AS-level results were above average. Over half the candidates gained A or B grades, and all but one candidate gained a grade; nearly three-quarters of the candidates did as well as or better in their history as they did in their other AS-level subjects.

115. Standards of work seen in the two Year 13 groups are above average and students' achievement since the start of Year 12 is good. They have a good grasp of the topics they are studying and can analyse relevant issues and topics successfully, as in a lesson on the reasons why the British Government pursued a policy of appeasement during the 1930s. The written work of most students is clear, effective and well substantiated, although a few have difficulty in bringing enough detail and depth to their work, especially in some of their work using historical sources.

116. Year 12 students have made a good start to the course and the standards of work seen are above average. In their work on Edwardian England, for example, students are beginning to understand in some depth the forces making for change during the period. Their achievement, thus far, is good.

117. The quality of teaching overall is good, and often very good, and students learn well as a result. Teachers' very good subject expertise and their enthusiasm for history successfully motivate students. Teachers plan lessons thoroughly so that key themes and ideas are carefully highlighted and emphasised, as in a lesson on the process and extent of change in provision for the poor in 19th century Britain. Teachers also use a reasonable range of methods and are particularly skilled at questioning, which enables students to consolidate and extend their understanding of topics effectively. In very good lessons students are provided with a wide range of questions, tasks and resources, which stimulate and challenge their thinking. In one Year 13 lesson, for example, a well-judged small group task on the role of the Gestapo in Nazi Germany helped students appreciate the complex nature of the evidence surrounding the topic. Less effective teaching relies too much on providing

information for students, which tends to limit historical enquiry and debate. Very good marking helps students identify their strengths and weaknesses, and effective guidance is given on how they can improve their work.

118. Students learn well. They are attentive in class, listening carefully to explanations and noting significant points. They respond well to questioning and are confident in discussion and debate. The rapport between teachers and students is very good and the attitude of students to their work is very positive. They usually work well on their own, although they sometimes lack confidence in their own independent learning skills and look unnecessarily for support from teachers. At the moment students do not have enough opportunities to use ICT to enhance their work in history.

119. The overall level of improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. After a period of considerable instability the teaching of history is now in the hands of four very well qualified staff and the new head of department has successfully identified the areas that need improvement. In particular, examination and assessment information is not analysed in enough detail. This means that trends in performance are not clearly identified and the progress of pupils is not tracked closely enough. However, the department is in a good position to address these issues successfully.

Psychology

Overall, the quality of provision in psychology is good.

Strengths

- Students achieve well considering their GCSE results
- Teaching is good
- Assessment of students' progress is thorough and systematic
- Leadership and management are good

Areas for Development

- Insufficient opportunities for students to take initiative in their learning in lessons
- Procedures for tracking students' progress are not systematic and rigorous enough

120. The results of GCE A-level examinations over the last four years matched national averages overall. They were above average in 1999, but dropped sharply to well below average in 2000 largely because of the long term absence, through illness, of the teacher mainly responsible for the teaching of psychology. Results improved in 2001 and the standards of work seen during the inspection matched those expected at this stage of the GCE A and AS courses. Comparison of individual students' A and AS level results in psychology with their average points score at GCSE, shows that they achieve well overall. Many students gained average and below average grades in the subjects they studied at GCSE. There are no significant differences in the standards achieved by male and female students.

121. Standards in the work of students in both Years 12 and 13 are average and show a trend of continued improvement. Students have sound knowledge and understanding of a range of psychological concepts, theories and research methodology. The course work of higher attaining Year 13 students shows good comparison, analysis and evaluation of theories and research findings. One good example of this was in course work judging the extent to which conformity is based on inherent personality traits. The majority of students are able to design and report on psychological investigations using an appropriate methodology and coming to conclusions which in the case of higher attaining students especially are usually well balanced, and draw upon the well structured discussion of relevant factors.

122. Students use appropriate terminology confidently, in for example, discussing theories. The higher attaining adopt a well informed critical stance in their discussion, and are developing a good range of key research skills. Course work is well structured and presented. Good use is made of ICT to analyse and present data. Course work reflects wide reading and well organised research. Psychological theorists are quoted in support of argument, and to indicate their influence on each other's work. At best there is a mature evaluation of research methodology. Writing styles are sophisticated and reports of investigations are logically organised.

123. There is however a significant difference between the standards of the higher attainers, and those of the average and below average students. This is especially evident in the range of students' knowledge and in the depth of their understanding. Written work tends to be more descriptive, less consistent in linking and comparing theories, and sometimes insufficiently clearly focused on the questions being addressed. Conclusions are too brief sometimes explained only by their congruence with those of a psychological theorist. The written work of some lower attaining Year 12 students suggests copying from texts with little understanding.

124. Students enjoy psychology. The up-take of the subject is good both at AS and A levels. All work hard in lessons and co-operate well. The students, especially in Year 12, make confident contributions in lessons. Others, including higher-attaining students in Year 13, are more passive and reliant on the teacher. Many average and below average students are reluctant to read widely around the subject in their own time despite the strong encouragement by the teacher for them to do so.

125. Teaching is good and often very good. This is evident not only from the lessons seen during the inspection, but also from planning, and the guidance and structure of learning shown in students' folders. The teachers' very good knowledge and understanding of the subject is skilfully shared through clear presentations and explanations of concepts, theories and principles. There are particular strengths in the provision of analogies, case studies and video material which help students' understanding of theories in the context of contemporary events and their own experiences.

126. Lessons are well planned to achieve their objectives. There is a strong emphasis on the use of psychological terminology, the consideration of different psychological perspectives and methodology, and the development of psychological skills. The continual reference to the methods and experiments of different researchers, and the demonstration of experiments, enables students to understand and identify closely with research methodology. This was demonstrated very well in a Year 12 lesson on human memory when students' understanding of memory store was significantly helped by their direct involvement in one of the experiments carried out by researchers.

127. The quality of learning is good. The students responded very well to the stimulus of this experience as they do to challenge in teaching generally. The teachers' appropriately high expectations of them in working accurately as psychologists is a major factor in the development of the good knowledge, understanding and skills. There are times however, when the teaching could be more challenging and more could be expected of the students in taking the lead in their learning in lessons. For instance, while questioning is used well to check understanding and progress, it is often not sufficiently probing in challenging students to develop their ideas and in encouraging debate. Furthermore, while the strong structure of lessons is effective in ensuring the acquisition of knowledge, understanding and skills, there are too few opportunities for students to take initiative in their learning. For example, through previously prepared presentations and opportunities to learn from each other in discussion. Such approaches, not observed during the inspection period, could be helpful both in ensuring appropriate challenge for the more able, and the greater involvement in lessons of average and below average students.

128. Students' work is marked regularly and thoroughly and comments help them to improve standards. Marking grades are recorded regularly and assessment is systematically linked to the key skill areas in psychology, and also to the development of sixth form life skills. Students are well informed about assessment requirements and marking structures. However, the procedures for monitoring and tracking their progress are insufficiently systematic especially in the use of performance data to track achievement against clear benchmarks, and to set targets for improvement.

129. Homework is used well to extend learning and to promote independent study and research skills. Research, in lessons and in students' own study time is well supported by up-to-date materials comparing different psychological perspectives.

130. The good provision for psychology results from the good leadership and management of the subject. The Head of Social Sciences who, as the main teacher of psychology, shares the teaching with one other teacher, provides a clear direction and good support for work in psychology. Courses are well planned and structured. Schemes of work are detailed with clear learning objectives, Very good guidance is provided for learning. The curriculum provides good breadth, balance and relevance and is kept under constant review along with all other forms of provision. Teaching is regularly monitored within the school's arrangements for performance management. There is clear evidence of continuing improvement in standards and in provision, but direct comparison with provision in psychology at the time of the last inspection is not possible.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English literature was the focus of the inspection. Drama and theatre studies were also sampled.

English

Overall, the quality of provision in English literature is good.

Strengths

- Good and effective teaching captures students' interests and stimulates them to succeed.
- Conscientious planning provides a variety in pace and strategy.
- Mature attitude to work displayed by all students.

Areas for improvement

- Use of assessment procedures to track students' progress and to set targets.
- Students' increased use of independent study to read widely beyond the set texts.
- Facilitate access to, and appropriate application of, ICT
- The shabby accommodation restricts activities

131. The opportunity to study the GCE English Literature at AS level, and A-level (A2), and the GCE English Language at AS level attracts a growing number of students and the retention rate is high. Students report and display enjoyment in their studies and this is matched by a good standard of work and examination success.

132. The above average standards reported during the previous inspection have fluctuated over time and standards achieved in English Literature GCE A-level are now broadly in line with national averages. The number of year 13 students achieving A or B grades in 2001 is a considerable improvement on the previous two years.

133. In Years 12 and 13, observation of lessons and an analysis of samples of students' work show that standards are average for the stage of the courses and indicate that students are achieving satisfactorily. Many students use spoken and written language with confidence and accuracy and can structure a cogent response or argument. In the lessons observed they were able to analyse and evaluate texts and were developing the ability to explain and clarify concepts and relationships. Students are encouraged to develop and express a personal response to literature, but need to extend these through their use of wider background reading.

134. The confident and perceptive oral contributions of Year 13 students reveal a growing awareness of social issues, for example, in the context of an examination of accent and dialect and their impact on society. In response to the challenges posed by teachers, students sustain analysis of demanding texts, both literary and non-literary, linking understanding of style and structure to meaning, purpose and context. They are able to use appropriate terminology and critical vocabulary when participating in discussion. Through skilful selection of specific aspects of texts and their interpretation of these, students demonstrate their understanding of how different kinds of form, structure and language shape meaning. Written work is average and shows a detailed knowledge of texts.

135. A consistently high degree of teacher commitment, enthusiasm and subject knowledge, contributes effectively to the satisfactory standards students attain. The quality of teaching is good overall, and teachers' awareness of students' needs contributes to their understanding and enjoyment. Conscientious planning provides a variety in pace and strategy and expectations are high for all students, increasing their ability to evaluate and consider issues critically. Teachers' enthusiasm and expertise stimulates students' confidence in their learning.

136. Students demonstrate a mature and responsible attitude to their studies, are motivated by the tasks and respond well to their teachers' high expectations. Critical analysis of the language used in Shakespeare's 'Richard II' was well structured and expressed through a skilful dramatic interpretation of the text. Good relationships between students and teachers and a high degree of mutual respect contribute to the successful outcomes observed in lessons.

137. Students value the support of their teachers who mark written work assiduously with constructive but critical comments. There is a marked gender imbalance with girls making up over 90 per cent of the group size in each year group. There is a lack of rigorous monitoring, tracking and assessment procedures to evaluate students' progress and to set realistic and achievable targets in order to raise standards.

138. The shabby and ill-equipped classrooms used for teaching English affect the quality of curricular delivery, which has an impact on standards. This was commented on in the last inspection and there is no evidence of progress since that time. Students and teachers in English make little use of ICT. The absence of computer hardware within the English area restricts its application during lesson time and for the purposes of research.

139. Competent management and a strong team approach together with a commitment to improvement and development supports the delivery of English in the sixth form.