

INSPECTION REPORT

SIR THOMAS RICH'S SCHOOL

Gloucester

LEA area: Gloucestershire

Unique reference number: 115717

Headteacher: Mr I L Kellie

Reporting inspector: Mr A Shield
3569

Dates of inspection: 8 – 11 October 2001

Inspection number: 189985

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Grammar (selective)
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 to 18 years
Gender of pupils:	Boys. Mixed sixth form
School address:	Oakleaze Gloucester Gloucestershire
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Miss J J Wilton
Date of previous inspection:	7 October 1996

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31159	Mr C Simmonds	Team inspector
20421	Ms E Raitt	Team inspector

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM INSPECTION TEAM

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Sir Thomas Rich's is a boys' grammar school for pupils aged 11 – 18, with girls in the sixth form. Situated on the northern edge of Gloucester, it is a Beacon School and has been a Language College since September 2000. Pupils are drawn from the City of Gloucester and from a wide surrounding area, including Cheltenham and the Forest of Dean. Most pupils come from socially advantaged homes, although not exclusively so, and some pupils come from more deprived backgrounds. At around two per cent, the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is well below average. There are 758 pupils on roll, with 208 in the sixth form, of which 33 are girls. The school selects its pupils by ability on entry both to Year 7 and to the sixth form, and attainment on entry is well above average in relation to other schools nationally. However tests on entry indicate that attainment is not as high as in some grammar schools. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs is consistently well below average, with just ten pupils, including two in the sixth form on the register of special educational needs; this represents less than two per cent of the school roll. One has a Statement of Special Educational Need for behavioural problems. The majority of pupils are of white UK heritage, but with 37 pupils of Indian heritage and small numbers from other ethnic groups. Although 48 pupils have English as an additional language, all are confident English speakers.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a very good school in which consistently high standards are promoted by very good teaching. All pupils achieve well in relation to their prior attainment. The headteacher, teachers and all other staff have created a climate of good relationships and behaviour in which pupils have the confidence to achieve well. The school provides very good value for money.

What the school does well

- Very high standards at the end of Key Stage 3, in GCSE examinations and at A-level are the result of very good teaching which enables pupils to make good progress.
- The very effective leadership of the headteacher and other senior staff focuses strongly on promoting high standards of academic and personal development.
- The very good range of well-supported extra-curricular activities effectively enriches the curriculum, provided by a committed and hard working staff.
- The very good personal development of pupils is strongly promoted by the very good provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The very positive ethos for learning challenges pupils to achieve and promotes excellent attitudes to learning.

What could be improved

- The use of information and communication technology in some subjects

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Overall improvement since the last inspection in October 1996 has been good. Test and examination results at Key Stage 3, GCSE and A-level have all improved; improvements at GCSE in particular have been very marked. The quality of teaching has improved and in particular the percentage of very good and better teaching is higher than at the time of the last inspection. Key issues from the previous inspection regarding the curriculum and middle management have been satisfactorily addressed although there is more to be done to ensure consistency at head of department level, and meeting the requirements for collective worship remains an issue.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1998	1999	2000	2000
GCSE examinations	A*	A*	A*	B
A-levels/AS-levels	A*	A	A*	

Key

well above average A
 above average B
 average C
 below average D
 well below average E

A indicates that the school's results were very high and within the top five per cent of schools nationally.*

In 2000, the school's Key Stage 3 test results in English, mathematics and science were very high in comparison with schools nationally. Comparison with other grammar schools indicates that results were well below average in English, above average in mathematics and average in science. The below average results in English were the consequence of fewer boys reaching Level 7 than in other grammar schools. However given the wider ability intake of Sir Thomas Rich's in comparison with many other grammar schools, this represents good achievement, and results in 2001 show a marked improvement in the percentage of pupils reaching Level 7 in English. Results in all three subjects have held steady at these high levels over the last few years and high standards have been maintained in 2001. The trend in the school's average points score for all subjects has improved in line with the improving national trend.

One hundred per cent of pupils gained five or more A* to C grades in 2000. This was very high in comparison with schools nationally and with other grammar schools. The average points score was also very high and above average in comparison with other grammar schools. In relation to their prior attainment at the end of Key Stage 3, pupils achieved well, making above average progress. The school maintained these high standards in 2001. Over the last three years results have been consistently very high, and the improving trend has been above the national trend.

GCSE results in all subjects were all significantly above average, but average points scores were particularly high in biology, chemistry, geography, history, mathematics and physics. Pupils in 2000 met the targets set for them by the school. Those set for 2002 are both challenging and achievable.

A-level results in 2000 were very high in comparison with other schools and similar to results in previous years. Both boys and girls do equally well. Students did particularly well in biology, business studies, English, general studies, geography, and less well in computer studies, history and music.

In work seen, the standards of pupils' work in English, mathematics, science and geography were well above average at the end of both key stages and in the sixth form. Pupils' achievements are good, given their attainment on entry.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Excellent. Pupils are keen to learn and have very positive attitudes which make a powerful contribution to their achievements.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. Many pupils demonstrate thoughtful and sensitive behaviour both in and outside classrooms.

Personal development and relationships	Very good and excellent in the sixth form. The quality of relationships amongst the whole school community is a strength. Senior pupils act with maturity and take their responsibilities seriously.
Attendance	Excellent. Attendance levels are very high and the zero rate of unauthorised absence is well below average.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

The quality of teaching is very good throughout the school, including in the sixth form, and has improved since the time of the previous inspection. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed and nearly one half of lessons was very good or excellent. Teaching in English, mathematics and science is very good throughout the school.

High expectations, good relationships, good pace of learning and effective classroom management characterise much of the good teaching. Planning is effective in meeting the needs of all pupils. The teaching of both literacy and numeracy is good. The quality of marking is usually very good, and pupils are clear about their progress and what they should do to improve. In almost all cases, the quality of learning matches the quality of teaching, helped by pupils' excellent attitudes in lessons. Most pupils confidently take responsibility for their own learning.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good. The curriculum has good breadth and balance, although statutory requirements for all pupils to study design and technology in Key Stage 4 are not met. The very good range of extra-curricular activities enriches the curriculum.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. The small number of pupils is treated sensitively and they make good progress.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good. A strong moral ethic underpins the work of the school and spiritual and moral issues are addressed in a number of subjects. Social development is actively encouraged and there are many opportunities for pupils to take responsibility. Cultural development is provided well through good opportunities in music, art and drama.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Good. Child protection and welfare procedures are satisfactory, as is the pastoral support provided by tutors. Assessment systems are good, but are not consistently effective in all subjects.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good. The headteacher and senior managers are providing clear educational direction. They are well supported by managers and staff at all levels, and all staff are committed to maintain and improve standards.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Good. Governors are committed and hardworking and bring a wide range of experience and expertise to the school.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good. The school monitors its performance in external examinations carefully, and has recently put in place systems to monitor teaching and learning and spread best practice.
The strategic use of resources	Good. The budget is prudently managed, and best value principles are applied wherever possible.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That their child likes school and there is an expectation that he or she will work hard and achieve their best • That behaviour is good and standards of self-discipline high • That good teaching leads to good progress • That the school is well led and managed and that its purpose and direction are clear • That the school is helping their child to become mature and responsible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A small minority expressed a wish to work more closely with the school

Parents are very supportive of the school and their children's learning. Inspectors largely agree with parents' views, although they consider that there are many opportunities for parents to contribute to the life of the school if they wish.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

There are 208 students in the sixth form of whom 33 are girls. Most are of white UK heritage although there is a small number from minority ethnic backgrounds, mostly Indian. All speak English confidently. The school provides a good range of AS- and A-level courses. Around three-quarters of students from Year 11 continue into the sixth form, where the minimum entry requirements of at least five GCSE passes at grade B are strictly adhered to. In each year about twenty students, including girls are recruited from other schools. A-level results are well above average, and all students embark on two-year programmes leading to A-level.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The overall quality of provision in the sixth form is very good, and is very cost-effective. Standards are very high in comparison with national figures, and students achieve well. Very good teaching and mature and responsible attitudes by students have ensured these standards have been maintained at this level in recent years. Teaching is particularly effective in English, mathematics, biology and geography. The sixth form is very well led and managed. The programme of curricular and enrichment activities is well designed to meet the needs of all students. The main strengths and areas that could be improved are:

Strengths

- Very high standards promoted by very good and sometimes outstanding teaching
- The maturity, confidence and poise of students, and their excellent attitudes to their studies contribute strongly to their good progress
- Excellent relationships amongst the students themselves and between staff and students

What could be improved

- Greater consistency across all subjects in the use of information and communication technology
- The guidance and support given to students in relation to careers choices

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	Very good. Standards are well above average as a result of very good and sometimes inspirational teaching.
Biology	Very good. Standards have been consistently well above average and result from very good teaching and the effective use of resources.
Physics	Very good. Standards are well above average despite dipping in 2001. Teaching is very good overall.
Business studies	Good. Students achieve very well and standards are above average. Teaching is good overall although a wider range of teaching strategies

	would ensure that students were more actively engaged.
Economics	Very good. Results especially last year have been very good, because of some very effective and stimulating teaching.
Art	Satisfactory. Standards are improving and are now above average. The quality of teaching is good, but some of the accommodation is poor and is restricting the range of opportunities available to students.
Music	Satisfactory. Standards are average, but group sizes are small and standards vary from year to year. Good teaching and the committed approach of students to their work ensure good progress.
Geography	Very good. Students have consistently achieved the very high standards at AS- and A-level of which they are capable. Teaching is very good and supported by the effective use of fieldwork and resources.
History	Satisfactory. Although overall pass rates at grades A-E have been well above average there has been a decline in the numbers of students gaining the higher grades. Teaching is good. Teachers use their subject expertise well to support students' independent learning.
Religious studies	Good. There are no previous examination results, but the current standard of work is above the national average. Students have a good grasp of difficult ethical and philosophical concepts. The quality of teaching is good.
English	Very good. Standards and results at A-level are well above average, as a result of good teaching. Teachers' very good subject knowledge, and the students' high level of commitment, mean that they achieve a very detailed knowledge of set texts and a mature style of writing. Students' capacity to interpret unfamiliar texts is less secure.
French	Good. Standards of speaking and listening are very high, the result of very good teaching and well-planned lessons. The use of information and communication technology to enhance learning is limited.
German	Good. Standards are above average as a result of very good teaching which inspires and motivates students to achieve well.

In other subjects, work was sampled. Teaching was generally at least good and often better. Some good teaching was seen in design, in which students were working thoughtfully and with clarity of purpose, computer studies, Spanish, chemistry, general studies, and in geology which is a particularly strong subject within the school.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Students benefit from excellent relationships with their teachers and tutors, and they generally feel well supported. Academic performance is closely monitored. The induction of students into the sixth form is very good. Whereas students are well informed about subject and higher education options, careers advice is more limited.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Very good. The school's ethos and expectations of academic success and personal development are clearly shared and understood. Examination results are carefully analysed and effective steps taken to maintain high standards. Once accepted into the sixth form, the school strongly promotes equality of access and opportunity.

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"> • Relationships with teachers are excellent and teachers will go out of their way to help if students have difficulties with their work • They are taught very well, and are expected to work hard • They enjoy being part of a successful sixth form • They are helped to settle into the sixth form • The school offers a wide range of extra-curricular activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • About one half of students in Year 13 felt that careers advice was inadequate • The space and rules governing independent study

Students are very positive about the sixth form, the range of opportunities it offers them, and the quality of the teaching they receive. The strengths identified by students are well founded, and strongly endorsed by both boys and girls joining the school for the first time. Sixth formers willingly take on extra work and contribute to the progress made by younger students. Students from minority ethnic backgrounds felt that the school provided them with a safe and secure environment in which to learn. Inspectors agree with students that the programme for careers advice as distinct from subject and higher education advice should be reviewed. The facilities for independent study are cramped, but the school has achieved a good balance between the need for supervised private study with an encouragement for students to work on their own more independently.

COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

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

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Very high standards at the end of Key Stage 3, in GCSE examinations and at A-level are the result of very good teaching which enables pupils to make good progress

1. Attainment on entry in Year 7 is well above average, although the ability range is wider than is found in many grammar schools. Standards in national tests in English, mathematics and science, taken by pupils at the end of their time in their primary schools are nevertheless well above average overall. However, the percentage of pupils reaching Level 5 or better is less high in English than in mathematics or science. Standards on entry are reasonably stable although, as measured by tests taken in Year 7, they are higher in the current Years 7 and 8 than in other years. Just ten pupils are on the register of special educational needs, including two in the sixth form, a proportion which is well below average. Of these, one has a statement of special educational need for his behaviour. Given the attainment of pupils on entry to the school, most pupils make good progress throughout the school and their achievements are good. During Years 10 and 11 they make very good progress.
2. Results in national tests taken in English, mathematics and science at the end of Year 9 in 2000, were very high and within the top five per cent of schools nationally. Comparison with other grammar schools indicates that results were below average in English, above average in mathematics and average in science. The below average comparison in English is the consequence of fewer boys in this cohort reaching the higher Level 7 than in other grammar schools. However, given the wider ability intake at Sir Thomas Rich's in comparison with many other grammar schools, this still represents good achievement. Results in 2001 show a marked improvement in the percentage of pupils reaching Level 7 in English. Results in all three subjects have held steady at these high levels over the last few years and high standards have been maintained in 2001. The trend in the school's average points score for all subjects has improved in line with the improving national trend.
3. One hundred per cent of pupils achieved five or more A* - C grades at GCSE in 2000. This is very high and again within the top five per cent of schools nationally and also very high in comparison with other grammar schools. Results have been consistently very high over the last three years and the improving trend has been above the improving national trend. Pupils' progress was above average in comparison with other schools with similar Key Stage 3 results in 1998. In 2001, the percentage achieving five or more A* - C grades was 98.2, around the average for the school since 1998. The average points score of 66.1 was an improvement on the score in 2000, and the percentage achieving A* and A grades was high at 56.9 per cent.
4. GCSE results in all subjects in 2000 were all significantly above average, but average points scores were particularly high in mathematics, biology, chemistry, geography, history and physics. The overall school target in relation to average points score for GCSE performance in 2001 was exceeded, and the challenging target for the percentage of pupils reaching five or more A* - C grades was met.
5. A-level results in 2000 were very high in comparison with other schools, similar to results in previous years. Both boys and girls did equally well, and students did particularly well in biology, business studies, English, general studies, geography; and less well in computer studies, history and music. The school insists on an entry

requirement in the sixth form of at least five or more GCSE grades B or above and English and mathematics to at least grade C. Students achieve well through the sixth form, making good progress.

6. The average points score in 2001 was 26.02 and maintains the high standards of previous years. The percentage achieving A and B grades was 53.8 per cent, an improvement on the 45.6 per cent achieving these grades in 2000. In 2001, AS-level results look high, although there are currently no national comparators.
7. The most significant factor in these high standards is the very good quality of teaching, which has a strong focus on maximising achievement for all pupils. In addition, the excellent attitudes of most pupils to their learning, supported by the overall ethos for learning, promotes good progress. The quality of teaching is very good in both Key Stages 3 and 4, and in the sixth form. It has improved since the time of the previous inspection. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed during the inspection. In the 32 lessons observed in Years 7 to 11 around 94 per cent of teaching was judged to be good or better and one half judged very good or excellent.
8. In work seen in English, mathematics and science, standards were well above average at the end of both key stages. The teaching of these subjects is particularly effective, and the teaching of both literacy and numeracy is good. This ensures a solid foundation on which achievement in other subjects can be based. Language is effectively used to challenge and deepen pupils' understanding, and the good use of questions ensures pupils explain their answers and think deeply about the issue. In English, a lot of work is covered at all levels and the work is thoroughly and thought-provokingly marked. High standards of presentation and accuracy are expected, and spelling and grammatical mistakes are usually corrected, although examples where spelling was not corrected were seen in science. Pupils take care with the presentation of their work and write at length and in a range of contexts. Many subjects as well as English offer good opportunities for different kinds of writing, in particular religious education, geography and history. Standards of reading are good, but reading is less rigorously promoted, particularly after Year 8, and the library is not well used to encourage wider reading around subjects.
9. Speaking and listening skills are high and a strength. Good opportunities for oral presentations encourage pupils to speak with confidence and listen attentively to others. In one excellent Year 11 biology lesson, pupils themselves confidently asked well thought out and probing questions which revealed a deep understanding. In another Year 10 chemistry lesson, the teacher drew answers from the pupils in a skilful and probing manner. In lessons, many are able to argue a case and explain a point of view convincingly.
10. Numeracy skills are very good and pupils are able to manipulate numbers and apply numerical and graphical skills in a variety of subject contexts. Many pupils are very adept at mental calculations. Some effective work was seen with pupils using graphs and formulae in science, and pupils confidently and accurately tabulate results and plot graphs. Other subjects in which the confident application of numeracy was witnessed included design and technology, geography and information and communication technology.
11. It is the high expectations that teachers have of what pupils can achieve that characterises the very best teaching. Where these are high, pupils are constantly challenged, the pace of lessons is brisk and the pupils' learning is very good. This

takes place within well-planned and well-managed lessons that take account of the different starting points of each pupil. For example in an outstanding Year 11 French lesson on holidays and travel, the challenge was maintained throughout the lesson through excellent use of French for all classroom communication. The teacher's imaginative approach engaged the whole class, and the boys responded very well to the good range of learning strategies and opportunities to work in pairs and as a whole class. Excellent progress was made in developing confident oral work. Learning was effectively reinforced by practical relevance and the fast pace of learning was maintained throughout. Pupils responded to the teaching with committed concentration.

12. Another lesson observed in which high expectations led to pupils achieving well was a Year 11 English lesson in which pupils were analysing the impact of advertising images. This top set group were interested and involved in the learning through critical and independent thinking. The teacher made it clear she expected high grades and then made it clear what standards were required to achieve these grades. Her own good subject knowledge enabled and encouraged the pupils to think laterally and beyond the immediate. Very effective questioning of pupils brought out the best in them, and their astute analysis of the cultural and moral impact of advertising images was very well presented through discussion. Because of the very well planned structure to the lesson, the pupils were confident in what they were trying to achieve and expressed themselves with clarity. The relevance of the topic to their everyday lives made the learning come alive.
13. Characteristic of much of the teaching are the very good relationships between staff and pupils. Many teachers have established trusting and productive relationships with their pupils. As a consequence good learning takes place in a friendly and secure atmosphere. Overall classroom management and discipline are also strengths of the teaching. In a Year 8 mathematics lesson on quadrilaterals, the respect with which teacher and pupils held each other was clearly evident. The learning moved at great pace as a consequence of the very careful explanations and appropriate examples chosen by the teacher. The pupils worked well together, sharing ideas and respecting one another's opinions, and responding very well to the teacher's questions. Although much of the teaching was to the whole class, the teacher's sensitive awareness and very good knowledge of individual learning needs resulted in effective learning. The lesson was characterised by clarity of purpose – the pupils knew exactly what they had to do – and a step-by-step approach in which learning was built on prior knowledge in a logical sequence. Good relationships secured high levels of motivation and concentration amongst all pupils, and this was another key factor in their very good progress. Gains in learning and understanding were tangible and all pupils responded very positively to the teacher's approach.
14. The quality of marking and the use of ongoing assessment are very good. In most subjects marking is regular and supportive with detailed guidance on how to improve. Pupils' knowledge of their own progress is very good, and most know exactly what they must do to improve. This is a key factor in the good progress which most pupils make overall, particularly in English, mathematics and science. In English, the use of personal targets kept in a folder by the pupil himself, is very effective in ensuring pupils are aware of their own progress and of their potential. In mathematics, most of the work is self-marked, but the teacher maintains a good overview of progress through regular marked assessments. In science, most work is carefully marked with helpful comments on how the work might be improved. Teachers of all subjects are very good at ensuring that progress is assessed at all stages.

The very effective leadership of the headteacher and other senior staff focuses strongly on promoting high standards of academic and personal development

15. Leadership and management are very good, and the school has maintained consistently high standards of achievement and teaching since the last inspection. In addition the school works hard to maintain its core values, which are to achieve the highest standards of work and behaviour and to promote a wide range of extra-curricular activities. The school is confident in its approach. It has recently been designated as a Language College.
16. The headteacher provides very good leadership. He is clear about the direction of the school and his authority is widely respected. He has been keen to maintain the traditional values of the grammar school, while moving the school forward and embracing new ideas and approaches. The school is confident in its successes, but is never complacent. Governors and the newly formed senior management team are continually evaluating what works and seeking ways to secure further improvements. The headteacher's approach to leadership has successfully gained the full support and co-operation of the staff. He is well supported by two deputy headteachers whose experience and expertise complement each other and provide the school with effective role models of good management.
17. The senior management team has been recently reformed, with the appointment of a new assistant headteacher in September. Together they are a strong focus for development in the school. They have a good understanding of standards through their monitoring of examination and test data, and the occasional monitoring of pupils' books. Monitoring of teaching and learning in lessons while satisfactory, has been less rigorously carried out. The school now has an effective procedure in place for performance management. Meetings provide a useful sounding board for ideas and a forum for raising and discussing ideas for development. The character of the small school is promoted through effective informal communication, and meetings are kept to a minimum. All staff are committed to improvement and share the school's values and ideals.
18. Management at other levels is also good and heads of department are providing effective leadership of their subjects, working hard to maintain high standards and secure improvements in teaching and learning, based on a careful evaluation of standards. They appreciate the autonomy given to them by senior staff to run their departments in their own way. This sometimes leads to inconsistencies in management practice, for example the frequency of departmental team meetings, or the extent to which heads of department monitor teaching in their departments. However improvements in practice are identified through departmental self-review. For example, the more consistent use of the target language in French and German teaching was identified and is now proving to be effective in raising standards. Monitoring the work of their teams by heads of department was a key issue for development at the time of the last inspection. There has been an improvement since then, but there is more to be done to ensure consistency.
19. The school has taken steps to spread best practice and to ensure more consistently good teaching by the appointment of a teaching and learning co-ordinator. Regular observation of lessons and feedback to departments is now being undertaken, and this is designed to encourage the school to be a more self-evaluating and reflective institution. However it is too soon to judge the impact of this work, but inspectors share the school's view that this, alongside the school's procedures for performance

management, will be a significant lever in raising standards even further. Early indications are that the process has been valued by staff who have participated.

20. The school is clear about its way forward, but the development plan does not articulate this in a meaningful way. Development planning both at whole school level and at departmental level is insufficiently focused. Some targets are imprecise and are sometimes little more than lists of tasks to be done, for example 'monitor the new student planner' or 'introduce performance management successfully'. Others relate to much needed improvements in accommodation in art and design technology, but do little to sharpen the impact of this on the quality of teaching and learning. Some reflect the school's wish to maintain standards in for example the provision of extra-curricular activities but have no measurable target to establish whether the priority has been met. The recently formulated plan for 2001-2 showed little measurable development beyond the plan for 2000-1. Departmental plans do not consistently relate to the whole school plan. A more sharply focused development plan based on a realistic self-evaluation of the school's strengths and areas for development would provide a more effective framework for maintaining and improving standards.
21. Governors are committed and hard working. They bring a good range of experience and professional expertise to the school's governance. They have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses through their detailed and comprehensive discussion of the school's work in committee and full governors' meetings. Governors are confident in their ability to question and challenge the senior management. Statutory requirements are met, except with regard to the provision of a daily act of collective worship, and the non-disapplication of some pupils in Years 10 and 11 who do not study a design and technology subject.
22. The school's budget is prudently managed, and the school seeks best value wherever possible in its spending decisions. Governors have a good overview of the budget and are kept regularly updated with monitoring statements. Budget planning is carried out with the school's educational priorities in mind.

The very good range of well-supported extra-curricular activities effectively enriches the curriculum, provided by a committed and hard working staff

23. The school aims to promote a wide range of extra-curricular activities; to increase the sense of belonging and pride in being a member of Sir Thomas Rich's; to help foster good relationships within the school and community through offering enhanced opportunities for experience, learning and achievement. The school manages this very well and the very good range of extra-curricular activities is a strength of the school's provision.
24. Both parents and pupils commented on the hard work and commitment of staff. Good relationships amongst the whole school community are a particularly strong feature of the school. These are strongly promoted by the commitment of staff to the provision of a wide range of activities beyond the school curriculum. Many of these activities are well supported by pupils who feel that the opportunities help to create a sense of school identity. Some activities, such as the railway club, the film society, and the house drama competition are run by the pupils themselves.
25. Sporting activities are well represented and the standard of school teams is high. In addition to the traditional boys' games of rugby, soccer and cricket, there are

opportunities for the girls to participate in netball, hockey, basketball, swimming, climbing and badminton. The headteacher himself organises a table tennis club. Some of the sixth form girls organised a five-a-side soccer tournament to raise money for charity.

26. There are many opportunities for pupils to take part in musical and dramatic performances. In addition to the school choir and madrigal group, there is an orchestra, wind band and string group. The annual production, this year it is 'Oklahoma!', is an eagerly awaited highlight of the school year. There is a debating society and public speaking competition, a chess club and opportunities for pupils to learn additional languages such as Gujarati, Italian and Latin. Pupils regularly take part in visits to the theatre, including foreign language plays, field trips and residential visits, often to foreign destinations.
27. This wide and comprehensive offer contributes much to the social development of pupils as well as effectively enhancing the pupils' learning experiences.

The very good personal development of pupils is strongly promoted by the very good provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

28. Pupils' personal development is very good and excellent in the sixth form. Most senior pupils are mature and sensible young people. The aims of the school provide a strong focus for co-operative endeavour and shared values. Following the lead set by staff generally, the great majority of pupils and students bring responsible and caring attitudes to their work and the whole school community. They co-operate well and enjoy teamwork. When opportunities for responsibility are offered within school, such as being a tutor group representative, prefect or 'observer', pupils take their duties seriously and reliably. Prefects play an important part in the day-to-day running of the school, particularly at break and lunchtimes, and carry out these duties conscientiously and responsibly.
29. Relationships throughout the school are very good, and in the sixth form they are excellent. Staff and pupils co-operate very well together. Form tutors often have very good levels of rapport with pupils, and pupils often relate very well to particular teachers. Pupils are very much at ease with one another. Overall there is tolerance of other people's differences, and pupils are encouraged to be aware of the impact of their actions. Only a few examples of less sensitive behaviour were witnessed by inspectors.
30. Tutors have good opportunities to work with their tutees during tutor periods on two mornings each week. This time is used to register the pupils and to deal with any outstanding administrative issues. Thereafter, tutors often work with individuals, monitoring their progress in subjects. However, the time is not structured or usually planned in any systematic way. As a result, although this time is valuable in building and confirming relationships, it is sometimes not a particularly purposeful start to the day. Assemblies are much more formal occasions and are well planned and structured. Pupils listen with attention and have good opportunities to reflect on religious and moral issues. Assemblies provide an orderly and thought provoking start to the day.
31. Overall the school's provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. Spiritual provision is good and pupils have good

opportunities in both assemblies, religious education and sometimes in other subjects to reflect on the spiritual dimension to their life. For example, a very good Year 8 English lesson on aboriginal stories prompted pupils to reflect on why aboriginal people used stories to explain natural events and how the spirit of an individual is captured in a natural object. Discussion was well managed and high attaining pupils in particular were challenged with additional and more extended tasks. Moral issues are also raised in a number of different subjects, and a moral dimension underpins much of the school's work. Another very good English lesson in Year 11 contributed effectively to both social and moral education through asking pupils to consider the impact of stereotyping in advertising and of the moral validity of suggestive imagery. In an excellent Year 11 biology lesson, pupils reflected on the ethics of abortion when parents discover the foetus has Downs Syndrome.

32. The school's approach to self-discipline enables pupils to develop a strong sense of personal and social responsibility. Within a secure framework of good relationships, pupils are encouraged to be self-reliant, to co-operate with each other in pairs and group work, and to be sensitive to each other's differences. Soon after Year 7 pupils arrive in school, they spend three days on a residential trip to Stratford-on-Avon. One group was away on the trip during the inspection. This provides excellent early opportunities for pupils to get to know each other and their form tutor. In Years 7 to 9, the programme of personal, social and health education contributes effectively to personal development, and includes reference to sex education and to the dangers of drug and alcohol misuse.
33. Pupils have very good opportunities to participate in music and drama activities which help promote their cultural development. During the inspection, rehearsals for a forthcoming production of 'Oklahoma!' were providing pupils of all ages with excellent opportunities for social and cultural development. The very wide range of extra-curricular activities, particularly in music and sport and including trips and visits abroad also make a strong contribution to pupils' personal development.

The very positive ethos for learning which challenges pupils to achieve and promotes excellent attitudes to learning

34. The school's very positive ethos for learning underpins the school's work and the attitudes of pupils. Learning is at the heart of the school's work, and is immediately apparent. Pupils move purposefully to lessons and attitudes in class indicate that most pupils are keen to do well. As a consequence they work hard, and learn at a good pace. Pupils' co-operative skills are very good. In a Year 7 gymnastics lesson observed, pupils worked together in groups purposefully, supporting and listening to each other. In a Year 9 music lesson, pupils worked together on composing variations on a theme of Paganini. All were highly motivated and were confident in suggesting ideas, valuing each other's ideas and building on them. Many demonstrated considerable responsibility and independence in their learning. The teacher had to intervene only occasionally to prompt ideas or adjust the direction of the learning. This was managed very effectively and encouraged the pupils to solve problems themselves, and not to rely on the teacher. In observing each other's work, pupils are sensitive and constructive in their evaluations. The teacher's use of National Curriculum levels meant that the pupils knew how well they were doing and what they must do to improve.

35. Key to the pupils' good learning skills are the comprehensive assessment procedures. Through the half termly 'Orders' system, all pupils know how well they are doing and what they should be doing to improve. This is considerably empowering and encourages pupils' to take responsibility themselves for their learning. Pupils bring mature attitudes to their learning. In discussion they are clear about what grade they should expect to achieve and whether they are on target to make it. They are confident in their evaluations of their progress and in understanding how they can improve.
36. Excellent learning was observed in a Year 11 French lesson. The lesson was conducted entirely in French and pupils were expected to respond only in the target language. Good use of humour was used to excite and maintain interest. The focus on active learning ensured pupils made good progress and developed independent learning skills. A very positive working atmosphere encouraged pupils to speak with confidence. Very good use of questions challenged pupils to think and reflect on what they already knew. Throughout the lesson, pupils were very keen to do the tasks set accurately, working effectively in pairs. They were all highly motivated and industrious and there was evident pride in their achievements by the end of the lesson. The lesson strongly encouraged the pupils to learn and think for themselves, and pupils produced a vast amount of high quality oral work.
37. In a Year 8 mathematics lesson on how to construct and bisect angles, pupils were enthusiastic about their learning and commented to the inspector that they learnt quickly and confidently in these lessons. The high level of pupil involvement made an important contribution to their learning. The questions that pupils themselves posed helped the lesson to evolve, and careful questioning of pupils by the teacher teased out quality answers from them.
38. Very good learning skills developed in the main school are put to good use in the sixth form, where students are encouraged to be increasingly independent in their approach, and to take the responsibility for organising and planning their own learning. This is evident in the very many examples of very well organised work files of students sampled during the inspection.
39. Pupils' excellent attitudes to their learning, encouraged by the school's disciplined approach to work make a powerful contribution to school standards.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

The use of information and communication technology in some subjects

40. Since the last inspection, when the provision for information and communication technology (ICT) was satisfactory, but with some weaknesses, much has been done. Standards have improved, and there is a much greater range of work and applications being used, particularly in Key Stage 4. Central facilities have improved and now provide a good resource for all pupils. Subjects are now clear where they are able to teach particular aspects of the ICT curriculum. However, the school still suffers from an under-investment in computer facilities. The two computer suites are heavily used; there are plans to add a further room for computers in the near future. However, not all subjects use computers as an everyday tool within their teaching.

41. Discrete lessons in Year 7 are providing pupils with a sound basis for using and applying computer applications in other subjects. Thereafter however, time available for learning ICT skills is more limited. In one very good Year 8 lesson observed on the use of a spreadsheet, the teacher's very good subject knowledge and clear explanations led to very good progress. Pupils enthusiastically tackled the tasks set and learnt very quickly. Most have above average keyboard skills.
42. Pupils' work shows little or no use of ICT to support learning, except for those who undertake work on their own computer at home. This is particularly marked in Years 10 and 11. Even in the sixth form, where there is some good practice in subjects such as business studies and music, less use is made of ICT than might be expected in mathematics, biology, geography, French and German.
43. Where teachers are confident in their own skills, they use ICT more and more within their lessons. But the picture is uneven and more training, underway with some teachers, is necessary. The school is aware of these issues and the school development plan goes some way to address the issues raised.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

44. In order to improve and maintain standards and the quality of provision further, the headteacher, governors and staff should:
 - (1) seek to improve the use of information and communication technology, particularly in Key Stage 4, by:
 - o improving the resources and facilities, particularly those in departments;
 - o ensuring that the ICT opportunities and requirements identified in the National Curriculum are fully implemented;
 - o implementing the training programmes for staff in the use of ICT.
(paragraphs 40 - 43)

This issue is already identified as an issue for improvement in the school development plan.

Sixth form

- (2) ensure greater consistency in the use of information and communication technology across subjects by:
 - o ensuring all staff are fully trained to use new technologies confidently within their subject;
 - o reviewing subject schemes of work to enhance learning through the appropriate use of ICT;
 - o monitoring provision to ensure consistency both within and across subjects.
(paragraphs 52, 119, 126, 168, 186, 192)
- (3) review the programme of careers advice and guidance offered to students in the sixth form and Year 11 to ensure more structured support overall.
(paragraphs 95 and 97)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	32
	Sixth form	62
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		47

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 7 - 11							
Number	3	13	14	2	0	0	0
Percentage	9.4	40.6	43.7	6.2	0	0	0
Sixth form							
Number	3	22	30	7	0	0	0
Percentage	4.8	35.5	48.4	11.3	0	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Figures relate to the 2000-01 school year

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	544	205
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	10	4

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	1	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	7	3

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	48

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	1
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	6

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	4.0
National comparative data	7.7

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.0
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	105	N/A	105

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	104	104	104
	Girls	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Total	104	104	104
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	99 (99)	99 (99)	97 (99)
	National	63 (63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	93 (92)	98 (98)	97 (99)
	National	28 (28)	42 (38)	30 (23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	105	105	105
	Girls	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Total	105	105	105
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	100 (100)	100 (100)	100 (100)
	National	64 (64)	66 (64)	62 (60)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	84 (92)	99 (99)	90 (93)
	National	31 (31)	39 (37)	29 (28)

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	132	N/A	132

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	132	132	132
	Girls	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Total	132	132	132
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	100 (99)	100 (100)	100 (100)
	National	47.4 (46.6)	90.6 (90.9)	95.6 (95.8)

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	64
	National	38.4

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

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

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	74	17	91

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	26.7	27.5	26.8	N/A	N/A	N/A
National	17.7	18.6	18.2	2.6	2.9	2.7

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	3
Black – African heritage	1
Black – other	0
Indian	37
Pakistani	3
Bangladeshi	1
Chinese	5
White	650
Any other minority ethnic group	22

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	1	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	1	0
Pakistani	1	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	9	0
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	48.4
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	15.5

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	10
Total aggregate hours worked per week	137.75

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	78.5
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	25.6
Key Stage 4	20.2

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000/2001
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	£
Total income	2,226,530
Total expenditure	2,163,006
Expenditure per pupil	2,876
Balance brought forward from previous year	0
Balance carried forward to next year	63,524

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	9.1
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	11.4

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

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	749
Number of questionnaires returned	242

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	48	49	2	1	0
My child is making good progress in school.	56	33	2	1	8
Behaviour in the school is good.	50	46	2	0	3
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	35	56	7	1	2
The teaching is good.	53	40	1	0	5
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	48	36	7	0	10
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	51	41	5	2	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	80	19	0	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	33	45	13	2	7
The school is well led and managed.	61	31	1	0	7
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	53	39	3	0	5
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	56	35	7	0	2

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

45. Standards in the sixth form are very high. The average A-level points score of candidates entered for two or more A-levels in 2000 was 26.8. This was very high in comparison with other schools; the national average was 18.2. Results have been consistently at this level over the last three years. The average points score in 1998-2000 was 25.0; very high in comparison with the national average of 17.9.
46. These high standards have been maintained in 2001, when the A-level average points score was 25.9. The average points scored by each subject was 6.3, with 54 per cent of students achieving the highest grades, A or B. Students in Year 12 also took AS- levels in 2001, achieving a 99 per cent pass rate and 64 per cent achieved an A or B grade. As yet there are no national comparators for AS- and A- level results in 2001.
47. Both boys and girls do equally well. Students from ethnic minorities also do equally well, although the numbers are too small to be statistically significant. The school analyses its results thoroughly and carefully monitors the performance of different groups. The school takes particular care to integrate students who join the sixth form from other schools, making sure that they are able to cope with the demands placed on them. In mathematics, for example, careful attention and additional support is given to these students early in Year 12 to ensure that they are working at the same level as other students.
48. In 2000 students did particularly well in biology, business studies, English, general studies, and geography, and less well in computer studies, history and music. In 2001, students did particularly well in music and classical civilisation (although numbers in both subjects were very small), business studies, chemistry and English. Other subjects in which a high proportion of students achieved A or B grades included mathematics, computing and geography. Results in history, French and physics were less high than in other subjects.
49. Around 70 per cent of students in each year stay on into the sixth form, with about 30 students, including girls joining from other schools. Before acceptance on an A-level course in the sixth form, all students must have achieved at least five or more GCSE grades B or above, including both English and mathematics to at least grade C. Otherwise, there are no additional entry requirements. Once students are admitted to the sixth form, retention rates are high and almost all students complete A-level courses.
50. In work seen during the inspection, standards in the courses inspected were well above average in mathematics, biology, physics, economics, geography, English, French and German. In the other subjects inspected in detail, business studies, art, music, history and religious studies, standards are above the levels expected at this stage in the courses.
51. Because standards are high on entry to the sixth form, conventional value added measures sometimes do not indicate the level of progress made. The school has designed its own system for comparing performance between subjects and

measuring the added value. Almost all students who achieved high grades at GCSE go on to achieve A or B grades at A-level, and the overall achievement of students is good.

52. Although the key skills of communication, the application of number and ICT are not taught discretely, standards in these important areas are high for most students. Where students need to use numeracy skills in other subjects, they do so with confidence. Similarly, pupils usually write with assurance and maturity, demonstrating in their writing a good awareness of purpose and audience. A minority lack organisation and detail in their note taking. Students use computers confidently in their work when required to do so, but opportunities in several subjects are not as frequent as they might be.
53. In mathematics, standards are well above average, and students' achievements are good. This is a very successful area of the school's work. Mathematics is a popular subject in the sixth form, and student numbers are often at least double those in other subjects. Provision for, and outcomes in, mathematics A-level have many strengths and no major weaknesses. High standards are the consequence of very good teaching and a methodical and rigorous approach to assessment. Teachers build successfully on the very high standards of numeracy and algebra established at GCSE, and by the end of the A-level course, students are successfully and confidently using a wide range of mathematical methods to solve problems.
54. In biology, standards are well above average and students' achievements are very good. Students move quickly and confidently beyond GCSE work to a deeper understanding of the application of their scientific knowledge and the ability to successfully plan and carry out investigations. Most students have a good basic knowledge which they are able to use and apply to unfamiliar situations.
55. Standards in physics are also well above average, and students make good progress through the course. The dip in A-level results in 2001 is not likely to be long term, as work seen in student folders in both Years 12 and 13 is of a high quality. Students exhibit a very good knowledge and understanding of scientific concepts and their practical skills are guided by a careful and accurate approach.
56. In business studies, students achieve above average standards and given the prior attainment of these students they make very good progress through the course. Students have a good understanding of business practice.
57. The majority of students studying economics have an exceptional grasp of the subject and are able to relate theory to everyday issues with confidence. Standards are well above average and students make very good progress.
58. Standards in art are above average and students' achievements are good given their attainment at the beginning of the course. They are confident in their ability to research and develop ideas through sketch books and the critical studies, but some of the observational drawing is less secure.
59. In music, standards are average and students make good progress. Individual students demonstrate an imaginative approach to composition and their technical and contextual knowledge and understanding is very sound.

60. Students in geography are very skilful at evaluation and the synthesis of complex ideas. They are very confident in themselves posing challenging questions and seeking answers. Standards are well above average and students make very good progress.
61. In history, where recent results have not been as high as in some other subjects, standards in work seen during the inspection were nevertheless well above average, and students are making good progress. They use their knowledge effectively to draw increasingly sophisticated and perceptive conclusions from historical evidence.
62. Students taking religious studies have a good understanding of ethical issues and of difficult philosophical theories. Written work is well argued and standards overall are above average. Students are making good progress.
63. English students are developing a mature writing style and are able to respond with sensitivity to the nuances of a wide range of texts. Standards overall are well above average and their achievements are good.
64. In French, students reach above average standards and make good progress through the course. Oral work in particular is of a high standard and students speak confidently with good pronunciation.
65. German students also achieve above average standards and their achievements through the courses are good. Speaking and listening skills in particular are generally of a high order.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

66. Students have excellent attitudes towards their studies, and the school ethos very successfully encourages students to take responsibility for their own learning. In classes, they listen attentively and are keen to take part in their lessons. During class discussions, they often reflect on ethical issues such as those involved in genetic engineering. They show a high degree of commitment to their work and are willing to learn from their mistakes. The high quality coursework students produce is evidence that they have a very good capacity to study independently. The students' exemplary behaviour and excellent levels of attendance also contribute to their very high level of attainment.
67. Students view the school as offering something special and almost all students have very positive attitudes to their schooling. The survey of upper sixth form students indicated that they particularly appreciated the accessibility of teachers to help them with difficulties in their work, and the fact that they were challenged to achieve highly. Nearly nine out of ten students said that they enjoyed life in the sixth form and would advise others to join.
68. Inspectors were given considerable evidence of how this positive attitude to school was reflected in subject teaching, tutorials and extra-curricular activities. Students in a number of subjects, including economics, are prepared to undertake additional work without being directly prompted by their teachers. They enjoy the challenge of intellectual debate, are encouraged to set high expectations of their own achievements, and expected to take a full part in sporting activities and dramatic productions. Students are encouraged to take the lead in organising charity events.

There is a firmly established prefect system which encourages sixth formers to take on responsibility and to play a significant role in helping younger students to succeed.

69. These positive attitudes to the sixth form are supported by students representing two significant minority groups, female students and those from minority ethnic backgrounds. Female students are particularly appreciative of those efforts and activities which are organised to encourage them to adjust to the demands of membership of a new school. Boys representing students from minority Asian backgrounds reported that they considered the school to be a safe environment.
70. Relationships with each other and with the staff of the school are excellent. Pupils work well together in pairs and they show self-confidence when sharing their views with the class. Some students help at a local special school on a weekly basis. The teachers at that school value the support these students provide and say how much their pupils look forward to the students coming. The students report that they also enjoy going to the school and building relationships with the pupils.
71. The personal development of students is excellent. Sixth form students, in and out of class, show a very high level of maturity and self-confidence. They work very well together and are encouraged to reflect on and consider their own feelings. Female students commented that they were made to feel part of the school very quickly. They valued the sense of equality of treatment that they perceived from both male students and teachers. In response to recent events in New York and Afghanistan, students from different ethnic backgrounds organised a debate to improve the mutual understanding of those from different groups.
72. Maturity in terms of personal development is reflected in those classes in which students are prepared to say that they do not know the answer to a particular question. Inspectors report that in such instances other students are more than prepared to help and support the learning of their peers.
73. Attendance by sixth formers is excellent. They have to remain on the school premises all day, and in the vast majority of classes inspected attendance was 100 per cent. It was slightly less good in tutorial periods in which there was some evidence of lateness by a small minority of students. Sometimes this is due to factors outside of their control, such as the late arrival of buses.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

74. The overall quality of teaching and learning in the sixth form is very good. During the inspection all teaching observed was at least satisfactory, and nearly nine out of ten lessons were at least good. Around four out of every ten lessons were judged very good or excellent. The very good teaching in most subjects is the main determinant of the success of students in their sixth form courses. Much of the teaching is challenging at the very highest level. Teaching is very good in mathematics, biology, physics, economics, geography, French and German. In all other subjects inspected in detail, the teaching is good.
75. Strengths of the teaching include the teachers' subject knowledge and understanding which enable them to confidently approach the syllabus, pose and answer questions which challenge the students' thinking, and plan lessons and schemes of work which successfully build on prior attainment in a meaningful and relevant way. One

excellent mathematics lesson on the modulus function with a Year 13 group presented a potentially tricky subject in a lively and vibrant way, reducing the problem to its simplest forms. As a consequence of the teacher's excellent subject knowledge, the students were enabled to approach these functions with confidence. Another factor in the excellent learning in this lesson was the challenge given to make the students think widely about a problem, drawing on all their previous knowledge. This approach enabled the students to see clearly the inter-relationship between graphical, algebraic and intuitive methods. Confidence was boosted by the skilful use of praise, given generously, but only when deserved.

76. Expectations are consistently high in a number of subjects. Students respond to the high levels of challenge with confidence. A very good Year 12 English lesson on Dickens' 'Hard Times' prompted nimble thinking and a positive willingness to have a go at defining difficult concepts. The teacher's strong focus on examination requirements drew the attention of the students to the assessment criteria, enabling students to measure their own progress and what they needed to do to achieve well. The teacher's enthusiasm for the text was contagious and the students responded with maturity, developing their thinking about satire and the social and political background to the novel.
77. Many teachers use a very good range of teaching strategies and methods to promote learning. In one excellent Year 13 physics lesson on radioactivity, the teacher's creative and innovative approaches were used to stimulate and capture the students' interest in nuclear stability. Skilful handling of the discussion about wave particle duality ensured that it was the students themselves who were the major contributors. Very effective strategies were used to engage and inspire the students.
78. In discussion with the students themselves, it was clear that they have a mature and sensible view of what makes for effective teaching. They reported that one of the key factors in the most successful teaching was the fact that the teacher made the learning relevant to everyday events and to contemporary issues. The learning in a Year 13 biology lesson on the factors affecting the rate of photosynthesis, was made even more successful by the teacher's authoritative and well-informed answers to a student's question about pollution and the impact of acid rain on the environment. Teaching in economics is also made accessible by the focus on relevant and up to the minute issues.
79. Other students indicated that teaching which encouraged active learning was most helpful, and that too much note-taking was considered dull. Students praised the support and helpfulness of teachers and their approachability and willingness to offer help at any time. Students also reported that lessons in which their own views and ideas were valued were effective. Teaching in English and biology in particular was mentioned as being good at this.
80. Teachers take particular care to ensure that girls and other students joining the school in Year 12, are not excluded from making good progress through a lack of prior knowledge. This focus on ensuring equal access and opportunity to the curriculum ensures that all students, including those from ethnic minority backgrounds make good progress.
81. The school does not formally teach key skills in the sixth form. However students' standards in numeracy, communication and information technology are generally well above average.

82. Students' learning skills are very good. They work hard and persevere to solve problems and overcome difficulties themselves. In one Year 13 biology lesson observed, the students were improving their practical skills, measuring and recording accurately and methodically. High achievement was encouraged by the teacher's high expectations that they would solve the practical difficulties themselves within the given time-frame.
83. A confident approach to learning is characteristic of many lessons. Students are determined to succeed and even when stuck with a problem, students speak positively about the amount of support they are given by teachers. Indeed the commitment and hard work of staff is another key factor in the high levels of student achievement. Students take care with the presentation of their work, and files and notes are well organised and can be used effectively for revision.
84. Much work is undertaken independently of the teachers, and in general students' skills in self-study and research are good. In biology, the Internet is used to download information on particular topics. Work in art is well planned to ensure that assignments are matched to the needs of students, and while offering teacher support, there is flexibility for the students to develop and exploit their own ideas. The St Ives project has been particularly successful in this respect. Students respond very positively to the opportunities such teaching offers. However to support the development of these skills, there is more to be done to ensure that resources in the library are made more relevant to their learning needs and that access to computers in departments is readily available.

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

85. The quality and range of learning opportunities offered to students in the sixth form are good. Students are able to choose from 21 subjects, including general studies, which are all offered at AS- and A-level. In recent years, new AS- and A-levels in physical education, Spanish, design and religious studies have been added. Advanced vocational and formal accreditation of key skills achievements are not offered but courses leading to these qualifications are readily available in other schools and colleges serving the catchment area.
86. Towards the end of Year 11 students are interviewed by a deputy head and given a free choice to indicate which subjects they wish to take in the sixth form. Once choices have been made the sixth form timetable is constructed with the aim of allowing students to take any preferred combination of AS subjects. The outcome of this process is that the overwhelming majority of students are satisfied with choice of subjects that they are following, and perceive that the information they have received to inform this choice is clear, accurate and helpful. The small minority of boys to whom these choices do not appeal are offered the option of careers advice from outside agencies. All students are expected to take at least four AS subjects in Year 12, with a number taking five. In addition general studies is taken by almost all students. The school has committed itself to allowing students to continue studies from AS to the full A-level, and a number of students in Year 13 are taking four, five and occasionally even six A-levels.

87. The provision of extra-curricular activities in the sixth form is very good, and students are encouraged to take part in a wide range of sporting and cultural activities. Students take responsibility for organising some of these activities, including a debating club and choosing and organising charity events. Regular sixth form assemblies are held which give opportunities for reflection and consideration of spiritual needs. However these do not meet statutory requirements for a daily act of collective worship. There is a well-established prefect system and the School Council and sixth form committee provide good opportunities for students to contribute to the way the sixth form is run and organised.
88. Each year the school admits around 30 students to the sixth form. The entry requirements are identical to those entering the sixth form from Year 11. The majority of this group are girls and some travel considerable distances to attend school. The needs of these newly arrived students are very well met. This includes support for a sixth former with special needs in respect of her hearing difficulties.
89. Once a member of the sixth form, the school strongly promotes equality of access and opportunity. In discussion, all students indicated that the induction processes enabling them to settle into the sixth form were very effective. Female students felt that they were valued as equals, and sixth form boys from minority ethnic backgrounds indicated that they felt the school provided a safe environment within which they could make progress academically and also develop good positive relationships with those from different ethnic groups.
90. The ethos of the school and very positive response of sixth formers ensures that students use their private study time well. Students are very well motivated and inspectors report that in many subjects further study and investigation is undertaken without the direct prompting of teachers. A balance of supervised and non-supervised private study is arranged. Although some students complain of the restrictive nature of these requirements, this provision helps reinforce high expectations of hard work and academic success. The school plans to improve the rather cramped accommodation that is used for supervised private study.
91. The provision for careers education is just satisfactory, but with some weaknesses. The school provides opportunities for students to access careers information in the library and through software packages. External advice from the careers service is available and school staff are always willing to guide and support students with their choices. The sixth form open evening provides good opportunities for students to discuss future career options. However the overall programme is not specifically structured to open up choices for students or to allow them to explore different possibilities. Students themselves were critical of the advice they had received both in Year 11 and in the sixth form. The head of sixth form has recognised the need for a more structured programme and is organising a careers convention drawing on the school's wide range of links with the community and contributions from former pupils. The contribution of the community to students' learning is good overall.
92. Current arrangements for work experience are also under review. Traditionally, a well-planned programme, which helped students to become better informed about career options, was run at the end of Year 12. The introduction of AS-level examinations has complicated the planning of this provision. However, in 2001 some students undertook and benefited from work experience.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

Assessment

93. Students benefit from very good procedures to assess and monitor their academic performance. Regular testing is undertaken starting in November of Year 12. The normal curriculum is suspended and all students are tested in all their chosen subjects. The results of these tests are incorporated in the 'Orders' system which is clearly understood and valued by both students and parents. The inclusion of this early testing helps contribute to high expectations and also provides students with rapid feedback on the suitability of their subject choices. This system continues through the sixth form and ensures that all students have, by the time they reach Year 13, an accurate assessment of their likely final grades.
94. Assessment procedures within individual subjects are also rigorous and consistently applied. Subject teachers use the excellent relationships they have with students to help students understand what they have to do in order to raise their levels of achievement. Assessments within individual subjects are incorporated within the 'Orders' system and these are also included in a simple reporting system which gives a clear picture of both attainment and effort within individual subjects. Both individual subject teachers and personal tutors are expected to track the academic progress of their students, and are quick to intervene if they consider that progress is not being sustained by individual students. Support is offered to students whose special needs have been identified. There is little evidence that assessment data are directly used to inform evaluations of the effectiveness of particular teaching programmes. A large majority of students and parents indicated that they thought that assessment procedures at the school were very good.

Advice, support and guidance

95. The overall educational and personal support and guidance for students in the sixth form is satisfactory. However some aspects, particularly those associated with careers guidance and guidance for future courses, are less satisfactory. All students in Year 11 are interviewed by a deputy head and asked about preferred choice of subjects in the sixth form. The small minority of boys to whom these choices do not appeal are offered the option of careers advice from outside agencies. The results of the survey of students in the upper sixth indicate that although around two-thirds of students felt that they were given helpful and constructive advice on what they should study in the sixth form, about one third felt this was not the case.
96. Once in the sixth form it is clear that most students are satisfied with their subject choices and little evidence was found of students being placed on courses to which they were unsuited. The assessment procedures outlined in the previous section work very well to continually inform students of their progress in the sixth form. Students, however, are less certain of the availability of strong and sensitive support and help from the school if personal problems arise. Almost half of those responding to the survey of sixth form students did not know the answer to this question or felt that this form of provision was not satisfactory. Girls from the upper sixth were very clear that they felt that they received strong support on personal issues, which may indicate a male reluctance to consider that school is the place from which to seek this kind of support.

97. Although personal tutors are expected to achieve a broad range of outcomes in tutor time, for example in the review of orders and supporting UCAS applications, there is not a formal tutorial programme available to all students. This means that the onus is put on students to raise matters relating to personal and social education, including careers. Observation of tutorial sessions revealed some evidence of more casual attitudes from students and more varied expectations from tutors than was shown in subject classes. Students are particularly well prepared for entrance to higher education. Personal tutors are responsible for helping with course and university choices and they provide clear help and guidance with the preparation of personal statements in support of UCAS applications.
98. Induction into the sixth form is a well-designed and managed process in which a variety of activities are used to enable students to get to know one another, what is involved in sixth form work, and to take greater responsibility for their own learning. A 'Challenge of Industry' day is used effectively to promote teamwork and collaborative activity.
99. The school takes good steps to ensure the students' health and safety.

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

100. Parents are very supportive of the sixth form. In particular, they feel that the teaching is good and consequently their children enjoy school, work hard and make good progress. The inspection team supports these views. A minority of parents feels the school does not work closely with them. However, the information they receive about their children's progress is good. They receive 'Orders' twice a term that give a clear picture of students' progress and the current grade the student is working at in each subject. In addition, there is an annual report and consultation evening for parents to discuss their children's progress with the subject teachers. The form tutor is responsible for informing parents about areas of concern or significant achievements of students.
101. Students are also very appreciative of the school's provision in the sixth form. They value highly the support that their teachers give them and feel that they achieve well. Students who join the sixth form from other schools are welcomed and quickly become part of the school community. The only criticism some students have of the school is the quality of the careers advice.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

Leadership and management

102. Leadership and management of the sixth form are very good. The headteacher offers a clear sense of direction and purpose to the whole school and takes an active part in ensuring that the sixth form provision is consistent and adds value to other aspects of the school's activities. He is well supported by a deputy who is head of the sixth form. He, his assistant and tutors ensure that students in the sixth form act as excellent role models for younger students. The success of the sixth form contributes to the very strong school ethos of hard work and achievement. Students in the sixth form are treated differently from their younger contemporaries. They have both more

responsibility and somewhat more freedom, yet the sixth form is very much connected to and integral to the success and good reputation of the school.

103. The sixth form aims to promote both academic excellence and personal development. The highly visible and successful presence of sixth form students contributes to the ethos and reputation of the school as a whole. This is recognised by students, staff and governors and reflected in the standards achieved not just by sixth formers but by students at all stages of their secondary education at the school.
104. Monitoring and evaluation of the performance of the sixth form are good. There is a sharp focus on reviewing and improving examination success. Early in the academic year each head of department reports directly to the headteacher on the results achieved the preceding summer. This is followed by a formal meeting at which results are analysed and targets set. This process is further informed by the use of value added measures developed by the school. These seek to refine judgements as to individual subject success by reference to the average point scores achieved by students in their GCSEs in relation to their final A-level grades. Individual heads of departments are expected to identify strategies to further raise standards. The outcomes of these reviews are reported back to the school governors.
105. The monitoring of teaching is less rigorously promoted, and while this is satisfactory, there are inconsistencies between subjects. Lesson observations, both by peers and senior management, are not well established, and mechanisms to ensure that best practice is shared are not securely in place. The recent appointment of a teaching and learning co-ordinator will do much to rectify this issue.
106. The head of sixth form offers very good leadership to the sixth form. He knows individual sixth formers very well, is very approachable and sets an excellent example in his teaching, assemblies and in the management of his tutors. He is ably assisted by the female assistant head of sixth form who ensures that the needs of sixth form girls are well met. They are both taking active steps to further improve sixth form provision by changes to the prospectus, improving careers preparation, and taking student views into account in decisions about improving provision, for example in the accommodation for supervised private study.
107. The governing body is well informed of the performance of the sixth form. They are included in the process of annual review and formulation of targets, and they play an active role in contributing to the constant drive to raise standards of achievement still further. They are aware of the strengths and weaknesses of individual departments and are ready to intervene when appropriate.
108. Management of the sixth form is very good because of shared values and common goals. Annual examination performance provides a strong focus for audit and review. Action taken to secure improvements is rigorous and effective. This management strategy is based on shared goals and clear strategies to maintain and improve performance.

Resources

109. Sixth form provision is highly cost effective. Data collected by the local education authority indicate that the 'cost per sixth form completer' (a student who passes their final examination) is the lowest of any sixth form provider in the county. This finding reflects the very high standards that are achieved along with a healthy average class

size in the sixth form. There are some small sixth form classes in modern foreign languages, for example, but the average student teacher ratio in the sixth form is almost 11:1.

110. The school seeks to apply the principles of best value whenever possible and a number of governors have extensive commercial experience. This experience is put to good use in the awarding of contracts for building and other capital works.
111. Teachers are well qualified and sometimes have appropriate industrial experience. Students are well supported by the quality and breadth of learning resources available and the accommodation which generally offers a welcoming and attractive learning environment, although the accommodation for art remains inadequate. ICT provision has improved. Library resources are satisfactory overall for sixth form study.

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

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

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

GCE A-level and AVCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	61	92	89	46	45	6.2	5.9
Biology	23	96	88	52	34	6.9	5.2
Physics	24	96	88	54	41	6.5	5.7
Business studies	20	100	91	60	30	7.3	5.3
Economics	9	100	88	44	36	6.4	5.4
Art	7	100	96	29	45	6.0	6.4
Music	6	100	93	0	35	4.0	5.7
Geography	25	100	92	68	37	7.9	5.7
History	12	83	89	8	34	3.8	5.4
English	20	100	92	65	31	7.6	5.3
French	10	100	91	30	39	5.6	5.7
German	8	100	92	25	41	6.7	5.8

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

The main focus was on mathematics, but further mathematics was also sampled. The entry requirement for further mathematics is high, an A* grade at GCSE is required. From a very able group of students, results in examinations are generally very high and were above average in 2000. Two lessons of further mathematics were observed and these were at least good in all respects. Teaching and learning in further mathematics are undertaken at a very fast pace and students rise to teachers' high expectations of their speedy understanding of new concepts and an agility in tackling mathematical manipulations and operations.

Mathematics

Overall the quality of provision is **very good**.

Strengths

- High standards in A-level examination results.
- Very good teaching overall and a methodical and rigorous approach to assessment.
- Very good support and guidance about mathematics is provided to students beyond lesson times – this is greatly valued by the students.
- Teachers have very good subject knowledge and great expertise in preparing students to pass examinations.
- There is an effective team of experienced teachers, focused on achieving high standards for students and working in strong partnership with common aims and approaches.
- An ethos of diligence and determination exists amongst students.
- An attractive learning environment is provided.

Areas for improvement

- Teaching does not always challenge students to explain their answers and reasoning or invite them to suggest possible ways forward in solving problems. In particular, the relatively weaker students are not always sufficiently engaged in discussion.
- Very little use is made of ICT.

112. Results in mathematics A-level examinations have been high and also risen from 1998 to 2001, both in terms of passes at grades A - E but also in terms of the proportion of pupils achieving the highest grades, A or B. In 2000, results were above the national average and the 2001 results are even higher than those in 2000. In 2000, students did significantly better in mathematics A-level than in other subjects which they took. Most students make good progress over the two-year course and achievement overall is good; in just a few cases, results are lower than might be expected in relation to students' GCSE results.

113. Standards of work seen in lessons and in students' books or folders are high. Teaching demands a brisk pace of work and much material is covered in lessons with students embarking on further work independently. The volume of work produced by students is impressive. Students in this sixth form have a very good grasp of algebra and other key mathematical skills by the start of Year 12. This enables them to absorb new concepts easily, make and describe generalisations efficiently and construct and manipulate formulae or equations skilfully. These underlying skills exist as a result of effective teaching in earlier key stages and are one of the major

contributory factors for the school's success in this subject. Students joining the sixth form from other schools are provided with extra support if their skills in algebra, for example, are not highly developed so that they are able, after a short time, to reach the same standards in basic manipulation as their peers.

114. In Year 12, students build well on previous learning from GCSE, extending their skills in solving quadratic equations and their understanding of forces, for example. They develop their understanding of mathematical models and when models have limitations. Students' expertise in permutations and combinations, for example, is extended and they are able to solve problems involving probabilities, using a range of techniques, applying formulae or from first principles. When given the opportunity, students are able to explain the reasoning behind an answer or justify the use of a particular technique.
115. In Year 13, students show confidence and mathematical maturity. Some use mathematical intuition very effectively, followed by a reasoned explanation of why an initial instinct is correct. Students exploring the modulus function, for example, are able to see clearly the inter-relationship between graphical and algebraic methods of solving equations or inequalities containing the function. They demonstrate ease in solving problems such as those relating to rigid bodies in equilibrium, using moments or resolving forces in different directions.
116. In all lessons, students' learning is at least good and sometimes very good or excellent. The previous inspection report gave some reasons for this and these included good teaching, sound working habits, homework conscientiously completed, an ethic of serious work in class and students taking responsibility for their own learning. These attributes still exist. Students show great diligence and determination in their learning. They take advantage of teachers' readiness to help outside lessons and appreciate this greatly. A few students have relative weaknesses and whilst they may not speak out in the main part of a lesson, they are given appropriate attention when the teacher provides individual instruction so that their learning is also good.
117. Both the quality of teaching and learning are very good overall. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and great expertise in preparing students to pass examinations. Students' progress is very carefully monitored through regular testing. Teachers set clear expectations about what should be achieved. They place a responsibility on students to manage their work and seek out help when required but they also keep a close eye on how well each one is learning. Relationships are strong, cordial and respectful. Teachers' willingness to provide students with help at almost any time is a particular strength and contributes greatly not only to students' rate of progress but to their very positive attitudes towards mathematics.
118. In the highest quality teaching, the dialogue between teacher and students is lively and includes the teacher's invitation to students to expand on their ideas and reasoning, to justify the use of one method over another or to outline why an approach might be flawed. Occasionally, teachers' presentations are interspersed with interesting commentaries about how a given technique is used in industry or commerce, for example. In other lessons or parts of lessons, the opportunity for students to explain their thinking is more limited and sometimes dialogue is restricted to simple questions and brief answers.
119. Students make appropriate use of calculators. They are encouraged to manage without them wherever possible. Very little use is made of computers to support

students' learning in mathematics. The broadening of mathematical experiences through the use of computers was also raised in the previous inspection report. Access to computers is possible but teachers generally feel that the time spent on their use is not justifiable given the volume of work that needs to be covered on the A-level courses. Students have limited experience of how computers might be used in a range of mathematical applications.

120. Leadership and management in mathematics are very good with a steady, considered and well-tested approach to all aspects. The mathematics department comprises an effective team of experienced teachers, focused on achieving high standards for students and working in strong partnership with common aims and approaches. Students speak highly of the department and feel known and secure. Administration is efficient. Rigorously kept computerised records of students' attainments show clearly how each is progressing and what outcome is hoped for. Resources are adequate. Accommodation is sited in a very pleasant new building and this also contributes positively to the high quality teaching and learning in mathematics.

Sciences

The focus was on biology and physics, but chemistry and geology were also sampled. In chemistry, examination results were above average in 2000 and students performed as expected from the predictions based on their GCSE results. Two lessons were observed. Both were very good. In one, very good learning resulted from very clear explanations by the teacher and effective use of resources. This led to students gaining a very good understanding of the reactions of a group of organic acids. Standards in the geology lesson observed were above average, the result of good teaching which built on the students' prior knowledge effectively.

Biology

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

Strengths

- A-level results have been consistently high and well above average since 1997.
- The teaching is very good with lessons being very well planned and the teachers having very high expectations of their students.
- The effective use of resources enhances learning.

Areas for improvement

- Although improved since the previous inspection, the use of ICT needs to be developed more. This is scheduled within the subject development plan.

121. The A-level examination results in 2000 were well above average with 96 per cent of the students achieving a pass and 52 per cent achieving a higher grade of A or B. These results are well above the national average and above those of other grammar schools. Female students did better than male students in the higher grades with 63 per cent achieving a grade A or B compared to 47 per cent of the boys. Students with English as an additional language achieve well. The A-level results were also well above average in 2001 and in the AS-level examinations, all students achieved a pass, with 66 per cent achieving a grade A or B. The number of students studying A-level biology has increased from 15 at the previous inspection to over 40. The retention rate on the course is very high. In relation to their GCSE results, students do better than expected, and their achievement is very good.

122. The standards of work of current students is well above average, with the students in Year 13 achieving at a level much higher than their GCSE results predicted. Effective teaching challenged all prior attainers and questions were levelled at the gifted students as well as the average ones. The focused learning in lessons is the result of the perseverance of students and the effective methods used by the teachers. In one lesson, students carried out an investigation using a simple respirometer to see how fast a species of germinated bean used oxygen. They planned and implemented the investigation and made accurate observations. A significant majority have very good recall of prior knowledge and can use it well in unfamiliar situations. Their written work is also very good and they discuss their current work confidently.
123. Students in Year 12 have successfully bridged the gap from GCSE to AS-level. For example, although only one week into the course, they show very good knowledge of cell ultrastructure and are now familiar with the functions of cell organelles such as mitochondria and chloroplasts. All students understand that a chemical (messenger RNA) leaves the nucleus and is responsible for making proteins in the cell. Students tackle problem solving with enthusiasm and can make detailed comparisons between plant and animal cells.
124. The teaching is very good overall. Teachers have a profound knowledge of their subject areas and their expectations of the students are very high. Planning is very good and the objectives of the lessons are shared with the students as a matter of course. A wide range of teaching strategies is used and these have improved since the previous inspection. The questioning and answering of the teachers is a major strength. Their knowledge allows them to dispel common misconceptions made by the students in their homework. Teachers are enthusiastic about their subject and this has spilled over to a majority of students who have an excellent attitude towards the learning of biology.
125. The type of written work done by the students varies. It may take the form of answering past questions for homework, making notes during a lesson, copying notes or writing up experiments. There are many opportunities for extended writing, particularly in writing up conclusions to practical investigations. Marking has improved since the previous inspection, but occasionally the comments lack depth or significance to specific pieces of work. The oral feedback to classes following the return of homework is very good when particular mistakes can be identified and rectified. Students are kept up to date on worldwide developments in biology through monthly updates produced by the head of sciences. The updates include comments on ethical approaches to experiments, for example embryo culture to produce mast stem cells, and the use of chemicals from genetically modified corn to produce sterility in human males, acting as a contraceptive and aiding population control.
126. The students have excellent listening and speaking skills. They work productively and persevere with tasks. They accept challenge as an everyday event. They are adept at problem solving and will argue logically to put a point over. Consequently their learning is very good. Relationships are very good. Opinions are respected and ideas shared. They are very confident in discussing the subject in open debate, and use the subject vocabulary well.
127. Students are expected to work on their own in study periods and do this in a mature way. They use their textbooks confidently and can extract information to supplement their notes. The use of ICT has improved since the previous inspection and data

logging is a strength. The use of spreadsheets is being developed for practical investigations. A majority of students have a computer at home and many download scientific information from the Internet. The use of ICT needs to be extended to be a part of everyday lessons and give the students more opportunities to develop their ideas and improve their work, particularly in adding to their independent learning.

128. The subject is well led and managed and this results in very good teaching and learning. There is commitment to maintain very high standards. The scheme of work identifies areas where a range of strategies has been used to promote more effective learning, particularly incorporating the use of effective demonstration. The use of investigative experiments has improved since the previous inspection. Target setting is well established overall, but needs to focus on specific learning goals in all topics. The monitoring and evaluation of the subject performance is very well established, and students' progress is assessed regularly. The effective use of resources is a major strength of the department and there is excellent support from the technical staff in providing these for class practical lessons.

Physics

The quality of provision is **very good**.

Strengths

- Examination results are above average.
- The quality of teaching, including marking, is very good, enabling students to learn very well, leading to a high level of achievement.
- Students' mature and positive attitudes in lessons contribute significantly to their learning.
- Good well-equipped laboratories are used effectively to contribute to the quality of learning.

Areas for improvement

- There are no planned strategies to raise students' attainment above present levels.
- In some practical classes time is not well used because the tasks are not sufficiently challenging.
- In some lessons there is insufficient use of questions to target the needs of individual students.

129. Physics A-level results in 2000 were above the national average and close to well above average. In 2000 the results matched the average for other maintained grammar schools. Standards are similar to that reported in the most recent inspection report in 1996. Between 1998 and 2000 the proportion of students attaining the highest two grades has risen. In 2001 the overall results were lower because a small minority of students chose to concentrate their revision efforts in other subjects where high standards were needed to gain entry to their chosen university courses. Results by male and female students are similar. Attainment at the end of Year 12 in the AS-level examinations is very high; with nearly three-quarters of students attaining at least grade B.

130. The standard of work by those students currently studying physics is well above average for the stages they are at in their courses. Students are making good progress and achievement is good. Year 12 students are achieving well early in the AS-level course, meeting the high expectations set by their teachers. This was particularly evident in a lesson in which students were measuring the energy stored in

a stretched rubber band. Achievement was particularly high because the teacher introduced the work so that students were challenged to consolidate their previous understanding by applying it in a new situation. Folders of students' work show very good progress in understanding Hooke's Law and Young's Modulus through extensive calculation exercises that were informatively and helpfully marked. Students are still learning about recording their accurate measurements, at times quoting too many decimal places. The quality of graphical work is good but some lower attaining students produced examples of misjudged best-fit lines.

131. The standard of students' work in the second year of their A-level studies is well above average. The work in students' folders shows a high level of understanding of the work taught earlier in the course. The work reflects the high quality of teaching and the good use made in lessons and in private study of many opportunities to improve and develop students' understanding. During the inspection they demonstrated high levels of knowledge and understanding of how the stability of an atomic nucleus is determined by the number of protons and neutrons it contains. Students' practical skills are well developed. Measurements are accurately taken and recorded, although at times they have to be reminded of the significance of repeating measurements to improve accuracy. Achievement in Year 13 is good.
132. Teaching is very good overall, ranging from satisfactory to excellent. In most lessons this enables students to learn very well. Lessons are well planned and the expectation of what students can learn is high in all but a minority of practical lessons where measuring tasks are routine, rather than challenging. Teachers apply their very good understanding of physics particularly well in most lessons. Teachers usually pose questions well to enhance students' understanding of concepts, but in some lessons they are not used sufficiently to target the needs of individual students. Inspirational teaching that stimulated some high quality discussion, including extended contributions from students of real quality, resulted in understanding of a very high order of electron capture and changes in atomic nuclei during gamma ray emission. The teacher made especially effective use of simple models to convey to students, an understanding of advanced concepts.
133. Students learn very well. They acquire and consolidate new knowledge to a high standard because teachers have high expectations and use time in most lessons very effectively. As a result, over time, students' achievements are good. The key skills of applying English, mathematics and ICT in science are well taught. Students write one essay per term, for example, 'Models of the Atom, Democritus to Rutherford', to a good standard, which can involve the Internet as a research tool. Mathematical concepts are very well developed and used as an integral part of physics theory, while accurate calculations, clearly laid out benefit well from frequent practice. The provision for learning computer skills in science has improved markedly since the 1996 inspection. Students now have two or three good opportunities each year to use sensors attached to computers as measuring tools. Teachers assess and monitor students' progress regularly and this enables them to identify any underachievement early and to take appropriate action. In this way teachers ensure that all students are actively involved in their own learning. The students speak very highly of the teachers and of the support they give.
134. In lessons, students sustain concentration very well and work productively without intervention or guidance from the teacher. Homework is regularly set and handed in complete for marking. Students use their textbooks and home study time effectively.

135. The very good quality of teaching and learning reflects the commitment of a well-qualified team of three physics teachers, well supported by the full-time physics technician. However, although the overall provision in physics is very good, the department does not have specific plans to raise students' attainment above its present level. The plans that guide teachers in their work do not set out clearly what students are expected to learn in each lesson or block of lessons. At the same time there is no programme in place for the head of physics to monitor the quality of teaching and learning in the department to identify where standards could be better.
136. Improvements since the 1996 inspection have been good. Students' work is now monitored to identify those few who underachieve so that the quality of their learning can be improved. There has been a significant improvement in the number and use of computers, dataloggers and a video camera in physics lessons. In recent years many more students have chosen to study physics and the teachers have done well to sustain standards of students' attainment.

BUSINESS

The focus was on business studies and economics, both of which were inspected in detail.

Business studies

Overall the quality of provision is **good**.

Strengths

- Results from an increasingly popular subject indicate students make very good progress.
- Subject knowledge and enthusiasm communicated to students.
- Use of technology and preparedness to innovate and improve the quality of learning.
- Marking and assessment helps students understand what they have to do to improve.

Areas for improvement

- Avoiding an excessive amount of teacher led discussion allowing a greater range of teaching strategies.
- Planning and organisation of learning tasks to ensure greater consistency of pace and challenge in all classes.
- Need to engage all students.

137. Business studies is becoming a more popular subject in the sixth form and results since the last inspection have improved. In 2001, 78 per cent of students gained A and B grades in their A-level, and a similar proportion were awarded the top two grades in the AS-level examination. Results in the previous two years were better than those recorded nationally. As higher attaining students are encouraged to take economics and other more traditional subjects, GCSE point scores of those taking business studies at A-level are lower than in some other subjects. The eventual success of these students in business studies shows that good teaching leads to students achieving very well.

138. The standards of work seen during the inspection were above average. Students keep detailed notes, combining those given in class with those derived from texts. Even Year 12 students at an early stage of their course show a good use of the appropriate technical vocabulary in relation to work on marketing. In Year 13, students show a good understanding of ratio analysis, and are prepared to help each other with mathematical tasks.

139. The quality of teaching and learning are good overall. Teachers of business studies are young and enthusiastic. They enliven classes through the use of modern and appropriate examples of business practice. They show confidence in explaining and getting students to use relatively difficult concepts, for example the use of ratio analysis to assess the financial performance of companies. Most students respond well to these challenges and are confident in their explanations and reasoned recommendations. Relations between staff and students are informal and this contributes to active involvement of most students. A minority of students need more help in linking policy options to the outcomes of numerical analysis. The teachers are making good use of ICT to enhance their teaching, using applications such as Powerpoint and the Internet effectively. They carefully evaluate the contribution that ICT makes to effective learning.

140. Marking of work is thorough and quickly returned. This enables students to have a good understanding of the progress they are making. Teachers indicate to individual students what they have to do to achieve higher grades and they are particularly effective in helping students develop an understanding of what examiners mean when they use such terms as 'evaluation' and 'synthesis'. Prompt action is taken if students fall behind and late or incomplete homework is not tolerated.
141. Not all lessons are so purposeful and lively, especially when too much discussion is teacher led and students are not encouraged to develop more extended responses to oral questioning. Teachers always need to ensure that a variety of teaching strategies are used. Group work could be more widely used to good effect, and this might provide a means by which less confident students are encouraged to make fuller contributions to lessons. Although the course work option is not taken, care needs to be taken that students are given opportunities to undertake individual research and extended writing in the form of business reports. This would help prepare students for the greater emphasis on independent learning to be found in higher education.
142. Similarly close attention needs to be given to the planning, organisation and pace of all lessons. Sometimes too much is expected of students in too short a time and, at other times, key information could be conveyed more quickly allowing students more time to apply and use organisational frameworks provided by teachers, for example in the development of strategies for successful product placement.
143. Lesson planning also needs to take greater account of the needs of some individual students. This applies particularly to Year 12 where some students are new not only to the school but to business studies. More hesitant girls and boys from minority ethnic groups need to be more involved in class-based activities and discussions.
144. Good leadership is provided to the small number of business teachers who work very well as a team. Lesson observations are being developed to further improve the quality of teaching and support is offered to colleagues in other departments anxious to take advantage of new teaching technologies.

Economics

Overall the quality of provision is **very good**.

Strengths

- Results especially last year have been very good.
- Learning and attainment in Year 13 shows very high levels of competence.
- Enthusiasm of subject staff and the high quality of their teaching results in stimulating lessons.
- Teamwork shown by members of the department helps to promote continuous improvements.
- Enthusiasm and quality of student responses to teaching contribute to high standards.

Areas for improvement

- To continue to develop a wide range of teaching methods.
- Clearer identification of learning objectives for individual lessons to ensure consistency of challenge in all lessons.

145. A-level results have shown continuous improvement since the last inspection when it was noted that attainment was not as high as might be expected. In the last three

years all students have achieved at least grade A to E, and in 2001, 40 per cent of students achieved A or B grades. AS-level results this year are excellent with 14 students from a group of 15 gaining the top two grades.

146. Standards of work seen particularly from those students in Year 13 are well above average. Students are making very good progress and achievement is very good. They are able to apply theory to a wide range of contexts and show a sophisticated grasp of contemporary economic issues. For example, students are able to recognise and evaluate the impact of policies to promote tourism as a strategy to promote economic growth in developing countries. Their contributions to class-based discussion are thoughtful and reflective, and individual students have the self-confidence to acknowledge when they are not able to provide solutions to problems. In such cases fellow students are very supportive in offering alternatives. Students willingly undertake research around different topics, and are confident to work independently.
147. Year 12 students are still at an early stage in adapting to the intellectual challenges of economics, but some are showing an emerging confidence in using an appropriate technical vocabulary and in undertaking elementary graphical analysis of demand and supply.
148. The quality of teaching and learning are very good overall. At all times it is enthusiastic. In the best lessons students are continually engaged and challenged by appropriate questioning. Teachers' subject expertise is very good and this makes Internet based learning materials accessible and useful in extending student understanding. Students are encouraged to participate fully in lessons, but more time needs to be spent in using questioning skills to help students in Year 12 develop their skills of graphical analysis. Teachers are not complacent about the high standards achieved by students and are continually seeking ways to improve their teaching.
149. Learning objectives in individual lessons are not always precise and in some cases not made clear to students. Some plans are over ambitious leading to tasks not being completed or lack of time for students to develop more extended responses. More attention needs to be paid to framing objectives which will ensure that the pace and challenge evident in some lessons is found in all.
150. Leadership and management of the department are good, and are characterised by a high level of teamwork. This promotes productive levels of collaboration and ensures that expectations of student achievement are consistently high. The greater use of classroom observation would make a further contribution to spreading best practice and further developing the strengths of this department.
151. Good progress has been made since the last inspection in developing a range of different teaching strategies but in some lessons there is still an over reliance on teacher-led discussion. Information and communication technology is used very well in enhancing learning.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The focus was on art and music, and these subjects were inspected in detail.

ART

Overall quality of provision is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- Good teaching which promotes effective learning.
- Standards are improving.

Areas for improvement

- The accommodation which is particularly restrictive for A-level work.
- Standards of observational drawing.

152. Over the last four years A-Level results have shown little variation, being broadly average. When 2001 results are compared with 2000, attainment has improved although no data are yet available to allow comparison with the national picture. Similarly there is no national comparison data for AS-level. In 2001, 100 per cent achieved at least an A to E grade, half of which were at the higher grades A/B. When comparing A-level art results with those gained in the other subjects students studied, both male and female students did better in art. The school's own value added data indicate that all are making good progress.

153. The evidence from work seen in lessons and in student folders during the inspection shows that the recent rise in standards is being maintained, and is now above average overall. Both male and female students do equally well. Students are now making good progress through the course and their achievements are good. Students who have just started Year 13 are confident in their ability to research and develop ideas. This is seen in sketchbooks and critical studies books, which are full of stimulating visual imagery and media experiments. Such research is a good basis for further study, which is seen in the current project where students' experimental work explores a possible focus for finished work. This approach, which is linked directly to clear teacher guidance, is having a positive impact on standards. A small number of students in both Years 12 and 13, not all of them the most able, draw well from observation. This is seen in the recent landscape work done in Cornwall. Overall however, the standard of observation drawing is below average in both Year 12 and Year 13. The ability of students to use line and tone in their observation drawings is not as good as it should be. The work of some students, not just the least able, shows too great a reliance on second hand sources of visual information such as books and magazines. Good levels of creativity are seen when such starting points are used, but a review of whole projects shows that such starting points are sought too readily by some students. The standard of personal study work is good and a small number is very good. The best work in this aspect of the course is very well presented with a good balance between the written and visual content. All students without exception express themselves well through their written work, and the most able use a vocabulary which reflects a good understanding of a critical language. All show an ability to draw conclusions about the work they study, to speculate intelligently about the intentions of artists, and to make connections with their own work. In discussion, students show an equal facility, speaking confidently about their work and where ideas have originated and how they might be developed.

154. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have structured the course well, which reflects care and thought in planning. The course is underpinned by an appropriate methodology, which gives due weight to visual researching and the development of ideas. The effect of this is that students have a good understanding of what they are expected to do. The assignments chosen are well matched to the needs of students and provide sufficient guidance, but also sufficient flexibility to allow students to develop and exploit their own strengths. A good example of this is the St Ives project, which is specifically designed to provide direction and also to encourage freedom and personal development. This approach helps to raise standards. Many lessons start with whole class introductions, which help students to focus on what they are expected to do. Teachers have a good knowledge of their subject and they frequently draw on their wide understanding of art when making suggestions about which artist might be studied by a student to support their learning. Year 12 and Year 13 are taught together, this is well managed by the teachers and because younger students work alongside older students some positive benefits are seen. Students feel fully involved in their learning, and to a large extent this is the result of the very good written and verbal feedback provided by teachers. As a result students feel well informed about how well they are doing and how they might improve.
155. Students have a mature attitude to learning and routinely take initiative and work in their own time at school and at home. By making visits to art galleries and collections on their own initiative, students make a significant contribution to the personal study section of the course. Lessons are characterised by high levels of motivation and student involvement.
156. The teachers work well as a team. Effective management decisions have been taken for example in reviewing and shaping the course and in developing more effective methods of monitoring progress. There is a good understanding of where weaknesses lie and what needs to be done to improve further.
157. Accommodation for teaching art in the sixth form is poor. The studio is too small and on a number of occasions the main art room is used for other classes at the same time as the sixth form. This means that students are being taught in very cramped conditions, which inhibits their work. This is a major disadvantage and its impact is minimised because of the dedication of teachers and the co-operation of students.
158. Since the last inspection the place of art within the sixth form timetable is more secure. This means that students attend lessons in settled groups, which ensure continuity of teaching. In addition a second full-time teacher has been appointed which has added depth to students' learning. The effect of both these changes has been to raise standards.

Music

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

Strengths

- Good teaching which is based on a thorough and detailed approach to learning.
- Planning which takes careful account of the examination syllabus.
- The committed and positive approach of students to their work.
- Good relationships which create a positive ethos for learning.

Areas for improvement

- Small student numbers which inhibit discussion, the sharing of ideas and ensemble performance.
- Timetable arrangements which offer fewer than normal number of lessons each week.
- The lack of a music technology option.

159. In 2000, six students took A-level music. Results were below average, with no students achieving higher grades A or B. The average points score of 4.0 was below the national average of 5.7. However, in the most recent year, 2001, both students entered achieved A grades, and at AS-level two students achieved B grades and one a C grade. Because numbers of students entered are so small, comparisons are not statistically valid. In general, students achieve their predicted grades and make good progress in relation to their prior attainment at GCSE. Overall achievement is good.
160. The standard of work of current students is average. In lessons seen, the students were achieving well as a result of effective individual coaching, with thorough attention given to detail. A Year 12 student was making satisfactory progress in her understanding of the harmonies leading up to a cadence, and a Year 13 student was making confident gains in his ability to realise a two-part figured bass. One final year student's composition in a minimalist style showed imagination and a good awareness of musical techniques such as retrograde, inversion and augmentation. Standards in the work observed on understanding the musical techniques and context of the prescribed work for study was less secure.
161. Teaching is good overall. A very good subject knowledge and understanding is the basis for clear explanations and planning which builds successfully on prior learning, and which is geared effectively to the examination syllabus. Good use of questions encourages the students to solve problems themselves and to think more deeply about issues raised. Relationships within the department are relaxed and friendly, contributing to the positive ethos for learning. Marking of students' work is thorough and detailed, offering guidance on how to improve. A very good feature of the teaching is the use of self-assessment sheets for the students which encourages them to monitor their own progress and consider ways forward. More might be done to encourage students to consider the musical impact of techniques used in work on prescribed pieces.
162. The quality of learning is good. Students are committed and highly motivated. They clearly want to do well and have a mature and responsible attitude to their own learning. They have developed good skills of being self-reliant and independent learners. During lessons they are attentive and work productively. On occasions, they lack confidence in asking questions and expressing their ideas and responses to music. However, the small group sizes and nature of the often individual teaching going on, does not encourage the sharing of ideas and dialogue. In addition, although

the students are committed to contributing to extra-curricular activities in music, there are few opportunities for ensemble performance within class. As a consequence some important aspects of their musical development are constrained. Students are beginning to use computers effectively to support their learning and develop compositional techniques.

163. Leadership and management of the subject are good. The department's work is very well planned and organised, and there is a strong commitment to improve provision and standards. Assessment practice is well considered and supports students' progress. Because of small numbers, joint Year 12 and 13 classes are sometimes organised and the overall timetable allocation is below that which A-level subjects normally receive. This inhibits progress as less time is available to work beyond the constraints of the syllabus and develop a wider range of musical skills. Music technology, a popular option in many schools, is not offered. This would be worth considering in the light of the low numbers of students currently choosing to study music in the sixth form.

HUMANITIES

The focus was on geography, history and religious studies.

Geography

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

Strengths

- Students achieve very well because teaching is very effective.
- Students work well independently but also with their peers.
- Teachers use their specialist subject knowledge to stimulate interest and enjoyment.
- There are many opportunities for geographical enquiry work to extend students' personal development.

Areas for improvement

- Insufficient use is made of information and communication technology.
- Assessment is not used effectively to track students' attainment.

164. A-level results since 1998 have been consistently high, and have improved since the previous inspection. In 2000 they were well above average. All students were successful and well over half gained the higher A/B grades with male and female students performing equally well. In 2001, the results at A-level were very similar. The AS-level results in 2001 were very strong with almost two-thirds of students passing at the higher grades. Students' achievement in the sixth form is very good.
165. Standards are well above average and Year 13 students are achieving well encouraged by their very successful AS-level results. Students' attitudes are very positive to lesson activities as a consequence of very effective teaching. Lessons are planned carefully to integrate students' independent work at home with evaluative group discussion. In a Year 13 lesson this culminated in a student presentation on tourism resources and the way they have been marketed over time. In a Year 12 lesson, students, having researched evapo-transpiration (EVT) processes for homework, learned how its rate may be calculated. They then analysed comparative world EVT/rainfall data to identify the type of landscape it suggested and to evaluate the consequences there of the imbalance between EVT and rainfall.
166. Students learn very well. They respond positively to the mature environment established by teachers and to the challenge of the work set. They work with a high level of sustained concentration and when required, very co-operatively with their peers. As a result, they make very good progress. Giving formal and informal presentations enhances students' personal development. It develops their oral skills and the ability to justify their judgements to their peers in subsequent discussion.
167. Teaching is very good and has a strong impact on students' learning. Lessons are planned well to develop knowledge gained from homework and reading. Teachers' subject knowledge is very high. It stimulates effort, thinking and discussion and results in a deepening interest in the subject and enjoyment of the work. In a Year 13 lesson, teachers' personally researched work was used most effectively to exemplify the mechanics of glacier movement. There is a good balance of varied activities, which are generally conducted at a sharp pace. Teachers pose demanding questions to provoke discussion and to extend knowledge and understanding. They use diagrams very well to illustrate geographical processes and reinforce learning by

requiring individual students to talk through the diagrams to the whole class. Students' work is marked thoroughly with helpful written comment. The return of written work is accompanied by discussion, which students find very helpful and, as a result, they know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.

168. Although marking is done well, assessment generally is not well focused. There is no procedure for tracking the performance of individual students against their past performance data, to monitor attainment, to set targets or to inform planning. Information and communication technology is used in geography only to a limited extent. Teachers have the skills to do so but as yet have not developed its use in modelling and simulation exercises. Students' programmes of study are devised thoughtfully to be inclusive of all groups represented in the school. New students in Year 12, particularly female students, are well integrated into lessons. They are well supported in their studies, and lesson planning in Year 12 is directed to ensuring that their knowledge base is sufficiently secure to embark on advanced work. Throughout Years 12 and 13, care is taken to include all individual groups into the activities of lessons and related work. The subject is led very well and the teachers operate effectively as a team, sharing responsibilities and through lesson monitoring, sharing expertise and new ideas. They are determined to build on current success to sustain very high standards.

History

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

Strengths

- Students work well independently; they also collaborate very well with each other in lessons.
- Teaching is good and teachers' subject expertise is very high.
- Marking is thorough with accompanying comments that students find very helpful.

Areas for improvement

- The number of candidates passing at the higher A-level grades has declined since 1998 to well below average.
- Assessment is not used effectively to track individual attainment or to inform planning.

169. Although the numbers entered for history have been low, the A-level pass rate at grades A-E since 1998 has been consistently high and well above the national average with male and female students performing equally well. However, the proportion of students achieving higher A/B grades has declined significantly over the same period to well below the national average. This has reduced the average points score such that results are below the average for other grammar schools. In 2001, A-level results improved slightly, and results have improved since the last inspection overall. The AS-level rate at grades A-E in 2001 was very good. All students were successful and almost half the students gained the higher A/B grades. Despite this, standards in history are below those of most other subjects in the school. Given their attainment at GCSE, students' achievements overall are satisfactory.

170. The standard of current work indicates that students are achieving well in relation to their above average GCSE results, although significantly not at the higher A*-A grades. Encouraged by good AS-level results, students' work at the beginning of Year 13 is well above average. Although they find the work demanding, students in Year 13 enjoy history and have no regrets about choosing to study it. With the stresses of

the new AS-level examination behind them, students look forward to the expansion of their learning into advanced work, particularly the challenge of the enquiry work associated with their individual assignment. Their positive contributions to group work is based on wide preliminary reading, which was evident in a discussion to establish the criteria by which the effectiveness of Philip II of Spain's government might be judged. The students in Year 12 also clearly enjoy history. They are a dynamic group who interact well with their teacher and each other. They responded enthusiastically to role-play in a lesson planned to determine why Henry VIII's divorce from Catherine of Aragon was so controversial. Their submissions reflected well the appropriate level of priority given to a wealth of evidence all placed in a relevant perspective. They effectively got under the skin of some of the participating characters and successfully depicted their arguments in the light of their personal feelings, attitudes and ambitions.

171. Students learn well and make good progress. Teachers have established a good relationship with the class to which the students respond by working with a high level of sustained concentration. Enthusiastic and co-operative participation in role-play enhances students' personal development very effectively. It is part of a process to include new students more fully into the working of the class and it does so very successfully. It also develops oral skills and the ability to justify arguments. As a result, numbers choosing history have increased with 16 students in the current Year 12 and 15 students in Year 13.
172. The quality of teaching is good, an improvement on the last inspection. Teachers have established very positive relationships with the students and this builds confidence and makes for good class management. A secure level of subject expertise supports clear explanation and one teacher's experience as an examiner is helping all teachers to have a more focused awareness of the demands of higher grade answers in history. This formed the basis of a most helpful lesson in planning an essay on the 'Need for Reforming the Church in 1529'. Students' ideas on the main features of the answer were analysed in the class and then related very effectively to the requirements of a grade A answer. Expectations are high, work is challenging and much of it is investigative in order to develop independent learning skills. There is a good mix of activities and the pace of lessons is usually brisk. Teachers are very supportive of students with difficulties but at the same time their questions are developmental and move potential higher attainers to a higher level of discussion. Teachers work co-operatively to improve their teaching skills and as a result, lesson activities are well planned and stimulate interest.
173. The history department is well led and managed. The staff have worked together effectively to revise the sixth form study programme to reflect recent changes in the way history is examined and this is reflected in the slight improvement in the 2001 results. They work well as a team, sharing expertise and ideas positively through the monitoring of lessons and informal discussion in the shared aim of raising standards particularly at the highest levels.

Religious studies

Overall the quality of provision is **good**.

Strengths

- The quality of teaching is good. Teachers have a very thorough knowledge of the subject, which they effectively use to raise standards.
- Students have good grasp of the ethical and philosophical concepts covered in the course and are able to apply them well to relevant situations. They use religious language well.
- Students are strongly motivated. They respond well in lessons sharing ideas in a sensitive and perceptive manner.

Areas for improvement

- There is a need for a greater variety in teaching strategies.

174. There are no previous examination results as the subject has just been introduced into the sixth form. The current level of work is above national standards, and students are achieving well in relation to their prior attainment at GCSE. Students have a good grasp of the importance of sacred books and writings. They have produced some good essays on the meaning of inspiration in sacred literature.

175. Their understanding of ethical issues is good. One Year 12 group was carefully considering utilitarianism and students were able to compare the works of Bentham and Mills. They have a good understanding of the difference between qualitative and quantitative concepts of measuring pain. The students' written work is well prepared. They are able to use religious language well and can demonstrate a good understanding of difficult philosophical theories. They had produced some very good essays on the work of Hume. These were well structured showing the ability to present a well-reasoned argument in support of a particular theory.

176. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers have a very good knowledge of the subject. They create a challenging learning environment that is characterised by good humour and positive reinforcement. Lessons are well planned with suitable tasks. There is some variation in the teaching methods used but there is a need to develop a wider range of activities in order to maintain the pace of the lessons. Students' work is assessed well. Related homework is set and essays are well marked with helpful comments on how the students should improve. Students make good progress. They are attentive and responsive in the classroom and produce their written work on time. The standard of literacy is high. The subject is well managed, and there is a strong commitment to building up the subject.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English

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

Strengths

- A-level results have improved and are now well above average.
- Teachers' very good subject knowledge, very good relationships with students and thorough marking.
- Students are committed and work very hard.
- Students' very detailed knowledge of their set texts and the background of the times in which they were written.
- Students achieve a mature, personal style of writing.

Areas for improvement

- All students' capacity to interpret unfamiliar texts.
- Some lessons allow students to be passive recipients of others' knowledge for too long.
- Some students do not take sufficiently useful notes.

177. The results in A-level English literature in 2001 were well above the 2000 national average both in the overall points score and in the percentage gaining grades A and B. These results continued the upward trend in points scores over the last four years, so that the boys are now doing at least as well as the girls. All students complete their courses and all gain at least an A to E grade. The numbers studying English have declined over four years. The school has twice needed to change its choice of syllabus. The results of the 24 students who sat AS-level in 2001 were spread evenly over grades A to D. As yet there are no national figures to compare these with. Eighteen of these students have chosen to continue with the A-level course.

178. The standard of the work of current students is well above average. This represents good, and some very good, achievement since GCSE. Students in Year 13 have covered a lot of ground in the sixth form and have written a good number of worthwhile essays on each of their texts. The best work is supported by thorough, well-organised notes and is alert to the author's use of form and style to convey meaning. Students reading seventeenth century poetry have written very effective sonnets incorporating a rhetorical style of address, as well as the tight form, to express real feeling. All students gain a very good appreciation of the historical, social and political context in which each text was written, for instance the religious and political melting pot of the first half of the seventeenth century. Most students learn to construct a lucid argument in their essays, all write fluently and are developing a mature, individual style of writing, which indicates very good progress in both academic and personal development and which will stand them in very good stead at university. On the other hand students lack confidence when trying to interpret unfamiliar literature, for example unseen poetry. This is partly because they are not acquiring sufficient strategies to tackle this sort of work and because of a weak general knowledge about biblical, classical and current affairs. Although students usually make their own notes during lessons, some note-making is not sufficiently thorough or well organised to be useful at a later date.

179. Students in Year 12 have made a good start on their AS-level course. They are enjoying their texts and remembering a lot of detail about the plot, the setting and the characters. In many cases their memory of, and reflection on, such detail is well

above expectations and is enabling students to respond with sensitivity and to explore nuances.

180. The teaching is good overall, ranging from satisfactory to very good. In the best lessons the teachers make the students think and they use effective methods to help them muster all that they can bring to the topic under discussion and then to refine their perceptions. This happened in a Year 12 lesson where the teacher's skilful questioning elicited many relevant comments and insights into utilitarianism in 'Hard Times' and into the nature of satire. Here the students were learning to think quickly and also to grasp difficult concepts. All the teachers are enthusiastic about literature and have very good subject knowledge which stimulates the students and contributes very well to their cultural development. Teachers have very good relationships with their classes challenging them and treating them as responsible young adults. They share with their classes their very good understanding of the assessment objectives of the courses. They mark the students' work thoroughly, including some comments which further challenge the students' thinking, indicating strengths and areas for future improvement. Teachers give the students opportunities for independent work, not only in essays and occasional personal writing but also in researching background to relay to the rest of the class. The result of all this is that students are committed, they learn well, and they are particularly assiduous in the work they do on their own.
181. The less successful elements of the teaching are that in some lessons teachers allow the students to be passive recipients of others' knowledge for too long. Sometimes they do not use effective methods to help students cope adequately with unfamiliar texts or with discussing abstract concepts such as what is literature and the nature of tragedy. More time for individual reflection after a first reading and more use of pairs and small groups for re-reading and discussing in a focused way would draw all students into the process of exploring meaning and would sometimes divide the labour efficiently.
182. The department is well managed. All the team focuses well on ways to enable students throughout the school to do their best. They are now sharing ideas about teaching strategies but this process has not so far been enhanced by the head of department regularly observing colleagues' lessons and by teachers observing each other in order to spread good practice. The team provides a good number of activities both inside and outside school for enriching students' appreciation of literature. The students use the Internet a good deal, but in the sixth form, as well as in the previous key stages across the school, the school library is under-used for research and personal reading. Although the library is often used as a private study area in the sixth form, sixth form borrowing figures are very low.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

The focus was on French and German but Spanish was also sampled in Year 12. Spanish has just been introduced into the sixth form and the number of students is low at the moment. Examination results in Spanish were above average in 2001. Two lessons were observed, one was good and the other very good. Students enjoyed the lessons and made very good progress in listening and reading and understanding of grammar. Speaking skills are less well developed.

French

Overall the provision is **good**.

Strengths

- Teaching is very good. Lessons contain a wide variety of logically-linked activities which ensures that students make good progress.
- The standard of speaking and listening in Year 13 is very high.
- Teachers' subject knowledge and linguistic skills are very good.
- In all lessons teachers effectively use French as the normal means of classroom interaction.
- Regular testing helps students make good progress in their learning.
- Relationships are very good.

Areas for improvement

- The oral work of some students in Year 12 needs to be developed.
- More use should be made of information and communication technology to enhance learning.

183. Over recent years, results have been in line with national averages for all schools. The most recent results followed the same pattern. The coursework of students is generally of a high standard. The results in AS-level in 2001 were good with a high number of grades A and B.

184. Evidence from work seen in lessons and in students' files during the inspection shows that many students are achieving good standards. They make good progress and their achievement is good. Standards in one group in Year 12 and in the Year 13 group were above average overall. The standard of speaking and listening in Year 13 is very high. Students from the whole ability range make good progress and high attainers make very good progress. The pronunciation and intonation of most students are very good. Many students speak with confidence and express their opinions clearly and accurately. Some students in Year 12 are more hesitant in oral work and speak confidently and fluently only on topics that are very familiar to them from their GCSE studies. All students have good listening and reading comprehension skills. They are able to understand the gist and extract details from a wide range of written and spoken texts and cope well with lessons conducted entirely in French. Students produce a wide variety of written work ranging from notes and exercises to extended projects and presentations. Higher attaining students are very accurate in their writing and use a good range of structures with rich vocabulary and expressions. They have a good knowledge of grammar. Some Year 12 students' knowledge of grammatical structures is still insecure at this early stage in the course.

185. Progress made by students in lessons is good. They acquire new vocabulary quickly and learn new structures efficiently. They use dictionaries well to check meanings and

develop good reading and listening skills. They are generally good at seeing language patterns and are able to manipulate structures once they have been introduced. Some are very good at giving their opinions and stating reasons orally.

186. The quality of teaching and learning are very good. All lessons are well prepared and have clear and appropriate aims. Teachers provide students with good strategies to promote reading and listening skills and develop speaking skills by skilful guided questions and interesting cues and prompts. All teachers conduct most aspects of lessons entirely in French which greatly enhances students' aural comprehension and oral production. Lessons contain a rich variety of activities which are logically linked and motivate students to achieve their best. Very good use is made of a range of authentic listening and reading resources which stimulates students to produce good oral and written responses. Teachers also made good use of the overhead projector and cassette player, but the use of computers is more limited. Teachers prepare a good range of activities and tasks which stimulates students to acquire and consolidate their skills well. All lessons proceed at a brisk pace and good use is made of tight deadlines to ensure that students remain on task and produce high quality work in a short span of time. On many occasions humour is used to great effect to keep students interested and enthusiastic. Teachers frequently praise students for their efforts and correct errors constructively which enables them to make very good progress.
187. Students have a serious approach to the subject and are very attentive and focused in lessons. They listen to recordings intently to extract details and work hard to understand demanding written texts. Many are keen to express their views and some can sustain and develop their opinions well, especially in Year 13. They use dictionaries well. They frequently ask questions for clarification and seek help if they do not understand. This aids their progress significantly. They are enthusiastic learners and participate fully in lessons.
188. There is good leadership for the subject and teachers have a common approach to teaching methodology, assessment and correction of students' work. The teachers have very good subject knowledge and are very competent linguists. The head of department has observed all teachers in the classroom as part of performance management, but there is no peer observation which would help disseminate ideas and share expertise. The well-structured French exchange is a strong factor in raising the standard of speaking and listening skills. The careful integration of the French 'assistante' into the mainstream work of the department also ensures that her impact upon speaking and listening competence is maximised.

German

Overall the provision is **good**.

Strengths

- Teaching is very good. Lessons are varied and contain stimulating tasks and activities which motivate students to progress well.
- Results at A-level are above average.
- Teachers speak very fluently and have very good subject knowledge.
- Teachers conduct all lessons almost exclusively in German which greatly enhances students' language skills.
- Regular testing is used successfully to help students make good progress in the acquisition of new vocabulary and structures.
- Very good use is made of a wide range of authentic material to promote learning.
- Relationships are very good.

Areas for improvement

- More use should be made of information and communication technology to enhance learning.
- The German teachers should observe each other teach in order to share ideas and expertise.

189. Over recent years results have been above national averages for all schools. In 2000 eight students passed A-level German and no one was awarded lower than a grade C. There was also a high level pass rate at AS-level in 2000.

190. Evidence from work seen in lessons and in students' files during the inspection confirms that most students are achieving good standards. They make good progress and their achievements are good. Standards in both Year 12 and Year 13 are above average. All students from the whole ability range make appropriate progress. Pronunciation and intonation are generally very good. Students read out loud with confidence and fluency. Many students speak confidently and are at ease expressing their opinions. Students in Year 13 are able to answer questions at length on demanding written texts and can talk freely and in an interesting way about topics of general interest. Students have very good aural and reading skills. They are able to understand the gist and extract details from a wide range of written and spoken texts and follow with ease lessons delivered entirely in German. Students' written work is very varied. It consists of grammar notes, exercises for practice and consolidation, projects and presentations. Some of the work is wordprocessed and there is evidence of redrafting. The most able are very accurate in their writing. They write complex sentences with subordinate clauses and use a variety of structures and vocabulary. Year 12 students' knowledge of grammar is less firm at this early stage in the course, but the gaps in their knowledge are quickly being filled.

191. Progress made by students in lessons is very good. They learn new vocabulary and structures efficiently. They make good use of dictionaries and have good strategies for tackling reading and listening texts. They quickly understand language patterns and are able to generate new language using grammatical rules. Students are very good at stating opinions and giving reasons.

192. Teaching and learning are very good in all lessons. Lessons are well prepared and have clear and appropriate aims. Teachers use effective strategies and techniques to develop reading and listening skills. They also make good use of structured questions

to ensure that students have the opportunity and encouragement to speak at length. Teachers speak almost entirely in German in lessons which provides a good model for students' learning. Lessons are varied and made up of a good range of different activities which promote all four skills. Authentic listening and reading texts are regularly used. These interest students and motivate them to produce good oral and written work. Teachers make good use of audio-visual aids, but no one was observed using computers. Teachers use a wide variety of activities and tasks to enable students to progress well in all skills. Lessons are brisk and purposeful. Deadlines are frequently set to ensure that students are focused and work efficiently. The atmosphere in lessons is very positive and students are obviously enjoying learning German. Teachers often praise students and correct their errors positively which encourages them to try their best.

193. Students are mature in their approach. They listen carefully to recordings, to the teacher and to each other and concentrate hard when reading demanding texts. They express their views with enthusiasm and sometimes at length. If they do not understand a point, they have no hesitation in asking for clarification. They work with enthusiasm and contribute well to lessons.
194. The subject is well led and the two German teachers complement each other well. They both have very good subject knowledge and very high linguistic skills. They do not observe each other teach, which would help them share their considerable joint expertise. The German exchange has a very good impact on standards of speaking and listening.