

# INSPECTION REPORT

**VANDYKE UPPER SCHOOL &  
COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

Leighton Buzzard

LEA area: Bedfordshire LEA

Unique reference number: 109678

Headteacher: Mr J B Oliver

Reporting inspector: Mrs Linda Ellis  
3773

Dates of inspection: 28 - 31 January 2002

Inspection number: 189688

Full 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 students: 13 to 18

Gender of students: Mixed

  

School address: Vandyke Road  
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Appropriate authority: The Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Cllr. C. Hinchliff

  

Date of previous inspection: 07/10/1996

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
3773	Linda Ellis	Registered inspector		<p>What sort of school is it?</p> <p>The school's results and students' achievements.</p> <p>How well are students taught?</p> <p>How well is the school led and managed?</p> <p>What should the school do to improve further?</p>
9865	Sue Howley	Lay inspector		<p>Students' attitudes, values and personal development.</p> <p>How well does the school care for its students?</p> <p>How well does the school work in partnership with parents?</p>
31586	Gillian Cawley	Team inspector	Sixth form English Theatre Studies	<p>How well are students taught in the sixth form?</p> <p>Literacy across the curriculum</p>
19858	John Follett	Team inspector	Physical Education	
10916	Kewal Goel	Team inspector	Science Sixth form Biology Equal Opportunities Special Educational Needs	
1421	Keith Gould	Team inspector	Sixth form Mathematics	<p>How well does the school use its resources?</p> <p>Numeracy across the curriculum</p>
15023	Ali Haouas	Team inspector	Modern Languages Sixth form French	
3902	Jim Harrison	Team inspector	History	Management in the sixth form
23323	Janet Harvey	Team inspector	Music	
15479	Chris Land	Team inspector	Geography	

1153	Stephen Lavender	Team inspector	Religious Education	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to students?
31688	Brian McGonagle	Team inspector	Art and Design	
8119	David Milham	Team inspector	Information and Communication Technology  Sixth form Design and Technology	
20132	John Plant	Team inspector	Mathematics	Standards in the sixth form
3653	Stuart Powell	Team inspector	Design and Technology	
3769	Anne Punter	Team inspector	English  English as an Additional Language	
20420	Stuart Rawcliffe	Team inspector	Science  Sixth form Chemistry	
1578	Maureen Sinclair	Team inspector	Business Education	Work related learning curriculum

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## **REPORT CONTENTS**

	Page
<b>PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT</b>	<b>7</b>
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Students' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
<b>ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>PART B: COMMENTARY</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?</b>	<b>15</b>
The school's results and students' achievements	
Students' attitudes, values and personal development	
<b>HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO STUDENTS</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>PART E: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM</b>	<b>69</b>

## **PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT**

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Vandyke is an upper school providing education for about 1060 students aged 13 to 18, of whom 258 are in the sixth form. The students mostly come from the local area. There are roughly equal numbers of boys and girls in the main school although there are more girls than boys in the sixth form. The school is smaller now than at the time of the last inspection. About 12.5 per cent of students are eligible for free school meals, which is broadly average. Twenty-five students (3 per cent) have English as an additional language, which is slightly higher than in most schools. The school has only a very small number of students from minority ethnic groups. The percentage of students with special educational needs (24.1 per cent) is above the national average; 1.9 per cent has statements of SEN, which is about average. There is a full range of ability amongst the students on entry to the school. In recent years this range has included fewer higher attaining students than normally found; it is now close to that found in an average school. The school is a member of the Bedfordshire School Improvement Partnership. It has received a Charter Mark and has achieved the Investors in People award. There have been difficulties recruiting staff in some subject areas of the school.

### **HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS**

Vandyke is a good school that serves its community well. The headteacher provides very good leadership and this is reflected in the good quality of education the school provides. Responsibilities for social inclusion are taken very seriously and staff work hard to ensure that all students can participate in all the school offers. It is effective in enabling most students and sixth form students to achieve what they should. However, some boys should achieve higher standards by age 16. Resources are well managed and the school provides good value for money.

#### **What the school does well**

- Teaching is good and most students make good progress in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form.
- All students are valued and the school gives them very good guidance and support.
- The school is committed to providing appropriate educational opportunities for all students who attend the school.
- Provision for students' moral and social development is very good.
- There are very effective links with parents and with middle schools.
- Extra-curricular opportunities are very good and extend students' experience well.

#### **What could be improved**

- The achievement of some boys at age 16.
- Standards for some higher attaining students, especially in English at age 14.
- Students' performance in A level biology and chemistry.
- The awareness and understanding of the diverse cultures represented in modern Britain.
- Statutory curricular requirements in respect of religious education in all years including the sixth form.

*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 maintained and built upon the strengths reported in the last inspection report (1996) and good progress has been made in most of the key issues for improvement. The quality of teaching has improved and, after a brief period of decline, the overall standards attained at ages 14 and 16 in 2001 match the national average, representing good progress for most students. Since the last inspection there has been a considerable investment in

computers and a broadening of the curriculum. There remain, however, problems with the provision of religious education (RE) and some aspects of design and technology (DT); there has been a willingness to improve but staffing issues during a period in which student numbers in the catchment area have declined have prevented effective progress. The school has improved its monitoring, evaluation and review procedures so that there is a structure for ensuring sustained improvement. The management team has recently been extended and there are now established links between senior managers and middle managers. The full effectiveness of these links in raising standards is not yet evident.

## STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by students at the end of Year 11 and at the end of Year 13 based on average point scores in GCSE and A-level/AS-level examinations. In this report similar schools are those with about the same percentage of students eligible for free school meals.

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

Key	
Well above average	A
Above average	B
Average	C
Below average	D
Well below average	E

**Year 9:** Standards in mathematics and science were in line with the national average but English was below average. The weaker performance in English was largely because fewer students attained the higher grades. Overall attainment was below the average of similar schools but represented satisfactory progress from the attainment at age 11.

**GCSE:** Over recent years GCSE results have been consistently close to the national average. In 2001, 94 per cent gained 5 or more GCSE passes which was above the national average. Also, 44 per cent of students achieved 5 or more A\* - C grade GCSEs, close to the national average. Most students made good progress from their attainment at age 14. Girls out-performed boys in several subjects at GCSE, most notably in the language-rich subjects of English, modern foreign languages, history and media studies. In English, girls' attainment was in line with the national average but boys' results were well below average. However, nearly all students were entered for the examination and achieved a grade. This high entry rate is also found in mathematics and science, where attainment for both was in line with the national average, and science was above average for similar schools. In both subjects students made good progress from their attainment at age 14. The school results have improved over the last two years after a decline from 1997-99.

Well-above average results were attained in art and physical education and current work is of a high standard. Good results were attained in information and communications technology. There are high standards in the current work in design and technology and the GCSE results matched the national average. In history and geography, results were average, with the students taking the course making good progress. There was well-below average attainment in modern languages but current work shows that students are making satisfactory progress. In business studies, music and drama students made satisfactory progress and average standards were attained. The school did not quite reach its targets for 2001 but has set appropriate targets for 2002 and is on-line to meet them.



**Sixth form:** The average point score achieved by students taking advanced courses is below the average of maintained schools. It is however in line with the average attained by all providers of post-16 education, which, given the wide range of attainment on entry and diversity of courses, is a more reasonable comparison. In most courses, students made good progress from their attainment at age 16, with the exception of biology and chemistry courses where progress was unsatisfactory. These popular courses have had a significant negative impact on the overall attainment.

### STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Good. Most students enjoy coming to school and are generally keen and ready to learn. However, there are some students, in all year groups, who show limited enthusiasm, concentration and perseverance.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Overall behaviour is satisfactory. Behaviour in the majority of lessons is good. A minority of students display inappropriate behaviour but teachers have strategies to minimise the impact on other students.
Personal development and relationships	Personal development is good. Students respond enthusiastically to opportunities to get involved in the life of the school. Students are generally supportive of each other and work well together. In lessons, however, many students lack the skills and confidence to take responsibility for their learning, except in the practical subjects.
Attendance	Attendance at 90.4 per cent was just below the national average last year, despite a reduction in unauthorised absence. Most students come to school regularly and punctually. A minority of students has poor attendance, which impacts significantly on their achievement.

### TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of students:	Year 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 was satisfactory or better in the vast majority of lessons seen. It was very good or better in one in every four lessons in Year 9, and in one in every five lessons in Years 10 and 11. Some lessons were excellent in all year groups. Two-thirds of lessons were at least good. There was unsatisfactory or poor teaching for Years 9-11 in about one in ten lessons largely due to unqualified or temporary teachers or those teaching outside their area of expertise. Teaching in the sixth form is good; in the lessons observed one quarter was very good or excellent. Students learn well in most lessons and particularly well when there is a good pace and a variety of activity. However, a significant proportion of lessons had a limited range of teaching methods and this has a negative effect on the learning of some boys. Mostly, teachers plan their lessons well but, on some occasions, the work is not sufficiently difficult for the highest attaining students.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good overall. There are very good opportunities for vocational education and extra-curricular activities. However, the appropriate statutory curriculum is not in place for religious education and there are missing elements in design and technology.
Provision for students with special educational needs	Very good. These students make good progress and almost all are entered for GCSE examinations. Students with mobility and health problems have good access to the curriculum. Students with emotional and behavioural difficulties benefit from the inclusion project associated with the school.
Provision for students with English as an additional language	These students make satisfactory progress but receive no specialist language support.
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good overall. The opportunities for social and moral development are very good. Opportunities for reflection and spiritual development are increasing and are satisfactory. Whilst students have a good understanding of their own culture they have limited understanding of the beliefs and values of others.
How well the school cares for its students	Very good. All students are well known by staff who show considerable commitment to their personal and academic development.

The school places high priority on involving parents and is successful in engaging parents in their children's learning. Excellent written information is provided to parents at each stage of their children's education and there are very good arrangements for consultation which enable parents to meet with staff up to five times a year.

## HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good. The headteacher is successful in creating a clear educational direction for the school. He is ably supported by senior staff, and the aims and values of the school are reflected throughout its work. There are some weaknesses in the management of individual subject areas.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governing body is effective and highly supportive. It meets most of its statutory responsibilities. Governors take a keen interest in the work of the school and provide it with a source of specialist help and advice. They are well aware of the school's strengths and weaknesses.
The school's evaluation of its performance	There are good systems in place. The school knows itself well and has identified appropriate goals for continued improvement. Middle managers could make more effective use of detailed information about students' performance in tests and examinations.
The strategic use of	The school's educational priorities are well supported through

resources	careful financial management and planning. Spending decisions clearly relate to improving the education for all students.
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The school has not managed to recruit sufficient staff and there are currently a number of vacancies filled by unqualified or temporary staff. In the last two years the difficulties in recruitment have affected standards in English, design and technology, modern languages, mathematics and religious education. The accommodation allows the curriculum to be taught effectively in all subjects except music, where there is only one full size classroom. The learning resources are satisfactory. The school gives careful consideration to all its spending options when purchasing resources and provides good value for money.

### **PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL**

<b>What pleases parents most</b>	<b>What parents would like to see improved</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 90 per cent of parents said that their children enjoy school.</li> <li>• The quality of the information that they receive about their child's progress.</li> <li>• Teachers know the students well and provide good support and guidance.</li> <li>• The school is welcoming and staff listen and respond quickly to difficulties.</li> <li>• Parents are very supportive of the headteacher and the values that the school promotes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The behaviour of students.</li> <li>• A wider spread of time over which course-work should be completed.</li> <li>• The science reports.</li> </ul>

The inspection confirmed parents' positive comments. In respect to behaviour, the inspection finds that whilst a minority of students does exhibit poor behaviour this is well controlled in the vast majority of lessons and does not affect the learning of others. It is judged that students receive good notification of course-work dates. However, it is agreed that the science reports do not explain variations in achievement in physics, chemistry and biology.

**INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM**

The sixth form is above average in size, is expanding and, with 258 students, comprises about one quarter of the school. About one half of students in the school at age 16 choose to continue their studies into the school's sixth form and a few students join from other schools. There are slightly more girls than boys. Most students study at least two A level courses or an advanced vocational course. The usual qualification for entry is 5 A\*-C grade GCSEs, although a number of students have lower grades. Overall, the attainment on entry to this sixth form is lower than is found in the average school. Each student has a personal tutor who helps ensure that appropriate progress is made.

**HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS**

The sixth form is mostly successful and cost effective. Students learn effectively. The sixth form caters well for students by providing a wide range of academic and vocational courses and the provision for personal development is good. Teaching in the sixth form is good overall. Students receive good guidance and there is a better than average number of students completing courses. Results in 2001 for A level or AS level equivalent were below the average for school sixth forms but in line with standards attained by the full range of providers of post-16 education. The level of attainment represents satisfactory achievement for most students. Leadership and management are good.

**Strengths**

- Standards in both art and design and design and technology.
- Teaching is good and teachers' subject knowledge is very good.
- The wide range of the curriculum.
- Opportunities for personal development.
- Guidance and support for students.

**What could be improved**

- Standards in biology and chemistry subjects.
- The opportunities for independent learning.
- Attendance.

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

**THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS**

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

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	<b>Good.</b> Students make good progress and work hard. Teaching is good and the teachers have good subject knowledge. Students need to be given further opportunities to work independently.
Biology	<b>Unsatisfactory.</b> Standards are well below average and there is ineffective management of the subject. Many students make

	insufficient progress.
Chemistry	<b>Unsatisfactory.</b> Standards are well below average. The teaching in lessons observed was satisfactory or better. However, too little emphasis is placed on students' independent work.
Design and technology	<b>Very good.</b> Standards in 2001 were above average. Teaching is very good and the courses are well planned.
Business studies	<b>Good.</b> Standards in the GNVQ are good. The present work in Year 13 is good, although in 2001 the results were well below average.
Physical education	<b>Good.</b> Results in 2001 for the AS and A level courses are broadly in line with national averages and students do well compared to their performance at GCSE. Students particularly do well in the practical elements of the course. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and teaching in all areas of the syllabus is good.
Art	<b>Very good.</b> Standards are consistently above national average and students make good progress.
Music	<b>Satisfactory.</b> There is good breadth of provision. Students are making reasonable progress in A Level courses and there is very good teaching in the AS music technology course.
Theatre studies	<b>Good.</b> Standards are about average. Students on the A Level course have made good progress. Performance skills are satisfactory and students gain a sound knowledge of technical terms and evaluations.
Geography	<b>Good.</b> Standards are above average and students are achieving well as a result of good teaching and effective planning.
History	<b>Satisfactory.</b> Standards are in line with the national average and most students are making satisfactory progress.
English	<b>Good.</b> Standards in English language are good and this is a popular choice, but standards in English literature are below average.
French	<b>Good.</b> Standards in 2001 were above average although there has been great variation in the last few years. The quality of teaching is good and students are given effective guidance.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	The school provides good individual support to students and open access to relevant post-16 choices. There is good provision for guidance into the sixth form, although a significant minority of students surveyed was dissatisfied with the guidance for careers. Procedures for monitoring progress and personal development are good with regular updates. Tutors and the sixth form management team know the students well and provide good individual personal support and guidance. Enrichment opportunities are not always well-planned and private study time is not well monitored.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	The leadership and management of the sixth form are good. There is a clear direction for the work and development of the sixth form. The commitment to provide access and opportunity for all students ensures continuity and coherence post-16 with the aims, values and ethos of the main school. Monitoring and evaluation of the provision is satisfactory although more should be done to promote students' independent working.

## 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"> <li>Nearly 80 per cent state that they enjoy the sixth form and would recommend it to others.</li> <li>The match of courses to students' talents and career aspirations.</li> <li>The school is responsive to students' views.</li> <li>Teachers are accessible and helpful.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Information about their progress.</li> <li>Assessment of work.</li> <li>Guidance about careers and employment opportunities.</li> </ul>

The inspection confirms students' positive comments. Information about students' progress is good and the students receive useful reports at regular intervals during their studies. There are, however, some subjects where marking does not give good quality feedback to students. Some students were particularly concerned about the workload in Year 12 and felt that they hadn't been given sufficient guidance about this. The introduction of these new courses made guidance difficult.

## 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**

### **HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?**

#### **The school's results and students' achievements**

1. In recent years, the attainment of students on entry to the school in Year 9 has been slightly below average. However, in 2001 the school's intake included a greater proportion of higher attaining students and was therefore similar to the average school.
2. In Year 9, students make satisfactory progress. This includes students with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language. By the end of the year, the standards achieved by students are generally in line with national expectations although below those with a similar proportion of students eligible for free school meals. In the Year 9 national tests, standards in mathematics and science are average when compared to all schools nationally. In 2001, 67 per cent of students achieved Level 5 or higher in mathematics and science compared to 66 per cent nationally. In both subjects, the proportion of students gaining the higher levels 6 and above was also about average. Over the last three years, results in mathematics and science have been improving in line with the national trend.
3. Standards in English are significantly lower than in mathematics and science. In recent years there has been a downward trend in performance, although there was an improvement last year. In the 2001 tests, 61 per cent of students achieved Level 5 or higher in English compared to a national figure of 64 per cent. However, the proportion of students achieving Level 6 or above was only 18 per cent, significantly below the national figure of 31 per cent. In the present Year 9, standards of work seen are in line with national expectations in mathematics and science but are again lower in English.
4. Year 9 students achieve well in art and design, design and technology (DT) and information and communication technology (ICT). In these subjects, the work seen was particularly good and was of above average standard. Standards are generally average in other subjects with students making satisfactory progress. Standards in religious education and French are below average and are unsatisfactory.
5. In Years 10 and 11, students build well on their previous achievements and make good progress. Students with special educational needs (SEN) are effectively supported and do particularly well. Over recent years GCSE results have been consistently close to the national average. In the 2001 GCSE examinations, 94 per cent of Year 11 students gained 5 grades A\* - G which was above average compared to the national figure of 91 per cent. Also, 44 per cent of students achieved 5 A\* - C grades, close to the national figure of 48 per cent.
6. Girls outperformed boys in several subjects at GCSE, most notably in the language-rich subjects of English, modern foreign languages, history and media studies. In 2001, 57 per cent of the A\* - C grades in all subjects were achieved by the girls. Raising the performance of boys has been identified by the school as a key area for improvement. Also, the proportion of students who achieve the highest GCSE grades A\* - B is significantly lower than average and this impacts on the attainment levels of students as they move into the sixth form. This is an area for concern.
7. About half of the students in Year 11 achieve GCSE grades A\* - C in English language and science, with slightly fewer in mathematics. Standards in English language and English literature fell last year and were below average, with boys doing significantly less

well than girls. A higher proportion of students was entered for the examination than average. In the present Year 11, standards are higher and the progress of students is satisfactory. Standards have risen in mathematics over the last three years and students achieve well. GCSE results are close to the national average. In 2001, all but one student entered for GCSE mathematics passed. A small number of students are not entered for GCSE and complete other courses such as the Certificate of Achievement. Most students are entered for GCSE science and results are close to the national average. The progress of students in the present Year 11 in science is satisfactory.

8. Standards are average and students make satisfactory progress in several subjects including geography, history, music, art and design. In modern foreign languages (MFL), whilst the students make satisfactory progress, the standards attained are below average. Students make good progress in ICT. Standards in physical education (PE) are above the national average. Students perform very well in PE, particularly the boys. Standards are also high in design and technology, where the girls do well. These are strengths of the school.
9. In 2001, many students benefited from completing short course GCSEs. Nine subjects were offered and the overall pass rate was 99 per cent. Overall, standards seen in the present Year 11 are broadly similar to last year's, with students continuing to do well. In addition to the timetabled GCSE courses, the school offers some GCSE opportunities as extra-curricular activities to enhance students' study options. These are very much valued by those who participate. Learners also include sixth formers and staff!
10. Standards in literacy are satisfactory overall but some boys have a lower standard. Students' listening skills are better developed than their speaking skills particularly amongst average and lower attaining students. Overall, reading skills are in line with expectations and in ICT lessons, students develop their research skills through the use of the Internet. Additional literacy support is provided for those students whose skills are below average on entry to the school. The focus of this support is on writing and spelling but because the support is provided within lessons students also benefit from the opportunity to participate in discussion with students of all abilities. Scrutiny of students' work revealed a reasonably wide range of forms of writing across the curriculum but spelling accuracy was below expectations.
11. Standards in some areas of numeracy are below average, particularly amongst the lower attaining students. In Year 9, many students struggle with basic number work, particularly when they are asked to apply their numerical skills within a new context. Knowledge of number facts is often poor. However they are able to use and apply graphical skills in science and geography. In Years 10 and 11, students employ a very limited range of calculation strategies to solve problems and this often hinders their progress in mathematics, however they are able to manage formulae in science. Cross-curricular links involving mathematics are not sufficiently developed to help raise attainment.
12. Standards in ICT are good. When using Microsoft Access, students were able to log on to the software quickly and confidently to create an empty database. They were then able to list field names and input data using information researched within the community as a homework topic. By exchanging data, students were able to build up a larger database, which was later interrogated. Students had good keyboard skills and lessons progressed at a good pace. Girls and boys achieved equally and special needs students were well integrated into all lessons. Students were collating hard copy evidence of their work in topic folders. Previous work, using PowerPoint, showed that students were also able to present information using text and images.



13. The school has set appropriate student performance targets, including statutory targets agreed with the LEA, and has made satisfactory progress towards meeting them. There are good systems in place for measuring standards in subjects. Target setting is effectively informed by the use of student performance data enabling departments to set predicted examination grades for students based on their prior attainment. Actual performance matches quite closely to predictions and targets.

### **Sixth form**

14. The attainment of students on entry to the sixth form is below average. This reflects the school's inclusive recruitment policy and the lower than average proportion of students in Year 11 who achieve the higher grades A\* - B at GCSE.
15. The development and extension of the post-16 curriculum has led to an increased number of students entering the sixth form, bringing its size to over 250 students. They have a greater choice of courses. The overall retention rate is high at over 90 per cent. Pass rates are also high, often over 90 per cent. However, the average performance of students taking two or more GCE A levels is below the national average for maintained schools, with male students doing slightly better than female students. Inspection evidence and school assessment data indicate that the majority of students, male and female, make good progress on their courses. The school standards are in line with the average attained by all post-16 providers. In the light of their previous results at GCSE, teachers successfully enable students to build effectively on existing knowledge. Students do well, achieving good standards. Students' progress is carefully monitored and they are set targets based on their prior attainment. Students are also required to evaluate their own progress and performance and set goals that are usually achieved. A useful programme of key skills in communication, ICT and the application of number will lead to accreditation this year.
16. Over the last three years, the school's overall standards at GCE A level have been consistent and slightly below average. Standards are above average in GCE A level art and design, DT, geography, sports studies, English language and French. For example, in art and design over the last 4 years, an average of around 20 students per year have produced very good results, with 100 per cent passes at grade C or above. Students also do particularly well in ICT.
17. Standards are average in several subjects including history, mathematics and music. Students do less well in English literature, chemistry, physics and biology, where standards are below average. Students underachieve in chemistry and biology where standards are unsatisfactory. Improving these results in the sixth form is a key area for improvement for the school.
18. Students do well on GNVQ courses, which include health and social care and business studies. In 2001, results in advanced GNVQ business were very good. Out of nine candidates, all passed with four students gaining merits and four gaining distinctions.
19. Also in 2001, Year 12 students gained AS level qualifications in over twenty subjects. The overall pass rate was 89 per cent with a quarter of candidates gaining the highest grades A or B. Sixth form students also benefit from a range of other curriculum opportunities leading to accreditation. These include music examinations, text and word processing, Young Enterprise and GCSE examinations, enabling students to improve and extend their qualifications.

20. The school's value-added data indicates that, based on their previous attainment at GCSE, the vast majority of students in the sixth form perform well. Overall, students' successes in the sixth form are preparing them effectively for the next stage in their lives.

### **Students' attitudes, values and personal development**

21. Most students enjoy coming to school and are generally keen and ready to learn. 90 per cent of parents responding to the questionnaire stated that their children enjoy school and 98 per cent said that the school expects their children to work hard. Students are friendly, relaxed and pleased to discuss their work. Those interviewed during the inspection speak enthusiastically about the school, about staff and about lessons.
22. Movement around the school is sensible and most students arrive in registration and lessons on time and well equipped. Students are particularly motivated in those lessons where teaching is good and they are given opportunities to work independently, for example in art, DT, and some humanities lessons.
23. Most students are compliant, get on with their work and complete homework tasks, and many take up opportunities for additional lunchtime sessions. However, there are some students, in all year groups, who show limited enthusiasm, concentration and perseverance. A significant minority in Year 9 has poor learning skills.
24. Students with SEN are well supported and on the whole have good attitudes. The school has also achieved success with a small number of students who may otherwise have been excluded. These students are helped by an initiative, the Pyramid Project, which consists of a small team of support workers working with staff and students at the school and in the feeder middle and lower schools. Through the project, student disaffection is being effectively addressed at the school and important preventative work is being carried out in the middle and lower schools.
25. Students mix well with one another and this is evident in the mixed year tutor groups as well as in lessons. Behaviour in the majority of lessons is good. Teachers have high expectations and disruption to learning is minimal. Students feel secure and have a clear understanding of the code of conduct, "the 4Cs", displayed in classrooms and in their planners, and of the rewards and sanctions. Access to classrooms and work areas is good. Most students are trustworthy and respectful of property. A minority of students exhibits challenging behaviour. Teachers have identified effective strategies to minimise the impact on other students of bullying and inappropriate behaviour. Overall, behaviour is satisfactory and parents are satisfied with standards, recognising that the school deals well with particular incidents.
26. The use of exclusion is appropriate and the school takes particular care with reintegration. Last year there were three permanent exclusions and sixty-two fixed term exclusions. Permanent exclusions have reduced over the last three years, and although fixed term exclusions have risen, they are generally for three days or less and a significant number are attributed to the same students.
27. Provision for students' personal development is good and is given a high priority. 95 per cent of parents who responded to the questionnaire stated that the school is helping their child to become mature. Students respond enthusiastically to opportunities to get involved in the life of the school; for example, there was no shortage of volunteers from Year 9 to help at the Careers Convention during the inspection. Students take an active role in School Council matters through their tutor groups and are keen to have their say. Most students take good advantage of the range of opportunities, visits and trips on offer.

However, in lessons, many students lack the skills and confidence to take responsibility for their learning, except in the practical subjects.

28. Relationships are a real strength of this school. Teachers are committed to the success and well being of their students, and this is reflected in the very good rapport between students and staff. Peer group relationships are also very good and students work well in a variety of groupings. Students generally listen to one another and respect the views of others; however, many do not have a good understanding of other cultures and beliefs.
29. Attendance at 90.4 per cent was just below the national average last year, despite a reduction in unauthorised absence. This represents a downturn from the last inspection, when attendance was good. Figures produced by the school for the autumn term suggest an overall improvement. Most students come to school regularly and punctually and are pleased to accept awards that recognise good and improved attendance. A minority of students has poor attendance, which impacts significantly on their achievement. There is some truancy but this is quickly detected.

### **Sixth form**

30. Most students enjoy being in the sixth form and over 80 per cent stated in the student survey that they would advise others to join. Most have good attitudes to their learning, although private study time is not always well used and many lack good independent learning skills. Personal development is good and students are mature and responsible young adults. Many students take advantage of enrichment opportunities, trips and visits and some support students at the school and in other local schools. Relationships are very good and this is why many students choose to stay at the school. Whilst most students attend regularly, overall attendance in the sixth form is unsatisfactory.

### **HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?**

31. During the inspection, 193 lessons were seen across the whole school. Almost all lessons were satisfactory or better with one quarter being very good or excellent. This is an improvement in the quality of teaching observed at the time of the last inspection. It reflects the good quality of the training opportunities offered to teachers in the school and leads to the good progress that students make.
32. Teaching is good in Years 9, 10 and 11. Learning is good in Years 10 and 11 and satisfactory in Year 9.
33. Teaching is very good in ICT in Year 9, where it is taught as a subject, and good in Years 10 and 11, where it is taught by a range of teachers as part of their subject. In Year 9 teaching is good in science, art, geography, history, MFL and PE. It is satisfactory in English, mathematics and music. There is good teaching in design and technology. There is, however, a weakness in subject knowledge.
34. In English, mathematics and design and technology, teaching is good for Years 10 and 11, and this is an improvement on that observed in Year 9. Teaching in art and design, geography and PE is also good, as is the teaching of permanent staff in modern languages. The quality of teaching in science and history, however, whilst satisfactory overall, is less good than in Year 9.
35. Most classes are taught by teachers with good subject knowledge, and in the most effective lessons students learn well because their teachers are able to explain things clearly and understand how to introduce each new piece of knowledge or skill. In these

lessons teachers ask questions which are sufficiently difficult to make students think, and by listening to students' answers the teachers can decide what students have understood and what they need to do next. There are some examples of lessons that are particularly effective in this way in mathematics, English, science and geography. In the few unsatisfactory lessons in modern languages, mathematics, DT and general studies, the teachers' weak understanding of the material that was to be taught caused most students to achieve little new learning.

36. The majority of lessons are well planned. Teachers know their students well and ensure that they have provided experiences that stimulate and interest them and also make sure that the work allows most of the students to make good progress. In the most effective lessons teachers were able to finish the lessons with a review of what had been learnt, engaging students in discussion, for example, in a practical lesson about sensitivity in science and a mathematics lesson in Year 9 on space and shape.
37. Good communication with the middle schools ensures that most work at the beginning of Year 9 is planned to build upon the knowledge and skills students have achieved by the end of Year 8. There was no evidence of students repeating work that had already been covered. Development from the middle school is particularly difficult in design and technology and modern languages. In French lessons some students lack motivation but they are more enthusiastic about German.
38. Most teachers are particularly good at providing work at the right level of difficulty for lower attaining students, but in some lessons in English, mathematics and modern languages in Year 9, the highest attaining students are given work that is too easy. This influences overall standards in the subject at GCSE. In PE and in art there are high expectations of students' skills and understanding and teachers instill in them an enthusiasm for the subject and support them to achieve a good standard; gifted and talented students do well in these subjects.
39. Teachers have high expectations of students' behaviour and this is a strength of teaching in the school. Some students are not easily motivated and try to gain attention through unsatisfactory behaviour. In almost all instances observed, teachers skilfully managed the situation so that the learning of others was not disturbed. However, poor management of behaviour was a significant feature in some of the unsatisfactory lessons with temporary or unqualified teachers, and whilst the school has effective support systems to deal with the students, little learning took place.
40. In the vast majority of lessons in all subjects, students make at least satisfactory progress in their learning. Most have very good attitudes to school and have respect for their teachers; they want to do well and are responsive to good teaching. Students maintain a good pace of learning in lessons where there is a range of different experiences provided, such as in an excellent Year 10 DT lesson on lighting. Here the teacher, employing video, presented them with a stimulating introduction; they had opportunities for whole class and small group discussions and a variety of ways of communicating their ideas.
41. In other effective lessons, students were motivated and able to keep their attention on their work for long periods when they were able to choose how to develop a task. Examples of this were observed in art and design lessons and in others where ICT was the focus. On other occasions, such as in a food technology lesson on vegetable protein, the students produced quality work because the teacher was very skilled at leading the whole class. There was effective use of the white board and skilful management of discussions.

42. In a significant proportion of lessons there was a limited range of teaching methods and this had a negative effect on the learning of boys in particular. Boys were often seen to lack attention in lessons when any one activity or type of task was lengthy. This problem occurred less frequently with girls.
43. Overall, teachers use a good range of strategies to assess what students know and can do. Much of the good teaching is based on a wide range of learning activities with opportunities for students to discuss and explore ideas. This enables teachers to thoroughly assess the depth of their students' understanding and helps them plan the next steps. For example, in some lessons observed, students were engaged in collaborative tasks that promote focused discussion between students. Assessment is less effective in some subjects where learning is over-directed and activities are not sufficiently varied to enable teachers to find out how well their students have understood new work.
44. The quality of marking of students' written work is inconsistent. In some subjects, teachers mark work carefully and provide clear guidance to students on what they need to do to improve. Books contain encouraging comments. For example, in English, there are good examples of very effective marking to help students improve their extended writing. In some subjects, marking is weak. For example, in mathematics, work is often not adequately marked nor monitored, resulting in some poor standards of presentation and accuracy. Praise is often used well in lessons to encourage students but the use of rewards, such as school credits, varies across departments. Different faculties use different grading systems and sometimes this confuses students. There is some good practice that is well understood by students. For example, in German, marking criteria are clear and shared and marking is done in the learned language.
45. Students with special educational needs make good progress with the support of learning support teachers who have a good understanding of the student's needs, and also the planned work in each lesson. Subject teachers work well with support staff to provide good learning opportunities. In DT, the technician makes a significant contribution to the effectiveness of lessons aiding students with the use of specialist equipment. There is good use of ICT in most subjects, although there is insufficient use in science.
46. Teachers generally make good use of homework to extend students' learning. The tasks are appropriate although not always adjusted in line with the prior attainment of the groups of students in the class. Thus, on many occasions, some students find homework tasks considerably easier than others.
47. Teachers have been provided with some training to help them teach students good literacy skills throughout all the subjects. There is some evidence that this is being effective and in many lessons there is a good emphasis on learning new and technical words. The best teachers are also using well-focused discussion and getting students to order their thoughts through talk and structured writing tasks. Particularly effective use was made of literacy skills in a general studies lesson where through structured writing and then role play, students reflected on the previous work on personal skills. There is, however, more to be done before this becomes a significant feature in good teaching, and a weak grasp of some literacy skills is a factor in lowering some students' attainment at GCSE.
48. Teachers have not yet had the benefit of training to help them develop students' numeracy skills because of staff changes in the mathematics department. This is a weakness in Year 9 mathematics teaching.

49. Students on work related learning courses in Years 10 and 11 are making very good progress with their learning. The courses are designed to motivate and engage those individuals who have not made good progress in more traditional subjects. The teaching in these courses is very good and appropriate to the needs of the students.
50. Those students whose first language is not English, and who need additional help, receive satisfactory teaching. Whilst these students receive support in classrooms and have additional language lessons, teachers are not generally aware of the particular needs of this small group of students.

### **Sixth form**

51. Overall, teaching and learning in the sixth form are good. Of the 77 lessons seen, 97 per cent were at least satisfactory, over half were good or better and 28 per cent were very good or excellent. Two lessons were unsatisfactory. In one lesson, taught by a temporary member of staff, subject knowledge and understanding were weak, and in the other the pace of the lesson was slow and students were insufficiently engaged with, or active in, their own learning. In art, theatre studies, DT, PE, geography and health and social care, teaching and learning in all lessons observed were good or better.
52. Teachers' knowledge and understanding of their subjects is very good overall, as seen in AS/A2 physical education, where the teachers' expertise is put to good use in answering students' questions and exemplifying difficult concepts. Teachers also plan well and, where teaching is at its best, there is an effective lesson structure and learning objectives are clarified explicitly with students. In general, teachers' expectations are high, but where this is not the case the pace of lessons and subsequent learning is slow. There is some variability across departments in the effectiveness of the teaching strategies employed. In science, in one lesson about alkalines, questioning was used effectively to probe student understanding, whilst in another lesson, in a question and answer session, the teacher was too keen to provide answers when students struggled. Teachers in some subjects employ a limited range of teaching styles, which means that students are not as engaged in their learning as they might otherwise be. For example, even in a good Year 12 mathematics lesson, opportunities for paired discussion and investigation were missed, which would have allowed students to explore the topic in a more active and challenging way. Teachers do not always plan sufficiently for the needs of students of all abilities. Departments which have particular strengths in this area are art, DT and PE.
53. Whilst there are some good examples of marking, generally targets for improvement are not regularly set although the comments made are supportive. Overall, there are insufficient opportunities in lessons for support and guidance in independent learning, and as a result students make insufficient use of non-taught periods. This is particularly true of average and lower attaining students.
54. However, students generally learn well, and the good relationships they have with teachers are an important factor in this.

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

55. The quality and range of learning opportunities are very good except in religious education, where the appropriate statutory curriculum is not in place, and in DT where there are elements missing. Provision for students' personal, moral and social education is very good, but provision for spiritual and cultural education needs further development.

56. During the last academic year there was a major curriculum review, which resulted in changes to both curriculum and timetabling arrangements for this academic year. Students now enjoy a very good range of curricular opportunities in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. However, there are still weaknesses in the provision of religious education and DT at both key stages. The weaknesses in ICT highlighted in the last inspection have now been eradicated, with all students now studying core ICT in Year 9. In Years 10 and 11, many students choose an examination option in ICT and many departments include ICT elements within their own subject areas.
57. In Year 9, students study the National Curriculum subjects and these are allocated enough time. In addition, all students take drama and general studies, taught for three hours per fortnight, which includes provision for Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) and a small element of religious education. The statutory requirements for religious education are not met in Year 9. Most students study two modern foreign languages.
58. In Years 10 and 11, there is a flexible programme, which means that students can study between seven and ten GCSEs, including an optional subject that can be taken before or after normal school hours. The majority takes 9 GCSEs, with about 40 students taking either an extra modern language or an extra humanities subject outside school hours to bring the total up to 10 GCSEs. Disapplication is used to ensure students with special educational needs and others have an appropriate curriculum. Overall, the provision for work related learning is good. There is an excellent work related curriculum for Year 10 and Year 11 students who have not found it easy to make progress within the traditional academic curriculum. These students are strongly supported by dedicated staff and a structured but flexible timetable. Contacts with work placements and the local Further Education College are established and provide appropriate links for future developments. Students are able to take a range of courses, including those that are based on short-term tasks and their own interests. These help to maintain motivation and, as they are all accredited courses, they form the basis for further study. Students' responses have been positive and they benefit from one to one help.
59. The school has enhanced its provision of work related learning for other 14 - 16 year old students. Vocationally based courses in leisure and tourism, ICT and child care have been introduced. These are being very well taught and students' learning is well above average. There are plans to introduce more options in September 2002. Students take examinations in text and word processing; a third gained distinctions this year. All students can progress to related courses in the sixth form.
60. Provision for gifted and able students is beginning to be developed in Years 10 and 11. A register of students has been established and they are brought together as a group for extra curricular enrichment activities. Provision of extra challenge and stimulus for this group in the curriculum is not apparent in lessons.
61. Students in Years 9 to 11 follow a well-planned course in personal, social and health education (PSHE), which provides for the development of a range of learning and interpersonal skills to prepare them for adult life. Health education includes significant units of work on sex education, alcohol and drugs awareness, smoking and other substance abuse. The programme includes some units of religious education but these are too few to make any significant impact. Plans are in hand to meet the new requirements to teach students about citizenship from September 2002. There are some weaknesses in the timetabling of general studies; over twenty teachers are involved in delivering the programme. Some classes have more than one teacher for the subject,

and although teachers work hard to co-ordinate with one another, continuity of relationships with students can suffer in these circumstances.

62. Provision for extra curricular activities is good. These activities broaden students' learning and experiences, and teachers give their time willingly to organise and manage these activities. There is a good range of sporting, musical and dramatic activities. At lunchtimes a range of opportunities are open to students, including open access to a homework study club that is also available after school. There is a full programme of educational visits and residential courses throughout the school year.
63. Provision for careers education and guidance is very good. It begins with a Year 8 day on Economic and Industrial Understanding hosted by the school for middle school students. The careers education programme begins in earnest in Year 9 to fit in with students' option choices. All Year 10 students participate in work experience and very good care is taken to ensure that students with special needs are placed so they can fulfil their potential. Some excellent written work arises out of work experience and some students in past years have won prizes for their work in a Bedfordshire initiative. By Year 11 the programme focuses on transition into the sixth form, and access for students to personal careers guidance is good. During the inspection, the excellent annual careers convention took place, which was very well attended. Students are offered impartial advice on whether to transfer into the school's sixth form or whether their interest would be better served by going to a local college. Liaison with local businesses is good but is more in evidence in the sixth form than lower down the school.
64. The school has begun work to support literacy and numeracy in all subjects. The procedures for literacy have been implemented with a staff training day and there is some evidence of early impact across the curriculum. Numeracy across the curriculum is unsatisfactory in Year 9 but planning has begun to start the training for this in the summer term.
65. The school has very good relationships with partner institutions. All curriculum areas have regular meetings with the local middle schools to look at curriculum issues. Links with the other upper school in the town are good, and the two schools are looking at further co-operation with sixth form courses and in submitting a joint bid for specialist college status.
66. There is a good use of visitors to the school and trips and visits are arranged to enhance the students' learning. The school makes good use of people within the local community to enhance students' learning. Many visitors address student groups and work alongside students in small groups.
67. The school's provision for personal, social and moral development is very good. Respect for moral values pervades many areas of the taught and non-taught curriculum. The school's ethos is promoted throughout the documentation that outlines school policies, and in communications with parents; for example the Ten Commitments which detail each person's responsibilities and entitlement, stressing respect for others and equality of opportunity. The core general studies programme offers students the opportunity to study and discuss a range of moral issues, and the assembly themes have a strong moral emphasis. Teachers provide good role models for students and students generally treat them respectfully, as they do other adults in the school.
68. The provision for social development is good. Extra curricular activities including clubs, visits and courses provide opportunities to develop positive relationships. Students have excellent opportunities to contribute to the life of the school through the house and school



councils. Council representatives regularly feed back what they are doing to fellow students. They have a strong influence in the school, managing their own budget and being involved in many aspects of school life.

69. The school has improved provision for spiritual development since the last inspection and it is now satisfactory. The school has strengthened the tutorial system with a move to vertical grouping which encourages the use of tutorial time for moments of reflection. The termly themes and thoughts for the week are very well organised and are the emphasis for the one formal assembly per week. Whilst assemblies observed during the inspection were well prepared and thoughtful, there was insufficient attention paid to a reflective element for them to be an act of collective worship. Across the curriculum some departments are beginning to make a positive and planned contribution to spiritual development and this was most noticeable in some of the thoughtful and creative work in the art department.
70. There are many musical and drama activities in the school and these are celebrated in an excellent display of photographs around the theatre, foyer and other areas of the school. A variety of trips and visits to places of cultural importance are arranged. A few assembly themes celebrate the religious and cultural diversity outside the school but more could be done to create a fuller awareness of this diversity and to better prepare the students for life in a multiracial society. Overall, therefore, provision for cultural development is unsatisfactory.

### **Sixth form**

71. In the previous inspection report the post-16 curriculum was praised for its range and diversity. Curriculum provision remains good.
72. A major strength of the curriculum is that it contributes significantly to the school's commitment to providing access and opportunities for students of all abilities. This is achieved not just through offering a broad and balanced curriculum but also through a willingness to make specific arrangements to accommodate the needs of individual students. One example of this was seen in arrangements made to enable students to study music technology. There is a commendable flexibility about the way in which the school uses both in-school and out-of-school time to meet students' needs.
73. The school works diligently to anticipate the needs of students through careful consultation and reviews of students' future intentions in Years 10 and 11. Recently this has led to additional courses being developed such as Law, Sociology, Psychology and Media Studies. The school has been successful in balancing identified curriculum needs with staff and funding arrangements during a period of staffing difficulties caused by a falling roll. The success of the school in this work is evident in the high retention rates of many of the courses provided and the sound progress made by students of all abilities, including those with special educational needs.
74. An enrichment programme offers a broad range of opportunities. Provision for the development of key skills is good, tailored to the workloads of students with an emphasis on ICT, communication and the application of number. Other opportunities promote social and cultural development, health and fitness, enterprise and environmental awareness. Sixth form students are encouraged to undertake community service. A weakness in this area of the curriculum is that the statutory requirements relating to collective worship and the teaching of religious education are not met. Also, whilst there have been initiatives to address sex education and drug misuse, provision is not adequate.

75. Work experience is well integrated into the subject curriculum, especially in the well established and generally successful vocational education programme. Industry links are common throughout the school and students regularly enter enterprise challenges set by Cranfield University and Young Enterprise.
76. The school does monitor students' private study time but observation of students during the inspection suggests that the time is not always used well by them.

## **HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?**

77. The school continues to place a high priority on the welfare and care of its students and has further improved on the good standards observed at the last inspection.
78. The school provides a very good standard of care for all its students and places considerable emphasis on ensuring that "Everyone Matters". All students are well known by staff, who show considerable commitment to their personal development, led by the excellent examples set by the headteacher and senior staff.
79. The school has very effective tutorial and house arrangements that ensure good continuity of knowledge and care as students move through the school. The termly reports and well prepared action planning interviews are a strong feature to support continuous improvement. Particular individual needs and concerns are effectively identified. The transfer and induction arrangements for Year 9 students are very thorough, addressing all areas of need including arrangements for the able and gifted. There are excellent procedures for monitoring and supporting personal development and the school works extremely hard to be socially inclusive. The Pyramid Project is providing funding for key workers who support targeted individuals on issues related to attendance and behaviour. The project is having a significant impact on groups of students at risk of exclusion and is funding similar work with future students currently in the feeder schools.
80. Child protection procedures and staff awareness of these procedures are very good. The designated staff member is very experienced and liaises effectively with other agencies. Health and safety arrangements are satisfactory and there are some ongoing improvements to student toilets, in response to concerns raised by the school council.
81. Attendance is given a high profile and staff reward good and improved attendance. The high level of monitoring resulted last year in a very low level of unauthorised absence and improved overall attendance in the autumn term. There is a well organised First Day Contact scheme and truancy is quickly detected as a result of electronic lesson registration.
82. Staff have high expectations of good behaviour and work hard to minimise disruption in lessons. The very well thought out behaviour management policy is consistently applied and provides clear warnings, choices and consequences to students and ready support for class teachers. Students on report are dealt with sensitively and effectively and internal exclusion is very well managed. The school deals well with more difficult students and works very hard to avoid exclusion.
83. There are effective measures to eliminate oppressive behaviour and harassment, particularly bullying, with incidents quickly addressed. Plans for the Bullying Awareness Week in February were being actively discussed by sixth form students during the

inspection. However, the school has been slow to introduce a log of racial incidents and there is no planned provision to raise awareness of the main faiths.

84. There is a small number of students learning English as an additional language (EAL). Special needs staff plan and supervise the work of each individual student; this is done in a sound and sensitive way, so that students make good progress. Liaison with other staff, students' families and agencies in the community are strengths. Specific training for EAL teaching would extend the staff's expertise further.
85. In all subjects, students receive regular feedback from teachers about the quality of their work. However, the quality of marking and the value of the comments made is variable and inconsistent. In some subjects, such as PE, design and technology (DT) and art, students are aware of how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. In English, there are examples of the effective use of marking to improve standards in writing but marking is less good in mathematics and science.
86. Overall, the school's procedures for assessing students' academic progress are satisfactory and support students' learning. There are some very good systems for assessing and monitoring students' attainment and progress but the information gained is not used consistently well to inform curriculum planning in order to help students do better. Systems for supporting students with special educational needs (SEN) are good because individual education planning is based on clear assessment of needs, and students make good progress towards meeting their targets. Students with EAL are also well supported. Gifted and talented students are appropriately identified, but their needs are not always well assessed and provided for. In Year 9, accurate assessment indicates that a significant number of students have weak literacy and numeracy skills. The school has developed a range of strategies to support literacy. Good use of assessment has identified the under-performance of boys in some subjects, and as a result this issue has been highlighted in the school's improvement plan.
87. There is good use of assessment tasks and testing to help track students' progress and inform planning; for example in history, students' targets are reviewed on a regular basis. This good practice includes the use of student self evaluation in some subjects such as DT. Other subjects usefully provide students with curriculum information, such as topic records in science or more detailed learning objectives in French. The school has appropriate and effective systems for meeting the assessment, verification and moderation requirements for statutory national tests and for external examinations. Generally teachers' assessments of students' work are sufficiently well informed to be consistent and accurate, although there is little formal monitoring of work in PSHE.
88. The school has developed good systems for tracking students' attainment levels. There is increased use of performance data supplied by the feeder schools, including the results of statutory and optional national tests in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science from Years 6, 7 and 8. All students entering the school in Year 9 are given a baseline entry test that is used to establish expectations, support target setting and help with curriculum planning, such as the organising of ability groups in some subjects. The senior management team has developed clear systems for using student performance data, to monitor the progress of students within different subjects. This includes value-added information that helps the school to set realistic targets based on the students' previous levels of attainment. The information is effectively used to measure students' success as they move through Years 9 to 11. Information is usefully shared with heads of faculties to help teachers set targets, including predicted examination grades. However, in some subjects, the information is not effectively used to

decide what needs to change in planning lessons in order to raise standards. Some teachers are unsure about how to use the data to support individual students.

89. Assessment procedures are effectively linked to reports. Parents receive two reports per year. The interim 'progress' reports provide an early indication of how well students are doing. The students and their parents value them. The 'full' reports are good. They meet statutory requirements and provide clear judgements about students' academic and personal progress. There are very good systems to support the reporting process. Students have one-to-one interviews with their tutors to discuss their progress. Students prepare well for these interviews in tutor time. There is also appropriate use of Records of Achievement. The students contribute significantly to the value of the reports with their self-assessments that include their own personal targets. Sometimes these targets are too general and not sufficiently focused on what students can do to improve their work in specific subjects. However, parents are pleased with the information in full reports and are able to reply with written comments and discuss issues at follow-up consultation meetings.
90. The school has a good record of developing the use of assessment to help raise standards and has identified assessment as a key area for further improvement, particularly in supporting middle managers to make more effective use of student performance data.

## **Sixth form**

### ***Assessment***

91. Assessment data provides a key context for discussions with Year 11 students as they consider their post-16 options. Sixth form students are counselled carefully about their choice of courses and their attainment at GCSE is a key factor in those discussions. For some students, specific areas of support are identified. For example, some students on science courses are advised to follow the key skills course in the application of number at an appropriate level. Students with SEN are well supported, as are the small number with EAL. Social, personal and academic needs are appropriately identified and the provision offered is well matched to those needs.
92. As sixth form courses progress, teachers get to know their students very well and there are many very good strategies within faculties to produce accurate and useful information. For example, in ICT, teachers provide much one-to-one feedback to students. Open questioning and discussion work is strong in many subjects and this is used effectively to help guide lesson planning. In some subjects, students are too passive. They have insufficient opportunities to develop independent learning skills and this can limit their understanding of their own learning, making accurate self-assessment more difficult. Marking is satisfactory and as a result students' discussions with their teachers and form tutors about their progress are well informed. During Years 12 and 13, students receive regular feedback in the form of two 'progress' reports and one 'full' report per year that are strongly focused on supporting students to achieve the highest possible standards. These reports are of good quality and are highly valued by students and their parents. They help maintain the students' momentum for learning, particularly during the first half of Year 12, and provide a valuable check on how well students are doing.
93. The school has good systems for monitoring and tracking students' attainment and progress. Assessment information has led to curriculum changes as course options are extended or modified. Senior management makes good use of a commercial value-added A level information service that provides a range of information and feedback. The leadership team has used this data to identify areas of under-achievement, for example, on A level science courses, where problems have yet to be fully addressed. The head of sixth form has provided good leadership in supporting staff in dealing with assessment data. She has provided heads of faculties with the relevant data and training on its use. However, the value-added information is still not well understood or well used in some subject areas, particularly in helping teachers to understand the wide variation in the progress of different students on particular courses.

### ***Advice, support and guidance***

94. Responses to the student questionnaire suggested that a few students were dissatisfied with the guidance they received prior to joining the sixth form. Evidence from interviews and discussions during the inspection did not sustain this. The vast majority of students spoken to were very happy with the guidance they were given and the appropriateness of their courses. However, some were concerned about the work load in Year 12, which was greater than they had been expecting, but they understood that teachers were not in a position to guide them on this because of the changes to the examinations system.
95. The school also works hard to ensure students are given impartial advice. During the week of the inspection the school hosted a careers convention where local colleges were

invited to speak to students. Links with the local community are good and the curriculum at the school complements local provision.

## **HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?**

96. Since the last inspection the school has continued to place a high degree of importance on working in partnership with parents and has made further improvements to practice. Parents are very positive about the school and what it provides for their children. They feel able to bring any issues to the school and are confident they will be responded to promptly. The PTA provides good support through its fundraising events and the school values these additional funds for resources.
97. The excellent Parent Partnership Agreement, produced in consultation with parents, provides very clear commitments for all and it is fully discussed with new parents. The school conducts an annual survey that is thoroughly reviewed and discussed and helps to inform school priorities and financial planning.
98. Parents feel very positive about the school. The responses to the questionnaire, sent before the inspection, were very strongly supportive of most aspects of the school. Parents who spoke to inspectors were very pleased with the extent and quality of communications with the school.
99. Excellent written information is provided to parents at each stage of their children's education, complemented by parents' evenings related to Key Stage 4, post 16 options and post 18 opportunities. Regular newsletters, scheduled postings and a calendar which is also posted on the web site all keep parents well informed. Evening presentations on a range of relevant topics all provide helpful information and useful support to parents.
100. There are very good arrangements for consultation, which enable parents to meet with staff up to five times a year. Reports are well written in the majority of subjects and contain clear information to parents about how they can support improvement. As well as the annual full report, parents also receive two progress updates each year which further update them and raise any concerns. Particularly in the sixth form, parents value these regular updates as they also provide an overview of attendance and whether or not students are up to date with work.
101. The school is successful in engaging parents in their children's learning and teachers aim to maintain an ongoing dialogue. Parents are communicated with effectively regarding achievements or concerns, and staff work hard to involve parents in resolving issues. The school is currently exploring ways of working with those parents who are reluctant to come into school.

## HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

102. The overall leadership and management of the school are very good. The headteacher is providing very good leadership and a clear educational direction for the school. The headteacher, senior management team and other staff work hard to ensure that the school provides a safe, secure and well-ordered learning environment. The school's motto "Everyone Matters" is a consistent theme throughout the working life of the school and is reflected in the strategic plans and the school's current development priorities.
103. The school aims to provide a clear guide for policy, practices and procedures. There is a commitment to improvement and the raising of standards. The driving forces for raising standards are the processes of improvement planning and self-evaluation, both of which are very good.
104. The improvement plan is founded on an extensive consultation involving parents, students, teachers and support staff. Also included in the process are the review and evaluation of the actions in the previous plan, the issues raised by departments through a self-review process and a synthesis of the individual performance management targets. The current plan has a clear focus on improving the quality of teaching and raising standards to meet the school's challenging targets. The process, the structure of the plan and the monitoring and review of actions, represent good progress since the last inspection. There is capacity to continue the improvements.
105. The performance management of staff has been effectively integrated with the school's monitoring for self-evaluation, and all teachers have agreed targets and are working towards meeting them. Another aspect of monitoring includes an in-depth review of each department every three years with extensive lesson observations.
106. Line management responsibilities are clearly defined and each member of the senior management team has responsibility for particular teams. This is an improvement since the last inspection. Line managers meet regularly with subject team leaders. There is an overall pattern to the meetings but important decisions and points for action are not written down, which hinders monitoring. An important function of the first line-management meeting of the school year is to analyse and reflect upon the attainment of students. The senior management team is aware that the school is not yet making consistent use of all available information to help with the evaluation of departmental performance. The more effective use of data is part of the school improvement plan. A major part of the self-evaluation process is the use of a set of criteria used by individuals and teams to identify areas for maintenance, improvement and change. The quality of this self-evaluation relies on a good understanding of the evidence needed to make good judgements. There has been training, but since the system was introduced there have been many staff changes and there is currently some lack of clarity about what is required.
107. Leadership in all subjects is at least satisfactory. Leadership is very good in the work related curriculum, in PE and in DT and it is good in art and design, geography, drama, ICT and modern languages. There is currently a vacancy for the leader of the mathematics department but the acting head of department is effectively managing the day to day work. The head of English has managed to maintain department morale through a difficult period of staff absence, which adversely affected standards last year. The head of science has some good strategies for improving standards but there is no effective co-ordination between the three aspects of science. Team leaders and heads of subject have access to a range of information concerning students' achievements but

in many cases they are not effectively using these to inform the development of schemes of work.

108. The leadership and management of heads of house are very effective. The house system gives students a very good sense of identity and contributes well to ensuring very good relationships.
109. The management of the provision for students with SEN is good. There is effective monitoring of the progress that students make and this influences the deployment of support. There are sufficient staff to enable students to make good progress. The school's priorities of inclusion and equal opportunities are positively reflected in the provision and support for SEN students. Provision is enhanced by good quality communications with the middle schools that help to ensure that continuity and support are maintained when students transfer. Support for students who have behavioural problems is well managed and monitored through the heads of the three houses and through the Pyramid Project.
110. The governing body is effective and highly supportive. It meets most of its statutory responsibilities but has failed to provide adequate provision for the teaching of religious education and some aspects of DT. Governors take a keen interest in the work of the school and provide the school with a source of specialist help and advice. Governors receive regular detailed reports from the headteacher and other senior members of staff. There has been a full appraisal of the headteacher, and performance targets have been set. A group of governors has a monthly lunch with invited staff. A recent development has been to link governors with subjects and some have made visits. Through these reports and visits governors have a good level of awareness of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Whilst there is no written strategic plan there is clear strategic thinking and good anticipation of changes to funding and the local area.
111. The school's educational priorities are well supported through careful financial management and planning. Spending decisions clearly relate to improving education for all students. The school has above average funding overall and the sixth form funding is generous. The changing arrangements for sixth form provision, whereby funding will be directed into schools via the Learning and Skills Council, will present the school with considerable challenges. The school has quite properly lived within its means but these future funding arrangements will cause it to examine the efficiency of its sixth form provision and in particular some small classes.
112. The school's financial arrangements have been recently audited and the system and procedures were considered sound. The school's Charter Mark Award similarly confirms the good practice in this area. The school's finances are ably administered and governors properly hold the school to account. Financial planning is very good. Proper use is made of the various designated grants.
113. The school applies the principles of best value. This is demonstrated by the purchase and construction of the school's Astroturf, a considerable financial undertaking. The school engaged a consultant to provide them with expert advice. The consultant was chosen by a selection process, as were the subsequent contractors. Interestingly, the school seeks to involve students in some of the decisions: as an example, students will be involved in reviewing the school's catering arrangements. Good use is made of new technology in the efficient running of the school. All the school's policy statements and items of administrative importance are available on the school's computer intranet. Some teachers were praised by parents for their effective use of e-mail to communicate with students.



114. The school experienced a large turnover of teachers over the last two years. As a consequence of teachers leaving, mainly through voluntary redundancy or promotion, it was necessary to appoint 25 new teachers during this period. This represents approximately 30 per cent of the teaching staff. The school has not managed to recruit sufficient staff and there are currently a number of vacancies filled by unqualified or temporary staff. In the last two years the difficulties in recruitment have affected English, design and technology, modern languages, mathematics and religious education. The school has made considerable efforts to attract staff including the provision of a crèche and links with initial teacher training colleges to provide experience for trainee teachers. Despite the high turnover of staff and recruitment difficulties, the overall quality of teaching has improved and relationships between staff and between staff and students remain very good. This is in part due to the effective induction programme for new staff.
115. A professional development programme is in place, which has gained Investors in People status for the school. The strengths of the programme include lesson observations and feedback and a range of other training opportunities linked to staff needs. The school is also part of a County school improvement initiative (BSIP) focusing on teaching and learning enquiries and research. Technical and support staff are appropriately qualified and play a very valuable role in, for example, DT, science and ICT. The secretarial, clerical, catering and site maintenance staff also make significant contributions to the day-to-day running and general ethos of the school. There is a very good spirit of teamwork amongst all staff and this is a strength of the school.
116. The accommodation allows the curriculum to be taught effectively in all subjects except music, where there is only one full size classroom. There is good access to the site and ground floor rooms for people with mobility problems. There are very good facilities for the teaching of PE. The inspection team agrees with the views expressed by some parents with regard to the overall quality of the learning environment: much of the fabric of the building is in need of redecoration and some carpets are in a poor state of repair. Within the limits of its budget, however, the school offsets the poor decoration by making good use of displays of student work. In English and PE there are good displays of posters and students' work that are referred to and used effectively. Displays in the corridors are used to provide information about school achievements, such as success in GCSE examinations. They also celebrate achievement in sport through photographs and text from local newspapers. There are other sections where posters provide information about degree courses at various universities. The photomontages of students performing on stage and engaging in a variety of other extra-curricular activities are excellent. Due consideration has been given to their mounting behind glass in suitable frames, and to their presentation. The display of art and design work in the foyer is excellent. These displays are successful, on the whole, because they demonstrate to the students that the work that they produce, or the activities that they engage in, are highly valued by the school.
117. The school provides adequate library facilities and benefits from the services of a qualified chartered librarian. The library area is well used by students as a study area. Resources meet the needs of subject areas but the range of fiction is small given the size of the school.
118. Provision of ICT equipment is good: the ratio of students to computers is 6:1, which is better than the national average. This good level of resourcing provides many opportunities to widen the curriculum and provide different learning experiences that were not available at the time of the last inspection. Other learning resources in the school are sufficient to facilitate good learning, although there are some inadequacies in a few areas

that adversely affect standards. There are insufficient keyboards and inadequate software in music. Also, access to computers is difficult for the mathematics department and some equipment in the science area, particularly in biology, is outdated.

119. The school buildings and resources also provide a valuable amenity to the local community. The school building and its facilities are in use for a good proportion of time. Students have access to computers before and after school and community groups use the sports facilities and other parts of the school for adult learning.

## **Sixth form**

### ***Leadership and management***

120. The leadership and management of the sixth form are good. There is a clear direction for the work and development of the sixth form. The commitment to provide access and opportunity for all students ensures continuity and coherence post 16 with the aims, values and ethos of the main school.
121. There is good strategic thinking with regard to the curriculum offered and the school provides appropriate courses complementing the other sixth form provision in the area. The governors and senior staff have a good understanding of the needs of the local community and the provision is responsive, for example, in the development of an increasing range of vocational courses. The governing body fulfils most of its statutory duties in helping to shape the direction of the sixth form and generally has a good understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. However, it does not ensure that all students receive their entitlement curriculum in religious education.
122. Monitoring and evaluation of attainment data by senior staff is sound. It is based on value-added analysis of individual subjects. Where value-added analysis identifies weaknesses in achievement in particular subjects, the school has made strenuous efforts to investigate the causes and has channelled staff development resources to tackle the issues.
123. Monitoring of teaching is satisfactory and is undertaken as part of the whole school evaluation process: subject leaders have generally observed sixth form lessons. There are no particular sixth form teaching and learning issues identified in the current school or sixth form improvement plans.
124. The day-to-day management of the sixth form is good. There are effective procedures in place and students are aware of exam timetables, coursework commitments and the need for self-study. There is satisfactory leadership of most subjects. Leadership in PE is very good, and it is good in art and design, DT, geography, French and business studies. Leadership and management of the vocational courses are also good. There is weak management of the biology course; individual subject teachers are not working as a team.

## Resources

125. Staffing, accommodation and resource provision are satisfactory overall.
126. Teachers have good knowledge of their subjects. This is a strength of the sixth form. There is effective use of support staff to help provide good learning opportunities in practical subjects, but the learning of those studying music technology is adversely affected by the lack of a technician to service the equipment.
127. Each subject is taught in suitable accommodation (although space for music is very tight) and in some subjects like DT and PE it is better than is usually found. However the general accommodation for the sixth form is barely adequate and, as currently managed, affects the students' capacity for self-study. There is good access to computers, available for the majority of the time, and GNVQ students have additional resources. The library facilities are sufficient but the environment is not always conducive to sixth form study, even though specific areas have been designated for sixth form students. The common room space is adequate but is also used by the community in the evenings, which causes some conflict in terms of display, furniture provision and arrangement.
128. The sixth form is currently resourced from the funding allocated for the students. Some classes are quite small, but numbers fluctuate (for example, history and English literature), and at present it has been decided to maintain them. Some aspects of the enrichment curriculum do not appear to be cost effective; courses are placed on the timetable and staff allocated but attendance is not always very good. A significant number of students have considerable amounts of independent study time because they have opted for a limited programme and use of their time needs more direction. The school has taken steps to remedy this situation in the next academic year.
129. The educational priorities of the school are well supported by careful financial planning. This has been a significant factor in the sixth form continuing to offer a broad and balanced curriculum during a period of staffing difficulties. The school has made sound strategic decisions to ensure the needs of its students are met. Principles of best value have been applied. This has ensured the overall cost effectiveness of the sixth form.

## WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

130. In order to raise standards of attainment and improve provision, governors, the headteacher and other staff should:
1. Raise the achievement of some boys by:
    - increasing the range of teaching and learning styles used within lessons so that they have good pace and include motivating starts;
    - developing the use of assessment for learning so that students are aware of:
      - the learning objectives for a lesson and short course of work
      - the quality that is expected
      - short term goals for their learning in each subject
      - how well they have achieved in each lesson;
    - paying attention to developing literacy skills.

(paragraphs 6, 10 and throughout the report)
  2. Increase the attainment of higher attaining students by:

- improving the use of assessment data to inform curriculum planning and schemes of work;
- teachers having higher expectations based on prior attainment;
- making full use of all available performance information to evaluate and improve provision;
- creating and resourcing extension tasks.

(paragraphs 3, 6, 88, 89 and throughout subject reports)

3. Improve knowledge and awareness of a range of cultures by:
  - instigating a discrete religious education curriculum;
  - providing a wider range of experience for students;
  - identifying opportunities to promote cultural awareness in the subjects of the curriculum

(paragraphs 57, 70 74, 238 and 239)

### **Sixth form**

1. Raise students' performance in A level biology and chemistry by:
  - improving the management of both A level subjects;
  - ensuring that students' work is well organised and that they are aware of syllabus requirements;
  - increasing the range of teaching strategies and providing more opportunities for independent work;
  - a greater emphasis on quality work.

(paragraphs 248 - 263)

2. Improve students' capacity for self-study by:
  - increased monitoring of the study areas;
  - improvement in study facilities provided for students;
  - providing a wider range of opportunities for students to develop independent learning skills.

(paragraphs 53, 30, 127)

3. Improve students' attendance

(paragraph 30)

In addition to these key issues governors should also be aware of other issues in the report when developing their action plan:

- Improvement in some aspects of numeracy (paragraph 11)
- Extending the range of experiences in DT (paragraph 55)

## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

### Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 9 - 11	116
	Sixth form	77
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students		50

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
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#### Years 9 – 11

Number	3	22	44	36	8	8	0
Percentage	3	19	38	31	7	3	0

#### Sixth form

Number	5	16	26	27	2	0	0
Percentage	7	21	34	36	3	0	0

### Information about the school's students

#### Students on the school's roll

	Y9 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of students on the school's roll	805	258
Number of full-time students known to be eligible for free school meals	101	n/a

#### Special educational needs

	Y9 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of students with statements of special educational needs	15	1
Number of students on the school's special educational needs register	194	17

#### English as an additional language

	No of students
Number of students with English as an additional language	25

#### Student mobility in the last school year

	No of students
Students who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	33
Students who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	21

### Attendance

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
	%		%
School data	9.3	School data	0.3
National comparative data	8.1	National comparative data	1.1

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2001 [00]	137	125	262 [276]

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	67	96	99
	Girls	70	79	77
	Total	137 [135]	175 [179]	176 [163]
Percentage of students at NC Level 5 or above	School	62 [49]	67 [65]	67 [59]
	National	64 [63]	66 [65]	66 [59]
Percentage of students at NC Level 6 or above	School	11 [11]	36 [38]	30 [24]
	National	31 [28]	43 [42]	34 [30]

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	71	91	85
	Girls	81	75	86
	Total	152 [191]	166 [164]	171 [155]
Percentage of students at NC Level 5 or above	School	58 [69]	63 [59]	65 [56]
	National	65 [64]	68 [66]	64 [62]
Percentage of students at NC Level 6 or above	School	13 [25]	35 [32]	25 [20]
	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)

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	2001	150	139	289

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
	Boys	54	137	144

Numbers of students achieving the standard specified	Girls	74	136	138
	Total	128	273	282
Percentage of students achieving the standard specified	School	44 [49]	94 [91]	98 [95]
	National	48 [49]	91 [91]	96 [96]

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per student	School	39
	National	39

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

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

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	01	32	45	77

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	13.6	13.7	13.7	[ ]	[ ]	[ ] ([ ])
National	16.9	18	17.5	[ ]	[ ]	[ ] ([ ])

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number in their final year of studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those students who achieved all those they studied	School	9	100
	National		[ ]

**Ethnic background of students**

	No of students
Black – Caribbean heritage	1
Black – African heritage	1
Black – other	2
Indian	15

**Exclusions in the last school year**

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	1	0

Pakistani	2
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	7
White	1005
Any other minority ethnic group	15

Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	59	3
Other minority ethnic groups	2	0

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

### **Teachers and classes**

#### **Qualified teachers and classes: Y9–Y13**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	60.5
Number of students per qualified teacher	17.5

#### **Education support staff: Y9–Y13**

Total number of education support staff	21
Total aggregate hours worked per week	534

#### **Deployment of teachers: Y9–Y13**

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	77%
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#### **Average teaching group size: Y 9–Y11**

Key Stage 3	[ ]
Key Stage 4	22

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

### **Recruitment of teachers**

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	24.2
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	22.2

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	3.4
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	3.4

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

### **Financial information**

Financial year	2001
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	£
Total income	3,067,749
Total expenditure	3,029,095
Expenditure per student	2,891
Balance brought forward from previous year	66,247
Balance carried forward to next year	104,901



**Results of the survey of parents and carers**

**Questionnaire return rate**

Number of questionnaires sent out	1060
Number of questionnaires returned	185

**Percentage of responses in each category**

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	43	48	6	2	1
My child is making good progress in school.	45	49	5	1	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	26	55	11	2	6
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	21	59	14	4	2
The teaching is good.	30	62	5	1	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	49	41	9	0	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	57	37	4	1	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	59	39	1	1	0
The school works closely with parents.	48	44	5	1	2
The school is well led and managed.	56	39	2	0	3
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	46	49	2	0	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	26	56	8	1	10

## PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

### ENGLISH

242. Overall, the quality of provision in English is **satisfactory** in Years 10 and 11, despite the unsatisfactory dip in last year's results because of staff illness. In Year 9, as identified in the last Ofsted report, there is still some under-achievement.

#### Strengths:

- Teachers' knowledge of the subject.
- Mutually supportive members of the department.
- Carefully planned lessons and schemes of work.
- Carefully marked and recorded assessment information.

#### Areas for improvement

- The setting of higher expectations for the more able students at Key Stage 3.
- The rigorous analysis and evaluation of assessment data to inform how teaching and learning will be organised so that all groups of students reach their full potential.

243. The results for 2001 standardised tests taken at the end of Year 9 showed that the number of students attaining a Level 5 (the expected grade for that age group) was just below the national average, and there was little difference between the performance of girls and boys. This result was, nevertheless, an improvement on that of the previous two years when results were significantly below the national averages. Both girls and boys under-performed at Levels 6+; significantly fewer students than the national average attained these upper grades in 2001, 2000 and 1999. The attainment of these students at age 11 was only just below the national average in the core subjects, but by the end of Year 9, standards in English had fallen below those for science and mathematics.

244. The 2001 GCSE English, English Literature and Media Studies results dipped very significantly below the national A\*-C grade average; boys particularly attained well below national figures. These results, which run counter to the previous two years' upward trend, came at the end of a year when the English department lost several staff to long periods of illness. The department enters a greater proportion of students into examinations than is usually found. This would tend to decrease the proportion attaining grades A\*-C.

245. Standards observed in lessons in Year 9 reflected the test and examination results, with most lessons being satisfactory, but with one lesson unsatisfactory and only one lesson good. Students did not always listen to each other, and their technical accuracy in written work was patchy. Sometimes progress was slow. Standards in GCSE lessons were at least satisfactory and were often good, which tends to match more closely the grade profile of the school's students at GCSE in 2000, rather than the depressed results of 2001. At GCSE students were able to argue their point of view critically, understand and analyse prose, poetry and non-fiction writing and write well structured and relevant answers for a range of purposes and audiences.

246. Standards in literacy are satisfactory overall but some boys have a low standard. Students' listening skills are better developed than their speaking skills particularly amongst average and lower attaining students. Overall, reading skills are in line with expectations and in ICT lessons, students develop their research skills using the Internet soundly. Additional literacy support is provided for those students whose skills are below

average on entry to the school. The focus of this support is on writing and spelling but because the support is provided within lessons students also benefit from the opportunity to participate in discussion with students of all abilities. Scrutiny of students' work revealed a reasonably wide range of forms of writing across the curriculum but spelling accuracy was below expectations.

247. Students' attitudes and behaviour in lessons at GCSE were at least satisfactory but often good or very good. This evidence of hard working, highly motivated, responsive and self-controlled students is complementary to the overall GCSE picture of good teaching, and sound or better learning and standards. In Year 9, there were some instances of barely satisfactory and unsatisfactory behaviour.
248. Teaching in just over half the lessons observed was good or very good; the remainder was satisfactory. Year 10 and 11 lessons were better than those in Year 9. Strengths observed were:
- the subject knowledge of the teachers and their reading aloud of texts;
  - the careful planning of lessons and schemes of work;
  - the variety of teaching methods used, and especially brisk teacher-led class work with a great deal of structured and focused student participation;
  - the use of praise, encouragement and humour;
  - the use of material and teaching styles featured in the National Literacy Strategy;
  - the notice board displays of material supporting current teaching points.
249. These strengths contributed to learning by giving students a structured, focused coverage of the course material, by enthusing and motivating both boys and girls and by enhancing learning through the use of up to date resources.
250. Areas for further development apply particularly to the under-performance of the most able students in Year 9 and to the predominance (one third) of students attaining a D grade in GCSE English. They include:
- the design and use of a range of tasks and practice materials to target the needs of each sector of the ability range and particularly those just below a C grade at GCSE and the most able at Key Stage 3 (a concern also raised by students themselves);
  - the management and grouping of students to ensure that they prepare work efficiently, remain on-task and reach their full potential.
251. The department is well administered and the members of staff are mutually supportive. The department managed the staff absence crises last year, inducted successfully two newly qualified teachers and integrated ICT into schemes of work. Liaison has been established with the middle 'feeder' schools in order to begin to organise progression in learning for the students in Year 9. The department is fully staffed with qualified subject specialists who are able to adjust departmental schemes of work in the light of their own expertise and the learning needs of their students. The student result tracking sheet, which records all test and examination results and targets from Key Stage 2 to GCSE, is a strength. A more analytical approach to the interpretation of this data, however, would allow the department to identify key areas for attention for groups of students within a cohort.
252. The gradual improvement in the GCSE results had continued since the last report in 1996, until the extreme dip in last year's results. The Year 9 picture is similar to that outlined in the last report: some students are under-achieving and expectations could be higher. The weakness in assessment has been addressed, but the data now needs further analysis and evaluation.

## GCSE Drama

253. Attainment in GCSE drama is in line with national averages and within the school the subject does well in comparison to others. Standards in lessons are satisfactory and achievement is good overall, particularly in Year 10. Students benefit from a Year 9 drama curriculum which provides a sound basis of skills from which to progress in Years 10 and 11. Behaviour and student attitudes in lessons are very good overall and in a Year 10 lesson on Brecht, students displayed excellent concentration and commitment to individual practical work. A Year 11 group of lower ability students responded enthusiastically to group work but lacked the same degree of concentration.
254. Teaching is good, and effective teacher questioning and planning are strengths. Students are clear what they have to do and understand the focus of lessons well. Although opportunities to review learning are planned for, rushed endings to lessons sometimes curtail the time available. Learning is good, and students clearly develop their skills in drama through very good intellectual and creative efforts.
255. The department is well led and good extra curricular opportunities are available to students through a lunchtime drama club and an active drama group, "The Company", which works on a commissioned basis for the school. For example, their next production supports the forthcoming Bullying Awareness week.

## MATHEMATICS

256. Overall the quality of provision in mathematics is **satisfactory**.

### Strengths

- Standards at GCSE are satisfactory.
- Teaching is good in Years 10 and 11. Students achieve well and make good progress.
- Teachers manage their students well and establish good relationships in lessons.

### Areas for improvement

- The standard of students' oral and written work is inconsistent, and often too low.
- Standards of numeracy in Year 9 are too low and hinder students' progress.
- There are too few opportunities for students to engage in practical, collaborative and investigative work.
- There is insufficient use of ICT to support learning.

257. The mathematical attainment of students on entry to Year 9 is about average. In recent years the standards achieved by students by the end of Year 9, in the end of Key Stage 3 national tests, have been consistently in line with national expectations. In the 2001 national tests, 67 per cent of students achieved Level 5 or higher compared with a figure of 66 per cent for all schools nationally. In 2001, the proportion of students who reached Level 6 or higher was 35 per cent compared to 42 per cent nationally. However, last year standards were below average when compared to similar schools. In the present Year 9, students in some lessons are not making sufficient progress, particularly in basic number work where standards are too low. For example, in a number of lessons observed, students struggled with their work because they had difficulty remembering simple number facts. Overall, students deal well with new topics such as geometry, although they are less confident with aspects of algebra. Students are often unable to explain their methods clearly and many have little sense of the appropriateness of answers. Many fail to check their work.

258. In Years 10 and 11, students make good progress and many achieve well. In recent years, standards at GCSE have been consistently in line with national expectations. In the 2001 examinations, all but one student entered for GCSE achieved grades A\* - G. In addition, a small number of Year 11 students successfully completed the Certificate of Achievement in mathematics. These results were a significant success for the school, particularly reflecting the good progress made by students with special educational needs. In 2001, 45 per cent of candidates in mathematics gained grades A\* - C compared with 48 per cent nationally. Although the proportion of students achieving the higher grades A\* - B was below the national average, overall performance at GCSE was good when measured against the students' prior attainment at the end of Year 9. Last year, the girls did better than the boys at GCSE but over recent years there has been no significant difference in the performance of girls and boys. Overall, students are set work, and entered for examinations, at levels appropriate to their abilities. As a result, most students are able to demonstrate a good knowledge across the different aspects of the subject. The department has identified coursework as an area where standards need to be raised.
259. Overall, teaching is satisfactory. It is good in Years 10 and 11. Generally, teachers work hard to engage and motivate their students. The teachers know their subject well and provide clear and interesting instruction that captures the students' attention. They question students effectively to assess the extent of their learning. Teachers manage the students well by setting high expectations of behaviour and by maintaining good discipline. Teachers make very good use of praise and rewards to encourage their students. As a result, students usually behave well and work willingly. Teachers are successful in engaging all students in their planned activities and enabling them to participate in the lessons. Teachers and learning assistants provide sensitive support for individual students as they work on written tasks and this helps students, including those with SEN, to readily learn new skills and gain knowledge.
260. Teaching is less effective when it is over-reliant on the use of text books. This often results in students spending too long on unexciting tasks and so they lose interest and concentration. A significant number of students have negative views of mathematics and they often show signs of disaffection and disinterest. Oral work is often restricted to question and answer sessions and this does not provide students with sufficient opportunities to discuss their work and develop their mathematical thinking. Group or paired work is not often used to promote learning. Opportunities for students to explore mathematics through practical and investigative approaches, including the use of ICT, are often limited by over-direction. The quality of marking is inconsistent. Teachers are not setting high enough expectations of written work. Exercise books are not monitored sufficiently closely to ensure work is well presented, accurate and well marked. Corrections are rarely done.
261. In Year 9, two lessons observed were unsatisfactory. These lessons were taught by temporary teachers. Many lower attaining students in Year 9 have poor number skills and the work set is not always well matched to students' needs and abilities. The Year 9 curriculum is not sufficiently focused on the needs of all students, particularly those that are mathematically weaker. For example, in a Year 9 'support' lesson, lower ability students were set work that was far too difficult and this only reinforced their low self-esteem and confidence. However, the department is beginning to develop a wider range of teaching styles and approaches. The 3-part lesson is established, there are good starts to lessons and the learning points are summarized effectively. Innovations such as the use of individual student white boards are helping to raise motivation and interest in class. In some lessons, teachers have successfully involved students in demonstrations to stimulate the students' interest and thinking. In one or two lessons, the introduction of

mathematical games created interest and a sense of fun as well as enabling students to use their skills and knowledge.

262. Generally, there has been a lack of recent development in Year 9 teaching within mathematics. The acting head of faculty, who joined the school within the last year, has worked hard with members of the faculty to identify a wide-ranging plan focussed on raising standards and improving the quality of learning. The teachers in the faculty are keen to build on the significant existing good practice to enhance and enliven the teaching environment and make learning mathematics more interactive and exciting for students.

## SCIENCE

263. Overall, the quality of provision in science in Years 9 - 11 is **satisfactory**.

### Strengths

- Teachers' knowledge and their commitment to students' learning.
- Teachers' management of students.
- Students' attitudes to their work.

### Areas for improvement

- Monitoring the work of the department.
- Developing the role of subject leaders.
- Raise standards in sixth form biology and chemistry.
- Developing the strategies for marking and assessment of student work.

264. The attainment of students on entry to the school is in line with or slightly below the national average. When compared to all schools nationally in tests at age 14 in 2001, students' attainment was in line with national averages. Boys' attainment was also in line with that of boys nationally whilst girls' attainment is just below the national averages for girls. Students' attainment in science in the school is higher than in mathematics and English. Over the last five years there has been a rising trend in attainment in science with the rise between 2000 and 2001 being faster than that nationally.

265. In 2001, GCSE results in science were just above the national average for A\* to C grades for all students. Girls' attainment was above the national average for girls and all girls achieved G grade or above. Boys' attainment was in line with that nationally for boys. Within the school, students' performance in science was better than in mathematics and English. School data, based on national comparisons, show that there has been the same improvement in attainment from students age 14 to GCSE over the last three years.

266. The work of students in Key Stage 3 is appropriate in content. In biology, books contained printed sheets that, whilst appropriate, were dated in their presentation. Some students showed evidence of the use of ICT in producing graphs but little other ICT evidence was seen. Students had produced work demonstrating some independence and creativity in advertisements about smoking; however, some students had not completed this work. Some students could readily describe pollination and relate this to detailed flower structure and fruit formation showing above average understanding. Others, whilst understanding pollination and fertilization, were not able to complete the picture to fruit formation. Students who had learned and could explain clearly genetic variation in humans and environmental variation in plants found difficulty answering questions about environmental variation in humans, showing some lack of ability in transferring knowledge. Students had learned about food chains but recall was insecure.

In chemistry, work showed good logical progression and theory was well supported by practical work. The work of able students showed a good understanding of word and symbol equations, and of the reactivity series of metals, to above average level. The work of some less able students was incomplete and whilst details of practical work were evident, conclusions were omitted. Hence, conceptual learning was missed - as in work on neutralisation and the reactivity series. In physics, work showed evidence of independence and creativity in the journey to the planets of the solar system. Students also demonstrated skills in investigatory work on paper helicopters, being aware of ideas of fair testing, and cause and effect explanations of rotor length. Others were able to identify anomalous results from their graphs and explain the pattern of results obtained - showing average and above average attainment. Some students had an insecure grasp of the units of measurement being used.

267. The work of able students in Years 10 and 11 in biology showed clear development of ideas and good explanations. In lessons they showed very good understanding of the endocrine system and the role of hormones in controlling the menstrual cycle. But some students were unable to explain the statement in their books "respiration, not breathing". Work is typical of that expected from a range of students studying GCSE. In chemistry, work, though of an appropriate standard, showed weakness in the logical sequencing of ideas – as in work on hydrocarbons – and some concepts were under-developed. Able students were able to explain the composition of molecules such as aluminium sulphate. Lower ability students showed poor recall of the chemistry of salt formation, the composition of carbonates or the result of adding acid to a carbonate. In physics, the books of some lower ability groups have unfinished work where concepts are incompletely developed. Others showed work of satisfactory standard with examples of creative writing in a letter to the Prime Minister about energy conservation issues. Students were able to explain the ideas behind step up and step down transformers but some found explaining the basic principle of a generator difficult. Others could explain the idea of acceleration as getting faster but not its detail and units. The understanding of speed calculations and distance/time and velocity/time graphs was good, showing average to above average attainment.

268. Teaching in science is good for students in Year 9, teachers having a secure knowledge of science. All the lessons seen were of a good standard. Teachers plan their work well and make effective links with previous learning. Often lessons contain a variety of methods which keep students interested in the lesson. There is also good use of humour to motivate students. However, there is evidence that teaching can be over-directive not allowing students sufficient opportunities to try out their own ideas and learn from their mistakes. Marking is carried out but the quality of feedback to students is inconsistent in its quality and in explaining what it is that students should do to improve. Assessment data could be more effectively used to inform teaching.

269. In Key Stage 4, equal small amounts of good, very good and unsatisfactory teaching were seen; the standard of teaching observed was satisfactory overall. Where teaching was good, as in a lesson about sensitivity, the lesson was well planned and started with questions and answers to enable all students to recall the previous lesson and prepare them for new work. There was effective class discussion of the intended practical work and students were encouraged to consider what results they expected, based on their learning so far. The lesson was consolidated effectively with class discussion in which the teacher encouraged students to critically examine their data to arrive at a conclusion and compare this with their predicted result. Some teaching could be improved by ensuring that the work is appropriately difficult for the range of students in the class. In some lessons, teachers talk for too long and there is too little use made of students' own ideas, leading to some students showing lack of interest in the work.

270. The attitude of students to their work throughout the department is good overall. Relationships at all levels are good and students co-operate well with each other and with the teacher. Where relationships become strained it is often due to the teaching style adopted by the teacher.
271. The statutory curriculum is in place. Year 9 students complete the scheme of work started in the middle schools. In Years 10 and 11 students are entered for a GCSE in double science. Contributions from the department to numerical and literacy skills of students are evident. Key words are displayed on laboratory walls, and there are examples of number work and the use of graphs in all years. However, it was not evident that there was a well co-ordinated strategy in operation in either of these areas. Provision for students with special educational needs is satisfactory but there is a need to co-ordinate the production and shared use of differentiated materials. Gifted and talented students have been identified but the follow up action of provision to meet their needs is yet to come into full effect.
272. Management of the science faculty is overall satisfactory but there are some weaknesses in leadership affecting the attainment of students. The day-to-day running of the faculty is good with staff understanding clearly what needs to be done. Performance data are effectively analysed at student, group and teacher level. Otherwise, however, the monitoring of the work of the different science departments is not well developed and the individual subject leaders do not have a clear understanding of the quality of the work in their area. Each science subject has a development plan but these are of different styles and are not clearly linked to the faculty development plan. Professional development training has taken place but the effectiveness of this and the link to the development plan have not been monitored.
273. Whilst some ICT is used in the department, it is limited by the age and quantity of hardware available. There is useful development of prompt sheets for investigatory science but there is no clear overview of approaches to, and the place of, investigatory science in the curriculum. There are insufficient textbooks for GCSE students and better books are needed for Year 9. Resources have been purchased to help students with special educational needs but there is need to consider the requirements for gifted and talented students.
274. There has been good liaison with feeder schools to establish agreement on the QCA scheme for Key Stage 3 and its organisation. The Leighton Science links project has raised the image of science, and helped with links between partner schools and the local community. Technicians support the department well. There is a need to review the layout of the preparation room and the storage of chemicals. Science accommodation is good but some areas need redecoration.
275. Since the last inspection improvement has been satisfactory. The progress has to be judged in the light of a changing national picture and school factors as they impact on science. Several areas identified in the previous report still apply. Standards at Key Stages 3 and 4 have been maintained. There is a well qualified science team but there is a need to develop more lively teaching styles, involve students more in their learning and relate science to the real world. Schemes of work are still developmental, but this is a reflection of changing national requirements. The use of ICT is still insufficient. The use of data to inform teaching has improved but needs further development.

## **ART AND DESIGN**



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

Strengths

- Teaching is good overall.
- The overall standard of work in Years 9 to 11.
- Teachers are well informed.
- Students are encouraged to work independently.

Areas for improvement

- Boys' attainment at Key Stage 4 in public examinations.
- ICT resources
- Vocational subject areas within the curriculum.
- 

277. Attainment on entry is below the national average for students in Year 9. However, students make good progress and in 2000 students in the school were working at a level that was just beyond the expectation for students of their age. In 2001 there was further improvement and a significant number of students were working well beyond national expectation. At Key Stage 4, however, attainment in 2001 was just above national expectations. A much higher percentage of girls achieved grades A\* - C by comparison with boys. Although boys' results were broadly in line with the national average, girls' results were much higher than those for girls nationally.

278. Work seen during the inspection shows that, overall, standards are improving and at present are above the national average in Year 9. Teacher assessments for students at age 14 are significantly above the national figures. The majority of students are making good progress. They show interest in the work set by their teachers, and produce 2-dimensional drawn compositions based upon chess pieces, playing cards and two mirrors set at various angles to one another. Most students work at a good pace, which demonstrates enthusiasm for the subject. Students are capable of using line, tone, shape and colour to produce interesting compositions. It is evident that most enjoy art lessons and are motivated to produce work of a high standard. During this year many students acquire a deeper appreciation of art and design as a means of communicating ideas and expressing feelings. As their confidence grows, the quality of their ideas and concepts improves. Girls tend to work with much greater application and concentration than boys, many of whom talk during lessons. All students are expected to work at home to carry out research into a wide variety of topics. This is intended to improve their capacity for independent working. Their drawn studies are stored in their visual diaries and sketchbooks.

279. On the basis of work seen during the inspection, students' progress is satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. In Year 10, although many students show interest in the tasks set by their teachers, a significant minority need to work to improve their basic drawing and painting skills. Lower attaining students struggle to communicate their ideas through art and design activities and find it difficult to sustain concentration over long periods of time. Although there is emphasis on a traditional fine art and craft approach to the curriculum, one or two students have begun to experiment with photography and computer-generated image making as a means of communicating ideas. Teachers encourage the more able students to collect research material from a wide variety of both primary and secondary sources. These can take the form of drawings, photographs and images from the Internet that can be stored in their visual diaries. By Year 11 the quality of students' ideas has improved and most are beginning to produce more complex studies in two or three dimensions. Although there remain many weaknesses in their control over media and

materials, most students are working at a level that is above the national average. Teachers encourage students to develop greater independence in their ways of working and to carry out research away from the studios in school. Students are given ample opportunity to develop awareness of their own and other cultures through independent research. Most are productive and work at a good pace. They show that they have acquired the capacity to think and learn for themselves. They are also keen now to improve their technical skills so that they will be able to communicate more effectively with others. Girls work with much greater focus and concentration than boys at this level. They relate much more readily to the set tasks, and to the given subject matter.

280. Teaching is good overall. There is evidence of good, sometimes very good, planning before lessons. The teachers come to lessons well-prepared, which can be seen in the quality of exemplar material used. Teachers possess good subject knowledge and understanding which leads to a very well-informed line of questioning as they draw appropriate responses from the students. Consequently, students are very clear about what it is that they have to do during the lesson. Teachers' expectations of students are high. Organisation of lessons varies from good to very good. There is a good balance between group work and one-to-one interaction with individual students, depending upon their needs at the time. Most subject matter is appropriate in meeting the needs of students at this level, but much more needs to be done to improve boys' achievement. Although there are a few examples of the use of modern technology, presently there is too much emphasis on fine art and craft activities to the exclusion of design activities, such as graphic design and product design. Suitable assessment procedures are in place and recording documentation is good. Assessment is an on-going process and feedback is provided for students on a regular basis. Teachers make considerable effort to inform students about their progress during each lesson. On the whole, teaching methods employed are appropriate in that they are designed to enable students to make good progress. The department is highly successful in involving students with special educational needs in art and design activities where they make good progress.

281. Teachers give students opportunity to develop deeper awareness of themselves as individuals within a much larger social environment. They are encouraged to investigate their own cultural backgrounds and to explore the cultures of other peoples and other civilisations. This is usually carried as a form of independent study away from school. The display of art work in the art studios and throughout the school is very good. This stimulates discussion and interest in the subject area.

282. Progress since the last inspection has been satisfactory at this level, but boys' performance remains a cause for concern. It might be possible to remedy this by broadening the curriculum to incorporate more design activities within a vocational context. This will require some move away from the current model which is based upon a predominantly fine art and craft orientated model of the curriculum. At present ICT resources within the department are unsatisfactory which restricts what students can achieve using computers, digital cameras, scanners and printers. To successfully broaden the curriculum and make it more relevant to the needs of many more students, especially boys, will require greater access to modern technology, ICT and photography within a more work-related, vocational curriculum.

## DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

283. Overall, the quality of provision in design and technology (DT) is **good**.

### Strengths

- Good subject knowledge of permanent staff.

- Clear guidance on what has been achieved to attain a given level.
- Good organisation of materials and other resources.
- Good pace in many lessons.
- Appropriate challenge in work set.
- Very good relationships.
- Good assessment systems.

Areas for improvement

- Temporary staff lack subject knowledge.
- Uneven experience for students in terms of taught time in a given area.

284. Standards in DT are good in the areas studied but provision overall does not meet statutory requirements because many students do not have access to this subject.

285. Standards of work seen at the end of Year 9 are about average overall. Standards of design work were good in the lessons observed but slightly below average by the end of Year 9: 62 per cent of students were judged by the school to be performing at Level 5, compared with 67 per cent nationally. Contributory factors are: widely differing starting points upon entry to the school by students in terms of knowledge, skills and understanding and dissimilar experiences provided to students throughout this year group.

286. Standards in GCSE examinations in 2001 were slightly better than the national average and were good given students' level of attainment on entry to the school. Girls attained significantly higher results than did boys (71 per cent for girls compared with 36 per cent for boys). Gender differences for students who were entered for the short course examination were not significant. No differences in the quality of work were noted in the lessons observed. GCSE pass rates have shown a steady improvement for the past three years.

287. In Year 10 practical skills are broadly average; students use tools with an appropriate degree of accuracy. Some practical skills, such as measuring and marking, are above average but knowledge of joining methods is a weakness. Both higher and lower attainers complete tasks well and all students evaluate their work against specific criteria. Students use the correct technical vocabulary to describe properties when talking about the subject, but are less accurate in their written work.

288. By the end of Year 11 students are performing well across both design and making activities. High levels of commitment were noted among students in food technology groups, and in resistant materials the quality of design work was often superb. Many students produce work to a high standard in graphics, which demonstrates both design flair and understanding of processes. Students of all ages make effective and appropriate use of ICT, not only to enhance their work for presentation purposes but also as an integral part of design and manufacture. Students with special educational needs make very good progress because they receive good individual support from the teacher, and students of all abilities benefit from outstanding support from technicians in the food and resistant materials areas. The quality of debate between technician and student was often observed to be of a high level and enabled students to take forward their learning in a purposeful manner. This support contributes significantly to raising standards and improving student progress.

289. The quality of teaching and learning is good or very good in Years 10 and 11. Lessons are well structured and teachers have good subject knowledge, which they impart with clarity to students who respond with enthusiasm. Demonstrations of

personal skill by teachers help students understand better what is meant by quality. The pace of lessons is good and the content is appropriately challenging. The teaching of some students in Year 9 is biased wholly to graphics or food, denying them an essential experience in resistant materials.

290. Specialist teachers have a good knowledge of their subject, which they use very effectively to guide students through GCSE coursework. Teachers have high expectations of students and are demanding with regard to homework, which they use well to extend students and to develop students' ability to work on their own. Teachers manage students' learning exceedingly well. Teachers create a very good environment for learning which is respected and valued by students.

291. Leadership and management of the faculty is excellent. The monitoring of teaching is good and there is purposeful intervention and support provided to non-specialist and temporary staff. The school has good accommodation although there is no dedicated graphics facility.

292. Overall, good progress has been made since the previous inspection, although the difficulty which the school faces in recruiting specialist staff is adversely affecting what the school can achieve. Despite this difficulty, standards have risen and inspection observations suggest an improving trend.

## **GEOGRAPHY**

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

### **Strengths**

- Students like geography and work well. They take pride in their work and presentation and relate well to their teachers.
- The subject is taught well by a committed team of teachers.
- Progress made by low attaining students is good.
- Students have a good grasp of geographical skills.

### **Areas for improvement**

- Develop further strategies for target setting, assessment and marking to help students learn.
- Continue to develop independent learning through geographical enquiry for gifted and talented students.

294. The standards achieved in geography at age 14 are in line with national expectations. Overall, students in Year 9 make satisfactory progress in lessons. Their use of geographical skills is a strength. However, progress in learning is good where students are given the opportunity to extend and talk about their own views and ideas. For example in a Year 9 lesson students were encouraged to think about the problems caused by environmental change in N E Brazil. They were able to draw on their learning to explain the advantages and disadvantages of development on different communities.

295. At age 16 attainment at GCSE is also in line with national expectations and a little above the average for the school. Progress in learning is good. In Year 11 students can describe how tourism affects the environment in Kenya and can explain some of the advantages and disadvantages development can bring. Written work is well presented with maps and diagrams of good quality. In Year 10 the enquiry exercise on the Norfolk

Broads produced some excellent examples, with some students using ICT to enhance their work. This standard is also seen in some Year 11 coursework.

296. Teaching is always satisfactory and often good or very good. Teachers are well qualified and have a depth of knowledge and expertise, which is passed on well to students. Oral work is helped by the good use of questioning techniques to elicit from students what they already know. In particular, teachers are patient in encouraging participation by more reticent students. Lessons are planned and managed well. The most effective lessons have clear structure, where students are informed of the aims and focus of the lesson, where the pace is good and where there is a variety of activities, including discrete periods of time for individual work. Lessons are less effective where teaching styles are limited and opportunities for group work and independent learning are not taken. To this end, the library and ICT resources are not always used to their fullest potential. Students of different abilities are managed well and appropriate work is made available for the less able. This is good for these students, but extension work for the more able needs to be targeted more rigorously. Work is always marked, often with helpful comments, and students are beginning to be informed of their National Curriculum levels at major assessments. This assessment needs to be developed further to include individual targets used to motivate and inform students. Fieldwork is well organised and appropriate in all years. Use of ICT needs to be expanded with more opportunities made available in all years for students to gather and process data.

297. Students are punctual, settle down quickly into lessons and are interested in their work. They are responsible, mostly well motivated, and respond well to their teachers. Students are always courteous, helpful and show respect. They work hard and co-operate well with each other. Levels of concentration are good especially in Year 10. Students are capable listeners and are keen to please. Although there is limited extra help available in geography lessons, where present, the classroom assistants support students with special educational needs well. These students learn to write clearly and accurately and listen well.

298. The head of department provides good leadership and is making continued good progress in developing the subject. The curriculum meets statutory requirements. The amount of time allocated to geography in Year 9 is now adequate. Planning is effective and the members of the department work well together. The good liaison developed with middle schools ensures students get off to a good start in Year 9 with common basic knowledge. Formal monitoring of teaching and learning is in place. Assessment procedures need to be further developed to accurately track individual student progress. Schemes of work show logical progression and are regularly monitored. Departmental resources and accommodation are good. In Service Training (INSET) opportunities are well planned and developed.

299. Since the last inspection, progress has improved in Years 10 and 11 leading to improved results at GCSE. Although the challenge of work for the most able is better, there is still room for improvement for students to develop their own enquiry skills. Teaching methods are improving with some good examples of group work. ICT use has also improved, but there is still room for development.

## HISTORY

300. Overall, the quality of provision in history is **satisfactory**.

### Strengths

- Attainment in history has risen over the last three years.

- Students enjoy the subject, demonstrate good attitudes and behave well.
- Option numbers have risen in recent years.
- Teachers are diligent and committed.
- Resource provision in many lessons is good.

#### Areas for improvement

- Day to day assessment is inconsistent.
- In some lessons the learning needs of high attaining students are not met effectively.
- Monitoring and evaluation within the department needs to be more rigorous.

301. Recent teacher assessment in history shows attainment at the end of Year 9 to be above national expectations. However, evidence from observations of lessons and students' work suggests that current standards are generally in line with expectations, with a significant minority of students above average and very few students significantly below. In Key Stage 4 recent GCSE A\*-C results have been close to national averages and A\*-E pass rates have been above average. Girls' attainment has been significantly above that of boys although this is to be expected as more able girls often opt for history in Year 10. Attainment in the current Year 11 cohort is above expected standards.

302. Knowledge and understanding in history is satisfactory in all students and is often good. In a Year 9 lesson many students described and discussed trench conditions in World War One with confidence and detailed reference. Year 11 GCSE students demonstrated a good grasp of the factors surrounding the rise to power of Hitler in Germany in the 1930s. This knowledge and understanding was evident in students' completed written work. By Year 11 some able students are confident to produce clear, concise and closely argued short answers. However, some longer, empathy pieces and some source analysis responses seen were less impressive, with little high-grade work evident.

303. Students of all abilities make at least satisfactory progress in their learning. Low attaining students and those with special educational needs progress well and this is reflected in their success in GCSE examinations. Progress by higher attaining and gifted and talented students is more varied as the tasks set in lessons do not always fully challenge them. The quality of teaching is always satisfactory and often good. Teachers have very good relationships with their students and manage lessons well. Planning and resource provision are thorough, particularly in ensuring lower attaining students are able to gain a sound understanding of topics. For example, some vivid images of trench warfare in World War One did much to interest and inform Year 9 students. ICT is used well on occasions, as demonstrated in some Year 10 student presentations about medicine in Renaissance times. However, it is not used regularly as a major learning resource. Lessons often benefit from well-sequenced activities but lack the inclusion of more structured tasks to challenge the most able students. Questioning is used well to review learning and to engage all students but, again, some opportunities to provoke high level thinking amongst the most able are missed. Homework tasks are well planned to complement learning in lessons.

304. The marking of students' work is varied in terms of quality and frequency. Where good, students receive both encouragement and direction for future improvement. However, some books seen had not been marked for a considerable time. The students do benefit from having target grades established early in Year 10 and their progress towards achieving them is monitored regularly. Reports to parents are good.

305. The students respond well in lessons. They behave very well, listen carefully and work well in whole class, paired or individual activities. Some paired, collaborative work in

an observed Year 11 lesson on Nazi Germany was done very well and did much to ensure good progress was made. Work in students' books shows consistent effort and care and reflects the effort and interest they demonstrate in lessons. Literacy levels are satisfactory but the range of writing undertaken is limited and could be better supported by teachers through greater use of drafting and more specific strategies to structure written responses.

306. The leadership and management of the department are satisfactory. Schemes of work are sound but lack sufficient detail on assessment and on teaching approaches to promote students' thinking skills. The current development plan addresses appropriate issues but lacks real detail and needs to be more overtly responsive to issues emerging from monitoring and evaluation work. The number and range of resources in the department is good. Support for non-specialist teachers in Year 9 is good and the arrangements to cover for staff absence during the time of the inspection were also good. Overall, since the last inspection progress has been satisfactory. Over the last year progress has been good and this is an improving department. Attainment is rising, the subject is attracting more students in option groups, resource provision is improved and a wider range of teaching and learning strategies have been incorporated into lessons. The department makes a good contribution to the ethos and aims of the school. Although having faced some difficulties caused by staffing issues the department is well placed to progress further.

307. In seeking such improvement the department should:-

- Improve the quality of day to day marking
- Develop approaches to monitoring and evaluation based more firmly upon focused classroom observation and more detailed analysis of attainment data
- Develop more structured tasks to ensure high attaining students are challenged fully

## INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

308. Overall, the quality of provision in information and communication technology (ICT) is **good**.

309. Where ICT is taught within examination subjects and discrete modules the quality of provision is good. There has been improvement in the amount and quality of ICT used in the different subjects in Years 9 -11 but this is not yet fully developed.

### Strengths

- There has been a large investment in equipment to locate the business and ICT suite centrally.
- Five rooms are well equipped with a Study Centre for Sixth Form use and a bookable room for cross-curricular use. This facility is heavily used during lunch times.
- Teachers have very good subject knowledge and work hard to achieve good results with students of all abilities.
- The ratio of computers to students is now 1:5.9, better than the national average.
- The recently introduced module for all Year 9 students is working well.

### Areas for improvement

- More needs to be done to enable all students to develop ICT skills across the curriculum in both key stages.

- More use needs to be made of student data to aid target setting in order to continue to raise standards.

310. In Year 9 a carefully planned scheme of work enables the majority of students to learn quickly and make good progress. When using Microsoft Access students were able to log on to the software quickly and confidently create an empty database. They were then able to list field names and input data using information researched within the community as a homework topic. By exchanging data students were able to build up a larger database which was later interrogated. Students had good keyboard skills and lessons progressed at a good pace. Girls and boys achieved equally and special needs students were well integrated into all lessons. Students were collating hard copy evidence of their work in topic folders. Previous work, using PowerPoint, showed that students were also able to present information using text and images. During the inspection all groups were working on the same topic.
311. In Years 10 and 11, students may opt for either the Part One GNVQ or Full Intermediate GNVQ in ICT. Depending on their progress they may enter the most suitable examination. In a full intermediate GNVQ lesson students were working on individual PowerPoint presentations. Students could either choose a topic from a wide ranging list of ICT related areas or devise one of their own. This allowed for the full range of abilities in the group and their own interests. Students used a variety of research material, including the Internet, in order to investigate their topics. They quickly and confidently, using previous learning skills, designed their presentation slides. All students made progress during the lesson. Gifted and talented students were able to extend their learning. They were producing presentations reflecting creativity and very confident use of the software. The majority of students have computers at home and are able to develop their work as homework. This enables rapid progress to be made.
312. Special needs students also were confident and were producing impressive work. In a Year 11 Part One GNVQ lesson students were learning how to structure a web page using HTML tags. They were able to choose their own web page topics and produce rough drafts on paper before transferring designs to Notepad software. Students learnt to write tags in the correct order for their pages to work.
313. In 2001 42 per cent achieved Level 5 or above in Year 9 teacher assessments. This is well below average. Teachers were secure in these judgements now that they have a good course to follow. In previous years, teacher assessment allocated too many students to Level 5. Girls and boys achieved equally at Level 5 whilst boys were just ahead of girls at the higher levels. In GCSE examinations A\*-C passes ranged from 35 per cent in 1999, 45 per cent in 2000, to 61 per cent in 2001 and students made good progress. The national average in 2001 was 56 per cent. However, results for short course ICT were 35 per cent A\*-C compared to national average of 46 per cent.
314. The quality of teaching and learning in all lessons observed was at least satisfactory, with some good, very good, or excellent lessons seen. All teachers have very good subject knowledge and are confident in the delivery of their subject. Lessons in Year 9 were very carefully structured with good introductions and clear details listed on the whiteboard. This approach worked well for the wide range of abilities present in groups. The pace of lessons was good. Relationships in all lessons observed were very good, some were excellent. Students were keen to learn and were attentive at all times. In GNVQ lessons careful planning ensured that students fully understood what was required. Very good booklets and new books were used to provide information. Teachers encouraged students to develop work based on their own interests. This made ownership of the projects more personal and therefore more detailed. PowerPoint



presentations and web page designs also enabled students to relate to real world applications. Students' work was also carefully collated and marked with good feedback provided. Students understood the marking criteria and were able to make up any deficiencies identified through marking. A full range of work was seen from distinction to pass level with the majority being at merit level or above. Students' enthusiasm for the subject was reflected in these grades. Good use was also made of ICT in English, where a group of students were drafting and re-drafting assignments using different styles of presentation. In a work related learning lesson students were developing key skills to produce a party invitation as part of their certificate. They were keen and enthusiastic and with literacy support they all made progress. Their behaviour was excellent.

315. Students' attitudes and behaviour in the majority of lessons were at least very good, sometimes excellent. Students were enthusiastic and responded well to good teaching coupled to interesting relevant tasks. Special needs students were fully integrated into all lessons and achieved equally well. Relationships between students and staff were at least very good. Students reacted well to high expectations. Gifted and talented students were not restricted in their coursework but were encouraged to reach the highest levels of achievement.

316. The department is well managed with teachers working well as a team. The documentation is good and good schemes of work are in place. The development plan is being implemented and the department has benefited from refurbished rooms and new equipment. Future development targets are being carefully thought through. The head of department contributes to regular after school staff ICT training and works well with the member of the management team responsible for the delivery of ICT. The department has good technician support. The school website is very good. The Intranet is also being used and developed across the school. The Swedish cultural programme is providing resources for the development of video conferencing.

317. To further improve the provision the ICT subject link teachers need to resolve the lack of ICT usage in some areas of the curriculum. More effective use could be made of student data for target setting. Newly introduced subject reports need to be monitored to make sure all departments are including valid ICT judgements.

318. The department has made good progress since the last inspection. There has been heavy investment in the subject over the last two years. Reliable equipment is working well and students are responding with higher standards of achievement. Assessment in Year 11 is now taking place but some Year 10 and 11 students are still not being given sufficient opportunities to develop their ICT skills across all subjects. There has been progress in the monitoring and implementation of ICT but more work still needs to be done.

## MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

319. Overall, the quality of provision in modern languages is **good**.

### Strengths

- The quality and commitment of permanent staff have a positive impact on students' achievement.
- The faculty enjoys effective leadership and teachers work well as a team.
- Students benefit from the breadth and range of the curriculum, including additional provision for Spanish.

### Areas for improvement

- Students should be given greater opportunities to read independently.
- Students should be introduced to the past and future tenses earlier in order to extend the more able and increase the proportion of those capable of reaching higher levels of attainment by the age of 14.

320. Teacher assessment in French indicates that attainment in French by the end of Year 9 is below the national average and that it has declined in comparison with the previous year.

321. The proportion of students attaining higher grades, A\*- C, in the GCSE examinations in 2001 was well below the national average in both French and German. In German the proportion of students attaining these grades is lower than in French. There is significant gender variation with girls outperforming boys by a very wide margin. The school is aware of this and measures have been put in action to motivate boys, for instance by introducing competition and this is having a positive impact on their attitudes. The proportion of students achieving A\*-G grades is above average in both languages. The majority of students are entered and this is why the results have remained relatively low over the last three years. The school's analysis of these results by set shows that students in the top set exceeded the national average.

322. Students in Year 9 continue with French and all of them begin to study German as a second language. Overall attainment by the end of Year 9 is average in German but below average in French. In their first language, students show understanding of classroom language and answer questions related to the topics being studied. This is made possible because teachers use helpful prompts and visual aids to support students' oral responses. When reading, high attaining students identify main points but a significant number cannot read fluently and independently, use context to deduce meaning or tackle authentic material. This is due to the lack of planned opportunities to develop independent reading early enough as a regular activity. In both speaking and writing students' ability to refer to the past and the future with sufficient confidence is limited and this why the performance of the majority is still below average by the end of the key stage. In writing, high attaining students write a few sentences in sequence, but the majority have not acquired enough skills to begin to use their knowledge of grammar sufficiently to adapt and substitute individual and set phrases.

323. Although students' attainment on entry in Year 9 is below average, the majority achieve appropriately against their prior attainment. They make gains in acquiring vocabulary and build on their previous knowledge of key phrases, and benefit from the good modelling of correct pronunciation and intonation, especially in German.

324. Attainment by the end of Year 11 in French and German is below average. Students' achievement is satisfactory in both languages and is more consistent in German. Clear signs of improvement in achievement are also detectable in the current Year 10 classes as students exercise their choices of pursuing language studies. Students' understanding in both languages is better than their speaking and writing. In Year 10, in German, they know a range of classroom language and have reasonable control of key grammatical features. By the end of Year 11, some higher attaining students have a good knowledge of topic vocabulary, key structures and a grasp of past tenses but the majority of students are not transferring this knowledge into their writing, particularly in French. Evidence from the analysis of students' work also shows insufficient opportunities to develop their writing skills beyond the practice of structures and the practice of past and future tenses, which are crucial to achieving higher levels of attainment. Pronunciation is satisfactory overall but distinctly better in German.

325. Students with special educational needs achieve appropriately against their prior attainment particularly when they are effectively targeted through additional staffing or supportive and opportune interventions. However, this is not consistent because the specific needs of these students to access a foreign language are not always clearly defined, and tasks are sometimes too difficult for them.
326. Students show positive attitudes to the languages studied across both key stages. They show interest, listen attentively and apply themselves well. When given the opportunity of working in groups, they respond enthusiastically and show a sense of enjoyment and initiative. This was well exemplified in one Year 9 German class where the students responded enthusiastically to the teacher's brisk pace of oral questioning, and were used to the well rehearsed routines of working competitively and responding in the target language. Relationships with teachers and between students are good and this is often well used by the teachers to work in oral activities. Some students, especially boys, do not actively participate in activities unless prompted.
327. The quality of teaching by permanent staff is good overall and is sometimes very good or excellent in German. Permanent staff have good subject knowledge reflected in the use of effective methodology and the presentation of lessons. There is a good ethos in the faculty where teachers use the target language consistently to teach, manage and instruct students. In the best teaching this has a positive effect, especially where good modeling of pronunciation and sufficient whole class practice before independent work enable students to develop good intonation and a feel for idiomatic use of the language. This was effectively demonstrated in a Year 9 German lesson focussing on the use of prepositions. In this instance, the judicious use of the overhead projector and visual aids helped students learn and consolidate key vocabulary through a range of methods, enabling them to chorus and rehearse the language before introducing the key grammatical feature, and challenging the highest attainers by requiring them to use more complex language. The lesson was carefully structured so that each phase reinforced previous learning and enabled all students to work at a brisk pace and make clear gains. In another Year 9 class with a number of disaffected boys and students with special educational needs, the teacher used competition by having two groups in the class scoring points against each other. This was particularly effective, as students had to use the target language either to gain points or score against the other party. This also enabled students to work at a productive pace. At intervals, the teacher checked what the students had learnt, enabling them to evaluate critically where they experienced difficulties and to come up with the solution as to how they might overcome them. Where teaching was unsatisfactory, it was mostly in lessons taught by temporary staff and, in the short term, this is having a negative effect on students' capacity to learn and the progress they are making.
328. Leadership and management of the faculty and the commitment shown by its members have a positive impact on students' achievement. There is a positive ethos of sharing good practice and regular reviews of the curriculum, for instance in the liaison with feeder schools to standardise judgements and agree a common scheme of work. Good analysis of provision is regularly made and action identified, to inform development planning. Clear priorities are identified including teaching and learning but occasionally the evaluation criteria are not linked sufficiently to the impact of developments on students' achievement. Although there are regular assessment tasks, the evaluation of students' work and marking is not closely related to the demands of National Curriculum levels of attainment nor used to identify short and long term targets. This is particularly so in relation to developing students' cultural awareness in a systematic way.

329. Progress since the last inspection has been satisfactory. Although results have declined, this is largely due to the changes in the National Curriculum order for languages where the demands for average attainment have been raised. Against this background students' standards of achievement have been maintained. This has been the result of teachers sharing good practice and the clear commitment to raising students' achievement.

## MUSIC

330. Overall, the quality of provision in music is **satisfactory**.

### Strengths

- Students' positive attitudes in class.
- Relationships.
- Support for students with special educational needs.
- Provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Teachers' ambitions to raise standards.

### Areas for improvement

- Pace of lessons.
- Involvement of students in extra-curricular activities.
- ICT facilities.
- Accommodation.

331. By the end of Year 9 students' attainment is broadly in line with expectation, with a few above and a slightly larger number below. Most students reach appropriate standards in composing, performing and listening, though a significant minority are less competent in performing; they cannot 'catch up' if they get lost while playing with a group.

332. GCSE results over recent years have been in line with national averages and with expectations based on students' prior attainment. Current Year 11 students vary widely in ability, particularly in performing, from confident soloists at the upper end of expectation, to students who find difficulty in playing a simple melody. Standards of composing are slightly lower than in performing. Pieces are short and simple and are sometimes limited by the performing skills of the composer.

333. Students' achievement within lessons and over time is satisfactory. Boys and girls achieve equally well. Students from minority ethnic groups are fully integrated into all classes and their achievement is also satisfactory.

334. Students enjoy music. They work co-operatively with each other and their teachers. They are well behaved in lessons, rare misbehaviour being quickly challenged by staff. However, students rely on teachers to encourage them to work more quickly and productively; they do not set their own deadlines or focus on how they can improve their work themselves.

335. Teaching is satisfactory. Teachers have good subject knowledge, shown by skilful questioning and expert assessment of students' work in class. They are able to give effective technical help to students, for example by giving clear explanations of how to create and perform a 12-bar blues in different ways according to students' performing skills. However, in lessons the pace of work is often too slow. Students are not consistently given clear aims or timed deadlines. As a result they do not use time efficiently. The most able and middle ability students make only satisfactory progress

because they work at such a leisurely pace. Students with special educational needs are well supported, both by teachers and by support staff, and as a result these students make better progress than their peers. The learning of all students is constrained by the poor accommodation. There is only one full sized classroom and some students have to work in unsuitably small rooms, a particular problem when students have to work in groups as they cannot hear their work properly. Higher achieving students in Year 11 are not maximising their potential, particularly for ensemble work, because there are not sufficient spaces for separate practice and careful listening to their work. Sometimes they have to work in the corridor, where they do not have sufficient access to the department's instruments and recording equipment.

336. There is at present no full scheme of work for Year 9 students, but the curriculum is satisfactory. Topics currently or recently studied have been appropriately planned. Some students have two music lessons in one week and then a gap of nearly a fortnight, which means they forget previous work. The school's values are well supported through a strong focus on development of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. In a lesson observed on blues, for example, teachers encouraged students to consider thoughtfully the importance of tolerance of others' values and beliefs.
337. A good range of extra-curricular groups offers opportunities for students to develop performing skills, and to play in public at events such as the annual Christmas concert and the Year 9 Showcase. Most of these groups have a small, though loyal, following. Students are encouraged to attend the county's Saturday Music School held on the premises, and gifted and talented musicians extend their performing skills through the wide range of opportunities which this presents, along with membership of one of the County bands or choirs.
338. Reports to parents are satisfactory. Students make a good contribution to these but teachers' comments focus more on personal qualities than on musical standards.
339. The department is managed well and is helpfully supported by the senior management team. The head of department has only been in post one term and has not yet had time to implement all her ideas. There are clear and accurate perceptions in the department about what it needs to do to improve, including raising standards of attainment and increasing the number of students involved in extra-curricular activities. These ideas have not yet been prioritised with criteria for success and timelines for achievement. Positive encouragement of music in the school as a whole is promoted by playing a 'CD of the week' over the school's public address system before school and during breaks. Provision of teaching and support staff is satisfactory, but there is no technician support, which means that teachers have to solve problems with computers, keyboards and drum kits. There are not enough computers with appropriate software to support the composing of the GCSE students, particularly the less able. There are not enough good quality electronic keyboards or CDs.
340. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. Students have increased their ICT skills and there is better monitoring of their academic achievement.

## PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

### Strengths

- Good GCSE exam results with students achieving better in the subject when compared to their other results.

- Very good leadership of the subject with a clear purpose and direction for the subject's future development in the school.
- Committed teachers who have very good subject knowledge and deliver a well-balanced curriculum with a good range of extra-curricular opportunities.
- Teachers who work hard to be fully inclusive so all students, whatever their ability, can participate in all aspects of the curriculum, including GCSE.

#### Areas for improvement

- Develop the use of ICT as a tool for learning, especially in GCSE teaching.
- Review the policy for marking GCSE work to ensure a consistency of approach across the faculty.

342. By the end of Year 9, the majority of students are performing at a level that is typical for their age and a good number are producing good performances in a range of activities. Students of all abilities make good progress and acquire a good knowledge, understanding and level of skill in the main sports undertaken. For example, in a Year 9 trampoline lesson most students made good progress, despite the short time they had experienced the activity. All students were able to perform a short sequence using the basic movements they had learned with satisfactory control. Several gifted and more confident students, with very good teacher support, were able to perform a front somersault with increasing control and accuracy. Many students know about the effect of exercise on their bodies and the importance of taking part in sport for their future health and enjoyment.

343. Students in Years 10 and 11 continue to make good progress so that by the end of Year 11 most students are at least working at a level which is typical for their age. However, a significant number are working above this level. During the inspection, because of the school's two-week timetable, it was not possible to see any GCSE groups being taught. However, through the review of students' work, the faculty's schemes of work and students' past performance it is clear that many of these students are making very good progress. Knowledge and understanding of physical education is generally better for those who opt to study the subject at GCSE where it is a popular option. The school's policy of open access to the subject means that students of all ability levels are represented in the groups. Students with special educational needs are well supported by subject teachers and learning support assistants and make good progress. The results for 2001 were very good. All students passed, with 77 per cent gaining a C grade, or better. The school's performance was well above the national average of 52 per cent, as has been the case over the last three years. Whilst the subject tends to be a more popular choice with boys, girls' achievement in the higher grades in 2001 was at a slightly higher rate than that of boys.

344. Students' standards of behaviour are good and they respond well to the teaching. They are keen to do well. Most listen carefully and follow instructions well and at the same time show good levels of effort. Working relationships are usually very positive. Students generally show respect for each other, teachers and other adults, and work well to improve their own standard of performance. There were good examples seen during the inspection of students showing a good appreciation of others' performance by clapping at the end of the sequence or demonstration.

345. Teaching is good with some very good features. Teachers establish very good working relationships with their students, set very clear objectives for every lesson, explain these fully to their students, and often review them at the end of the lesson to ensure they have been met. Teachers have high expectations of students, instill in them an enthusiasm for the subject and support them well to achieve a good standard of

performance. Teachers' knowledge and understanding of physical education is very good and they make good use of student questioning to ensure students have understood what they have been taught. Lessons are very well planned and teachers make very good use of varied activities to help students fully learn what they have already been taught. For example, in a Year 11 netball lesson students were given a good opportunity to plan and develop a series of set moves in their teams and then put these into action against their opponents. This was well developed by students, and with good teacher support, and their standard of performance improved as a result. Teachers know their students very well. Those with special educational needs are set tasks which are appropriate to their abilities, given very good support, both by the teacher and other students in the group, and as a result they make good progress.

346. The curriculum is broad and balanced and includes a good range of extra-curricular activities. The school has recently extended the curriculum time for all students in Years 10 and 11, resulting in improvement in their performance skills as well as their knowledge and understanding of rules, tactical play, and the features and importance of fitness. Teacher assessment of students' performance is thorough and accurate and the results are effectively shared with students and reported to parents. Students have an opportunity to assess their own progress in each activity and this is part of the assessment process. Assessment against GCSE requirements is good and again the results shared with students, targets are set and students are clear what it is they need to do to improve. Whilst GCSE homework is often marked well, this is not always carried out consistently, and there is a need to look at the policy for marking work and the use of grades that relate to the standards of the GCSE syllabus.

347. The head of the faculty provides very good leadership and a very clear purpose and direction for the subject's future development in the school. He is very well supported by all faculty colleagues in the drive to raise standards in the subject. The spacious and well-resourced sports hall and the recently developed floodlit astro turf area provide excellent accommodation for teaching the subject. There is a need to improve the resources for the teaching of gymnastics and ensure that the intranet connection in the subject area is operational.

348. The subject received a very positive report at the last inspection and has continued to make good progress. For example, GCSE results have continued to improve steadily and remain above the national average; teaching continues to be good with some very good features; the leadership and management of the subject remains very good and progress for Year 9 students is now good rather than satisfactory. The last inspection report highlighted the need to review the availability, deployment and development of all teaching staff to ensure full opportunity for all students. The faculty is now fully staffed and deployed to teach to their strengths. There is good access to professional development opportunities and all teachers are involved in training in the use of ICT in the subject, although this has yet to have an impact on the curriculum.

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

349. Overall, the quality of provision in religious education is **unsatisfactory**.

### Strengths:

- None

### Areas for improvement:

- Increase the amount of time in all year groups (9 - 13) so that provision meets the statutory requirements of the Agreed Syllabus and students receive their entitlement.

350. Religious education forms part of the core general studies programme in Years 9 to 11. The number of modules in the programme with a clear religious education element is very limited and the provision does not meet the requirements of the Bedfordshire Agreed Syllabus.
351. During the inspection there was no religious education being taught in any year group and none had been taught since September. There was no written work to scrutinise or displays to view. In a discussion with a small group of Year 11 students it is evident that students' knowledge and understanding of the six principal religions in Great Britain is well below average as students only have the ability to recall basic facts. Their ability to give viewpoints and argue points is better developed but they could not draw on a range of beliefs to inform their own views.
352. A new head of general studies has taken over since September and is beginning to review with the senior management of the school what needs to be done in order to improve provision. There is no specialist teacher on the staff to lead curriculum development, although there is a range of relatively up to date teaching resources.
353. There has been no improvement since the last inspection.



**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
Biology	4	-	52	-	2	-	0.79
Computer Studies	2	100	74	-	13	2.00	1.75
English Literature	1	100	-	-	-	1.00	-
French	2	100	78	-	13	2.00	1.65
Mathematics	2	100	62	-	15	1.00	1.51
Other Social Studies	6	100	74	17	11	2.50	1.47

***GCE A level and AVCE courses***

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and Design	25	100	96	52	46	7.04	6.57
Biology	23	74	88	17	34	3.30	5.25
Business Studies	13	69	92	-	32	2.92	5.50
Chemistry	13	62	90	23	43	3.23	5.90
Computer Studies	12	83	86	8	23	4.00	4.62
Economics	8	88	89	50	36	6.00	5.52
English Language	28	100	91	18	30	5.79	5.27
English Literature	4	50	95	-	37	2.50	5.91
French	7	100	89	43	38	6.29	5.59
Full Design and Technology	14	93	91	29	30	5.86	5.38
Geography	8	88	92	38	38	6.50	5.74
German	3	67	91	33	40	4.67	5.81
History	2	100	88	-	35	5.00	5.45
Mathematics	14	79	87	29	43	4.71	5.80

Physics	11	82	88	27	40	3.64	5.67
Sports/PE Studies	12	100	92	25	25	5.17	5.09
Theatre Studies	4	100	93	-	31	4.00	5.53

### *Intermediate vocational qualifications*

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		Average point distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Business	8	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	15.00	10.45

## SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

### MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

243. There are two mathematics courses offered at AS and A2 level, pure mathematics with statistics and pure mathematics with mechanics. Lessons from both courses were observed.

244. There are four science subjects offered in the school. The focus for this inspection was on chemistry and biology, but physics and psychology were also sampled. In 2001 physics, examination results produced an average point score below that found nationally for advanced level and on average, students achieved less well than would be expected from their GCSE results; some students who followed an AS level course in physics in 2001 performed on average better than would be expected from their GCSE results. Some students achieved more highly than expected, and others worse. Of the two lessons seen, both showed strengths in teaching, but evidence from student work indicates there is limited opportunity for students to work independently. Those students following a course in psychology achieve well. Students' attainment in 2001 was, on average, almost one grade higher than predicted from their GCSE grades. During the inspection very good teaching was observed in psychology where students contributed very effectively to each other's learning, using presentations based on their own independent research. Students and teacher worked well together in contributing to discussions of a good intellectual standard.

### Mathematics

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

#### Strengths

- Students work hard and achieve well; they make good progress.
- Teaching is good overall; teachers have good subject knowledge.
- Relationships between teachers and students are good.

#### Areas for improvement

- Students need to be given greater opportunities to discuss their work with their peers, to prepare work for next lessons and to work independently.
- Teachers need to use a wider range of teaching and learning styles.

246. In the last four years seventy students have taken A level in mathematics. The ratio of boys to girls (2:1) taking the subject reflects the national picture. The percentage of students in the last four years achieving the higher grades A - B is around the national averages; the percentage of students achieving A - E grades has been just below the national averages. The prior attainment of these students (by overall GCSE results) is average and below. This indicates that students generally make good progress in the subject. In some years students do well against their performance in other subjects and in other years less well. Generally girls have achieved better results than boys. In 2001 the percentage of students achieving A - B was below average; in the previous year the figure was average. Standards seen in lessons reflect those of previous years. Most students make good progress. This is because skilled practitioners, who know their subject well, teach them.
247. Each year between 10 and 20 students take GCSE mathematics. These are largely students who seek to attain a grade C or better. The modular course suits them well and nearly a half achieved a grade C or better in 2001. Indications from the most recent external module test show that students have achieved one grade better than their results in last summer's GCSE examinations. Students make good progress in this course.
248. Teaching is good overall and at least satisfactory in all lessons seen. Teachers have good subject knowledge. There is enthusiasm for the subject from the teachers which is conveyed to the students. Most teaching builds upon previous learning. Some good examples were observed of teachers picking up on students' difficulties and providing them with support in their learning. Teaching, on occasion, gives students too few opportunities to discuss the mathematics and to develop ideas. The teaching needs to enhance the amount of work undertaken by students outside of lessons in preparation for future lessons. Some opportunities are made, however. In one good statistics lesson students were asked to examine a set of data and to determine areas to be explored with this data. They were then required to complete an investigation into this data and to prepare a report. In this example, on GCSE mathematics results and related Key Stage 3 results, the students posed such questions as: 'Do girls do better than boys on the GCSE Intermediate paper?', 'Should all students with a Level 6 and above attain a grade C or better?'. Students need to be given more opportunities of this nature.
249. The teaching makes effective use of graphic calculators and students are both proficient and confident in their use. In one lesson the teacher made good use of graphic calculators to demonstrate the similarities between types of graphs. ICT was little used; there is little immediate access to computers. Students are encouraged to use the school's Intranet to download data and it is clear that many students are proficient computer users. Students do need to be given more frequent opportunities to discuss methods and difficulties, and, between themselves, to ask such questions as 'Why hasn't this worked?', 'Who has got a different answer?', 'Who has got a more elegant solution?'. In one lesson on division of a polynomial by a factor the opportunity was missed for students to understand that they could check whether they had the correct answer by multiplication.
250. Folders contain good examples of thorough marking, which picks up students' errors and provides them with support. This needs to be more consistent across all teaching staff and areas of mathematics. Positive comments are often seen on students' work. There are also some examples of teachers testing students' understanding on a regular basis. This helps students to know the strengths and weaknesses in their work.
251. Students have good to very good attitudes to their studies. However, there are some students who could work at a faster pace and concentrate more on their studies. There

is much mutual respect between teachers and students. The atmosphere in lessons reflects the strong positive relationships that have been formed between students and their teachers. The confidence of Year 13 students in response to questions depicts a growing depth of subject knowledge and understanding. However, there is a need for more active participation in some lessons in order to develop their independent learning and study skills.

252. There are satisfactory schemes of work; each student is provided with a copy of the syllabus for the subject. Teaching and learning would be improved if these schemes of work contained not only what should be taught but also teaching ideas and alternative approaches and texts. Whilst there are some good examples of modelling, such as in mechanics, students need to be given more opportunities to see the power of mathematics in solving 'real world' problems.

253. Good teaching and learning is the outcome of satisfactory management and a strong team of post-16 teachers. The GCSE modular course is a good choice for students wishing to achieve a grade C or above pass. The success rate at this level is testament to this. Numbers taking mathematics in Year 13 have been relatively small. This is the first year of A2s: there are three students taking the pure with statistics option and eight the pure and mechanics. The school will need to look critically at group sizes in future years.

## Biology

254. Overall, the quality of provision in biology is **unsatisfactory**.

### Strengths

- Teachers' subject knowledge and understanding is good.
- Relationships at all levels are good.
- Subject specifications are strictly followed.

### Areas for improvement

- A wider range and quality of teaching and learning strategies could be employed.
- The retention rate is unsatisfactory both for AS and A level courses and the attainment overall is well below the national expectation.
- Students should be given opportunities to develop independent learning skills.
- Students' performance should be monitored and evaluated for effective action.
- There is lack of effective leadership and management.

255. The attainment of students in A level biology in 2001 was well below the national average. Girls performed better than boys. None of the boys achieved grades A -C. The average point score per student shows a decreasing trend over the last three years. Results in AS level biology in 2001 were also well below the national average. This could be due to the ability range of students allowed to follow the course, some of whom took foundation tier at GCSE. Retention rate for AS level is unsatisfactory.

256. Standards of achievement are unsatisfactory. The quality of students' work, as seen in lessons and files, matches the pattern of recent results. More able students' files are very well organised. They show a full range of subject specification. They show skills of inquiry, and independent work. Most other students' files are not organised and contain some incomplete work. Special educational needs students are making good progress. Students show good recall of taxonomical hierarchy, DNA structure, facilitated diffusion and active transport and food chains. Coursework completed by more able students is of

very high standard. Routine practical work observed was of a less challenging nature. Students in Year 12 are developing their understanding of the concepts of mitosis, meiosis and cell structure. There was little evidence of investigative work in their files.

257. In the lessons observed the teachers showed more strengths than weaknesses and these were satisfactory, but observation of students' folders and work programmes indicate that, overall, teaching is unsatisfactory. Teachers showed good knowledge and understanding of the subject and planning and exposition were clear. Sometimes homework is used to develop students' independent learning skills. Teachers plan their lessons to provide a suitable introduction to the subject but the teaching is narrow in approach and lacks stimulus and excitement. Lessons are always teacher led and students are expected to do no more than take notes. Teachers' plans suggest differentiation by outcome. Questioning techniques do not encourage students' thinking skills. Comments on the course work and homework are not constructive and do not give strategies for improvement. There has been very little analysis of strengths and learning needs of different groups of students.

258. Students' learning is generally satisfactory. They take keen interest. They are attentive and show a willingness to learn, seeking clarification of their understanding by asking thoughtful questions. Most students are good at taking notes and they organise their work well. When given the opportunity they participate well in the class discussion. Students can recall simple facts and concepts. Their ICT skills are well developed; for example, Year 13 students used PowerPoint for their presentation on taxonomy. Relationships in the classrooms are good. Most Year 12 students and some Year 13 students lack confidence and look for reassurance from the teacher during practical work.

259. There is little evidence of independent work or individual research by students except one more able Year 13 student. There is a need to encourage students to become more independent and responsible for their own learning and research from a wider range of sources of information. Learning resources are inadequate. This impacts adversely on the quality of learning. There is no evidence of celebration of success to give an incentive to others.

260. The biology department lacks leadership and management. Teachers do not meet together regularly or systematically to review the progression in concepts and to develop common approaches. There is no overall policy for setting or marking homework. Assessment is not used effectively in planning and teaching and there is no effective monitoring of the quality of teaching. More effective monitoring is needed to identify the weaknesses in the provision, teaching and learning. The department needs to identify the reasons for underachievement overall and particularly boys' underachievement. It should develop a clear programme to inform students exactly what it is they should do to improve.

## Chemistry

261. Overall, the provision in chemistry in the recent past has been, and is currently, **unsatisfactory** but is set to improve.

### Strengths

- There is a well qualified team of chemistry teachers.
- The team has a strong wish to improve.
- Teachers care for the students.

- Teachers plan their work.

#### Areas for improvement

- Management could be more pro-active.
- Teaching is too reliant on teacher -delivery and there is insufficient opportunity for independent work by students.
- The monitoring of the work of the department and teachers should be strengthened.

262. The GCE A level examination results in 2001 showed a fall from that previously attained. This continued the falling pattern over the last 4 years. The average point score in the subject has fallen over this time when nationally it has risen. Students following the AS level course in summer 2001 also achieved less well than would have been expected using predictions from their GCSE results. There is very little difference between the achievement of boys and girls at either advanced or AS level.

263. The standard of work of students in Year 13 shows a logical progression through material designed to meet the advanced level specification. The work in some folders was of a high standard, reflecting the school's evidence that some students are achieving in line with expectations with good students achieving well. In lessons there was evidence of students asking searching questions to help their understanding of oxidation states.

264. Students in Year 12 following the AS course again show logical progression in their work. However, in the folders inspected, the quality of note-taking and file organisation for some students was weak and showed work of below average standard. In lessons, able students showed a good understanding of alkane structure and reactivity, a boy giving a particularly clear explanation of the relationship of alkane molecular shape to density of the substance. Some girls seemed to lack confidence in their own ability and needed coaxing to respond to questions. A number of Year 12 students were showing attainment below that expected from their GCSE grades.

265. Teaching overall is satisfactory. Teachers showed very good understanding of chemistry in the way they were able to answer questions and present work logically to students. The teaching of alkane molecular structure and its effect on boiling point was very clear, progressing from simple to more complex structures. Building on this foundation graphical work and molecular models were used and completed the picture. In practical work on alcohol, some students showed poorly developed skills in the use of basic apparatus. During the lessons seen, there was a tendency towards over-emphasis on teacher delivery and too little contribution from students. Where questions were asked, there was also a tendency for the teacher to provide answers too quickly rather than use searching questions to help students to arrive at the correct answer.

266. Much of the written work seen in student files consisted of teacher directed notes and past examination papers, with some information sheets. There was very little evidence of work which involved students in independent research or where the students actively contributed to their own and others' learning. Marking of work is carried out by teachers, but the quality of feedback on how to improve is inconsistent. There is also a need to be more rigorous in the use of deadlines for submission, return to students and recording of attainment of the work of students. The attainment of students in module tests is logged and used for monitoring purposes. However, the use of interim assessments and monitoring needs further development to enable student progress to be checked on a more regular basis.

267. The reports provided for parents and students, whilst making reference to attitudes and approaches to work, make insufficient reference to aspects of chemistry. These could more clearly show students' strengths and weaknesses, and say what it is students need to do to improve.
268. Students apply themselves well in lessons and respond appropriately to teaching. During the inspection attitudes to work were very good or better in all lessons seen. Year 13 students showed confidence in their approach to questions from the teacher and in turn were confident in asking questions of the teacher. Able Year 12 students also showed confidence in responding to the teacher. However some were less confident, meaning that more vocal and able students contributed more to oral work and others were not always brought into question and answer dialogues as much as they could be. The attitudes between students and teachers were good and students listened carefully to others.
269. The head of department has only been in post a short time. Over the last year the department has had significant problems in accommodation. Whilst laboratory facilities are good, a fire, gas failure and insufficient access to laboratories due to timetabling have caused problems. There have also been problems with the use of temporary staff covering for a long period of absence. These problems will have affected the standards achieved by students. There is a need for the management of the department to become more pro-active and effective. Whilst chemistry is a part of the larger science faculty, there is a need for the head of chemistry to establish his own area of working and take a more active role in managing all aspects of chemistry at student and teacher level. Monitoring of teachers should be more regular, as should monitoring of student progress. Schemes of work are developing and the preparation of these could be shared across the team. The opportunities to incorporate visits out and visitors into the department to develop an awareness of chemistry in the world of work and daily life would increase the range of learning opportunities for students. The opportunities offered by the use of ICT in administration and teaching and learning in chemistry could be usefully explored.

## ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

270. The focus was on design and technology, but Home Economics- Food AS and A2 were sampled. In GNVQ Health and Social Care-full intermediate, and GNVQ Health and Social Care, students were particularly enthusiastic about the course and how it was developing their maturity. Last year eight students achieved pass grades. The majority of this year's entry, from a higher ability group, are predicted merits or distinctions with a small number of passes. In food, students develop knowledge about critical issues that affect people and how to manage resources, as well as home economics. Results at AS last year were just below national average but higher results are predicted this year from a larger group. This subject is re-establishing itself after a two year lapse. Teaching in both subjects was consistently very good or excellent.

### Design and Technology

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

#### Strengths

- Teaching is consistently very good or excellent with well planned lessons.
- Relationships between staff and students are excellent.
- Students work hard, are enthusiastic and achieve good results.

- Students integrate a wide range of practical, graphical and design skills to produce work of good quality.
- Leadership and management of the department is very good, with well co-ordinated team teaching.

Areas for improvement

- There is a lack of ICT to support researching, folio presentation and designing.
- The examination results of boys need raising.

272. Both AS and A level Design and Technology – Product Design were inspected.

273. Standards in the AS level course are good. Last year eight students entered and achieved a 100 per cent pass rate from grades B to E, compared to the national average of 86.8 per cent. Current students continue to produce work of at least the same standard. A level results over the last three years have varied with fluctuating numbers being entered. Boys' performance was just below the national average in 1999 and 2000. Girls achieved above average in 1999, but none were entered in 2000. Last year's results were good with a full range of grades being achieved and were above national average. Girls achieved the higher grades whilst boys continued to be just below national average.

274. Attainment in lessons is good at AS level. Students start the course with a variety of strengths in different areas. They are brought together with new design and resistant materials skills very quickly. The scheme of work has been carefully planned to provide for short projects, initially to develop graphical imagination and creativity, as well as practical modelling skills. All students had then made good progress with a chair project which was designed and modelled using a wide variety of materials in only six weeks. When starting to design a radio case, their understanding of the design process and the need to address a target audience was being developed by a teacher with expert knowledge and expertise. Students worked independently on the set task. They also gained new materials knowledge. An industrial link project had also been included in the later part of the AS course to allow all students to work with a local company. Special arrangements had been made to allow the only A2 student, who has special needs, to continue studying the subject. Her graphical work was of outstanding quality and her practical work was good. Her interest and enthusiasm were very apparent. All work seen showed originality of thought with good use of the design process. Higher level graphical skills were being developed through the use of homework, whilst models showed good progression with materials skills. Previous years' high quality major projects and photographs were being used as exemplar material for teaching.

275. All teaching is well planned. Teachers use their considerable subject knowledge to impart skills to students quickly. Teachers support each other well. Lessons progress at a good pace and are broken down into discussion and practical sessions. Design language is used and reference is made to industrial practices. The industrial link project is very beneficial to all students and is directing them to higher level design courses. Teachers have high expectations of students and inspire them through their enthusiasm for the subject. Students respond by listening carefully and working hard. They develop independent learning skills through individual design briefs. Teachers give good individual support and encouragement to all students. Work is monitored well with good written and oral feedback given. Students are being well prepared for all components of the examination. Discussions with students reflect good motivation and enthusiasm for the subject. Higher level key skills of researching, critical analysis, development and evaluation are being developed.



276. Leadership in the department is very good. The course is well planned with good progression to develop a wide range of skills with depth of understanding. It is taught by two teachers with expert knowledge. Changes have been made, to the course in the light of last year's experience with AS, to develop skills to a higher level. Accommodation is good, well ordered and clean and very well supported by able technicians. The work of the department to encourage more students onto the course is being hampered by recruitment problems. The head of faculty has made considerable progress in just over one year.

## **BUSINESS**

### **Business Studies**

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

#### **Strengths**

- Good results in the GNVQ Advanced course.
- Very well organised work experience that is linked with the curriculum.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge that is well taught to students on advanced courses.
- Well organised leadership of the department, with a strong commitment to supporting the school's vision of its role within the community.

#### **Areas for development**

- The organisation and implementation of a high quality GNVQ Intermediate course.
- Continue to develop the rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning.
- Management structures that will solve the current overlap of roles and responsibilities between the business studies and GNVQ departments.
- Marking that consistently offers detailed guidance on how to improve and informs students of their achievement against national standards and their own targets.

278. The 2001 GNVQ advanced results were very good, within the range of the top quarter of schools in the country. These were better than those of previous years, which were broadly in line with national averages. Until 2001, the results of the A level business studies course had been similar, but there was a drop in attainment for that year and results were well below average. Students taking the newly introduced AS business studies examination did well, with two thirds obtaining the higher grades. However, as in 2000, the results of the students on the Intermediate GNVQ course were less satisfactory. No one obtained the highest grade and only half passed the course.

279. Work seen in lessons and in the students' files indicates that standards in the business studies AVCE courses remain high. Coursework is often good. Although some of the Year 13 files show that students find aspects of the finance units difficult, they persevere and, over time, produce the correct answers. Year 12 classes rapidly increase their understanding of the subject and quickly study a number of topics, ranging from market and mixed economies to detailed cost analysis. Both year groups work hard, completing case studies that often involve real life situations, such as how a local supermarket could use its human resources more effectively. Students were able to make cogent suggestions such as the introduction of a greater variety of appraisal techniques. Good teaching in lessons increased students' understanding, as when a Year 12 class made substantial progress in developing their own marketing strategy because of challenging questions. This was especially impressive as about a third of this group had entered the class with relatively low GCSE grades. In another Year 12 lesson,

the teacher's clear explanation of price skimming resulted in good and easy learning of marketing strategies,

280. The poor A level results in 2001 are not reflected in the work of the current students. Both Year 12 and Year 13 students produce carefully prepared coursework and assignments, covering a range of issues. There was good work on motivational theories and the aircraft industry, with evidence that Year 12 students, from a wide ability range, are making good progress. All students in a Year 12 class had to contribute to class discussions and a good range of teaching and learning styles maintained interest. Excellent on-going summaries of the main learning points greatly enhanced understanding. Year 13 students had been well taught and many produced good critical path analysis work with explicit references to aspects such as lean production.
281. Overall, standards reached by students taking the GNVQ business studies Intermediate course are just satisfactory. Some work well and have learnt about a range of business activity such as running a company and industrial relations. Their weekly work placement provides practical examples to reinforce what has been taught at school and, overall, good progress is being made. Other students are less committed and are not consistently involved in the lessons. They are not currently on the work placement programme and do not benefit from being able to link their learning with the workplace or the discipline of work.
282. In the lessons observed teaching in the GNVQ Intermediate lessons was satisfactory overall, although staff had to work hard to maintain the concentration of students drawn from a wide range of ability. Despite an attempt to provide suitable resources, many of the students were not very interested in the desk bound task that required them to write about the European Commission. Therefore, learning for some was just satisfactory. Another class acquired a reasonable understanding of the attitudes of the various stakeholders in a company. There was not a strong sense of a learning partnership between students and teachers, nor of an approach that integrated pastoral care with academic teaching.
283. The teaching of the advanced courses is good overall and the quality of the students' written work over time indicates that teaching is thorough. New knowledge has been briskly acquired, and carefully chosen case studies allow students to successfully apply their new understanding to a range of contexts. Teaching in class was always satisfactory and was good in two thirds of the lessons. Information and communications technology is effectively used and the courses support the development of literacy and numeracy. Teachers care about the progress of their students and bring their own magazines and other resources into school. Teaching would have been even better if there had been a consistent focus on the interdependence of all aspects of business activity, thereby developing the students' overview of the subject. The more able could have been challenged to contribute. On occasions, there were too few references to basic ideas and concepts.
284. The majority of students approach their work with maturity and a responsible attitude. They appreciate the teachers' good subject knowledge and their willingness to give extra help, such as marking extra examination questions. Most students work hard, as indicated by much of their coursework which is well researched and often of a high standard.
285. Business studies is well led by a very new head of faculty. A particular strength of the department is its expertise and commitment to furthering the ethos of the school. It is playing a major role in promoting business education and the concept of enterprise as a

whole school activity. Within the department, good progress has been made in establishing structures, transforming accommodation, and providing other resources. A new handbook, as yet incomplete, has been introduced. Although course requirements require a degree of joint assessment, the monitoring of teaching and learning is under developed. For example, the head of business studies has only just started to make use of assessment data. The allocation of responsibilities and roles between the business studies and GNVQ departments overlap and hinder the coherent development of business education.

286. The room used as a base for the GNVQ Intermediate course is unsuitable, has an uncared-for look and an unattractive appearance. It is cramped and does not facilitate the range of active teaching and learning strategies that is the mark of good practice for this type of course. It does not send a signal that this course has status. For example, there is no on-going access to good quality computers and software. Students who do not participate in the weekly work experience face a very unstructured day, not conducive to the development of good study skills.

## HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

### Physical Education

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

#### Strengths

- Examination results have followed a steady upward trend in recent years.
- Very good leadership of the subject with a clear purpose and direction for the subject's development at post-16.
- Committed teachers who have very good subject knowledge and as a team provide a good coverage for all areas of the AS and A level syllabus.
- Teachers work hard to be inclusive enabling a wide range of students to participate in the subject.

#### Areas for improvement

- Develop the use of ICT as a tool for learning in GCE AS and A level.
- Review the policy for marking work to ensure a consistency of approach across the faculty.
- Review schemes of work and teaching styles to ensure more opportunities exist for developing students' independent learning.

288. The subject has been offered at GCE A level at the school since 1993 and over that period there has been a steady rise in both participation rates and examination results. The most recent GCE A level results showed a steady improvement on previous years. All students who took the A level examination in 2001 gained a pass grade. Almost 60 per cent were grades A - C, compared to 56 per cent nationally, and no student achieved lower than a D grade. Although numbers entered were relatively small, girls' achievement was higher than that of boys. AS level has been introduced successfully and of the 23 students entered for the 2001 examination all but 2 gained a pass grade, with 48 per cent gaining grades A - C. Overall, results are broadly in line with schools nationally and students do well compared to their performance at GCSE.

289. The standard of written work of current students is in line with that to be expected. Their speaking and listening skills and understanding of difficult concepts is slightly above that normally seen. All teaching groups contain students across the ability range and the

majority are making good progress. Most students are able to understand and relate some of the more difficult theoretical elements of the syllabus to their own experience and the practical work they undertake. For example, in a Year 13 class focussing on sports psychology, students were learning about Bandura's four stage model of self-efficacy, and were able effectively to relate this model to the stages that a novice high jumper would be coached through in order to learn the skills involved in the event. Students' performances in the more practical elements of the course are above the standard normally seen. For example, in a Year 12 AS level lesson focusing on developing basketball skills, students were able to plan, refine and carry out a series of drills aimed at beating a defender in a position close to the basket.

290. Teaching is good, and students make good progress and learn well as a result. A particular strength of the teaching is the good subject knowledge teachers have. Teachers are deployed effectively to teach the areas of the syllabus where they have particular strengths. For example, in a Year 12 AS level lesson focussing on anatomy, the teacher was able to respond with a good deal of confidence and precision to students' questioning and their need to seek clarification when they had not fully understood. Teachers set clear learning objectives for the lesson and share these with students. There were some good examples seen of teachers using different learning styles and providing students with opportunities to develop their skills for independent learning. For example in a Year 13 lesson, with good teacher support, students worked well to plan, develop and teach a netball lesson to a Year 9 class. Afterwards, through good teacher questioning, they were aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the lesson and of how they could improve further. However, this is an area where further development in teaching is needed in order to engage students in their own learning. All teachers are currently undertaking training in the use of ICT as a tool to aid learning in the subject. The use of ICT in lessons would also aid students' development of independent learning skills.
291. Much of the written work demanded of students takes the form of specific worksheets prepared by teachers, students' own notes, and structured tests. Marking is generally good and usually contains comments encouraging students and informing them what it is that they need to do to improve further. Percentage marks are given on tests, but students are not usually given information which relates this to a grade in the examination course. There is some good practice in the marking of students' work, but there is a need for a more consistent approach shared by all teachers in the faculty.
292. The majority of students learn well. They are generally attentive and participate well in discussion and small group work. They listen to others' views and contribute in a mature way to support, or counter, points being expressed. For example, in a Year 13 lesson where the focus was on sport in society, students were able to explore the subtle differences between what constitutes 'deviance' and 'cheating' in global sport, with both boys and girls participating equally. This participation was particularly effective in moving the learning forward.
293. The sports hall and floodlit astroturf provide excellent facilities for practical working. The provision of a regular classroom for the teaching of theory lessons would enable teachers to have more ready access to their resources and provide greater opportunity to enhance the learning environment with displays and key words. Although there is some good progress being made in establishing target setting based on good analysis of students' performance in tests, there is still a need to be more specific regarding what it is students need to do to improve further. The good teaching and learning are a result of the good management and leadership of the head of faculty, ably supported by a strong team of teachers. There is a shared commitment in the faculty to develop the subject at

post-16 further, both at A and AS level, and as an enrichment and extra-curricular experience for all post-16 students.

## **VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA**

### **Art and Design**

**294.** Overall the quality of provision in art is very good.

#### **Strengths**

- 2001 GCE A level results.
- Teaching is good and students are encouraged to work independently.
- The subject is well managed and well led.
- Students work confidently to explore their own ideas and concepts.
- Good use is made of research in visual diaries.

#### **Areas for improvement**

- Over reliance on traditional processes, media and materials.
- Use of modern technology, ICT and photography.
- Boys' achievements in GCE examinations.
- Work-related, vocational courses.

**295.** Through art, students are given ample opportunity to develop their own concepts, ideas, attitudes and beliefs. They are encouraged to develop deeper awareness of themselves as individuals operating within a particular social environment. Consequently they are affected by, and respond to, events that happen around them. They are highly motivated and make good progress.

**296.** In the 2001 GCE A level examination results for all students were above the national average for students at this level. Over half achieved grades A – B, while all twenty-five students achieved grades A – E. Girls' achievement was much better than boys, and there is significant disparity between the achievement of girls and boys in the school.

**297.** In general most students have made good progress from Key Stage 4 to Year 12. Year 12 students have developed the capacity for working with much greater focus and for sustaining concentration over much longer periods of time. Most have acquired reasonable skills in the manipulation of a range of different media and materials in two and three dimensions. They have acquired the capacity to think and act with some degree of independence, are productive and work at a good pace. They work in a controlled and disciplined manner. Teachers actively encourage the students to take much greater responsibility for their own learning at this level. In many instances they have responsibility for selecting their own subject matter for investigation, and for setting their own briefs. It is evident that many find this a challenging process, but they make good progress and develop the capacity for resolving problems of increasing complexity. As their confidence in their own abilities grows they are prepared to take the initiative and experiment with a much greater range of media and materials.

**298.** By Year 13, students have worked effectively to develop their knowledge and understanding and to acquire suitable skills and techniques in the manipulation of media and materials. They work with much greater focus and explore their ideas through the use of tin foil, plastics, wood, plaster, tissue paper and PVA glue in their collages. Although they work with fairly traditional materials some of the students succeed in producing highly creative and personal images. Visual diaries are used effectively to

collect and store a wide range of research material from both primary and secondary sources. By this stage students have acquired a much deeper understanding of the art and design process and have the ability to develop this research material into complex and interesting final pieces of work. The quality of work in these visual diaries demonstrates that these students are highly motivated in their desire to communicate their ideas and express their feelings through art and design activities. Girls continue to produce work of a higher standard than boys.

299. Teaching ranges from good to very good in sixth form lessons and is good overall. Consequently students learn well. There is evidence of very good planning before lessons, which improves and informs the line of questioning during lessons. Teachers possess sound background knowledge and understanding which they use to guide, inform and support students. They place great emphasis, however, on encouraging students to develop greater independence in thought and action when carrying out initial research. At regular intervals throughout the course students are asked to discuss their work with other members of the group. This is to develop their capacity for critical thinking and to improve their ability to evaluate their own work. It is a characteristic of teaching and learning at this level that teachers place great emphasis on the need for students to find resolutions to problems that they have encountered individually. The intention is that, over time, this process will enable students to resolve problems of greater complexity and thus improve the overall standard of their art and design work. Teachers set very clear objectives for students during lessons, as a consequence of which they know what must be achieved within pre-determined time limits. Although students are largely given responsibility for determining their own pace of working, the teachers are always on hand to ensure that ideas are moved forward in a structured manner. Most assessment is carried out on an informal one-to-one basis that involves discussion between teacher and student. Written records are kept, however, and more formal assessment takes place at least once per term. This process enables the teacher to provide feedback to the individual student on his or her progress.
300. Leadership and management are good. Students are given ample opportunity to develop their own ideas and concepts in a traditional, well-structured learning environment. Students are set challenging tasks that are derived from the GCE examination specifications. On occasions students are encouraged to devise their own briefs that have arisen out of their own world experiences. They are also expected to broaden and deepen their knowledge and understanding by investigating the work of artists, craftspeople and designers from other cultures and from other ages. This knowledge and understanding leads to improvement in terms of the depth and breadth of their own work. The head of department is aware of the concerns about boys' under-achievement and she has produced a policy document outlining procedures for improving this situation. It should be mentioned here that staffing difficulties, due to long-term illness, have had an adverse impact on the standards of students' work, particularly boys, over the past two years.
301. Progress overall has been good since the last inspection. The department recognises that the introduction of vocational art and design courses, designed to meet the needs of a broader cross-section of students, would help raise the standards of boys' work in art and design. By placing greater emphasis on design activities, such as graphic design and product design employing modern technology, photography and computer-generated imaging, it should be possible to extend greatly the range of activities on offer, thereby leading to improvement in the overall standard of students' work.

## **Theatre Studies**

302. Overall, the quality of provision in Theatre Studies is **good**.

Strengths

- Subject leadership.
- Teacher subject knowledge.
- Student response and involvement in lessons.

Areas for improvement

- Developing students' independent learning skills.
- Ensure that timing of lessons allows for effective opportunities for self and peer evaluations.

303. Standards in theatre studies are satisfactory overall. Owing to temporary staffing difficulties only one student so far has taken an AS examination, gaining an E grade. Others have taken the examination in January 2002 and await results. Of the eight students who took the AS course, four remain at A2.

304. In lessons seen during the course of inspection, standards were in line with expectations in Year 12 and good in Year 13. Students enter the course with average attainment at GCSE drama and acquire knowledge of dramatic conventions, and skills in interpreting them, in the first year. By Year 13, students show good knowledge of technical terms and can interpret text well.

305. Performance skills are sound and students overall are confident in contributing to practical work. They understand the impact of punctuation, pace and tone in performance and the ways in which mood and theme can be presented on stage.

306. The quality of teaching is good overall with some very good elements. Teacher subject knowledge is very good and teachers are skilled in providing purpose and focus to lessons through their planning.

307. Teachers challenge and support students well; for example, in a Year 13 lesson on Brecht, where high expectations of student response were ensured through effective teacher questioning. The activities planned are engaging for all students and schemes of work are detailed and provide for continuity and progression of skills development. As a result of small group sizes, however, there is a tendency for over direction from the teacher and greater use could be made of student non-taught time in preparing for lessons. Assessment of written work is supportive and sets targets for improvement. Where teaching was very good, opportunities for students to review their own learning were organised and sufficient time was allowed for this to be effective.

308. Learning is effective. Higher attaining students make greatest progress but the progress of average and lower attaining students is sound. Students acquire, consolidate and develop their understanding of the practical issues of interpreting text into performance over the two years and progress over time is good. Lessons are engaging and challenging for students and their response is never less than good. For example, in a lesson on Brecht the teacher's question "What have you learned?" prompted student discussion of the topic at a sophisticated level on the themes of 'hopelessness', 'desperation' and 'isolation'. Students work co-operatively and supportively with each other in lessons and relationships are very good. Students' independent learning outside lessons is underdeveloped at present and this limits what is being achieved in lessons.

309. The leadership and management of the subject are good. The head of department is providing clear educational direction. Good record keeping systems exist and knowledge

of students' prior attainment is used in pitching lessons at an appropriate level. The department benefits from a purpose built drama studio, but access to the school theatre is restricted during examination periods.

## Music

310. The school offers AS and A-level music and AS music technology. Lessons of all these courses were sampled during the inspection.

311. Provision for music in the sixth form is **satisfactory**.

### Strengths

- Students' attitudes.
- Relationships.
- Provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Assessment and guidance of students.

### Areas for improvement

- Pace of lessons in Year 13.
- ICT facilities.
- Involvement of non-examination students in extra-curricular activities.

312. The attainment of students in Year 13 is in line with expectation. Students are confident performers and good sight-readers. They have adequate listening skills. They are weaker at harmonising Bach chorales, having not yet acquired complete understanding of the rules and procedures of figured bass. There were no A level candidates in 2001. Numbers entered for the examination in previous years were too small to compare with national averages but were in line with expectations based on students' prior attainment. The AS music technology course is new this year. Year 12 and 13 students taking this subject are reaching appropriate standards; for example, they understand about different ways of using microphones, recognise how these have been used in different recordings, and are developing confidence in using them effectively without teacher intervention. The single Year 12 AS music student is attaining appropriately for this stage of her course.

313. Students' achievement is satisfactory. Students in Year 13 have systematically developed their skills over the course. Standards are highest in performance, where students also benefit from extra-curricular instrumental tuition. Their response to aural work over the course has varied in quality. The Y12 music AS student is also making satisfactory progress. The progress of students in the AS music technology group is good because they work together effectively in lessons, drawing well on each other's skills as well as those of their teacher. There are no significant variations in the attainment or achievement of students from different ethnic groups or of different gender.

314. Students have very positive attitudes towards music. They come to lessons willing to learn. They work well with each other and with staff, who treat them more like college students than school students. However, Year 13 students appear relaxed about their work. They engage well with teachers, but they are not consistent in applying the knowledge they have. Year 13 files show little evidence of personal research beyond what has been set for all. Students on both AS courses tend to offer minimal written answers to questions on aural work, but in class they are more forthcoming. They show real commitment in practical activities.



315. Teaching is at least satisfactory and for AS music technology it is good. Teachers have good subject knowledge, which enables them to stretch students' thinking through focused questioning in class. Teachers' written responses to work are detailed, especially for essay style answers which contain helpful suggestions for improvement. Homework set is relevant. However, the pace of Year 13 lessons is sometimes relaxed. Aims for the lesson and timings for work are not shared at the start, and students are not encouraged to complete work promptly, and move on. As a result, the pace of learning in Year 13 is modest. AS music technology students learn more quickly, because each student's projects have been assigned to challenge that individual. They also learn from each other through well-structured group work. Because all the sixth-form courses are new, teachers have had to be very creative about resources; they have shown imagination in drawing on their own personal CD libraries.
316. The breadth of courses offered is good. Flexibility about timetabling has enabled students in both Year 12 and Year 13 to study AS music technology, and a single Year 12 AS candidate to take some lessons with Year 13, making cost effective groups and providing more opportunities for students to learn through shared work.
317. A range of extra-curricular activities offers good opportunities for students to perform publicly. Students taking A level and AS music make significant contributions to events such as the annual Christmas concert, playing as soloists and contributing to chamber ensembles as well as larger groups such as the choir, orchestra and windband. However, few students apart from the examination candidates regularly attend rehearsals of these groups. Most of the musically gifted and talented sixth-formers attend the county's Saturday Music School which is held on the premises, and extend their performing skills through the wide range of opportunities which this presents, from string quartets in a local church to major civic occasions.
318. Assessment systems are very good. Students are well known to staff and get much individual guidance, for example, through carefully chosen project work in AS music technology, and choice of options within the A level syllabus to capitalise on students' strong performing skills.
319. The department is managed well. Although the head of department has only recently arrived she has already successfully introduced the AS music technology course. Book provision in the library is good, but there are not enough CDs. There is nowhere for sixth-formers to listen quietly to music which furthers their studies, and students' access to resources in their private study time is limited, both by the availability of accommodation and technology resources.

## HUMANITIES

### Geography

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

#### Strengths

- Standards in examinations are above average.
- Students achieve well and have a good grasp of geographical concepts.
- Teaching is good with well-structured lessons with varying approaches.
- The subject is well led with student progress monitored well.

#### Areas for improvement

- More independent learning for most students.

- Continue to develop information and communication technology.

321. Standards overall are above average with several students achieving their best individual result in geography. In 2001 three students from an entry of eight attained grade A or B. The entry was unusually low; normally classes are approximately twice the size. The 2001 results continue the pattern of good achievement at A level set over recent years. The AS level results are also promising and nearly all students continued to study the subject into Year 13. Both boys and girls achieved well. Students of all abilities are welcomed into the department
322. Students' written work shows a good grasp of geographical processes and of environmental issues. The major coursework assignments show students' initiative in researching a chosen topic in depth, and in presenting their findings clearly and effectively. The assignment of a student examining urban decay in a town centre was exceptional in its analysis and presentation. It also demonstrated the skilful use of ICT for data handling. In Year 12, students show good knowledge of physical, rural and urban geography. Recent coursework involving a coastal study shows how well they can use their skills in a practical assignment.
323. Teaching in the sixth form is good or very good and as a result students learn well. All teachers are well qualified and possess very good subject knowledge. They are enthusiastic and go out of their way to encourage, help and motivate students. Teachers produce lessons with sharp objectives, brisk pace and a range of teaching styles. They are especially effective with the less able students in the group. Extended writing and assignments are marked regularly, with useful comments giving students an accurate judgement of the quality of their work. In the latter half of Year 13, students are given ample opportunity to use their initiative in an extended eight-week study on aspects of global development. In this study it is expected that ICT resources will be used extensively.
324. Students learn well. They are attentive and respond well to the challenge of their teachers. They are appreciative of the support they receive and can talk authoritatively about the course they are studying. They mostly use the great variety of resources well and benefit from the coursework assignments. However, there is a disparity between the level of ICT expertise observed in the work of different students. There is good progression between Years 12 and 13 with students building on the work they have previously learned. For example, in Year 12, students identify issues relating to change in urban landscapes and apply this knowledge in their Year 13 coursework.
325. The subject is managed well. The schemes of work are up to date and use contemporary data. This brings immediacy to the subject that contributes to the students' interest and learning. Students are regularly made aware of their level of achievement and are told what they need to do to improve their grades. There are satisfactory stocks of current texts and resources. Teachers hold regular meetings to share best practice and monitor new developments. Students are given the opportunity to enhance their learning with outside visits to courses and lectures appropriate to the subject.
326. The progress noted in the last inspection report is being maintained. Information and communication technology has been introduced and the department is continuing to develop this as an integral part of students' learning.

## History

327. Overall the quality of provision in history is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- Students enjoy history and show positive attitudes.
- Teachers are diligent and committed and support students well.

Areas for improvement

- Some students are over-reliant upon teachers.
- Teachers need to develop more structured strategies to promote high level thinking.

328. The most recent GCE A level examinations saw two candidates entered. Both gained pass grades close to expectations based upon their previous attainment. The average points score was above the school average but below the national average. In 2000 ten students entered the examination. The A - E pass rate was 100 per cent and the A/B pass rate was 40 per cent. The average points score was above the national average. Eleven students were entered for the first year of the AS level examination in 2001. Here the A - E pass rate was 100 per cent, above the national average. One student gained a B grade and three students gained C grades. Overall, students' achievement was slightly above that expected from their previous attainment.

329. Lesson observation and scrutiny of students' work indicate that the current standards of attainment are close to expectations in Year 13 but above expectations in Year 12. There is a range of ability in both year groups. In Year 12 several able students have produced carefully structured, fluent written work showing mature analytical thinking at an early stage in their sixth form work. In two observed lessons these students gave presentations showing sound analysis of the issues surrounding the consolidation of power in Germany by Hitler in the 1930s. All in these groups were confident in responding to questioning and were able to recall relevant information and offer brief but cogent explanations. In Year 13 thinking is sound and well supported with factual reference, but few students demonstrate significantly high level analysis. In both groups there is little evidence of appropriate reference to the views of noted historians. Critical analysis of sources is not well developed.

330. All students enjoy the subject and are keen to succeed. Most of the 2000 AS level group decided to continue their studies into Year 13. Although some students, particularly in Year 13, are quiet in lessons all do contribute to whole group and paired activities. The quality of students' discussions in lessons is varied and often relies heavily on effective interventions by the teacher. Students' files show thorough and detailed note taking and some evidence of appropriate reading. Note taking is not always as concise as it could be but, in discussion, all confirmed they were comfortable with their approach to file management.

331. The sound progress made by all students in both year groups owes much to their commitment and diligence. It is also due to the good support they receive from their teachers both during and beyond lessons. Teaching in post-16 lessons is always satisfactory and often good. Lessons are well planned and managed with appropriate expectations of students. Teachers have good subject knowledge and use it effectively to introduce and review topics. They are quick to engage students through questioning and in paired and small group activities. Occasionally the tasks set lack the structure needed to ensure high level thinking and discussion, and are allowed to continue for a little too long.

332. Teachers offer very detailed comment when marking extended written work, offering suggestions for improvement. However, there is no regular assessment of students'

progress in other areas important for success in the subject, such as the development of their study skills and communication skills.

333. Resources for study are satisfactory. Students have access to a range of texts along with extracts from recently published articles and information from the Internet. The library provides access to a further good range of texts and articles.
334. The leadership and management of post-16 history are satisfactory. Course administration is good. The department has looked critically at its performance in the 2000 AS level course and made some changes in its approaches to planning and teaching. There are indications that this has had benefits for the current Year 12 group.
335. Standards in history are rising and the subject is increasingly popular. This is reflected in the growing numbers opting for and completing the AS and A level courses.
336. Provision is satisfactory and improving. Standards in 2001 were in line with expectations. Attainment in the current Year 12 is above expectations. Students enjoy the subject and are well supported by their teachers.

## ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

337. There are three A level English courses which are offered at AS and A2 level: English language, English literature and joint English language and literature. Lessons from all three of the courses were sampled.
338. The school offers both French and German at AS and A2 level. The inspection focused on A level French but some lessons of German were also observed.

### English

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

#### Strengths

- Teacher subject knowledge across the department.
- Relationships with students.

#### Areas for improvement

- Develop a wider range of strategies to promote active student learning.
- Build more effectively on students' prior knowledge from GCSE particularly in English literature.
- Ensure that AS teaching meets the needs of students of all abilities.

340. The department offers three courses at AS/A2 level: English language, English literature and English language/literature. After a lengthy period of staffing difficulties the department has managed to retain this level of provision well.
341. Standards achieved in English language are good. In 2001, there was a 100 per cent pass rate for the 28 students who took the examination and more than half attained A/B grades. Over the past three years, the subject has been a popular choice for students and results have been above the national average. In English literature, there has been a declining trend in the number of students choosing the subject over the past three years and results have been below national averages. Uptake of the course in 2001 has improved and currently 23 students are studying at AS level.

342. Attainment in lessons observed was sound overall, with students showing understanding of texts and characters studied and an increasing ability to use technical vocabulary and understand linguistic concepts. Many students lack confidence in discussion work, particularly the least able. The written work of students of all abilities shows a high level of personal engagement, particularly in language study, and individual projects show evidence of the development of sound research skills. Spelling inaccuracies are, however, noticeable in the work of average and lower attaining students.
343. The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall with some good and very good elements. Teachers' subject knowledge, particularly in the language courses, is very good. Teachers' planning has clear learning objectives that meet the requirements of the course. Although teachers plan for a variety of activities in lessons, sometimes not enough allowance is made for the learning needs of all students, in particular those of the least able. For example, in a Year 12 English language lesson, the teacher grouped students according to ability for a discussion activity but the least able were unable to engage with the material initially owing to limited teacher guidance at the outset of the lesson. In one to one discussions and in working with small groups, teacher support and guidance is good. Teaching is at its best in English language and English language/literature courses. In a Year 13 lesson, students worked well in a group discussion as a result of clear structures and timings for activities and through effective use of a plenary session, which was challenging and confidence building for students. Pace was less effective in lessons where teacher exposition or group discussions were too extended, and at times students were insufficiently challenged by extended periods of individual work. Students are often well supported in their written work by detailed teacher marking.
344. Student response to lessons is good. They often display engagement and interest in English and the more able and average ability students can sustain concentration for considerable periods of time. Learning overall is satisfactory and in language courses students develop a good understanding of the effects of linguistic and literary features in texts, given a limited prior knowledge of linguistic terminology and concepts. In English literature, there is no Year 13 group at present, but progress in Year 12 lessons observed was slow and did not build sufficiently on prior learning at GCSE. The most able students make these links independently but the least able need more structured support to improve their rate of progress. Students' rates of learning in pair or group work are variable and students lack the skills to make the most of these learning opportunities. Evidence from scrutiny of students' work shows that, overall, students make sound progress over time with the most able making the most progress and producing very good coursework which shows a sophisticated level of analysis of writing.
345. The leadership and management of English post-16 are good. Eight subject specialists teach at post-16 and responsibility for each of the courses rests with specific members of the team, which is helpful in offering clear educational direction. Considerable expertise has been developed in the teaching of English language and English language/literature and there are good examples of collaborative working on schemes of work and the development of resources.
346. The previous report referred to results in English literature being better than those in English language and that situation has now been reversed. The good practice, which has been developed in language teaching, is not yet as apparent in teaching of English literature, and monitoring systems have focused so far on moderation of students' work or curriculum issues rather than teaching and learning styles.

## French

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

### Strengths

- Students are given effective guidance on their courses and good advice on independent study.
- Permanent staff have good subject knowledge and this is reflected in the overall quality of teaching.

### Areas for improvement

- The quality of students' written work is variable with some students insecure in their knowledge of grammar.
- Students' pronunciation is not always accurate.

348. Over the last four years, results have varied. In general, they have been in line with the national average, except in 2000 when they were well below the national average. The most recent results have substantially improved, with nearly half the students obtaining an A or B grade.

349. The evidence from work seen in lessons and in students' files shows that standards are now average. However, current numbers in Year 13 are too small and comparisons with the national average are inappropriate. Students achieve appropriately with the most capable making good progress. They demonstrate good understanding of authentic texts adapted from newspaper articles and speak with a fair degree of fluency. However, pronunciation still has anglicised features. Students have good research skills and a grasp of topic vocabulary, but the quality of written work sometimes lacks grammatical accuracy.

350. Attainment in Year 12 is also average. The majority of students achieve appropriately against their prior attainment at this stage of the course. The majority achieve well in listening and comprehension. However some are less confident when speaking, especially if they are discussing a new topic. Pronunciation is not always accurate.

351. The quality of teaching in French in the sixth form overall is good. In the best teaching authentic resources, which reflect different aspects of culture, are effectively used to stimulate discussion and provide opportunities for students to express their opinions and question each other. Clear ground rules are established for using the target language and students respond well in their attempts to sustain its use both in communicating with the teacher and each other. There is an appropriate emphasis on the teaching of grammar, especially in the light of the demand of examinations, and this is helping the students consolidate their learning and mastery of tenses. Activities are well planned, with opportunities for students to practise complex structures. In the best teaching, opportunities are always provided for students to summarise what they have learnt. However this not consistent.

352. Most teachers in the faculty offer both French and German, and good teamwork provides students with a positive ethos for studying languages at this level. There is an effective process of curriculum review to inform planning. A good instance of this is the emphasis put on more thorough grounding of students in developing their grammatical skills to cope with the transition from GCSE to post-16 studies. There are good contacts with France and students can apply their language skills in work experience placements.