

INSPECTION REPORT

KING EDWARD VI GRAMMAR SCHOOL

Chelmsford

LEA area: Essex

Unique reference number: 115327

Headteacher: Dr M Walker

Reporting inspector: W Keast
1522

Dates of inspection: 5 - 9 November 2001

Inspection number: 190013

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
School category:	Foundation
Age range of pupils:	11-18
Gender of pupils:	Main school boys. Sixth form mixed.
School address:	Broomfield Road Chelmsford Essex
Postcode:	CM1 3SX
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Appropriate authority:	Management governors
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs J Patterson
Date of previous inspection:	October 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities (sixth form)	Aspect responsibilities (sixth form)
1522	W Keast	Registered inspector	Physics	The school's results and achievements. How well are pupils taught?
9053	V Phillips	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, behaviour and personal development. How well does the school care for its pupils? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
28199	P Lawley	Team inspector	English Theatre studies	How good are curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
2501	R Allison-Smith	Team inspector	Art	How well is the school led and managed?
1292	V Foster	Team inspector	Mathematics	
29742	P Fyans	Team inspector	Chemistry and biology	
4617	R Fox	Team inspector	French and German	
1355	S Morgan	Team inspector	Design and technology	
25073	S Jordan	Team inspector	Geography	
10761	P Willan	Team inspector	History	
11746	R Coulthard	Team inspector	Music	

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

King Edward VI Grammar School is a foundation boys' grammar school for pupils aged 11 to 18. A small number of students, boys and girls, enters at sixth form level. The school is heavily over-subscribed. The school has 838 pupils of whom 279 are in the sixth form. It is smaller than other secondary schools although the sixth form is larger than other sixth forms. Pupils come from a wide area and from a large number of schools. The number of pupils entitled to a free school meal and the proportion of pupils with special educational needs are both well below the national average. No pupil has a statement of need. The proportion of pupils for whom English is an additional language (6.7 per cent) is higher than in most schools but none of these pupils is at an early stage in learning English. Pupils come from generally, but not exclusively, advantaged backgrounds. The attainment of pupils when they come to the school is very high.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is an outstanding school. It has an extremely strong learning atmosphere in which there is a love of scholarship, and pupils revel in using their minds and applying their knowledge. This is clearly linked to the leadership within the school. Pupils become independent learners through the great breadth of learning opportunities to which they have access. The school supports their academic progress and personal development extremely well. As a result of the very high quality of teaching they receive and the excellent attitudes to learning which they bring to their work, pupils achieve standards which are very high and which are well above those achieved nationally by pupils with a similar starting point. The school provides excellent value for money.

What the school does well

- outstanding standards which derive from excellent learning resulting from excellent teaching
- excellent pupil behaviour and attitudes, supported by very high quality of care and guidance
- first class curriculum in a school atmosphere where learning is valued by both teachers and pupils
- excellent leadership provided by the headteacher, supported by the senior team, focused on making still further improvement

What could be improved

There are no improvements of a major nature which the school needs to tackle. The current school development plan and planning process includes a number of smaller developments which, as modifications to the current extremely effective practice, will go towards improving what the school is already achieving.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in October 1996. The improvement since then has been excellent. The standards, already high, have continued to improve in line with the national trend. The many strengths reported in the school have been maintained. Teaching has improved. Middle managers have been enabled to carry out their monitoring role and the use of assessment information has been greatly improved. The development of the buildings continues with a very recently completed music block. The teaching of religious education now meets the requirements of the Locally Agreed Syllabus, attainment in information and communications technology is now reported and afternoon registration procedures now meet statutory requirement. All pupils have at least three acts of corporate worship a week.

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				Key
	all schools			similar schools	
	1999	2000	2001	2001	
GCSE examinations	A*	A*	A*	A	well above average A above average B average C below average D well below average E
A-levels/AS-levels	A*	A*	n/a		

Results in the end of Year 9 national testing in 2001 put the school in the top five per cent of grammar schools in English, mathematics and science. Results continue to rise in line with the national trend. At GCSE, results in 2001 were in the top five per cent of schools nationally and well above average for grammar schools and for schools which had similar attainment at the end of Year 9 in 1999. Results are rising in line with the national trend. All pupils achieved at least 5 grades A*-C and pupils achieved an average of a grade A in all their examinations. These were the school targets. Performance at A-level was in the top five per cent of schools in 2000. Involvement in a national pilot study of the value being added at this level showed that, on average, pupils at the school achieved a total of three grades higher than the norm for pupils with similar GCSE point scores in 1998. This is excellent achievement by all three cohorts of pupils. In 2001, the AS-level results were very good and the A-level results were higher than in the previous year. However, at the time of publication, no national comparisons were yet available.

The evidence from the inspection is that the standards of pupils currently in Year 9, Year 11 and Year 13 are at the same previously high levels, and achievement remains excellent.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils show exceptional intellectual curiosity and determination to make the most of all that the school offers. Their thirst for knowledge is linked to development of critical thinking skills and a love of learning that ensure excellent use of opportunities for independent study.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour of outstanding maturity and self-discipline makes a significant contribution to achievement and a highly civilised working atmosphere.
Personal development and relationships	Impressive personal development and excellent relationships reflect high quality mutual respect and trust. Pupils value and celebrate each other's achievements in all areas of school life. Personal responsibility and service to the community are outstanding features of school life.
Attendance	Attendance is very high.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Teaching in Years 7 to 11 is excellent in English and mathematics and very good in science. A particular strength of all the teaching in the school is the teachers' subject expertise. This results in very well planned lessons which challenge pupils both intellectually and through the pace at which work proceeds. Explanations are clear. Pupils are given a wide range of tasks and activities which develop their general learning skills as well as increasing their understanding of the subject they are learning. Lessons are characterised by an atmosphere in which learning is expected and is fun. Pupils are keen to learn. They immerse themselves in their lessons, work extremely hard and produce copious amounts of work of a very high quality. As a result of the excellent teaching and the attitudes they have, pupils' learning is excellent.

Skills and standards in literacy and numeracy are very high. Nevertheless, the school is seeking to introduce aspects of the national strategy in these two areas. Pupils have very good opportunities throughout the curriculum to develop and practise these skills.

The school meets the needs and aspirations of its pupils extremely well. Their subject knowledge and understanding is developed very well, and this is achieved in a context in which they also develop and mature as individuals.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum offered is excellent, with an outstanding range of learning opportunities which are highly effective in providing academic achievement and developing individual thinking skills. The taught curriculum is supported by a very wide and effective range of extra-curricular activities on both a weekly and annual basis. These activities provide excellent opportunities for pupils' personal development. The curriculum meets the requirements of the National Curriculum.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	The progress of the very small number of pupils on the register is carefully monitored. The very good information available to teachers enables these pupils to perform at very high levels, and their achievement is excellent.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	The language attainment of pupils for whom English is an additional language is very high on entry to the school and this is not an issue for the school.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Outstanding, particularly in nurturing a spirit of enquiry linked to moral, social and ethical issues.
How well the school cares for its pupils	An excellent focus on personal and educational support is based on very high quality, thoughtful approaches to assessment and pupil well-being. The emphasis is on personal achievement, high challenge and low stress. All individual achievement, gifts and talents are valued and celebrated.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff are outstanding. They have a very clear view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and where improvements can be made and are actively addressing them. They lead by example - in being outstanding classroom teachers and

	senior managers. The school strives for excellence, reflected in the high quality strategic and short-term plans for improvement and the very good guidance and support available to students. The resources for teaching and learning have been used very effectively to help bring about exceptionally high standards.
Aspect	Comment
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors are an experienced and highly effective team who play a very active part in the school. They give generously of their time in order to get to know the school, the staff and the pupils, and to become even better informed in their decision-making. There is a purposeful professional relationship between the governing body and key staff, and a shared view of what needs to be improved. They are extremely rigorous in ensuring that the school is held to account and have set challenging targets for the senior staff. Their combined expertise gives a valuable steer in helping the school achieve its key priorities for improvement.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Monitoring of teaching has been used very effectively to bring about the improvements in learning and in raising standards. It is currently the key priority for development aimed at raising standards further. The school benefits from being involved in several research projects for school improvement whose focus is primarily concerned with improving teaching and learning. The school closely monitors its progress towards meeting the targets that have been set. A close watch is kept on how well pupils achieve, their attitudes to school and their success in examinations. This information helps the school evaluate what works well and what needs to be improved.
The strategic use of resources	The school has excellent strategic plans for improvement and development of the site. The budget is very well managed and efficiently administered to ensure there are clear links between what is planned and how the budget is allocated. The pupils derive great benefit from the wisely targeted resources. The school consults wisely and is very aware of its performance in relation to other schools. The school applies the principles of best value extremely well.

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 the school has high expectations of its pupils that pupils are taught well and make good progress that the school is well led and managed that the school helps their children to mature and take responsibility that they feel comfortable to approach the school with questions or concerns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> there were no issues about which more than ten per cent of respondents indicated any degree of concern.

The inspectors agree with the very positive views that parents have of the school.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

There are 279 students in the sixth form, making it larger than other sixth forms. The sixth form provides a wide range of A-level courses for students whose main intent is going on to higher education courses. Nearly all students in Year 11 go into the sixth form, where they are joined by a small number of students from other schools. Approximately 18 per cent of each year group are students new to the school. Those who do not continue into the sixth form choose to continue their education elsewhere where courses more closely meet their needs. The sixth form is gradually increasing in size. The school sets high entry criteria with the result that the attainment of students when they enter the sixth form is very high.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

This is an excellent sixth form. The sixth form meets the needs of its students extremely well through the excellent range of learning opportunities and the very high quality teaching. Leadership in the sixth form is excellent. Assessment procedures are excellent and other features of support and guidance are very good. Pupils' attitudes to learning are outstanding. These very positive features result in the students, who have high attainment on entry to the sixth form, maintaining these very high comparative standards and achieving significantly higher standards at A-level than students with similar starting attainment nationally. These very high standards have been gradually rising year by year. The sixth form provides excellent value for money with this very high quality provision being achieved within the proportion of the budget that is generated by the sixth form students.

Strengths

- excellent teaching leading to excellent learning and very high standards
- excellent range of learning opportunities in a climate for learning which fosters intellectual curiosity
- students' excellent attitudes to work and learning
- excellent leadership by the head teacher and senior team

What could be improved

There are no major issues which the school needs to address. The school development planning incorporates a number of smaller developments to modify and further improve the current high quality provision.

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. Economics, government and politics, Latin and religious studies were not inspected.

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	Very good. Standards are very high. The subject knowledge and expertise of the teachers promotes very effective teaching and learning. Leadership ensures a clear educational direction.
Biology	Excellent. Standards are very high. Excellent teaching provides intellectual challenge and the response by students is excellent and they achieve extremely well.
Chemistry	Very good. Standards are very high. Very good teaching leads to very good learning as students respond very well to the thought provoking lessons.

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Physics	Very good. Standards are very high. Very effective teaching combines with very good attitudes by students to provide very good learning and very good achievement.
Design and technology	Very good. Standards are well above average. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and this enables students to achieve well.
Art	Very good. Teaching and learning are very good and this leads to very high standards.
Music	Good. Teaching and learning are very good and students achieve very well. Students' learning is enhanced by an outstanding range of opportunities for performance.
Theatre studies	Very good. Standards are well above average as a consequence of very good teaching, which is informed by excellent knowledge of dramatic text and practical performance skills. Students' level and quality of teamwork is particularly impressive.
Geography	Excellent. Standards are very high. The quality of teaching is excellent and learning is most effective. Contributing factors include the outstanding leadership provided by the head of department and the quality of curriculum planning
History	Very good. Well above average standards result from the very good teaching and learning. Students achieve very well.
English literature	Excellent. Standards are very high as a result of excellent teaching characterised by excellent subject knowledge and planning. Students are taught very effectively to think and study independently and produce original work which is scholarly in nature.
French	Very good. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge, students have very positive attitudes and standards are very high. Teaching is very good.
German	Very good. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge, students have very positive attitudes and standards are well above average. Teaching is very good.

The other subjects being taught in the sixth form were sampled and the teaching and learning taking place in these, and the standards being demonstrated, were very similar to those reported in the inspected subjects.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Very good guidance and support is sharply focused on individual achievement and personal development.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	The staff who are responsible for the sixth form are a highly effective team. They work closely with other senior managers and governors and together provide outstanding leadership. The senior management team lead by example and are exceptional role models - as both managers and classroom teachers. They have very high expectations of the students and closely monitor their academic work, their participation and contribution to the life of the school.

	This results in very high standards and a shared ethos for learning that enriches both the school and the wider community.
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STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • that they are well taught and challenged by the teaching • that they are helped to study independently • that the choices they can make suit their talents • that they receive clear printed information and teachers are accessible for help • that they enjoy the sixth form and would recommend it to others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the advice on entering the sixth form and for future options • the information on the progress they make • the school's responsiveness to their suggestions and the extent to which they are treated as responsible adults • the range of extra-curricular activities

All the improvements sought relate to 'fine tuning' as further discussion with sixth formers made clear. Their specific suggestions for the timing and nature of advice have already been taken up by the school. The inspection findings do not support criticism of the range of extra-curricular activities nor the school's responsiveness to sixth formers' views and treatment of them as responsible adults.

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

Outstanding standards which derive from excellent learning resulting from excellent teaching

- 1 The results of the end of Year 9 testing in 2001 were outstanding. In each of the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, pupils' performance is in the top five per cent of grammar schools nationally. These very high standards continue to improve year by year, with a trend which matches the rising trend nationally. The results of teacher assessment in the other subjects are well above those reported nationally in all subjects. The school is heavily over-subscribed and pupils are selected for entry by examination. They come with very high standards of attainment. Pupils achieve extremely well. At this level there is currently little available national data to determine if the results are as high as they should be.
- 2 The results in GCSE in 2001 were also very high. They too were in the top five per cent of schools nationally and were well above average for grammar schools. Here again, results continue to rise steadily year by year. The results in all subjects were significantly above the national average. The results that these pupils gained can be compared with the results which they achieved in the end of Year 9 testing in 1998. When their attainment is compared with the attainment of pupils in other schools who had similar end of Year 9 results, the school is well above average. The school has added value to pupils' attainment and the pupils have achieved extremely well.
- 3 The picture is the same in the sixth form, where the very high standards continue to rise and where value-added measures show that, on average, students achieved three grades higher than other sixth form students who started from similar GCSE standards. This is reported in more detail in part D of this report. Reference is also made there to the results of the new AS-level examinations taken for the first time in 2001.
- 4 Teaching throughout the school is excellent. It is characterised by teachers' very good subject knowledge and excellent classroom relationships. These lead to very well-planned lessons that build upon pupils' previous experience. Teachers share with pupils what they are expected to achieve in the course of the lesson so that everyone knows what to expect. Lessons begin promptly and move at a brisk pace. This is often achieved through short activities and tasks each with a clear indication of how long pupils have to complete them. This keeps pupils on their toes and maintains their interest and concentration. Expectations of what pupils can achieve are very high. Work is challenging for pupils because of its depth, its detail or the pace at which new work is introduced. For example, in a Year 9 mathematics lesson, good subject knowledge enabled clear explanations so that pupils learned to solve quadratic equations by completing the square. They were not only learning to 'apply a rule' but also gaining an understanding of why the rule worked.
- 5 The work which is taught quite clearly covers the requirements of the National Curriculum and of the examination syllabi. However, teaching goes beyond this to cross subject boundaries and to develop the whole person. For example, at the beginning of a science lesson, pupils were recalling what they had previously learnt about the digestive process. They were given five minutes to select a feature and to encapsulate this in a slogan. One pupil, thinking about the stomach, came up with:
 'I'm a muscular bag
 With enzymes galore
 I've broken down the protein
 Now give me some more'

In a Year 10 history class, groups of pupils had previously researched one of five issues. In the lesson, the groups were re-formed so that each had a representative of each research group. These 'experts' then taught the rest of the group about their issue. In addition to demonstrating very high standards of knowledge and skills of literacy and communication, pupils were learning to question, to synthesise information, to reason and to give concise explanations. This teaching strategy of researching information is also used in science where members of groups take on differing roles as the group works towards its final presentation.

- 6 The learning which takes place is excellent as pupils take a great interest in their lessons and work hard, both during the lessons and during homework and preparation time. They produce copious work of high quality. Pupils just love to learn. For example, a Year 7 group had been introduced to some of the possibilities of Powerpoint presentations - a new software program for most of them. Towards the end of their second lesson, they had all produced a slide show combining a range of transitions from one slide to the next with clipart, text and moving images appearing in many ways. They were moving on to produce a second slide show to present information which they had researched on a personal interest.

Excellent pupil behaviour and attitudes supported by very high quality of care and guidance

- 7 Not only are pupils' academic standards very high, so are their personal standards. That is, their attitudes to school and to learning, their behaviour in and out of the classroom and their personal development. Pupils are very positive about the opportunities the school offers for academic and personal achievement. They relish the high quality learning opportunities provided. Their behaviour is mature, self-disciplined and directed towards learning and making the most of the rich range of experiences offered. Personal development is of a high order and reflects the trust placed in pupils, together with the mutual high regard and respect shown by staff and pupils. The development of personal and learning skills is outstanding, in line with the culture of excellence and personal achievement where all talents and successes are valued. For example, in a Year 7 gymnastics lesson pupils were working in pairs to put together a sequence of moves. They had been taught and understood the stages towards achieving a 'perfect' handstand. One pupil was struggling to achieve the highest stage of which he felt capable, helped by his partner but also being counselled by him to work at the lower stage so as to achieve the overall goal. Relationships are very positive and purposeful, with excellent support systems where older students help younger or newer pupils in and out of lessons. Regular, punctual attendance is the norm and contributes towards their learning.
- 8 There is relentless encouragement for pupils to aim high and all support systems are designed to ensure that they do so with quiet confidence. The quality of subject specific and general academic guidance is high so that pupils know exactly what they need to do to improve their work. This is confirmed in discussion with pupils. Guidelines and policy on assessment are impressive, particularly in the way they draw on current research to promote improvement in practice. Assessment procedures are used very well, ensuring early intervention when pupils are in difficulty. Tracking of individual effort and achievement is used very well to diagnose difficulties and identify targets or strategies for improving learning and standards of work. The whole-school approach to assessment and the feedback of information to pupils include the clear expectation that information is used to guide teaching and learning strategies. Teachers are approachable and very willing to give advice on work and course choices; confirmed in discussion with pupils in all year groups.
- 9 Pupils enjoy and would recommend their sixth form, particularly for the level of intellectual challenge, teaching and development of critical thinking skills. It is very clear to students whether or not they are likely to succeed if they make particular subject choices for sixth form study, but not always what the longer term implications of that choice might be for future studies or employment. Although support

and guidance based on high quality assessment processes are valued strongly, students would welcome earlier reassurance about progress in Year 12 and 13 courses. General information about courses and careers, including help with university applications is of a high order.

First class curriculum in a school atmosphere where learning is valued by both teachers and pupils

- 10 When the taught, subject based curriculum is considered together with the wealth of other opportunities available to the pupils, the opportunities for learning are excellent.
- 11 In the main school, the curriculum fully meets the requirements of the National Curriculum and the Locally Agreed Syllabus for religious education. In Year 7, the basic curriculum is enhanced by a second language and drama for all pupils. Drama continues in Year 8 where all pupils also begin a study of Latin. In Year 9, Latin continues but drama ceases in order that sufficient teaching time is available for the core subjects of English and science. Pupils are taught the fundamentals of information and communication technology in Year 7. In subsequent years these skills are taught and developed through the work of, and support learning in, other subjects. Word processing and presentational aspects, the use and understanding of spreadsheets and the research of information are particularly well covered and pupils' very good skills are clearly evident. The use of computers to collect data directly, to model and to control is not so strong but is under development. All subjects make some use of information and communication technology but the need to increase this, particularly in the creative subjects, is recognised and development is in hand. The choices available to pupils moving into Years 10 and 12 are wide. They provide a very good range and choice is not restricted by timetabling decisions. For example, only a very small number of students going into the sixth form were unable to study their preferred fourth choice of AS-level course.
- 12 What makes the learning opportunities so special in this school is the extremely wide range of additional opportunities. Many of these happen weekly and include, for example, a number of clubs, opportunities to study Greek and Italian and many sporting teams and musical groups. These are usually, but not exclusively, teacher-led. A number of extremely interesting and valuable visits and trips take place regularly as part of the subject curriculum, for example theatre and art exhibition visits, fieldwork to support geography and biology, trips to World War I and II cemeteries to support the study of history and foreign exchanges to support language teaching. Although these examples make obvious contributions to the subjects they are linked with, they also make impressive contributions to pupils' personal development. Other opportunities which make particular contributions to this personal development are the Year 8 residential visit and the Year 7 visit to an outdoor pursuit centre. Annual, foreign skiing and water sports visits are not only fun but also support personal development. Pupils have very many opportunities to take responsibility and show initiative. Inter-house competition is strong with great care being taken to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to play their part, be it through music making, drama presentations, chess, athletics or games; many of these activities are pupil led and organised.
- 13 Several schools have a cadet force but few have a Corps of Drums. Several schools have debating societies but the Fleur de Lys sixth form debating society is perhaps unique. Pupils are heavily involved in the production of the high quality school magazine and in designing and running the school website. Pupils are fortunate to have these very wide ranging opportunities. The wealth of opportunity and the extent to which pupils are involved in them clearly reflects the commitment to learning which is shared by all at the school.

Excellent leadership provided by the headteacher, supported by the senior team, focused on making still further improvement

- 14 Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff are outstanding. They have a very clear view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and where improvements can be made and are actively addressing them. They lead by example – in being outstanding classroom teachers and senior managers. The advanced skills teacher is playing a dynamic role in developing the quality of the teaching and learning across the school and is currently making an outstanding contribution in the English department. The school strives for excellence, reflected in the high quality strategic and short term plans for improvement and very good guidance and support available to pupils. The resources for teaching and learning are expertly administered and used very effectively to help bring about exceptionally high standards. The school provides excellent value for money.
- 15 The governors are an experienced and highly effective team who play an active part in the life of the school. Their combined expertise gives a valuable steer in helping the school achieve its key priorities for improvement. They give generously of their time, for example to meet curriculum leaders, to monitor progress being made on issues where resources have been allocated and also to attend pupil meetings. In these and in other ways, they make an active contribution to the decision-making process and help shape the plans for the future direction of the school. There are purposeful professional relationships between the governing body and the staff. These relationships help to plan and generate a shared view of what needs to be improved, and encourage a corporate responsibility for making the plans work. The senior staff set themselves, and agree with governors, some very ambitious targets. Governors for their part are extremely rigorous in ensuring that the school is held to account. Governors were criticised in the previous report for not being sufficiently knowledgeable about the school and the decisions they made. This is no longer the case. Governors carry out their responsibilities with great skill and fulfil all their statutory responsibilities.
- 16 Monitoring of teaching has been highly effective in bringing about the improvements in learning and in raising standards. The school benefits from being involved in several school improvement research projects whose primary focus is to identify and put into action the ingredients most likely to lead to gains in learning. These projects have successfully drawn staff into a school-wide learning culture that makes an important contribution to personal and professional development. The improvements are wisely focused on Years 7 to 9 where the longer-term benefits to pupils, as they progress through the school, will be measured. However, shorter-term benefits are having an impact, for example in the way teachers are using a wide range of teaching and learning styles and in their awareness of the need to plan particular work for students who are achieving very high standards. Heads of department carry out regular lesson observations and review the work of their department with a senior manager. This is a significant improvement on the findings of the previous inspection where links between senior and middle managers was less effective than they ought to have been.
- 17 The school closely monitors its achievements, by comparing its work with other schools with a similar intake, and analysing the achievements of individual students. In order to continue to meet the ambitious academic goals, examination results are routinely analysed to highlight where improvements are needed. Those with management responsibilities have not shrunk from taking action, for example by introducing more rigorous assessment and monitoring systems or in making curricular or staffing changes. There are regular reviews of the way the curriculum is organised and the effectiveness with which those with particular roles fulfil their responsibilities.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

- 18 There are no major issues which the school needs to tackle in order to raise standards still higher.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

- 19 The school is constantly reviewing its work and seeking ways in which this could be improved. This process has identified small changes and modifications to what the school is already so successfully doing. The school development plan either already includes these or is in the process of including them. They relate to both whole-school and sixth form issues. The school should therefore continue with its planned development.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	38
	Sixth form	62
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		40

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 7 – 11							
Number	7	16	14	1	0	0	0
Percentage	18	42	37	3	0	0	0
Sixth form							
Number	17	29	13	3	0	0	0
Percentage	27	47	21	5	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 as each lesson represents more than one percentage point.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	559	279
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	3	0

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

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	56

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	37
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	8

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	4.3
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
	2001	111	0	111

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	110	110	109
	Girls	0	0	0
	Total	110	110	109
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	99 (99)	99 (98)	98 (98)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	98 (97)	99 (98)	98 (96)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	111	111	111
	Girls	0	0	0
	Total	111	111	111
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	100 (100)	100 (100)	100 (99)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	100 (98)	100 (100)	100 (99)
	National	31 (31)	42 (39)	33 (29)

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	111	0	111

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	111	111	111
	Girls	0	0	0
	Total	111	111	111
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	100 (100)	100 (100)	100 (100)
	National	49.8 (47.4)	86.6 (90.6)	94.5 (95.6)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	70 (70)
	National	39.1 (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
	2001	102	18	120

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	35.9 (33.9)	33.5 (32.4)	35.5 (33.7))	n/a (8.7)	n/a (n/a)	n/a (8.7)
National	n/a (17.7)	n/a (18.6)	n/a (18.2)	n/a (2.6)	n/a (2.9)	n/a (2.7)

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	2
Black – African heritage	7
Black – other	1
Indian	35
Pakistani	3
Bangladeshi	3
Chinese	18
White	709
Any other minority ethnic group	30

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	1	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	1	1
White	8	0
Other minority ethnic groups	1	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)	49.4
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	11
Total aggregate hours worked per week	294

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	74.6
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y13

Key Stage 3	26
Key Stage 4	24

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000/1
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	£
Total income	2,445,713
Total expenditure	2,514,945
Expenditure per pupil	3060
Balance brought forward from previous year	209,946
Balance carried forward to next year	140,714

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	8.6
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	8.9

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	1
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)	1

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	780
Number of questionnaires returned	214

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	57	40	3	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	69	30	0	0	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	53	42	2	0	3
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	42	49	7	1	1
The teaching is good.	67	32	1	0	0
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	45	48	6	0	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	68	28	2	1	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	88	12	0	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	42	50	6	0	2
The school is well led and managed.	75	24	1	0	0
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	66	31	2	0	1
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	52	38	5	0	5

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

- 20 The school's A-level results in 2000 were very high. Students' performance put the school in the top five per cent of all those with sixth forms and of all providers of post-16 education. Standards have been gradually rising, and continued to do so in 2001. The school took part in a national pilot study to determine the value that had been added, in the sixth form, to students' attainment at GCSE two years earlier. The study found that students at the school gained, on average, three A-level grades higher than students with similar GCSE average total point score. This was excellent achievement for that cohort of students.
- 21 Students' attainment in 2000 was well above the national average in all the subjects that they studied and their performance was in the top five per cent in biology, geography, mathematics, government and politics and physics. Results in most subjects improved in 2001. In the majority of subjects results were in the top five per cent nationally. They were well above average in design and technology, German, history, music and theatre studies. In 2001, Year 12 students were examined in the new AS-level examinations. As yet, there are no national comparisons for these results. Results in the majority of subjects were similar to the A-level results in that the average attainment equated to a grade B. Results in history were particularly high. In design and technology and art, results at AS-level were disappointing and below those expected. In design and technology, some detailed information relating to the examination syllabus was not available until part way through the course. There were also some staffing difficulties within the department. These factors resulted in some units of work being covered in too much detail and others in insufficient depth.
- 22 The standards being demonstrated by students currently in Years 12 and 13 are generally well above the expected levels for the courses being followed. They are line with those in the previous year. The problem in design and technology has been resolved, and so current standards in Year 12 are much higher and in Year 13 are well above expected levels. Students' achievement remains very high. At this age, students' linguistic and numerical skills are of a very high order. In the course of their education they have learnt to make very good use of information and communication technology. In the sixth form they demonstrate high levels of skill and readily use the technology to research, to present the outcomes of their research, to collect and handle data and to support their learning.
- 23 All pupils in the school continue in education at the age of 16. The very large majority continue to do so at the school. A small number of pupils every year decide, following guidance, that their aspirations or needs will be best met in other institutions. About 18 per cent of each year group is of students who enter the school at sixth form level. The majority of these are girls. They all have very high GCSE results but this does not always mean that they had studied as widely or to the same depth as the school students they are joining. This is generally recognised by the school and the teaching in Year 12 is adjusted accordingly. Over time, the achievement of these students is not significantly different from that of their peers.
- 24 There is no drop out at the end of Year 12. At the end of Year 13, more than 90 per cent (96 per cent in 2001) usually move onto higher education courses.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

- 25 Students relish the high quality learning opportunities provided. Their enthusiasm for scholarship and intellectual effort is impressive, resulting in stimulating lessons where high quality analysis of ideas is the norm. Students are articulate, perceptive and intensely curious about the world of knowledge and ideas. As a result, they debate, question and explore evidence and theories with particular skill and drive. Attendance is very high because of the exceptional and enriching experiences offered.
- 26 The climate of openness and learning in the school fosters constant striving for personal achievement. Students approach academic studies, music, drama, sport, and community service with zeal. They respond admirably to the school's emphasis on low stress, high challenge by aiming for personal fulfilment and excellence in everything they do. Students are quick to acknowledge and value each other's qualities and achievements. The tradition of mutual support and personal responsibility results in impressive levels of maturity and willingness to contribute time and skills to the school community. Behaviour is outstanding. Sixth formers help each other and younger pupils in activities such as music, sport and use of computer software to support work and wider interests. For example, they work avidly to bring out the best in everyone who wants to contribute to house music competitions by organising and leading high quality rehearsals. Their determination to help people in other communities with fewer resources than their own is seen in the willingness of individuals to work as cleaners to raise funds for a World Challenge trip to Tanzania.
- 27 Personal development is exceptional, reflecting the high degree of trust placed in students, together with genuine respect for students' unique talents and achievements. Relationships among students and with staff are of a rare and remarkable quality because of the way each student is valued for personal qualities and achievements, not just high marks in public examinations. The culture of success embraces far more than that. Students recognise and celebrate each other's gifts, which encourages individuals to be comfortable with their own characteristics. They may be clever and outgoing, or more reclusive and reflective intellectuals, or exceptionally creative. All individual talents are equally valued and everyone is accepted as a full member of the school community. Respect for other people's feelings, beliefs and values is of the highest quality.
- 28 Students are determined to do their best for their own pride and self-respect, recognising their own gifts as something to cherish. They are highly motivated to make the most of the time available to them to work independently. They want to know exactly how to refine and improve their work, so engage readily in dialogue about this with subject specialists. Students thrive in a culture that teaches them to question, to examine research evidence, to evaluate ideas and to think critically about what passes as knowledge. They are keen participants in stimulating exchanges of ideas in general studies lessons, using work on ethical, moral and cultural issues to enrich their personal and social development impressively. Their facility for using philosophical ideas to deepen understanding of world affairs, including cultural and religious traditions and contemporary conflicts, underpins their rigorous analysis of racism, fanaticism and principles of equality. Their love of learning is well established by the sixth form. It is a first-class foundation for the attitudes and skills needed to sustain independent study, thought and learning throughout their adult lives.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

- 29 Teaching, overall, in the sixth form is excellent. All teachers have an extremely good grasp of their subject which enables them to explain new ideas and concepts clearly and gives them the confidence to deal effectively with any ideas or questions introduced by the students. This is a major strength in the teaching. A commonly-used strategy in many subjects is to hold a discussion to draw out ideas from the students or develop understanding of new material. Teaching then becomes more than simply the transfer of knowledge. It develops students' personal skills as well. It requires students to listen carefully to each other, to respond to what they hear and to organise and convey their own thoughts

and understanding. This was demonstrated to good effect in a general studies lesson where the students were introduced to the idea of cultural relativism. Several quick tasks drew on previous knowledge and led into a high quality philosophical debate, well managed by the teacher. Students clearly relished the opportunity to use their skills and engage in intellectual gymnastics. A very strong learning culture was evident with very high expectations of what the students could do.

- 30 Relationships are excellent. This enables students to contribute to lessons or seek assistance without fear of ridicule, in groups where the attainment of their peers is very high. It also helps the integration of students, particularly girls, who are new to the school. These students are quickly incorporated into their teaching groups and well supported as they come to terms with a level and style of working with which they may not be familiar. Although they are all high-attaining students, this does not mean that their experience has been as wide as the students with whom they have recently joined. This is the case, for example, in music.
- 31 Students are very capable independent learners. These skills are often assumed and are clearly required and developed by the tasks which students are given. For example, students are frequently expected to research a topic from text books, current magazines or newspapers, or through the Internet. They are then required to present the outcomes of their research to their group where they are often critically questioned by their peers. This teaching strategy also leads to the listeners learning from those who are making the presentations. Note-taking and the personal recording of information are of a high order. In English, part of the teaching strategy is to make students aware of how they learn best and to teach them how they can develop this. Homework tasks are set which extend learning and are rarely simply the completion of started work.
- 32 Students use their well-developed skills in using information and communication technology to very good effect. The word processing of material is almost automatic with high quality work complemented by including pictures, diagrams and other additional items. Students frequently turn to the Internet to seek information, either by direction from their teachers or because they recognise its potential. The new physics course is based around information, examples, models and simulations on a CD Rom. Students readily use spreadsheet packages to analyse and manipulate their numerical data, for example plotting graphs and testing relationships between variables in science. Powerpoint presentations are used well to summarise information and present it to others. Students have high literacy skills, which are further enhanced by teaching which incorporates very good and accurate use of the vocabulary specific to a subject.
- 33 Within lessons there is an evident love of learning. Students enjoy their subjects and the teaching they receive. They respond by working hard and participating fully in lessons. They put a lot of effort into their work and produce a great quantity of high-quality, well-presented work. This is generally well-marked and students know how well they are succeeding and what they need to do to improve further. In English and history, for example, they are guided to work in groups to assess their own work against examination criteria, before presenting it for teacher assessment. The excellent teaching which students receive, together with their own excellent attitudes to work, result in the very high levels of learning which occur.

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

- 34 The curriculum makes excellent provision for students' needs by focusing on A- and AS-level courses. Through meeting the learning requirements and needs of highly academically-motivated students it realises the school's aims and rationale for its sixth form, very well. The curriculum fully achieves its objectives in developing high quality academic education. It develops individual initiative, confidence in

problem solving, ability to work in a team, and an awareness of philosophical, social, moral, spiritual and cultural dimensions beyond the boundaries of individual subject areas.

- 35 Students are prepared well for the sixth form. Induction is well organised, particularly for those transferring to the sixth form from other schools. Here, students concerned found the move to the sixth form a big step, but greatly appreciated the care and individual attention they were given in order to ensure that they adapted successfully to the demands of higher-level academic work.
- 36 The school tracks the progress of its students with care and takes appropriate action to support them where they have need of additional personal support or help with their studies. All students receive regular guidance with their work and are particularly well provided for when they consider their options in higher education or elsewhere at the end of their two years of study. The curriculum ensures equal access for boys as well as girls. It is notable that female needs are dealt with sensitively within an environment where the majority of students are male.
- 37 The curriculum is planned and reviewed regularly to ensure that an extensive and appropriate range of options is offered, and new courses are made available when interest is sufficient to run them. Key skills are developed well within ordinary subject teaching. Students' skill in the use of computers to research material and present written assignments is a particular strength. There is suitable provision for private study. Students are well motivated and very capable as autonomous learners, although the full timetable means that there is little non-directed time during the school day.
- 38 In the sixth form, narrow specialisation is avoided by provision of an exceptionally wide range of extra-curricular activities and substantial programme of general studies. Areas of excellence include drama, music, sport, debating, visits abroad, community service, and successful efforts in raising funds for charity. Support from the community is strong, for instance in the input made by visiting lecturers and organisations. For example, staff welcomed representatives of local businesses to assist them in running a conference for sixth formers, which introduced them to the theory and practice of management, and to practical problem-solving in the world of business and enterprise.
- 39 All students receive religious education within modules of their general studies programme, and this provision not only complies with the requirements of the Locally Agreed Syllabus, but also offers additional depth to the subject in the way it places it alongside relevant ethical, moral and cultural considerations. Overall provision for spiritual, moral and social elements of the curriculum is of very high quality because of the lead taken by managers to set a tone, which translates the school's aims into everyday practice. It follows that sixth form provision achieves the school's self-set goal of 'high challenge - low stress' where personal and academic achievement are both valued strongly.
- 40 General studies makes a particularly strong contribution to all strands of students' personal development. There is less overt nurturing of spirituality and insight into the contributions of cultures beyond the European. Nevertheless, when opportunities arise to discuss issues of belief, spiritual awareness or cultural diversity, they are explored by students with enthusiasm and rigour, particularly in philosophy of religion and in general studies courses. Religious education and assemblies might be further developed to contribute to students' spiritual awareness and development.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

Assessment

- 41 Students are helped to understand their strengths, weaknesses and achievements very effectively because assessments are linked systematically to targets, to changes in the way lessons are taught and

to advice on future course choices. Parents and students are given a very clear picture of achievements and likely success in examinations through a very well-understood system of regular reports. Assessment of students' work is thorough, frequent and designed to ensure that each student knows what to do to improve performance in all subjects. Teachers make time to give individual advice on specific pieces of work making reference to clear, detailed marking schemes or assessment criteria. In English, for example, feedback is outstanding and underpins excellent support for students' independent learning.

- 42 The school's exemplary approach to assessment makes a significant difference to academic support in the sixth form as well as elsewhere. It is based on a clear, succinct policy and the use of a newsletter format, the *assessment bulletin*, to share current research evidence on interpretation of assessment findings to enhance teaching and learning. This results in open discussion of how to improve significant pieces of work and encourages both staff and students in most departments to reflect on how well they are working and learning. In the sixth form, this becomes much clearer after a month or two of new courses than it is in the first few weeks. A few students are targeted for extra help early on in new courses, when a snapshot of progress to date indicates that they have specific difficulties with unfamiliar work, or have underestimated the effort needed to keep up with independent study. Other students want reassurance that they are on the right track, even if it is too early to indicate predicted grades with any accuracy. Otherwise, assessment is timely, rigorous, used skilfully to diagnose weaknesses and celebrate achievement, with an admirable, sharp focus on exactly how to do better.

Advice, support and guidance

- 43 Outstanding relationships between tutors and students, with regular formal and informal opportunities for reviewing progress ensure that high quality personal and academic support is available. Students' health and welfare is always given the highest priority. An exceptionally high degree of mutual trust and respect ensures that students feel able to ask for help, as well as accepting the advice offered. They receive timely and carefully considered support for higher education and other applications, with thoughtful guidance on what to do to ensure that strong preferences are made known to the relevant institutions. Staff are readily available to help anyone whose results do not meet particular course or university requirements. Students feel that the information provided before they start courses does not always reflect their desire to know the wider implications of choosing particular combinations of subjects. They value the genuine encouragement from individual subject teachers to choose specific subjects because of likely success, but want additional, impartial advice from knowledgeable outsiders with real understanding of the dilemmas faced by very able students as they consider sixth form courses. Work experience is available for those who want it in Years 12 and 13. Careers guidance is of high quality, particularly in relation to university applications. Students praise and value the support given in general, which is sensitive, constructive and always focused on helping them to meet their personal goals and to feel a justified sense of pride in their individual achievements.

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

- 44 Parents and students are very positive about what the school offers, truly valuing its rich post-16 provision. Parents have a very clear understanding of the school's aims and approaches to its work. They are extremely impressed with the school's high expectations and the quality of its teaching and leadership. They have many opportunities to express their concerns and to contribute to school life through discussions with staff, use of notes in diaries, regular meetings and participation in events such as those organised by the Parents' Association. Parents are impressed with consultation and communication processes.

- 45 Students' thoughtful reflection on what the school and sixth form offer, resulted in helpful specification of where fine-tuning is needed in particular aspects of guidance. For instance, they value highly the quality of support offered and the sense that staff are on their side, but need additional, specific information on the range of courses and careers available with choices of particular subjects. They want to know what will and will not still be possible, given those choices. Students ask for early reassurance for everyone embarking on new courses in Years 12 and 13, not just those who underestimate the work required or have difficulties at the start. They view their experiences in the sixth form very positively. Newcomers make highly favourable comparisons with their previous experience of teaching, use of assessment and individual support, in particular. Students show their enthusiasm for all the learning opportunities available to them in an outstanding approach to study and all aspects of school life. They are involved in an extensive range of activities, taking the lead with school productions, the school council, community service and many clubs and sports. They are at ease with their role as senior members of the school community and show impressive levels of maturity in organising debates for the Fleur De Lys society, lively competitions between houses and thought-provoking, satirical scenes that enhance assemblies. They take pleasure in their experience of learning, are determined to achieve personal success and have a deep sense of belonging to a vibrant community.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

Leadership and management

- 46 The staff who have responsibility for the sixth form are a highly effective and well-coordinated team of senior and middle managers. They work closely with the governing body and together provide outstanding leadership. The senior management team lead by example and as managers and classroom teachers they are exceptional role models. In their day-to-day work they share very high expectations of the students' learning and personal development. Students' academic work and their participation and contribution to the life of the school are carefully monitored. This results in very high academic standards alongside an enthusiasm for learning that younger boys are keen to emulate. As well as academic accomplishments, many sixth formers possess outstanding teamwork and students play a leadership role. Their contributions, to sport, music, drama, the organisation of social functions and participation in a wealth of recreational activities greatly enriches the school and the wider community. The sixth form is a vibrant community and the staff are very aware of the positive contribution it makes to the school as a whole.
- 47 The school closely monitors its achievements, by comparing its work with other schools with a similar in-take, and analysing the achievements of individual students. In order to continue to meet the ambitious academic goals, the examination results are routinely analysed to highlight where improvements are needed. Those with management responsibilities have not shrunk from taking action, for example by introducing more rigorous assessment and monitoring systems or in making curricular or staffing changes. There are regular reviews of the way the curriculum is organised and the effectiveness with which those with particular roles fulfil their responsibilities.
- 48 Improved systems have been introduced that provide heads of year and tutors with current diagnostic information on how well students are progressing in their chosen subjects. This information is being used to evaluate what is working well and is enabling tutors and subject teachers to respond very quickly to individual need and to negotiate and agree with students the best course of action when improvement is needed. The system is still bedding in and for some Year 12 students, particularly those who are new to the school and settling into new ways of working, the first round of assessments is proving to be a difficult time. Senior staff have been quick to deal with students' concerns and they recognise that some changes will be necessary in the coming months. Monitoring and tracking the

progress students make is currently the highest priority in the sixth form development plan. Heads of department and heads of year are taking on an increasing responsibility for making assessments and then following through and monitoring improvements. This aspect of the role of middle managers has significantly improved since the last inspection.

Resources

- 49 The school has excellent strategic plans for improvement and development of the site. The whole-school development plans, targets and budget forecasts provide an excellent framework for planned improvements. Highly effective and efficient management systems ensure best use is made of available resources. Students derive great benefit from the wisely-targeted resources. The school consults wisely and is very aware of its performance in relation to other schools. It deliberately sets out to offer a different programme of courses from that provided by neighbouring schools and is keenly aware of the need to co-exist with other providers.
- 50 An analysis of the income and expenditure together with the financial implications of group sizes and the curriculum the school offers are all carefully calculated to ensure the sixth form continues to operate within its budget and that best value principals are secured. In its revised format, the school development plan will provide governors with a clearer picture of how the budget is to be divided and enable them to monitor whether the resources achieved the results they set out to do. The previous version made this task more difficult.
- 51 The highly qualified and experienced specialist teachers are a strength of the school. Together, they enable students to achieve very high standards. They are ably assisted in their work by a team of technicians and administrative staff and site managers.
- 52 The school has adequate accommodation and specialist learning resources to meet the demands of the curriculum. Since the last inspection the accommodation has been improved, for example to provide sixth formers with more areas where they can work in silence and have access to computers. Further improvements are planned for the future, in the short term to improve existing rooms and female toilets and in the longer term to provide additional sixth form accommodation and classrooms for mathematics and geography. Examples of high quality of displays of students' work, in the grounds, around the school and in many classrooms promote quality and achievement. Gaps in the resources that are available to teach students to use computers as part of their art and their design technology lessons adversely affect the range of computer-generated work that is undertaken in the sixth form and the standards achieved. Computers are used widely for research and investigation but the graphical capabilities are not yet fully exploited for designing and drawing or as a tool to manipulate images.

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 2001.

GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	1	100	62	100	15	5.0	1.5

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	66	100	37	73	43	8.3	5.8
Biology	38	100	88	76	34	6.1	5.3
Chemistry	42	100	91	74	43	8.3	6.0
Physics	42	98	88	55	40	7.1	5.7
Design and technology	6	100	90	67	30	7.0	5.3
Economics	25	100	89	80	36	8.8	5.6
Art	11	100	96	91	46	9.5	6.5
Music	7	100	93	57	35	7.7	5.7
Theatre studies	11	100	93	55	31	7.1	5.5
Religious studies	12	100	93	83	38	8.8	5.9
Geography	35	100	92	83	38	8.6	5.7
History	29	100	37	55	36	7.4	5.5
Other social studies	8	100	87	75	34	8.3	5.3
English literature	39	100	95	87	37	8.9	5.9
French	11	100	90	88	38	8.5	5.6
German	7	100	92	71	40	8.3	5.8

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

The focus was on all the subjects taught in this area.

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- results in A-level examinations are very high
- the subject knowledge and expertise of the teachers promotes very effective teaching and learning
- leadership provides a clear educational direction

Areas for improvement

- the number, condition and siting of mathematics teaching rooms
- the use of information and communication technology to enhance students' learning in mathematics

- 53 Results in A-level in 2001 were very high, in the top five per cent of schools nationally. The proportion of students choosing to study A-level mathematics is high and a very high proportion of them achieve A or B grades each year. In 2001, two-thirds of students gained grades A or B in the new AS-level examinations. There are no national comparators yet available. Each year 7 or 8 candidates enter for further mathematics A-level. All achieve at least grade C but most achieve A or B grades.
- 54 Standards in the work seen during the inspection, both in lessons and in the student work sample, indicate that standards are well above national expected levels. Students apply standard procedures accurately and with understanding. They also recall and use mathematical techniques, for example, they use the chain rule when differentiating a product. They have a facility with algebra which supports their work in all modules. In a Year 12 lesson students were able to solve simultaneous equations to support their work on geometric progressions. They use correct mathematical language, notation and symbols and this contributes to the standards they achieve in pure mathematics, statistics and mechanics. A particular strength is the quality of students' coursework in statistics. Students take an increasing responsibility for their own learning. They are able to talk about the methods they have used to solve problems and are able to explain their reasoning. On entry to the courses students' attainment is high and they then make very good progress. Their achievement is very good.
- 55 Students' attitudes and behaviour are excellent overall. The quality of relationships is a particular strength. Students collaborate well, as in a Year 13 lesson where they worked in pairs to sketch functions. Sixth form students help other students and also younger pupils at a weekly mathematics clinic.
- 56 The quality of teaching is excellent overall and as a result the quality of learning is also excellent. Teachers' subject knowledge is a particular strength and this enables them to plan effectively and to give clear explanations. In a Year 12 further mathematics lesson, for example, students gained a very good understanding of independent and mutually exclusive events because of the very clear explanations given by the teacher and the appropriate choice of illustrative examples. Lessons build suitably on students' previous learning experiences, as in a Year 12 lesson on sequences where the teacher checked students' understanding of mathematical ideas on sequences prior to introducing work

on arithmetic progressions, thus ensuring continuity of learning experiences. Teachers set and insist on high standards of rigour, precision and presentation in written work. Use of the correct notation for the n th term enabled Year 12 students to gain a greater understanding of inductive formulae. Students are very well motivated and make considerable intellectual effort. They are willing to offer suggestions for solving problems. They have limited opportunities to use information and communication technology to support their learning in mathematics and the use of graphic calculators is underdeveloped.

- 57 The subject is very well led and managed. The head of department has a good understanding of the work of the department through monitoring of teaching and the subject's performance. His leadership provides a clear educational direction. Full and comprehensive schemes of work are in place. Very good procedures for assessing students' attainment and progress are being implemented and include opportunities for student self-assessment. The quality of the curriculum and of assessment practice are contributing to the standards being attained.
- 58 Improvement since the last inspection is very good. Previous strengths have been maintained and there has been improvement in areas such as assessment and the monitoring of teaching and standards.

Biology

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

Strengths

- results continue at a very high level compared to national averages
- excellent teaching and subject knowledge
- excellent relationships leading to a very positive learning environment
- student attitudes to the subject are excellent. Students concentrate intensely on their work, working at a very good pace

Areas for improvement

- 59 The A-level results, in 2001, were very high. They were in the top five per cent nationally. All students who took the examination passed and the percentage gaining an A or B grade was very high compared to the national average. Girls, though small in number, performed as well as the boys. In relation to their GCSE grades, these students' achievement is excellent.
- 60 The standards of work of current Year 13 students are very high. Students are achieving extremely well in relation to their GCSE results, 73 per cent having gained an A or B grade in the 2001 new AS-level examination. In the lessons seen, students listened intently to their teachers and were very involved with their learning. For example, in a lesson discussing the light dependent and light independent reactions in photosynthesis students used a very high level of technical vocabulary as they explained what they understood and remembered. An excellent illustration was provided by the teacher of changing nomenclature in different texts and video. The homework set, to find out what Calvin did to establish his cycle, gave the students an opportunity to use their research and comprehension skills.
- 61 Students in Year 12 are also achieving very high standards. In a lesson setting up a practical investigation, students responded well to a very brisk introduction. They were given a wide range of materials from Internet references, theoretical information and an exemplar of high standards to aid them with the overall task. Students responded extremely well and said they enjoyed the challenge of the pace set for the lesson.

- 62 Teaching is excellent overall and student learning is excellent as a result. Teachers use their excellent subject knowledge to plan lessons that provide the students with up-to-date resources and activities, including use of information and communication technology and the Internet. They have exceptionally high expectations of their students' capacity to handle a range of learning materials and technical vocabulary. As in a lesson on Mendelian genetics, where students applied monohybrid and dihybrid tests to a maize cob and used the chi squared test to statistically validate their results. Although the practical task was simple, students were highly engaged with it, either individually or in pairs.
- 63 Highest-attaining students show an excellent command of language in their written work. They draw out information from texts and present it in a concise comparative form. They make appropriate notes and have very good drawing skills. Their work is extremely well presented and includes graphs and discussions of experimental error where appropriate. Other students also demonstrate many of the skills outlined above but their comparisons are more generalised. All students use technical vocabulary and apply chemical ideas to biological systems. The project work of all students is of a very high standard and of the highest attaining students, is excellent. Marking of work is encouraging, pointing out strengths and weaknesses. Students are given mark schemes so that they can identify their errors and omissions.
- 64 Students learn extremely well. They have excellent attitudes in lessons and are keen and enthusiastic learners. They enjoy studying biology. Students from other schools feel well supported in their learning and appreciate the challenging teaching. All students confidently use a great variety of sources, including information and communication technology, to support their learning. Basing homework tasks around the use of websites presented no difficulties for the group. As one student said, 'the school has a good supply of computers and most of us have access at home as well'.
- 65 The excellent teaching and learning result from the subject being very well led and managed. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. There is a commitment to team work and student achievement. The new scheme of work reflects the subject and students' requirements well. Students' performance is monitored throughout Years 12 and 13, but guidance on how to improve performance for the relatively weaker students could be more closely related to the learning process.

Chemistry

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

Strengths

- results are very high
- very good teaching: excellent subject knowledge leading to very well-planned and effective lessons
- excellent relationships leading to a very positive learning environment
- excellent student attitudes: students concentrate intensely on their work, work at a very good pace and enjoy the intellectual challenge that understanding chemistry requires of them

Areas for improvement

- to identify more opportunities in the new schemes of work for discussions on social and moral responsibilities in chemistry, so that students can increase their awareness of moral dilemmas they may face in the future

- 66 The GCE A-level results in 2001 were very high, in the top five per cent of schools nationally. All students who took the examination passed and the percentage gaining an A or B grade was well above the national average. In relation to their GCSE grades, these students achieved very well.

- 67 The standards of work of current Year 13 students are also well above average. Students are achieving very well in relation to their GCSE results, 79 per cent having gained an A or B grade in the 2001 new AS-level examination. In the lessons seen, students responded very well to the well-organised teaching, which probed their understanding of spectra and the mechanisms of organic reactions. In a lesson on spectra, students showed that they were thinking hard about the work they were doing through the questions they asked about scales on different graphs and the practical details to effect the changes they were discussing theoretically.
- 68 Students in Year 12 are attaining well above average standards. They extend the models of atomic structure from GCSE work, working out the numbers of electrons in different orbitals. One very keen student related the lesson to the underlying structure of the periodic table. Students used electron pair repulsion ideas to predict molecular shape. They tackle a variety of calculations, for example involving equations and the mole. Their written work is in note form and there is little evidence of extended writing, except the notes to accompany a Powerpoint presentation.
- 69 Teaching is very good overall and students learn very well as a result. Teachers use their excellent subject knowledge to plan lessons, which make difficult concepts readily accessible to students. They have exceptionally high expectations of their students' capacity to handle a range of learning materials and technical vocabulary. Students respond with enthusiasm and intense application, as in a lesson on molecular shape when a Powerpoint introduction to the reason why shape is important prompted very good efforts from students to interpret the molecules shown and relate them to important biological reactions. Students often use information and communication technology to word process their course work investigations.
- 70 Students learn very well. They have excellent attitudes to chemistry and are keen and enthusiastic learners. They enjoy studying chemistry, even those for whom it was not a first choice in Year 12. Students who come from other schools feel well supported in their learning and appreciate the challenging teaching. All students confidently use data books, textbooks and information and communication technology to support their learning. Homework that required students to use the periodic table database on the school network presented no difficulties of access for the group.
- 71 The very good teaching and learning result from the subject being well led and managed. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. There is a commitment to team work and student achievement. The new scheme of work being developed reflects the subject and student requirements well, but could benefit from identifying more opportunities for discussion on moral and social issues. Student performance is monitored throughout Year 12 and 13, but guidance on how to improve performance for the relatively weaker students could be sharper.

Physics

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

Strengths

- very high results at A-level
- very effective teaching
- a course which uses a very wide range of teaching strategies
- very good use of information and communication technology to support the subject

Areas for improvement

- more formal monitoring of provision

- more requirement and opportunity for students to write at greater length

- 72 Results at A-level in 2001 were very high and students' performance was in the top five per cent of schools nationally. Students started the course with very high attainment but this, nevertheless, represents excellent achievement. In 2001, Year 12 students sat the new AS-level examinations. There are, as yet, no national comparators for these results. However, students gained very good results with a similar proportion of grades A and B and a slightly higher average point score when compared with the A-level results. All indications are that the standards of students currently in Years 12 and 13 are at the same high level as previous cohorts and that these students are achieving very well.
- 73 Students are clearly covering the requirements of the examination syllabus and are following a newly-introduced course. They are demonstrating high standards in their understanding of the subject within the regular, well-marked assessments. Much of the recorded ongoing coursework is students' responses to short answer questions. Here they show a high level of mathematical capability. The standards of the highest-attaining students differ from the others to the extent that they give fuller responses to questions and do more short answer questions. Lower-scoring students in assessments perform equally well in calculations but have less success in expressing their understanding sufficiently clearly in writing. Students have high levels of skill in using computers to support their work in recording and analysing data. This was shown in the ease with which they were plotting current/voltage graphs from experimental investigations of a variety of electrical devices.
- 74 Teaching is very effective. Teachers have a very good grasp of their subject and already know the new course well. They are able to make very good use of the CD ROM which forms an integral part of this material. Lessons are well planned to draw upon this resource, with students using it either to research the topic beforehand or as a basis for follow up work or practical examples. The opportunities for comprehension exercises, for reading round a topic, for choosing to focus on examples linked to personal interest, and for computer based modelling and simulations are used very well. These strategies require students to be independent learners and further develop these skills. A feature of the course, particularly liked by some students, is the way in which experimental evidence is gathered and then forms the basis for group discussion and the pulling together of ideas and experience. This involves them all in their own learning process. The course materials encourage and require the use of information and communication technology to support students' learning. All students are anticipating going on to higher education. Nevertheless they do not all have the same facility with the subject. The higher attaining students are challenged, and the lower attaining students supported, through the careful choice of questions which they are given to answer. The results of assessment tasks may highlight a common misunderstanding which will then be dealt with at a later date. Most often it will highlight individual problems which are addressed immediately. There is variation between teachers in the detail with which recorded work is marked and annotated. As much of this is of the short answer variety, feedback is often given to students as the work is given back rather than in the form of written comment. It is not always apparent that the students have noted this for the future. Students' attitudes to work and to the subject are very good and this, together with the very effective teaching results in very good learning.
- 75 The subject is managed well. Improvement since the last inspection is very good with the maintenance of the high standards and the effective introduction of a completely new course. This latter has taken a great deal of time in preparing teachers and materials, and in monitoring its implementation. Formal monitoring of the provision in the subject, in terms of what happens in the laboratory, the detail of how other members of the team teach, assess and guide, has, understandably, not been a current priority. While variety in practice can be positive, the very best of practice needs to be shared amongst the team and this could be helped by a little greater emphasis on the monitoring role. Accommodation is of

a good quality but tight, with some teaching taking place in ordinary classrooms. Teachers move classes and technicians move equipment to minimise the affect of this. The subject is very well staffed.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

The focus was on the only subject taught in this area.

Design and technology

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

Strengths

- A-level results are well above average and have been consistently high
- teaching is very good: teachers have excellent subject knowledge and plan activities very well. This helps students learn effectively
- students have good knowledge of a wide range of materials and processes which they apply well in practical activities
- students have very positive attitudes towards their studies and this helps them achieve well
- the subject is very well led and managed

Areas for improvement

- results at AS-level, which are not as high as they should be
- the development of design ideas in students' work: students do not explore a wide enough range of design ideas in their coursework projects and do not develop them in sufficient depth

76 The most recent A-level examination results were well above average and similar to those of previous years. All students who took the examination gained a pass grade with a significant proportion gaining the highest grades. All students completed the course. In relation to their GCSE results they achieved well. The 2001 AS-level results gained by Year 12 students were disappointing and below those expected. Some detailed information relating to the examination syllabus was not available until part way through the course. There were also some staffing difficulties within the department. These factors resulted in some units of work being covered in too much detail and others in insufficient depth. Thorough analysis of the results has been carried out and appropriate action taken to modify the scheme of work to meet the examination requirements fully in future.

77 Current standards for Year 13 students are well above those expected in almost all elements of the course, and students are achieving well. Although still only in the first term of the course, current standards for Year 12 students show improvement on those of last year, and they are achieving well. In the lessons observed, in both year groups teachers had high expectations, both of the amount and quality of work to be completed. Tasks were demanding and interesting. These factors enabled students to make very good progress. In a Year 13 practical lesson, students used their knowledge of processes and materials effectively and worked with a good degree of independence, for example when marking out complex joints on pieces of wood and setting up and using a range of machines. In Year 12, students showed very good understanding of health and safety issues when preparing risk assessments for various practical activities. In both year groups, students' coursework projects indicate that their skills when researching and analysing information are very good. Students use a wide range of sources for information and prepare detailed specifications before designing. They use a wide range of graphics and presentation techniques in their work. However, some elements of their design work are weaker. Students often do not explore a wide enough range of ideas or develop and modify their designs sufficiently. When deciding on design projects they tend towards the traditional,

designing pieces of furniture or artefacts they will use. Overall, they are not as adventurous or creative as they could be and this has an impact on the standards achieved in this aspect of the course.

- 78 Teaching and learning are very good overall. Particular strengths in teaching are teachers' excellent subject expertise, detailed planning and enthusiasm for the subject. Teachers clearly explain what has to be completed, together with the preparation that is required from students for subsequent lessons. These features were exemplified in a Year 12 lesson. Here, the teachers' lively approach and very good questioning successfully involved all members of the group. The unit of work being covered, on health and safety, was well linked to students' own experiences and very good opportunities were provided for students to work both individually and in small groups to develop their thoughts. The teacher skilfully drew their ideas together and provided considerable encouragement and praise. This enabled all students to both make a contribution and learn from the activity.
- 79 The marking of students work is regular and thorough. Marking is linked effectively to examination marking criteria and students are given detailed guidance on how to improve aspects of their work. Very good informal feedback and guidance is given in lessons which enables students to make very good learning gains. Students show good levels of independence in their learning. The quality of their work shows that they spend considerable amounts of time outside the workshop completing assignments. This has a positive impact on standards achieved. Students confidently use a range of information and communication technology skills and apply these to their work. In lessons students' attitudes are very positive. They show respect for each other and all adults, and seek and value the views of others in the group.
- 80 The subject is very well led and managed and this has led to consistently high standards at A-level. Staffing difficulties have now been resolved, teachers work well as a team and show a very high level of commitment. There is a clear understanding of the strengths within the department, together with a clear view of improvements that need to be made. For example, appropriate action has been taken to improve standards in the AS-level examination with modifications to the scheme of work. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. Assessment procedures have been improved since the time of the last inspection. They are very effective in identifying strengths and weaknesses at individual student level and in each year group. This is having a positive impact on standards. Overall, resources within the department are satisfactory. Some weaknesses, for example in computer equipment for control applications and computer aided design, have been identified and the school is taking appropriate action for improvement.

BUSINESS

- 81 Economics was sampled in this area. Examination results were well above average in 2000. One lesson was observed in which the very good teaching drew all students into a discussion on current national issues and extended the scope of their views by making links with world wide markets.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The focus was upon all the subjects taught in this area.

Art and design

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

Strengths

- improvements in the results of A-level examinations

- very good teaching and learning
- students' excellent attitudes, interest and enthusiasm for the subject, leading to very high levels of independent learning
- the quality and use of on-going assessment
- teachers' subject expertise and knowledge of the examination requirements

Areas for improvement

- the quality and depth of students' oral responses

- 82 The school offers the AS- and A-level courses in art and design. Students have the chance to work in a range of art and craft disciplines, including sculpture, print and textiles in addition to painting and drawing.
- 83 Results of the 2001 A-level examinations were very high, in the top five per cent nationally. There has been a steady improvement in the proportion of students attaining the highest A grade since the time of the last inspection although, students had tended to do less well in art when compared to their performance in their other subjects. Most students who join the course do so having attained very high levels of attainment across the curriculum and A* and A grades in the art GCSE examination. Students achieved very well. There were no significant differences between the achievement of different groups of students. The first AS-level results were lower than expected and did not fully reflect students' prior attainment or their results in other subjects. There are, currently, no national comparators available for these results.
- 84 The work seen during the inspection shows similar very high standards and very good achievement. Students have highly developed research skills and are technically very competent in painting and drawing. Other practical work is highly creative and personal, often following a line of enquiry that students find particularly interesting. Examples include studies of site-specific sculpture or ideas for structures that form part of a larger study on contemporary architecture. Life drawing and painting classes provide a very good foundation for all students. For one student, they were the starting point for work based on the human figure and the chance to explore some of the techniques used by artists such as Frank Auerbach. Work journals and sketchbooks have examples of high-quality written work and reproductions of artists' work. A major strength of students' work is their advanced literacy skills. They read extensively and write fluently with deepening understanding, drawing on work they have seen in galleries and their general knowledge to provide an historical and social context for their studies. Some are less confident when they speak about artists' work or when they compare and contrast different critical view-points. In these situations, their opinions are not always well formed, for example when making comparisons across different periods and cultural traditions or when considering the different purposes, values and meanings art holds for different audiences.
- 85 Computers are used extensively for word processing and to gather information for research purposes but they are not generally used in more creative ways, as a drawing tool or to manipulate images. Prior to joining the course, few students have acquired the skills needed to use computers and other digital technology in creative situations. This aspect of the curriculum is not taught alongside other, more traditional, mixed media work, for example with paint and printed textiles.
- 86 The quality of teaching and learning are very good. Teacher expertise is a major strength and is used to very good effect alongside a secure understanding of the examination requirements. The course allows students' differing skills and interests to be developed and extended. This results in high levels of commitment from students and they speak with great enthusiasm about the subject. The newcomers to the school settle quickly into work routines and achieve very well. One-to-one work reviews, in addition to year group assessments, keep students well informed and up-to-date on their progress.

They provide an early warning system alerting students, teachers and tutors, to what is working well and where there is scope for improvement. In this way students can benefit from high-quality feedback by using the information wisely to refine and modify their work. Most students have highly-developed independent learning skills and thoughtfully apply problem-solving techniques to different aspects of their art-work. Critical and analytical skills are taught very effectively in terms of developing students' ability to communicate ideas in written and visual form. Teaching has been slightly less effective in ensuring the same high standards are evident in students' oral responses.

- 87 Management of the department is very good and improvement since the last inspection has been good. The results in A-level examinations have greatly improved over recent years and have set new, more challenging targets for the future. The extra curricular provision is excellent, with opportunities to visit major galleries, museums and places of interest in this country and abroad. Practising artists and designers visit, and occasionally work in the school, and therefore students have the chance to talk to them about their work. In addition, all students attend a life class. This adds significantly to the breadth and depth of work in their portfolios and is particularly good preparation for those going on to art and design courses in higher education.

Music

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

Strengths

- students achieve high examination grades
- the teaching is very good; teachers have excellent subject knowledge and highly developed performance and communication skills
- resources are very good, and students develop their performing skills through a very wide range of performing opportunities
- excellent opportunities exist for students to develop socially and culturally through their music

Areas for improvement

- the academic course could take more account of the varied strengths and aspirations of individual students
- assessment is insufficiently developed to diagnose fully all students' academic needs
- training for staff is required to further curriculum development, and to extend the use of information and communication technology

- 88 Results in 2001 were well above average with the majority of students attaining high grades. However, numbers are too small to allow meaningful comparisons with national statistics. At AS-level, taken for the first time in 2001, all six candidates passed with A or B grades. All students who study music in the sixth form have very high passes at GCSE.
- 89 Standards of work of current students are well above course expectations and students are achieving very well. Their performance skills are developed very well through their private instrumental studies and through the outstanding range of extra-curricular musical opportunities, which is a strength of the school. Year 13 students have a good grasp of the harmonic and stylistic conventions found in Bach's harmonisations of chorales. Knowledge of musical forms and genres is very good, and students are able to relate knowledge they acquire to music they have performed. A good grasp of musical terms was evident, for example in written research into the development of the saraband. Students' standards of analysis vary amongst the group, but they are well above average, for instance when they compare two sets of variations on a theme of Paganini.

- 90 Students in Year 12 are achieving very well. This group includes some students who joined the school this year. These students all have high prior attainment but as a result of different experiences from students who took GCSE at the school. Performance skills are very well developed, and students have acute aural perception, for example when they identify intervals played on the piano as a warm-up at the start of a lesson. The range of knowledge of technicalities, such as cadences and the movements found in baroque keyboard suites, is wide. Some students do not have the full range of historical and technical knowledge that the sixth form course assumes.
- 91 Teaching is very good overall. Practical music making is an integral part of the intellectual and creative lives of all of the students and teachers capitalise appropriately on students' enthusiasm and commitment. The teachers have excellent musical knowledge and use their advanced and varied practical skills effectively for demonstration. They communicate their own knowledge and enthusiasm very effectively and secure a brisk pace of learning. The students absorb new ideas well; they are mostly very confident learners and capable of a high level of independence in their learning. Occasionally, too many assumptions are made about student's existing knowledge and this results in work not best matched to prior attainment. Teachers give good guidance to students in class. On the whole, however, assessment is insufficiently used to determine the needs of individual students so that planning can be tailored to their aptitudes, needs and wishes, which the small size of the groups would allow.
- 92 The curriculum provides very interesting learning opportunities, but does not offer the range of options envisaged by the examination board. For example, there is insufficient use of musical technology, but this is included amongst planned developments. Computers apart, the subject is very well resourced. The new music suite is excellent. Both resources and accommodation have a very beneficial effect on provision. Opportunities for the professional development of staff have not been fully exploited, particularly to ensure the proper development of the use of information and communication technology. Plans for developing the subject are appropriate, but departmental planning has vague targets, concerned with completing initiatives rather than raising standards still further. Firmer line management is needed to ensure that the department achieves its intended development goals at a suitable pace. The department has maintained outstanding range and standards in its extra-curricular activities, and the overall improvement in provision for music since the last inspection has been good.

Theatre studies

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

Strengths

- A-level results in recent years have been very high in relation to national averages
- students have a very good grasp of practical performance skills and the ability to work well together as a team
- teaching is very good, based on very good subject knowledge and practical theatre skills

Areas for improvement

- the school has already identified the need to replace the faulty lighting equipment

- 93 The inspection dealt with the A-level and the AS-level course offered by the school.
- 94 The theatre studies course enables students to do very well. Results in 2001 were well above average. Over the last three years, all students passed the examination at A-level, and more than half gained higher grades A or B. This is a very high level of attainment, which builds effectively on students' starting points. AS-level results are also at a very high level.

- 95 The standard of work seen in lessons reflects these very high standards and excellent achievement.
- 96 In Year 12 students build rapidly and capably on their existing knowledge and skills. They devise improvised plays with a deep awareness of the challenges of practical performance in a small acting space, and utilise very well their knowledge of how to create fresh and original dramatic characters.
- 97 Year 13 students analyse playscripts confidently, and deploy practical knowledge of acting, performance and play production with assurance. For instance, one group read together a scene from Timberlake Wertenbaker's play 'Our Country's Good' identifying the difficulties of managing a large cast of characters and suggesting flexible and creative ways to overcome the problems. Here, they were effectively guided by the teacher's very good subject knowledge of stagecraft. It also led them to consider further the historical and cultural setting of the play's theme of deportation to Australia, and to undertake further independent research using the Internet. Another group was equally successful in producing a short scene for performance, helped by very effective coaching and suggestions from the teacher. These enabled them to gain a high level of individual poise and confidence, as well as the ability to support each other effectively in a dramatic ensemble. The very small minority of girls make similar progress to boys, as a result of teaching which is simultaneously aware of their needs, and ingenious in overcoming problems of an unequal gender balance in practical work.
- 98 Students learn very well from both AS- and A-level courses. This is because teaching makes good use of their existing knowledge and enthusiasm for what they have read about, or experienced in the theatre. It inspires interest and inquiry through a stimulating variety of activities, so that students share ideas generously and constructively, particularly when they are directed and led in practical acting sessions. Their attitudes to the subject are excellent. Students also make good use of computers and the Internet to acquire background knowledge and information. The quality of teaching is very good, matching the demands made on students to what they know and can do, but always challenging them intellectually. Of particular note is the way in which a very high order of teacher subject knowledge of dramatic literature and of practical performance techniques is combined to help students refine their background knowledge and awareness of performance skills
- 99 Theatre studies is very well managed by a specialist who takes responsibility for all teaching of the subject in the sixth form. Previous extra curricular productions; both studio presentations and large-scale presentations, have made a significant contribution to the cultural life of the school. They do much to help sustain an atmosphere of creativity and commitment, which in turn underpins very high levels of success in examinations. A recent failure of lighting equipment means that this range of curricular and extra-curricular work is likely to be curtailed in the near future, but plans are underway to replace the system.

HUMANITIES

- 100 The focus was upon geography and history although Latin, government and politics and religious studies were sampled. Four lessons were seen in these subjects. All were at least good. In one of two excellent lessons the teaching involved all students in summarising challenging texts and deepening their subject understanding and critical thinking while enjoying grappling with new concepts and vocabulary. Religious studies is a new and popular course and was examined at A-level for the first time in 2001. Results in Latin were very good. Those in government and politics were very high, within the top five per cent of schools nationally.

Geography

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

Strengths

- examination results are very high when compared with national averages
- the quality of teaching and learning are excellent
- management and leadership of the department are outstanding.
- the response of students to the teaching is exceptionally good.

Areas for improvement

- The accommodation currently provided is restricting and impedes some aspects of further improvement.

- 101 The inspection covered the AS-level course in Year 12 and the A- level course in Year 13.
- 102 The geography department does very well for its students and continues to achieve excellent standards. Students have gained results which are consistently very high when compared to the national average. Students do significantly better in this subject than in the others that they study. The proportion of A and B grades is exceptional and, over recent years, all students have attained at least grade D. The achievement of students is excellent.
- 103 The standard of work seen in lessons and in students' folders confirms this. Written work is of a particularly high standard and reflects the very good knowledge and understanding of male and female students. Teachers exploit opportunities to develop key skills. For example, in a Year13 lesson students marked each other's work against examination criteria in order to improve their essay writing. The work demonstrates that students acquire a wide range of advanced subject skills. These they apply precisely to consolidate their understanding, as seen in a Year12 lesson when students interpreted and mapped statistical data illustrating population changes within Paris. The analysis and interpretation of data collected in the field and the frequent use of statistical methods provide many opportunities for students to practise their numerical competence.
- 104 The teaching was always very good and, most often, excellent. As a result, learning is outstanding. The teachers' enthusiasm and very good knowledge of the subject were evident in all lessons and was recognised in the very positive, frequently enthusiastic, response of the students. The methods and techniques used, including the emphasis placed on geographical enquiry, met student needs and, over time, have contributed to their marked independence. The range and variety of teaching methods used is only limited by the accommodation. The excellent arrangements made for the curriculum underpin the high quality of topic and lesson planning observed. Students are aware of the learning objectives. Teachers have appropriately high expectations of students who respond to this challenge. The lessons proceeded at a brisk pace, the ideas covered were appropriately sophisticated and the work set required high levels of thinking and problem solving. Teachers work to ensure the effective inclusion of those students who join the school at the start of Year 12, for example, additional access to computers is provided if skills fall short of the very high levels of competence in information communication technology seen. While making very good use of the library, students are encouraged to draw heavily on a range of web-sites in order to glean the most up-to-date information. Students work diligently, show a pride in their work and take responsibility for their learning, as seen in a Year 13 lesson as students studied the impact of hazards. Here they demonstrated a very good understanding of human and physical processes and an appreciation of the complexity of inter-relationships. The marking of students' work is of a high standard across the department and students are given very good guidance as to how they might achieve further improvement. The department makes very good use of target setting and review with its students and they are required to maintain progress analysis sheets.

105 The management and leadership of the geography department are excellent. The team shares a commitment to further improvement and priorities are clear. For example, a current concern is the further development of the, already good, procedures for the evaluation of teaching and the monitoring of student progress. The development plan makes clear how improvements are to be achieved and the changes that will indicate their fulfilment. The monitoring of teaching by the head of department and his line manager is most effective. This management of performance is sensitive to the training needs of the individual and the demands of departmental improvement. The department responded very positively to the last report, dealing with all the issues raised.

History

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

Strengths

- excellent subject knowledge of teachers
- very good relationships between teachers and students
- consistently high student attainment
- excellent AS-level results in 2001
- a stimulating range of learning activities

Areas for improvement

- evaluate the impact of recent learning initiatives and incorporate the outcomes into planning

- 106 Results of the A-level examinations in 2001 were well above the national average, a standard sustained over recent years and since the last inspection. In the new AS-level examination taken in 2001, 93 per cent of students gained grades A or B. In the light of their previous attainment students have achieved very well.
- 107 Standards of work of current students are excellent compared to national expectations. The current Year 13 students are building on their achievements in last year's AS-level study. In a lesson on British Foreign Policy 1936-7 the teacher first briskly focused them on key points they had previously covered. The students drew effectively on this to interrogate several judgements passed by historians on this period. They were articulate and confident in dealing with shades of meaning within key concepts such as national self interest and appeasement. In a lesson on Civil Rights in the USA, students similarly showed an articulate grasp of the arguments and positions of different factions within the Afro-American community, drawing on individual research and group presentations. Questioned by their peers on aspects of their presentation, they were effective in explaining what evidence they were citing and its significance for the debate about the progress of civil rights.
- 108 In a Year 12 lesson on the 1905 Revolution in Russia, students drew very well on past learning and notes to focus their knowledge on two key questions for presentation to the class. Most sailed readily through the essentials of this task and, using the simple but effective device presented by the teacher of progressive interrogation of various causal factors, were able to build up an impressive explanation of events. Those few less fluent in completing this task still achieved a good understanding of the key questions of why and how the revolution occurred.
- 109 Overall, teaching is very good and students learn very well as a result. Excellent subject knowledge allows teachers to structure and vary learning activities to allow students some responsibility for their own learning. Just as important, teachers' confidence in subject knowledge allows them to apply a light touch at times. For example, during an excellent lesson on British foreign policy, the teacher knew when to let students run with their accounts and when and how to challenge them. The students were seen to be very confident as well as knowledgeable in the way they handled historical research and discourse. This was also clear in the work on civil rights in the USA. The opportunity for personal research allows students to extend their reading as they are able and inclined. The promotion of the use of information and communication technology in the department is an effective tactic in developing skills of individual research and study. The department's collection of appropriate reading material is also a valuable resource for extended study. There is very good provision for students' interests outside of the timetabled curriculum, for example involvement in sixth form history seminars. The different strategies used by teachers clearly engage the students. The most effective teaching seen drew increasingly sophisticated responses from the students as they met the challenge of focused,

short, sharp activities leading to shared presentation of ideas organised around clear objectives. Teachers understand the demands of the examination syllabuses being studied through close contact with the examination board. The instruction and advice given to students, for example for the AS-level candidates, leaves them in no doubt as to what is required, and how they can meet this challenge. For each topic, students' work files record the steady accumulation of knowledge and understanding gained through their many learning activities, leading to set pieces for formal assessment. The department encourages assessment by students' peers as one of their range of strategies.

- 110 The department is very well managed. Since the last inspection the department has continued to build upon its strengths and has made good improvement. It has, for example, extended further the range of student activities employed to develop student interest, motivation and independence. It lays great emphasis on the value of information technology to support learning objectives. It has, for example, set up a history and politics internet 'message board' for students to communicate with one another and with teachers. Teachers' planning would now benefit from a review of these activities, for example considering the different ways in which different students profit from them.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus in this area was on all the subjects being taught.

English literature

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

Strengths

- A-level results in recent years have been far above expected standards
- Outstanding teaching based on very good subject knowledge and planning
- Highly effective teaching of independent thinking skills, which promotes confidence and originality in students' work.
- First-rate leadership of the subject; the sharing of ideas between teachers and their awareness of each other's work is very effective in enhancing their skills.

Areas for improvement

- None

- 111 The inspection dealt with the AS-level and A-level course offered by the school.
- 112 The English department does very well for its students. Results in 2001 were very high, in the top five per cent nationally. Such very high standards represent a rising trend from previous years as well as an improvement from the time of the previous inspection. This is excellent achievement, which builds very successfully on the already very high standards of students when they start the course. Over the past three years, results have been consistently very high in relation to national averages for the subject. Results at AS-level in 2001 were of a similarly high level although there are not yet any national comparators.
- 113 The standard of work seen in lessons reflects recent examination results and is consistently very high. Students achievement is excellent. In Year 13, students are highly fluent and articulate in their discussions in class. They structure written assignments confidently and logically, deploying ideas and concepts they have examined in class with maturity and originality. They understand literary technical terms such as 'personification' and 'imagery', applying them accurately before going on to relate them to the underlying intentions of an author. For instance, one group compared the

treatment of death in three Elizabethan texts. They probed and challenged each other constructively to explore in depth, the different facets of the way the characters dealt with the theme in two Shakespearean plays and in a sonnet by John Donne. Girls often outperformed boys when presenting ideas to the class, and worked at a similar level to boys in written assignments. In Year 12, students have completed only a little of their course, but are making very rapid progress. They build well on their existing skills and knowledge of textual analysis; assuredly identifying themes, researching and summarising the historical and social contexts of literary texts, before going on to illustrate their views with well-chosen evidence from what they have read.

- 114 Students learn extremely well and make excellent progress because the teaching is outstanding overall. Teachers use their own exceptionally good subject knowledge, to make sure that lessons are intellectually demanding, fast moving and varied in activity. They hold their students' attention very well by questioning and probing them at a level which is well matched to their ability and sense of curiosity. Other notable strengths in teaching are the way in which students are taught to study and think creatively for themselves, to consider multiple viewpoints and to adopt them tentatively before arriving at firmer personal conclusions. They learn very effectively to use evidence-gathering techniques; carry out independent research from further appropriate sources including the Internet, reflect on their own responses and feelings, and to reflect on their own methods of tackling new texts and ideas. This extends greatly their powers of concentration and imagination. It has a particularly beneficial effect in enabling students to write with spontaneity and freshness while still maintaining a sense of scholarship in their work.
- 115 Students work co-operatively and sensibly in whole class, and in small-group discussions. Their commitment to study is exemplary, as is the way in which they support and respect each other's contributions. They research well; both independently and when co-operating in-groups. This was particularly evident in one lesson where they worked together to investigate and report back upon contrasting critical interpretations of 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Their ability to summarise and compare quite difficult concepts grew, as they made their presentations, took notes from each other's observations, and asked questions to explore them further.
- 116 English benefits from first-rate leadership. It follows that classroom work is scholarly, quietly authoritative, appropriately varied, and enjoyably demanding in the challenges it makes of students. Subject staff work together effectively as a team to share teaching approaches and resources, which leads to the consistently high standard of teaching and learning. Students' progress is analysed carefully, and their written work is marked conscientiously, along with helpful advice about individual strengths and how to improve. In all English lessons, there is a sense of energy and fun as well as enthusiasm for study. It is shared by teacher and student alike. The teachers' greatest achievement is to instil in their students a deep love of literature and all it has to offer. Improvement has been excellent since the last inspection.

French

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

Strengths

- well above average examination results
- very good teaching leading to very good learning
- enthusiastic, interested learners
- teachers with excellent subject knowledge

Areas for improvement

- review schemes of work and subject documentation

- 117 The A-level examination results for 2001 were very high, in the top five per cent nationally. The proportion of students gaining the highest grades was very high. In the new AS-level examination in 2001, two-thirds of the students achieved the higher grades. This represents very good achievement.
- 118 The standards observed during the inspection were broadly similar to those gained in the recent examinations. Year 13 students understand the importance of language patterns and use them effectively when speaking spontaneously; they take risks with new language. They use sophisticated structures to describe events in the past and draw on a wealth of vocabulary and idiom to raise the level of their work. They achieve very well. Year 12 students have made a very good start to the AS-level course and are also achieving well. Their well developed listening and speaking skills enable them to make sense of unfamiliar language and to reply spontaneously when called upon to do so. This was seen to best effect in a lesson where they developed new games shows. These were modelled on programmes such as *The Weakest Link* and the lesson culminated in a general knowledge quiz with some members of the group taking the part of contestants and others the role of the games show host.
- 119 Teaching is consistently very good. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and provide students with demanding, challenging work. At the beginning of the AS-level course, for example, they move away immediately from GCSE type questions by asking students to compare and contrast life in France and Britain. Lessons are well planned with detailed lesson objectives and are taught in a way that ensures that these objectives are met. Teachers give immediate feedback on what is good and what needs to be improved and how to go about it. They use French throughout the lesson and insist that students also use it at all times. As a result of the high pace and challenge, students learn very well. They draw effectively on their well-developed learning skills and creative abilities to enhance their language learning, whilst at the same time increasing their knowledge and skills in many areas.
- 120 Students work with enthusiasm and interest. They are very mature in their approach to study and use French amongst themselves when negotiating or discussing their work with one another. They take part in a wide variety of enrichment activities beyond the classroom. For example, they participate in school exchanges, a sixth form debate opportunity in Alden Biesen, Belgium, the Year 8 trip to Alsace and a variety of theatre and subject revision visits. They use information and communication technology occasionally to research and access information from the internet but are not yet using programmes such as Powerpoint to support their oral presentations. Students' progress is monitored well by regular assessment of their work. Marking provides constructive guidance for improvement and realistic evaluation of the quality of work done.
- 121 The department is well managed with the recently appointed head of department making a significant impact. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good. Several further areas for improvement, including reviewing the schemes of work and documentation, have been identified. The head of department has already produced lesson observations on the work of some of his colleagues, which are of a very high quality. The department is very well staffed and the foreign language assistant contributes effectively to the high standards attained.

German

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

Strengths

- well above average examination standards
- very good teaching leading to very good learning
- enthusiastic, interested learners
- teachers with excellent subject knowledge

Areas for improvement

- review schemes of work and subject documentation

- 122 The results of the A-level examinations for 2001 were well above the national average. Results in the 2001 AS-level examination were similarly high with two thirds of the students achieving A and B grades. In comparison with their GCSE results students achieved well.
- 123 The standards of attainment observed during the inspection were broadly similar to those attained in the recent examinations, although the standards of the current Year 13 are not quite as high as in previous years. Students use passive tenses in the past and present well. They draw on a wealth of idiom and structure to improve the level of their work and employ a variety of tenses including the subjunctive. They have well-developed listening skills as a result of the fluent use of German by teachers but are sometimes reluctant to use German themselves as the normal means of communication within the classroom. Achievement remains good.
- 124 Year 12 students use well-developed learning skills to improve their language skills as when they analysed the song *Meckie Messer* from Brecht's Threepenny Opera, not only in terms of its content and meaning but also to identify the use of grammar such as passive tenses. They achieve well. They have good computing skills, selecting and analysing information from the Internet successfully and substituting new vocabulary to express higher analytical ideas. They are not quite as advanced as their French counterparts, however, beginning the year with GCSE type questions on self and family. This is partly because they are the last cohort to have studied German as a second foreign language and not as an equal first language, as now happens lower down the school.
- 125 Teaching ranges from excellent to good but is very good overall. Strengths include very good planning, excellent marking and feedback and high expectations. Teachers guide students carefully through the work. A particular strength of the teaching is the innovative methods used to increase students' knowledge and skills beyond the expected level of A-level and AS-level courses. In a lesson on the media, for example, the teacher bypassed the usual language learning conventions and developed students' higher order thinking skills by requiring them to analyse, prioritise, synthesise and organise a range of information about German newspapers, in German. As a result of the very good teaching, learning is also very good. Students have positive attitudes and are mature, questioning participant who develop the four skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening well. They draw on a wealth of knowledge learnt elsewhere to advance their progress in learning the language and build up a body of work which will stand them in good stead long after the examinations have been taken.
- 126 The department is well managed with the recently appointed Head of Department making a significant impact. Staffing provision is excellent and a good foreign language assistant contributes to the high standards achieved. The department provides a wide range of enrichment opportunities for its students, including exchange visits and regular theatre trips. Assessment of work is very thorough and teachers

give detailed advice as to when, for example, the language used is too formal or too colloquial. Teachers are skilled at tracking the progress of individual students and provide comprehensive feedback, which is extremely well matched to their needs and abilities. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good.