

INSPECTION REPORT

NOTRE DAME HIGH SCHOOL

Norwich

LEA area: Norfolk

Unique reference number: 121189

Headteacher: Mr John Pinnington

Reporting inspector: Philip J H O'Neill
3162

Dates of inspection: 25th – 28th February 2002

Inspection number: 190098

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Voluntary Aided
Age range of pupils:	11 – 18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Surrey Street Norwich
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Julie O'Connor
Date of previous inspection:	October 1996

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REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	6
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Pupils' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM	
PART B: COMMENTARY	
WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL	13
WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED	16
WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	18
PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	20
PART D: THE SIXTH FORM	
RESULTS AND STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS	25
STUDENTS' ATTITUDES, VALUES AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT	25
TEACHING AND LEARNING	26
CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS	27
THE SCHOOL'S CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS	28
THE EFFECTIVENESS OF LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT IN THE SIXTH FORM	29
PART E: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM	30

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Notre Dame High School is a mixed comprehensive school for students aged 11-18. It is the only Roman Catholic secondary school in Norfolk; students come from a very large catchment area, over 20 per cent travel more than 20 miles. The school has had specialist language college status since September 2000. There are 1239 students on roll, of whom 346 are in the sixth form. The school is bigger than other secondary schools and the sixth form is much larger than other sixth forms. The school is heavily over-subscribed. Half the students join the school in Year 7, the other half joins in Year 8 from the middle schools. The number of pupils entitled to a free school meal, at 5 per cent, is below the national average. Ninety per cent of pupils are from a white, UK heritage background. The proportion of pupils coming from homes where English is an additional language (at less than 1 per cent) is low. There are three pupils who are refugees. The percentage of pupils judged to have special educational needs, at 9 per cent, is below average; the percentage of these pupils for whom a Statement of Special Educational Needs exists is also below average. About 82 per cent of pupils enrolled for courses in higher or further education in 2001, after completing sixth form courses at the school; this figure is high. Pupils enter the school with levels of attainment that are above average.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Notre Dame High School is a very good school that provides a very positive climate for learning. There is a high proportion of very good teaching, leading to very good standards in most subjects. The school provides very well for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils. Very good leadership clearly supports the very positive ethos and the school is well managed. The sixth form is effective in enabling students to develop both academically and personally. The school provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- Standards across the school are very good in most subjects.
- A high proportion of very good teaching supports very good learning.
- Students' attitudes and their enthusiasm for learning are a strength of the school.
- The school provides very well for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students and their response is excellent.
- The headteacher and his senior colleagues offer very good leadership that clearly supports the ethos of the school.

What could be improved

- The management of provision for students with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language is unsatisfactory.
- Teachers do not always use the library effectively as a resource for learning.
- The accommodation and staffing for art and design is unsatisfactory, as is the accommodation for music.

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 governors and staff responded immediately to its findings and brought about rapid improvement on all fronts. Students' learning is now more carefully planned across all subjects and all key stages. Teaching builds on a good knowledge of students' prior attainments and greater use is made of all available information gathered through assessment. All matters relating to health and safety, raised at the previous inspection, have been thoroughly addressed. Registration procedures now meet fully the legal requirements for recording attendance. The National Curriculum requirements for information technology are fully met. Financial systems and procedures for ensuring that educational developments are supported by careful financial planning are now very effective. The quality of the formal communication between senior managers and other staff, a weakness at the previous inspection, is now much improved. Apart from the issues raised at the previous inspection, the school has made significant advances in the monitoring and support for teachers and has introduced mentoring for all students; this is working

well. The acquisition of specialist language school status has added further to the already high standing the school enjoys in the city. The governors and staff have the imagination, the commitment and the clarity of vision to sustain the momentum of the current drive towards excellence.

STANDARDS

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

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

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

Overall, standards across the school are good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in the rest of the school. This represents an improvement since the previous inspection. The very good results attained in the GCSE examinations and at A level are reflected in the standards seen in the students' work, where there is clear evidence of the acquisition of new knowledge and skill at a rapid rate. All students generally achieve very well in relation to the standards they bring to their courses. In the 2001 National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9, in comparison with all schools nationally, attainment in English was above average and well above average in mathematics and science. In relation to similar schools the attainment of pupils in English was above average, well above average in mathematics and very high in science. In relation to similar schools, the proportion of pupils reaching the higher Level 6 or above was above average in English and well above average in mathematics and science. Girls did better than boys, but to a lesser extent than nationally in English. In mathematics, boys did slightly better than girls, while nationally girls did slightly better than boys. In science, boys did better than girls to a greater extent than nationally. English, mathematics and science show a rising trend. Standards in the 2001 GCSE examinations were well above average for boys and girls in relation to all schools and for similar schools. In relation to schools with similar prior attainment, standards were above average. Girls did better than boys and to a greater extent than nationally. Well above average standards were reached in art and design, design and technology, English language, English Literature, history, physical education and Spanish. Standards were above average in science (double award), geography and mathematics, average in drama and French and below average in German and religious studies. The targets set for improvement are challenging and are generally met. In the sixth form, overall standards reached by students were well above average in relation to all pupils nationally. Girls did better than boys. The highest-attaining subjects were history, sociology, and health and social care GNVQ. The lowest-attaining subjects were art and design, drama, economics and business studies.

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Students openly value what the school offers them and are very positive in their response. The students' very good attitudes to learning are revealed in their preparedness to work hard and to take responsibility for their own learning.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Students behave very well in lessons and around the school. Lunchtime is orderly and students are polite to each other, to staff and to visitors. Exclusions are declining and low.
Personal development and relationships	The excellent quality of relationships between students and teachers and between students themselves is a striking feature of the school. Students are particularly good at working collaboratively and supporting each other's learning.
Attendance	Satisfactory. Levels of attendance and of unauthorised absence are in line with national averages. Punctuality is sometimes affected by the late-running of public transport.

This is a school where the students, as a result of very good and excellent teaching, delight in their work and do their best to achieve the examination results their efforts deserve.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

The overall quality of teaching is very good across the school, with a significant proportion of teaching that is excellent. Just a few lessons were judged to be unsatisfactory. The most striking feature of much teaching is the teachers' knowledge of their subject and their enthusiasm for teaching it. English, mathematics and science are very well taught. Most other subjects are either well or very well taught. The teaching of business and economics is satisfactory. Literacy and numeracy are taught well across the school. The school has gained much from the effective way the teachers work with the national strategies for literacy and numeracy. The needs of individual students are generally well met. Students are very good learners. They are quick to acquire new knowledge and skill and show a real interest in their work as a result of the teachers' success in making it interesting.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum covers the full range of National Curriculum subjects. The school does not meet the National Curriculum requirement to ensure that all Year 10 pupils have the opportunity to study design and technology. There is a good range of extra-curricular activities.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Students whose special educational needs are clearly identified are very well supported by teachers and assistants. Where their needs are not clearly identified, students do not always receive the help they require to make the same progress as their peers.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	The provision for students with English as an additional language is unsatisfactory in that the school does not clearly identify the needs of individual pupils in order for them to be supported in the acquisition of fluency.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural, development	The provision for students' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a strength of the school. There are numerous opportunities for students to reflect on and discuss issues of deep moral and spiritual significance in their lives and the school is a thoughtful community.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school takes very good care of its students. The academic guidance and support given to students in the sixth form is not always sufficiently refined to enable them to achieve the highest grades.

The school works well with parents who, in turn, value what it offers their children.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher, supported by his senior colleagues, offers very clear direction to the work of the school, clearly focused on its underlying values. There are weaknesses in the management of provision for students with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governors are very well led in the exercise of their distinctive responsibilities.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Overall, the school evaluates its own performance well, but has been slow to address the inefficiency in the use of the library.
The strategic use of resources	Resources are very effectively deployed towards the maintenance of high standards. The library is not always used effectively by all teachers to support students' learning.

There is a good number of well-qualified, experienced and dedicated staff to teach what the school offers. In art and design there are not enough qualified and experienced teachers to ensure that the current good standards are maintained. There is an adequate range of resources and a good range of information and communication technology hardware and software. Accommodation is sufficient, apart from the accommodation for art and design and music, which is unsatisfactory. The school ensures that in all budgetary decisions, considerations of cost and value are paramount.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The progress their children are making. • That the school expects their children to work hard and do their best . • The attitudes and values that characterise the school • The school is helping their children to become mature and responsible adults. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The amount of homework their children receive. • The information they receive about their children's progress. • The way the school works with parents to support their children's learning.

Seventy parents attended the meeting held for them prior to the inspection. Parents returned 22 per cent of the questionnaires.

The inspection supports the parents' very positive views of the school overall. The school supports the students in working hard and making very good progress. The school community is underpinned by clear values that are reflected in all its work. It is particularly good at helping students to develop responsible and mature attitudes. Some parents think there is too much homework and others that there is too little. The inspection findings are that homework is appropriate and supports students' learning well. The inspection judgement is that the written information to parents about their children's progress is good, but there are limited opportunities for parents to meet individual subject teachers in Years 7, 8 and 9. The school makes every effort to work with parents, but the widespread nature of the catchment area means that some parents feel at a distance from the school.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

There are 346 students in the sixth form. This makes it larger than most other sixth forms nationally. Half the Year 11 students stay on into the sixth form. Most of the students who live in Lowestoft attend their local colleges. The school provides a good range of AS and A level courses and a few vocational courses. Boys and girls are equally represented in most courses. The school collaborates effectively with other local providers of post-16 education through some shared initiatives. The number of students from minority ethnic groups who continue into the sixth form reflects the small proportion in the school generally. There are a few pupils with special educational needs and none for whom English is an additional language in the home. Most students entering the sixth form follow AS and A level or advanced vocational courses. About 82 per cent of pupils who left in 2001 enrolled for courses in higher or further education after completing sixth form courses at the school; this figure is high. The drop out rate from the sixth form is very low. Students joining the sixth form have generally above average levels of attainment.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

This is an effective sixth form that has gone from strength to strength under the leadership of an imaginative and hard working head of sixth form, who works very effectively with two dedicated colleagues in supporting the needs of all the students. As a result of very good and excellent teaching, students attain mainly high standards. The students speak highly of their experience, while acknowledging that there are some areas that could be improved. Almost all of them would recommend it unreservedly to their peers. The quality of relationships between the students and between students and the staff is exceptional. Overall, the sixth form is cost effective and gives good value for money. With the introduction of AS levels the school had to manage the first year in a way that incurred higher than usual staffing costs. This is being resolved by the reduction in teaching periods and the introduction of more independent work.

Strengths

- The standards achieved in the majority of subjects are very good, particularly in history.
- There is a very high proportion of very good and excellent teaching.
- The students are very good learners and engage in lessons with great enthusiasm and earnestness.
- Students are willing to make consistent intellectual effort.
- Relationships between the students and between students and the staff are a strength.
- There are good opportunities for students to develop as responsible and mature young adults.

What could be improved

- Standards in business and economics are not good enough.
- The academic guidance given to students is not always sufficiently refined to enable them to achieve the highest grades. Furthermore, the careers advice and guidance is not focused enough on raising aspirations.
- The use of information and communication technology is not always used enough to support learning.
- Accommodation in art and design and music are unsatisfactory and there is inadequate staffing for art and design.
- The role of the head of the sixth form is not defined clearly enough particularly in relation to the responsibility for monitoring.

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

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

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

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	Good. Standards achieved by students at A level in recent years have been above national averages, although these dipped below in 2001. Students achieved good results in the 2001 AS examinations. As a result of consistently good teaching, students make particularly good progress and achieve well. The subject is well led and managed.
Chemistry	Very good. Results were average in 2001 and rising. Current standards are very good, mainly due to recent changes in staffing. Teaching is very good and students are achieving well. Information and communication technology is not widely used. The subject is very well led and managed.
Physics	Good. Standards, which were previously below average, are improving rapidly and are already good. This is a result of a change in staffing and leadership. Teaching is good and assessment is used well to guide lesson planning. The subject is very well led.
Human biology	Very good. Standards are above average, showing significant improvement from reported examination results. AS results show generally expected and better progress than might be predicted from GCSE scores. Teaching is very good and the sixth form team of teachers is very well led.
Full design and technology	Good. Students achieve well, although A level results dipped in 2001 after being consistently high. Teaching is good, based on excellent subject knowledge and is focused on students' individual needs. Individuality in students' designs is fostered, which leads to a high level of motivation. Leadership and management are very good.
Business and economics	Unsatisfactory. Results in both subjects are below average and are not as good as would be expected from students' GCSE results. Teaching and learning are satisfactory, but progress in business is reduced because of poor attendance. No clear management structure exists for this curriculum area and this is having an adverse effect on standards.
Health and social care	Very good. Students attain very good results in examinations. The very good teaching, linked to visits to health and social care situations, helps promote very positive attitudes from students. Leadership and management are excellent.
Art and design	Good. Students achieve well as a result of good teaching. Students respond very positively to their work. The subject is well led and managed. Staffing and accommodation are unsatisfactory.
Music	Good. Students reach average standards at A level. On the evidence of current work, these standards are now improving rapidly. Performing skills are a particular strength. Teaching and learning are good, though there is insufficient guidance for students on how to improve their work. The department is well led. Accommodation is unsatisfactory.
History	Excellent. Results are well above average and improving; they are better than would be expected from the students' GCSE results. The development of key skills, especially the skills of analysis and evaluation, is a particular strength. Staff are knowledgeable, committed and enthusiastic. Teaching is very good and this leads to very good learning by all students. The subject is excellently led and managed.
Sociology	Very Good. Teaching and learning are very good, and students' positive attitudes lead to high standards of attainment. Leadership and management are very good.

Psychology	Very good. Students reach above average standards of attainment in the A level examinations and achieve very well in relation to the overall standards they bring to the course. The students respond enthusiastically to the very good teaching they experience. The leadership and management of the subject are very good.
English	Very good. Results were above average in 2001 and standards are well above average in Years 12 and 13. Teaching and learning are consistently very good. The curriculum is very good and enriches students' intellectual and personal growth. The monitoring of students' attainment and progress could be shared with them more effectively. The subject is very well led and managed.
French and German	Very Good. Though standards at A Level were average in the most recent examinations, the current Year 13 students show higher standards. Good teaching stimulates the students to learn well. Leadership and management are good.

In addition to the subjects reported above, other subjects were sampled. There was excellent teaching and above average standards in classical civilisation. In the lessons seen in geography, students made good advances in their work, achieving generally good standards. The inspection of the course in key skills showed good teaching and learning. The overall provision for Spanish is very good.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Teachers know individual students well and give them very good guidance and support overall as a result of the commitment and dedication of the two heads of year. The academic guidance given to students is not always sufficiently refined to enable them to achieve the highest grades. The careers advice that is available to students is satisfactory, but there are limited opportunities for students to explore future options for work.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Leadership is good and management is satisfactory. The role of the head of the sixth form is weakened by the fact that it is defined purely in pastoral terms.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The quality of teaching they experience. They are helped to study independently. Teachers are accessible for help. The school helped them to settle into sixth form life. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The advice and guidance they receive. The information about their progress. The advice they receive about future options. The range of extra-curricular activities.

The inspection supports the very positive views expressed by the students. Clearly, they are right about the quality of teaching and the accessibility of teachers for help. They are given many opportunities to work independently and every effort is made to help them to settle in to the sixth form. Though the range of extra-curricular activities is limited mainly to sport, the students felt that they could do more themselves to initiate activities. The inspection evidence supports their view that there are some weaknesses in aspects of the advice and guidance they get about their future options.

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

Standards across the school are very good in most subjects

- 1 The students joining the school at Year 7 from the catholic primary schools and those arriving in Year 8 from the local middle schools show above average levels of attainment. Through very good teaching, these good standards are built on well as the students move through the school. Standards are good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in the rest of the school. This represents an improvement since the previous inspection. The very good results attained in the GCSE examinations and at A level are clearly reflected in the standards seen in the students' work, where there is abundant evidence of the rapid acquisition of new knowledge and skill.
- 2 In the 2001 National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9, in comparison with all schools nationally, attainment in English was above average and well above average in mathematics and science. In relation to similar schools the attainment of pupils in English was above average, well above average in mathematics and very high in science. In relation to similar schools, the proportion of pupils reaching the higher Level 6 or above was above average in English and well above average in mathematics and science.
- 3 Standards in the 2001 GCSE examinations were well above average for boys and girls in relation to all schools and for similar schools. Students reached well above average standards in art and design, design and technology, English language, English Literature, history, physical education and Spanish. The standards they attained in science, geography and mathematics were above average. In drama and French, standards were average; they were below average in German and religious studies. The variation across subjects can be traced to the quality of teaching and the disruption to some departments through changes in staffing, which have now been mainly resolved. A key factor in the steady rise in standards of attainment is the appropriateness of the targets set for improvement: these are based on accurate predictions of students' attainment and are appropriately challenging.
- 4 In the sixth form, standards have been well above average overall. The highest-attaining subjects were history, sociology, and health and social care GNVQ. The teachers' knowledge of their subject lies at the heart of the culture of excellence that informs the life of the sixth form.

A high proportion of very good teaching supports very good learning

- 5 This is a school where the students' chances of experiencing very good and excellent teaching are high. Of the lessons seen, one in every 11 was excellent, nearly half were very good, with around one in three good. The consistency in the quality of teaching is a real strength of the school. This points to the effective sharing of good practice, very good support and training and the commitment and dedication of the teachers. As a result of the opportunities they experience to use their imagination, the students respond to their work with commitment and perseverance. This was very evident, for example, in a very stimulating geography lesson in Year 9: when the teacher announced the end of the lesson, one student spoke for many when he complained, 'Ah Miss, we were on a roll'. In this lesson and in many others, what fires the students' interest is the teachers' own enthusiasm for what they teach.
- 6 A further defining feature of many lessons was the quality of the relationships between the students and between them and the teachers. Lessons are marked by

a blending of freedom and order that sustains a clear structure to the lesson while allowing students to take risks with ideas. This was magnificently exemplified in an excellent English lesson in Year 10 exploring some of the work of Seamus Heaney. The teacher very skilfully allowed the pupils to find their own way into the poem by encouraging them to stretch their minds to the limit in seeking to interpret key phrases. This led to increased intellectual effort as the lesson progressed. The students reached a very high level of sophisticated understanding of Heaney's skill in embodying both beauty and horror in a single verse. The quality of the exchanges between students and the teacher led to excellent learning in a physics lesson in Year 9. All the students were supported very effectively through attention to areas where they experienced difficulties and constant probing for understanding. This level of excellence characterised much of the teaching of science subjects. Many lessons were strengthened by the teachers' skill in explaining tasks and in ensuring that all the students were clear about what was required of them.

- 7 In the sixth form, a significant strength in much teaching is the depth and breadth of the teachers' knowledge of what they teach. This gives the students the assurance that when they ask questions, they will receive an answer that will take them further on in their understanding. This was manifestly evident in an excellent lesson in classical civilisation in Year 13 when the students were comparing and contrasting the approaches of historians and biographers as they studied Tacitus' Annals.

Students' attitudes and their enthusiasm for learning are strengths of the school

- 8 The students show a high level of enthusiasm for their work. They demonstrate, too, a sustained commitment to achieving the highest standards of which they are capable. Their very good behaviour is one of the key features in the school's success. Students are receptive to new ideas; they are alive with curiosity, particularly when they are working with issues that touch their daily lives and sensibilities. For example, in an English lesson in Year 7, the students were deeply touched by the story of Harriet Tubman and her experiences on the cotton plantations. Their response was one of deep concern for man's inhumanity to man. Students work very productively together. In a Year 9 physics lesson, for instance, when the teacher's expectations for responsible and mature engagement with the work were high, students rose to the occasion by organising themselves very effectively, making significant gains in knowledge as they supported and questioned one another. This was learning at its best, resulting from excellent teaching.
- 9 The students' capacity to concentrate and keep going even when they experience difficulties sustained the very good pace of many lessons. Another defining characteristic of the best lessons is the students' persistent use of the appropriate technical language. This arises to a great extent from the teachers' work on literacy. A significant feature of many lessons is the way the students take notes and use them for revision. These very good attitudes are demonstrated right across the school.

The school provides very well for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students and their response is excellent

- 10 The school is manifestly true to its mission to sustain a Christian community where each person is invited 'to follow Christ's call to live a life of faith, freedom, hope, joy and love'. In fidelity to this high ideal, the school does much to support the students' spiritual development. Every opportunity is taken to allow students to explore issues of deep personal concern in their lives. What they learn is regularly related to their own lives and beliefs. For example, when touching the harsher moments of human history, such as the slave trade, the students are helped to see the moral lessons for our age. The moral development of the students is very well catered for. This shows itself in the emphasis on respect for the beliefs and feelings and thoughts of others. In lessons, the students' own ideas are seen as reminders of the fact that they are also involved in making sense of the world, forming part of the community of those who have a concern for the truth and for what is good in human relationships. Students are given very good support in the development of their social awareness. They are helped to mix with ease in a variety of social settings through a wide range of activities, both within and outside lessons and through involvement with outside agencies. The very good opportunities students have to work abroad further extend their social horizons, as does their extensive involvement in the community through their links for work experience and with other schools and colleges. Students in the sixth form, following appropriate training, can act as counsellors to their peers. Many successfully complete the Duke of Edinburgh awards scheme.
- 11 The provision for students' cultural development is very good. Through the study of literature, art, history and religion, students acquire a very good appreciation of their own cultural traditions and cultures and religions other than their own. The multicultural dimension of the teaching of art and design is a strength in raising students' awareness of the wide range of ways that different people seek to make sense of their lives and embody in their art their noblest beliefs and aspirations.

The headteacher and his senior colleagues offer very good leadership that clearly supports the ethos of the school

- 12 A clear sense of common purpose and a shared vision of what counts in the students' lives are defining features of the school. At the heart of this driving force lies very good leadership and good management. The headteacher combines a passion for excellence with a realistic sense of what is possible within the constraints of the school's resources. A very effective deputy and assistants support him very well in this enterprise. The senior management team is newly formed. Its members, though still finding their feet, have moved successfully on a number of fronts. They have been careful to measure the pace of change so that the already hardworking teachers are not overburdened with new initiatives. Paperwork is kept to the minimum. Teaching is monitored in a way that supports teachers rather than oppresses them.
- 13 The clear focus on sustaining the very good standards of attainment and on supporting all students in achieving to the best of their capabilities influences all the work of the school. The combined creative energies of all the staff were steered very successfully in the acquisition of specialist language school status. The astute management of the school's finances is another strong influence on the school's work. Expenditure is closely monitored to ensure that it is directed appropriately towards the most efficient use. This is evident, for example, in the purchase of information and communication technology equipment.
- 14 The school's decisive and effective response to the previous inspection is a clear indication of the persistent drive towards improvement on all fronts.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

The management of provision for students with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language is unsatisfactory

- 15 The management of special educational needs is unsatisfactory. Much of the administration is not up-to-date. The format of the individual educational plans is inadequate and targets are often imprecise. No progress has been made on the introduction of the implications of the new Code of Practice. The annual reviews of students with statements are well managed, but parents are seldom invited to reviews of students' provision on other stages of the register. Students are seldom involved in setting targets. While the learning support assistants, who are experienced and well qualified, provide excellent help where used, their work is not monitored to ensure that they are best used. Progress of students with special educational needs is satisfactory overall. When students receive accurately focused help from assistants and teachers, they make good progress. However, support based on precise targets is not given to all students. The special education needs co-ordinator carries out students' assessments efficiently. This has resulted in students moving up the stages of the Code of Practice in order to obtain a Statement of Special Educational Needs and others having their statements withdrawn as their needs are met. The special education needs co-ordinator had not operated a clear leadership role, but has acknowledged past deficiencies and has produced an action plan, which should address the outstanding issues.
- 16 The school's policy for special educational needs does not meet legal requirements. The governing body's annual report to parents does not meet the requirement for the inclusion of a statement about the success of the special educational needs policy and of how resources have been allocated to and amongst children with special educational needs over the previous year.
- 17 The provision of English as an additional language is unsatisfactory. The school does not have a full register of students who require this support. At present, students who are receiving specific support are inaccurately placed on the register of students with special educational needs. The specific teaching that they do receive is very good. The individual needs of these students are well met; they enjoy the sessions and appreciate the challenge that moves them on in their learning. However, outside those sessions, any support that they receive is not necessarily relevant to their language needs, because they are considered as having equivalent needs to students with special educational needs. Teachers are unaware of the specific support that these students should receive. Some students with English as an additional language are not identified; therefore, there can be no assurance that their needs will be met. For example, their needs could relate to spoken English or understanding technical language. The school does not have a person solely responsible for these students, who could co-ordinate provision. Despite these shortcomings, these students are well integrated into the school community. The school supports new arrivals well, ensuring that another student initially accompanies them, to give them confidence and enable them to take part in school life. Teachers do not always use the library effectively as a resource for learning
- 18 The library is a very good resource, occupying an attractive space. The librarian does much to encourage the students to use it. The key weakness in the management and use of the library is that it is not seen in the school as having an

essential connection with the development of literacy across the curriculum. It is not used enough by the teachers, particularly in encouraging reading and independent research. There is no clear strategy for developing the resources in the library and for involving all departments in its effective use. This is an essential resource that is significantly undervalued.

The accommodation and staffing for art and design is unsatisfactory, as is the accommodation in music

- 19 **The accommodation for art and design is inadequate for the increasingly large numbers taking the subject. Many of the lessons are severely cramped, with the consequence that it is very difficult for teachers to circulate amongst the students as they work. The teaching of art and design has been recently weakened by the use of too many part-time supply staff. This has led to significant discontinuities in provision and standards are beginning to fall. The accommodation for music has some defects that can be easily remedied and while these have been brought to the attention of the school, there are other, more intractable difficulties. There are too few usable practice rooms and those that are available have poor ventilation.**

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

20 The school provides a very good education for the students. In order to consolidate what it already does well and further raise standards of attainment, the governors and staff should:

address weaknesses in the management of provision for students with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language by:

starting to bring provision into line with the recommendations of the new Code of Practice for students with special educational needs;

ensuring that individual education plans are carefully created and used;

identifying a member of staff to take responsibility for provision for the students for whom English is an additional language;

ensuring that parents are appropriately involved in decisions made about students with special educational needs;

reporting annually to parents about provision for students with special educational needs in the manner required by statute;

monitoring more carefully the way that support assistants are used;

(paragraphs 15-17)

take measures to ensure that the library is used more effectively as a resource for learning by:

strengthening the collaboration between departments, particularly the English department, and library staff in the use of the library;

(paragraphs 18, 44, 57, 80 and 101)

improve the accommodation and staffing for art and design and the accommodation for music, including that provided in the sixth form, by:

continuing to press for the funding required to address the current overcrowding and lack of appropriate storage space in art and design and the unsatisfactory condition of accommodation for music;

ensuring that the present unsatisfactory arrangement, by which the students in art and design are taught by a series of supply teachers, is urgently addressed.

(paragraphs 19, 91 and 97)

Sixth form

raise standards in business and economics by:

encouraging greater collaboration between these two areas;

addressing weaknesses in teaching;

strengthening the management of these subjects;

(paragraphs 43 and 76-80)

improve the academic guidance given to students by:

communicating to them more often how they are doing and

how they might improve on their target grades;

(paragraphs 37, 39, 51, 57, 95 and 123)

and

improve careers advice and guidance by:

placing more emphasis on raising students' aspirations about what they are capable of achieving after they complete their sixth form studies.

(paragraph 34)

make greater use of information and communication technology to support learning by:

ensuring that all subjects provide opportunities for students to apply and improve their skills in information and communication technology;

(paragraphs 44, 53, 58, 61, 82, 91, 97 and 111)

develop the role of the head of the sixth form by:

strengthening her responsibility for monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning.

(paragraph 42)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7-11	53
	Sixth form	67
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		75

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
Years 7-11							
Number	6	21	13	13	0	0	0
Percentage	11	40	25	24	0	0	0
Sixth form							
Number	5	31	23	6	2	0	0
Percentage	8	46	34	9	3	0	0

The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	893	346
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	48	0

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	14	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	114	5

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	16

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	20
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	44

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	8.2
National comparative data	8.1

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.5
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2001	90	110	200

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	68	70	74
	Girls	92	92	92
	Total	160	162	166
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	School	80 (77)	81 (78)	83 (79)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 6 or above	School	39 (30)	59 (48)	54 (47)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	71	70	86
	Girls	97	86	99
	Total	168	156	185
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	School	84 (81)	80 (74)	93 (81)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 6 or above	School	37 (36)	52 (54)	53 (44)
	National	31 (31)	42 (39)	33 (29)

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	2001	84	118	202
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GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	48	79	82
	Girls	85	111	114
	Total	133	190	196
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	66 (61)	94 (92)	97 (95)
	National	48 (47)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	46.4 (44.4)
	National	39.0 (38.4)

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

Vocational qualifications	Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	16
	National	N/A

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

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	61	77	138

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	18.5	20.0	19.3(20.1)	2.0	1.1	1.4 (3.2)
National	(17.7)	(18.6)	(18.2)	(2.6)	(2.9)	(2.7)

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

Vocational qualifications	Number	% success rate
Number in their final year of studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	16
	National	N/A

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	3
Black – African heritage	6
Black – other	1
Indian	3
Pakistani	1
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	2
White	1240
Any other minority ethnic group	78

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	1	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	46	2
Other minority ethnic groups	2	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 – Y11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	67.8
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	18:1

Education support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	8
Total aggregate hours worked per week	172

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	75
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	23
Key Stage 4	23

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000/2001
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	£
Total income	3,382,263
Total expenditure	3,333,288
Expenditure per pupil	2,723
Balance brought forward from previous year	21,971
Balance carried forward to next year	47,718

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	28
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	27

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	1.4
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	6
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	1.4

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate 21.5%

Number of questionnaires sent out	1230
Number of questionnaires returned	265

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	55	35	7	2	1
My child is making good progress in school.	52	41	5	0	2
Behaviour in the school is good.	35	55	3	1	6
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	29	45	16	4	6
The teaching is good.	43	49	5	0	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	36	41	16	5	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	59	34	3	2	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	60	35	3	0	2
The school works closely with parents.	31	48	14	4	3
The school is well led and managed.	58	35	2	2	3
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	56	37	2	2	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	28	40	9	5	18

Other issues raised by parents

There were no other issues raised.

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

- 21 Overall, standards attained in the examinations in the sixth form were well above average in 2001. Girls did better than boys. The highest-attaining subjects were history, sociology, and health and social care GNVQ. The lowest-attaining subjects were art and design, drama, economics and business studies. The high proportion of very good and excellent teaching lies at the heart of the overall high standards reached. Weaknesses in teaching, allied to some changes in staff, account for the relatively lower standards in some subjects. Standards are improving as a result of setting and reaching for challenging targets for attainment.
- 22 Apart from the subjects that formed the focus for the inspection, the inspection of Spanish revealed very good standards, particularly in reading and comprehension. In classical civilisation, excellent teaching led to a high level of engagement with the work. Students showed considerable skill in the critical evaluation of texts and in comparing and contrasting different perspectives on the history of Rome.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

- 23 Students' attitudes to the school and to their work have improved since the last inspection and are now very good. Despite the fact that one-fifth of the students live over 20 miles away, around half of those in Year 11 decide to stay on for the sixth form. These students are highly motivated; their enthusiasm is reflected in the fact that, during the year preceding the inspection, only 3 per cent of students left before they had finished their courses.
- 24 As part of the inspection process, students were asked to complete a questionnaire. Although they offer constructive criticism and are looking for possible improvements, they remain very loyal to the school. Ninety-five per cent of those who returned the completed questionnaire indicated that they are enjoying their time in the sixth form and would recommend it to others.
- 25 Students behave very well during lessons and at other times of the school day. They are clearly committed to learning and can be relied upon to get on with their work both at home and at school. Students and members of staff get along exceptionally well and relationships are excellent. Students work very productively, either on their own or in groups. Within an atmosphere of mutual support and encouragement, they develop an increasingly mature and sophisticated understanding of the topics they study, enabling them to produce work that is well above the expected standard. Students welcome visitors to their school. They are very helpful and polite. The high standard of their behaviour is reflected in the fact that there have been very few permanent exclusions.
- 26 Students' personal development is excellent; they are confident, mature and very articulate. They willingly undertake the academic work that is asked of them and many volunteer to do more. Students are keen to take on responsibilities around the school and around four out of five volunteer to take part in the wide range of additional activities and clubs. For example, the Support for Students scheme is entirely staffed and organised by sixth form students. Every day, two trained volunteers provide an informal 'drop in' centre. They make a valuable contribution to the welfare of the younger pupils who come along in order to discuss a problem or

who simply want company. Students also run a wide variety of clubs and societies, including drama and dance groups, various sports clubs and an information and communication technology support club.

- 27 Overall, attendance is satisfactory. In some subjects, however, attendance is unsatisfactory and this affects the work that can be undertaken by the rest of the class. For example, in Year 12 business lessons, up to one-third of the class is regularly absent. This adversely affects the dynamics of the group and inhibits the quality of discussion. It also lowers the standard of work.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

- 28 The overall quality of teaching is very good. Of the lessons seen in the sixth form, one in every nine was excellent; around half were very good; one-third were good, one in 11 satisfactory, with just a few lessons unsatisfactory. The most immediately striking feature of teaching in the sixth form is the teachers' extensive knowledge of the subjects they teach. This ensures that the students pursue ideas in sufficient depth to lead them to the higher grades in their examinations. The brisk pace to lessons was another notable strength. The teachers' skill in providing a progressively challenging sequence of activities enlivened many lessons. This was a marked feature of a Year 13 history lesson involved in evaluating the influence of the Anti Corn Law League. The effective combination of the teachers' explanations and challenging questions led to very productive work in small groups. The students made palpable gains in knowledge and in the sophistication with which they handled key ideas.
- 29 Many lessons were strengthened by the quality of the teachers' demonstrations and explanations and the persistent checking for understanding. It was these features that underpinned the success of a chemistry lesson in Year 13 dealing with kinetics. The teacher was meticulous in ensuring that all knew the purpose of the activity, with the consequence that the students engaged in their work with a clear sense of direction and made significant advances in learning. Homework is used to good effect in most subjects, giving the students many productive opportunities for independent study and research. Lessons are occasionally weakened as a result of a failure to involve the students enough in discussion.
- 30 Students are taught enough about the application of number, communications and the use of information and communication technology to support their studies. The compulsory course in key skills in Year 12 generally works to the advantage of all students. However, there is some overlap, for example, in the study of spreadsheets, which a significant minority of students have already covered in their earlier courses.
- 31 The teachers cater well for the needs of all the students. Those who experience difficulties with their work are helped to find their way through the most demanding ideas. The few students with special educational needs are supported well by all the teachers they encounter. The more able and talented students are encouraged to aim for the attainment that matches their exceptional talents and are supported appropriately in this endeavour.

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

- 32 Curriculum arrangements in the sixth form are good, with a broad range of learning opportunities being offered. There are over 25 AS/A level courses offered, complemented by two advanced vocational courses in business and health and social care. The curriculum, which in the previous inspection was judged to be inadequately meeting the needs of lower-attaining sixth formers, has been reviewed and modified to ensure better equality of access and opportunity. The courses now offered suitably match the aspirations of the students and build on their prior attainment. The school acknowledges that it is unable to meet the needs of every potential student. Staffing and financial resources do not allow this. Consequently, the school has made a decision that its sixth form will concentrate on advanced level courses. Potential students who do not achieve the necessary entry grades are advised of other opportunities existing within the local area. Suitable advice is offered to students in Year 11 and when their GCSE results are known. To this end, the curriculum is meeting external requirements and is responsive to local needs. The curriculum also satisfies statutory requirements with adequate arrangements existing for religious education.
- 33 The curriculum is enhanced in a number of ways. All Year 12 students follow good courses in key skills, covering the study of number, communications and information and communication technology. Many opportunities exist for students to accept positions of responsibility by working both in school and outside. Such involvement is a key part of the school's ethos and students have raised money for a range of charities, as well as running clubs at a local school for children with special educational needs. Sixth formers also have suitable opportunities to develop their interest in sport and recreation. The school basketball team, for example, is particularly strong. Good opportunities also exist for students to gain additional qualifications. The range of enrichment activities is making a good contribution to the students' continued spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- 34 There is scope for improvement in careers education and guidance. The students expressed some reservations about the quality of this provision, believing that while the advice for potential higher education students was good, other facets of careers education and guidance were less well catered for. The present programme does not focus enough on raising aspirations. There is no formally planned work-shadowing programme for all post-16 students. The newly established sixth form management team acknowledges this issue and has started some preliminary negotiations with representatives from local business and commerce, including the local Education and Business Partnership, but more work is needed before an effective programme including all students is available.
- 35 The very good provision the school makes for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is continued into the sixth form, where it is also very good. Students fulfil very well the school's mission statement and its very strong Christian ethos pervades everything they do. There are too few opportunities for students to contribute by leading assemblies or to provide some of the content.
- 36 Many opportunities are provided across the curriculum for students to be involved in activities such as discussions about fundamental beliefs. For example, in a Year 12 history lesson, a strong spiritual and moral content was seen, with students being moved by images of famine and treatment of Russian peasants in the 1930s. All members of the sixth form strongly feel they are part of a community. This feeling supports the excellent relationships and the very good attitudes students have towards their work. There is very good support for students' social development as a result of the provision of a wide range of opportunities, both within and outside

lessons, for students to work together. Following an appropriate course of training, students act successfully as counsellors to other students. Many successfully complete courses under the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme. The provision for students' cultural development is very good. Students have a very good appreciation of their own cultural traditions and cultures and religions other than their own. The promotion of positive attitudes to different cultures is helped, for example, through the study of the work of artists in different parts of the world.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

Assessment

- 37 There are effective arrangements for assessing pupils' work in the sixth form. There is a good level of information available to teachers to make judgements about students' progress and this is generally used well. There are many examples of marking of work that provide clear guidance to students on how to improve their work and all students are provided with target grades which help to direct their efforts. However, the assessment of their work is not always sufficiently refined to direct them on to the precise steps they need to take in order to improve on their predicted grades.

Advice, support and guidance

- 38 This school provides very good educational and personal support and guidance for sixth form students. This is reflected in the fact that almost everyone who starts Year 12 stays on until the end of sixth form. Nine out of ten students who completed the pre-inspection questionnaire feel that the school gave them plenty of help when they were settling in at the start of Year 12. Teamwork within the sixth form is very good and students feel that they were well advised when deciding which subjects to study. As a result, they are happy that the courses they subsequently chose suit their talents and aspirations well and this good match is reflected in the high standards of work seen. There are thorough and effective procedures to ensure students' health and safety.
- 39 Students keep the same tutor throughout their time in the sixth form and regular, one-to-one mentoring has recently been introduced to good effect. These meetings are held each half term and they provide a valuable opportunity for students to discuss their academic progress, along with any personal problems they may have. In addition to this verbal support, students receive detailed progress reports each half term. These provide a very useful record that informs individuals exactly how they are getting on with their work, along with their predicted grades at AS and A level. While students find this feedback to be very helpful, they would, however, like teachers to provide more information that would help them to improve their predicted grades.

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

- 40 Parents and students express very positive views about the sixth form at this school. As part of the inspection process, students were asked to complete a questionnaire and many also spoke to inspectors during lessons and at other times. The overwhelming majority of students indicate that they are enjoying these last two years and are pleased that they stayed on at this school. They hold the school in high esteem and this is reflected in the fact that around half of those in Year 11 choose to stay on for Years 12 and 13. Furthermore, the overwhelming majority feel

that the range of courses suits their talents and aspirations well and this general satisfaction is reflected in the very low drop out rate during Years 12 and 13.

- 41 Although there are some areas of school life that cause dissatisfaction, students are very loyal to the school. Students are pleased with the standard of teaching and particularly appreciate the fact that teachers make themselves available to provide help when it is needed. Each term, students receive very clear reports about how they are getting on, as well as details of their predicted target grades. Students indicate that the new mentoring meetings are proving to be very useful and that they appreciate this enhanced level of personal support.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

Leadership and management

- 42 The sixth form is well led by an enthusiastic and imaginative head of sixth form. She is very ably supported in her work by two very effective heads of year in working towards the maintenance of high standards of teaching and learning. Together, they have established a vibrant community of learners in which high standards are reached and maintained in nearly all subjects. A great strength is the extent to which they exercise their pastoral roles with commitment and dedication. The management of the sixth form is satisfactory. There are many strengths, particularly the way in which funding is carefully directed towards appropriate priorities. Weaknesses arise, particularly in monitoring teaching, not from the competence of the head of sixth form but from the fact that her role is defined purely in pastoral terms. This diminishes her capacity to monitor and support teachers in their work.
- 43 The governors work very effectively with the school in monitoring what happens in the sixth form, but there are some weaknesses in the management of business and economics, which remain to be addressed. Governors follow the trend in results of examinations and hold the school to account through a well-organised committee structure. The governors and staff have taken great care to ensure that the sixth form does not spend beyond its fair share of the budget. There have been some difficulties created by the number of teaching periods arising from the introduction of AS level examinations. The number of teaching periods is to be reduced so that the sixth form remains cost effective. This move will also provide more time for students to develop their skills in independent research and enquiry.

Resources

- 44 The teachers who teach sixth form subjects are well qualified, with the result that one of the strengths of lessons is the depth and breadth of the teachers' knowledge. They are provided with many good opportunities to extend their expertise through relevant in-service courses. There is a satisfactory range of learning resources and they are generally used well. However, the library is not always well used to support independent research and enquiry. There is a good range of information and communication technology available and students tend to use this well in their independent work. Teachers, however, do not always do enough to encourage the distinctive applications of information and communication technology that relate to their courses.

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

45 In the inspection, 15 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	45	71	71	31	32		
Biology	16	100	84	50	34		
Human biology	33	88		18			
Chemistry	32	75	87	25	42		
Physics	17	82	86	30	41		
Environmental science	16	88		19			
Design and technology: product design	5	100		40			
Design and technology: product design	13	85		8			
Economics	19	79		37			
Art and design	6	83	88	50	44		
Fine art	12	100		50			
History of art	16	100		26			
Drama and theatre studies	21	100	96	53	33		
Photography	1	100		0			
Music	10	100		20			
Geography	22	100	91	32	39		
History	46	98	94	52	43		
Religious studies	29	97	92	75	36		
Psychology	62	94		60			
Sociology	36	94		36			
Classical civilisation	17	100		12			
English literature	28	100	96	54	36		
English language and literature	53	100		76			
French	17	94	91	36	46		
German	5	100	92	20	44		
Spanish	9	67		33			

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	27	78	87	22	43	4.5	5.8
Chemistry	10	90	90	40	43	5.6	5.9
Biology	11	91	88	27	34	3.6	5.3
Human biology	11	36	90	9	30	2.7	5.2
Physics	11	91	88	27	40	4.7	5.7
Full design and technology	10	100	91	33	30	4.2	5.4
Business studies							
AVCE Health and social care	1	100		0		6.0	
Art and design	20	100	83	66	23	0	2.8
Music	2	100	93	0	35	5.0	5.7
Geography	4	100	92	75	38	7.0	5.7
History	22	95	88	50	35	6.8	5.5
Religious studies	13	100	92	61	38	7.1	5.8
Sociology	26	100	86	65	35	7.7	5.3
Psychology	27	93	87	76	34	7.6	5.3
English language	15	87	92	27	30	5.7	5.2
English literature	21	90	95	51	37	6.4	5.9
French	14	93	89	21	38	4.9	5.6
German	5	100	91	40	40	6.0	5.8
Spanish	13	92	89	31	39	5.5	5.7

Intermediate vocational qualifications

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		Average point distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Business Part 1	16	100		50		11.3	

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

The focus was on mathematics, physics, chemistry and human biology, but biology was also sampled. In biology, examination results were above average. The AS results were well above average and most students did as well or better than expected from their GCSE scores. Two lessons were observed in biology and both were very good, leading students to a very good understanding of biochemical structures.

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths

- Results at GCE A level in recent years have been above national averages.
- Results at GCE AS level were good with nearly a third of students achieving grades A or B in 2001.
- The range of courses provided for students at AS, mathematics and further mathematics, and A level is good.
- Teaching is consistently good across all sixth form mathematics courses.
- Students are well motivated, develop good learning habits and work hard.

Areas for improvement

- Students are not always taught the skills they need to tackle new work.
- Written comments on students' work, particularly in Year 13, do not always provide sufficient guidance for a student to know what to do to improve.
- Students have limited access to information and communication technology.

Standards and achievement

- 46 In 2001 the standards achieved by students at GCE A level were below the national average. The greater proportion of the higher grades A and B was achieved by female students. The number of students achieving a grade A to E closely matches the national average. The performance by male students in 2001 was significantly weaker than in previous years and below that of female students overall. The 2001 student performance at AS level was good with 32 students gaining a grade A to E. Forty-four per cent of these students gained an A or B grade, the greater proportion of these being gained by female students. Twenty-five of these students have returned to complete the A level course. This is similar to the national retention rate.
- 47 Students currently studying mathematics achieve very well, which reflects well on attitudes and response to the courses offered. The clear explanations and instructions students receive give them greater confidence in conducting sophisticated experimental work. Students in both Years 12 and 13 develop good analytical skills, drawing very effectively on knowledge gained from other aspects of mathematics.
- 48 The good teaching of mathematical methods is clearly evident in students' work through appropriate selected practice questions. However, there is limited evidence to show that students are encouraged to think about different approaches to finding the solutions to problems. In planning lessons, teachers do not take enough account of the range of students' attainment.

- 49 On the evidence of lessons and work seen, Year 12 students have made a very positive start to their courses. They are consolidating and building on the experience gained at GCSE. Students new to the school settle well and have been equally well prepared for work at AS level. Effective teaching enables most students to tackle demanding mathematical problems. Occasionally, students do not have the basic skills to work out solutions to problems. For example, when learning how to apply the laws of logarithms to solve complex algebraic problems, some students experience difficulties due to their lack of understanding of the principles and purpose of logarithms. Teachers do not always give enough thought in their planning to the skills, knowledge level and understanding students require before tackling new work.
- 50 The effective teaching of the application of number for students in Year 12 is of particular benefit to those not studying AS mathematics. In the lesson observed students confidently used fractions, decimals and percentages to calculate the income received over a 12 month period on the British Airways London Eye and then estimated the number of years it would take to recover the initial outlay of the project. In other courses such as health and social care, students competently use numerical methods to calculate the energy, protein, fat and fibre content per portion of a meal of their choice.

Quality of education

- 51 Teaching is consistently good and often very good. Opportunities for open discussion and student participation are used well in most lessons. Students receive effective individual support, praise and encouragement. This enables them to consolidate their learning and move on with greater confidence. Although students' work is marked and assessed regularly, written comments, particularly in Year 13, do not provide sufficient guidance for a student to know what to do to improve. The work of students in Year 12 is more comprehensively marked and the diagnostic assessment given by teachers enables students to be more aware of their weaknesses and how they should go about improving their overall standards.
- 52 The enthusiasm shown by teachers for the subject has considerable impact on students and their attitude to learning. Students are attentive, work well together, sharing ideas and support and help each other. The atmosphere in lessons reflects the growing, positive relationships that are being forged between students and their teacher.

Leadership and management

- 53 Students have limited access to information and communication technology. Resources for learning are adequate, although there is a shortage of suitable textbooks for students studying AS/A2 further mathematics. Students' own notes provide good guides for revision. Students are encouraged to make good use of the school's library and thereby develop good independent learning habits. The good teaching and learning that is occurring in the sixth form is the result of good curriculum leadership and management. Teachers are well matched to the curriculum requirements of the AS and A Level examinations. The department actively encourages students to attend lectures at universities, to hear visiting speakers talk about career opportunities in mathematics and to participate in the planning and teaching of activities for lower school students, such as the Year 8 mathematics day.

HUMAN BIOLOGY

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

Strengths

- Students' achievement is very good, some showing extremely high levels of motivation.
- Teaching is very good with high expectations for students' accomplishments.
- Very good leadership has established a climate of continuous review and improvement

Areas for improvement

- Students do not have enough structured time for personal guidance.

Standards and achievement

54 In 2001 A level results were below average. Boys performed less well than girls. The trend over the last three years has been below average. In the past, students with lower average point scores at GCSE have followed this course and this has meant the percentage reaching the higher grades A and B has been well below average. The range of attainment on entry is wider now as a result of changing policy. Results in AS at the end of Year 12 show significant improvement because the team of teachers is very capable and strongly committed to improvements in performance. The AS results show more than three-quarters began the second year of the course with expected or better progress from GCSE scores. At best, individuals performed two grades better than expected. The proportion of higher grades A and B shows performance is improving. Although a number of students find the course difficult, in lessons they rise to the challenge. This represents very good achievement. All except five have continued into the second year of the course. The school recruits approximately half the students from other schools. Students following the course take a wide range of other courses, including humanities and language subjects. Destinations are mostly for university, but for a wide variety of arts as well as science-based courses.

55 Students reach good standards in lessons because recent appointments have strengthened the management of teaching and learning. Practical investigation is very well organised and students in both Years 12 and 13 reach good standards of practical competence. They are encouraged to be analytical and evaluative throughout proceedings, raising their standards further. In Year 13, most students are beginning to consider how the structure of different sugar molecules affects the rate at which they are metabolised by yeast. In one group, they were entering data independently into the computer. They use the right technical vocabulary comprehensively when they have grasped an idea and are wonderfully open about their needs for greater understanding. They make good connections with other aspects of the curriculum, as illustrated in their confident writing. The most able students write extensively, considering spiritual and moral issues in exploring scientific developments, such as genetic engineering. They reach varying standards in applying statistical skills to biological problems and this is an area where some students need further support. They reach satisfactory standards in using computers for experimental analysis, but this is an area for further improvement.

Quality of education

56 Teaching and learning are very good. Commendable commitment to the personal development of students is at the heart of teaching. Scientific discovery is communicated in the context of expanding spiritual awareness and students readily engage in lively discussion about issues, such as the enormity of implications for society from increasing understanding of the structure and function of DNA. Teachers communicate a love of the subject with considerable skill. Preparation for investigations is very good. They are a highly effective team in managing students' practical work and this has a significant impact on the good standards reached. They

provide good opportunities to develop the key skills of communication, research, language and mathematics and are planning for students to engage in research with external organisations. Teachers use assessment well. They ask pertinent questions, expecting students to offer scientific explanations. They work very hard to ensure individuals have understood and extend discussions in the interests of those who need further time to widen their comprehension. They continue to question individuals and small groups as they work on tasks. Such a positive climate makes them increasingly confident in seeking clarification and correcting errors in their thinking.

- 57 Students have very mature relationships. Respect for each other and for teachers governs discussions. Students at all levels of attainment make positive gains from the course. The small numbers from different cultural backgrounds are socially integrated and make very good contributions to discussions. Boys and girls contribute equally effectively, with no distinct differences in performance. They work productively together, supporting each other's learning. When applying statistical techniques to the results from an investigation, those who have more advanced knowledge of mathematics work closely with others who are less certain of procedures. Students do not get enough formal individual guidance and support from subject teachers in order to refine their achievements further. They have a good capacity for working independently, taking study very seriously, as seen in the efficient preparation for an investigation. They study privately in the library, but the area is not well resourced with good quality advanced level books or with computers for the numbers following science courses.

Leadership and management

- 58 The subject is led very well and the work of the team of teachers continues to aspire to higher standards. Planning for the co-ordination of schemes is improving and the assessment of students is becoming increasingly cohesive. Resources are very well managed and have a significant impact on the quality of teaching. However, not all teachers use computer resources equally effectively during co-ordinated investigations. Technicians work very effectively and support students directly on occasions. As newly appointed teachers become more established, the quality of classroom observation is becoming a very good tool for improvement. This is well supported by the team's high level of involvement in the training of graduate teachers.

CHEMISTRY

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

Strengths

- Teachers use their good subject knowledge to ask probing questions and assist learning.
- Emphasis on practical investigations deepens understanding and develops problem solving skills.
- Very good relationships give students the confidence to express opinions and views.
- Lesson planning is very good, leading to a clear focus and pace of learning.
- All students are supported well in tackling demanding work.

Areas for improvement

- Predictions, related to previous understanding or research, are not used often enough.
- Not enough use is made of computing to enhance teaching and learning.

Standards and achievement

- 59 The GCE A level results in 2001 were average and show an improving trend. The results have improved since the previous inspection. The proportion gaining the highest grades, A and B, was close to the national average. Male and female students did equally well. Students make good progress when compared to their prior results at GCSE. Students did slightly worse in chemistry than in their other subjects, but not significantly so.
- 60 Current standards seen in lessons and in the analysis of students' files and coursework point to very good standards. Test marks and examination work show that standards are much higher than previously attained. This is mainly due to the efforts of a new head of department, who has focused the department on teaching and learning. Assessment is very good and students are enthusiastically involved in their own learning. Year 13 students explain some demanding aspects of chemical reactions and apply appropriate theories to explain, for example, the colours of transition metal solutions. All students make very good progress, with a high percentage working at the higher grade levels. Year 12 students explain how a membrane cell operates in the production of sodium hydroxide and chlorine. Year 12 students extend their understanding well beyond GCSE level and make very good progress towards their predicted grades.

Quality of education

- 61 Teaching is very good overall. Three lessons were seen and all were assessed as very good. The lessons were well planned and timed to give structure and pace. Each lesson had a lively opening that got students immediately interested and focused on their learning; for example, in one lesson, the introduction involved three students on a production line to demonstrate the rate determining step. The response was amusing and lively and the learning was rapid. This was followed by changes of activity, frequent checks of understanding and a final check to show that learning had taken place. Teachers use their very good subject knowledge to ask pertinent questions and so deepen understanding. Practical investigations are used as problem solving exercises to extend students' thinking. Students are positively encouraged to think about alternative approaches to problems. This was cleverly demonstrated in a Year 12 lesson, when the teacher used jazz music to show the benefits of improvisation. This encouraged students to question experimental techniques and to suggest changes. Computers are not widely used to enhance teaching and learning.
- 62 Analysis of previous work shows that students are able to carry out independent research using computers, the Internet and textbooks. Literacy and numeracy skills are good and computers are used to enhance the presentation of work and to interpret data. There is a good balance between students' own note taking and those

provided by the teachers. Predictions are not widely used and are not sufficiently related to previous understanding or research, with the consequence that evaluations are not deep enough. The quality and depth of work produced is similar for both male and female students.

- 63 Students form very good working relationships with each other and their teachers. This gives them the confidence to question and answer without fear of failure. Students enjoy their chemistry, they are willing learners and show maturity in their approach to independent learning.

Leadership and management

- 64 Leadership and management in the subject are very good. There is a collective desire to support students and set high standards for teaching and learning. Teaching is closely monitored to ensure quality and the spreading of good practice. The assessment system is very well used to support student progress and to guide lesson and curriculum planning. The technicians make a very positive contribution in a department that places great emphasis on practical investigations.

PHYSICS

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

Strengths

- Students share ideas freely when working in groups, deepening understanding.
- Students use computers well to enhance learning.
- Emphasis on practical investigations deepens understanding of the underlying principles of physics.
- Good questioning methods probe understanding and do not rely on simply giving information.
- Assessment is used well to guide lesson planning.

Areas for improvement

- Reports on students' progress do not have specific learning targets related to physics.
- Predictions are often missed out in shorter investigations and hence the scientific method approach is weakened.

Standards and achievement

- 65 The GCE A level results in 2001 were below average. There is a slight trend downwards. No students achieved a grade A in 2001. Students did not do as well in physics as in their other subjects. However, the current picture is very different. Observation in class, scrutiny of work and discussions with students show that standards are now good and rising rapidly. This has resulted from the arrival of two new staff, including a new head of department, who have produced a new scheme of work and have placed teaching and learning at the forefront. Staff and students have developed a very positive relationship and all are focused on enjoying physics and achieving their academic goals. Tests, assignments and examinations indicate that most students are achieving well when compared to their prior results in GCSE. The percentage of students expected to achieve the highest grades, A and B, is above average. Male and female students achieve equally well.
- 66 Year13 students have good practical and investigative skills. They explain how a capacitor charges and discharges. They also explain how a particle accelerator works and calculate the speed of a particle accelerated in a magnetic field. There

are no weaknesses in any of the curriculum areas and students are making good progress.

- 67 Year 12 students make good progress from GCSE levels of work. They describe the changes in the crystalline structures that occur in metals after quenching, tempering and annealing and relate the changes to the new properties of the metals. They carry out complex investigations and the associated calculations accurately.

Quality of education

- 68 Teaching is good overall. Of the two lessons seen, teaching was very good in one and good in the other. The very good lesson was very carefully planned and was designed for students to learn at a very rapid pace. Learning was carefully managed as groups of two were assigned so that the students could assist each other's learning. This clearly deepened understanding and built up the confidence of each student involved. Students worked on different experiments in preparation for reporting back to the class. The teacher supported each student in turn and probed progress and understanding by asking pertinent questions. This was also a strategy that helped maintain a lively pace in the lesson. In the lesson that was deemed good, there were many strengths such as the quality of questioning. The lesson was weakened somewhat by the lack of predictions and little reference to prior learning. Though the lesson did not always have a clear sense of purpose and direction, the effective recapitulation at the end showed that good learning had taken place. Students have good numeracy skills that enable them to carry out the many calculations involved in physics. Tests and homework are carefully assessed to indicate the success of the lessons. Consequent lessons are planned to take into account any weaknesses noted. Assessment of individual students is good. Students who do not do well in tests are given appropriate help and re-tested. This means that all students keep up a good pace of learning. Students are good at explaining their understanding orally, but not as confident in writing. There is good emphasis on using the correct scientific language.
- 69 Scrutiny of previous work shows that students take a pride in maintaining their files. Presentation is good and there is widespread use of computers for presentation and learning in physics. Planned independent work ensures that students are fully prepared for the next step into higher education. Day-to-day marking is good and students respond to any indicated errors. All areas of the curriculum are fully covered. Reliability of data and error calculations are prominent features. Students make good use of CD's, computers and the Internet in their research and learning. Students are very positive about the quality of teaching and their own learning. Many students plan to attend physics related courses at university.

Leadership and management

- 70 The leadership and management of the department are very good. The new scheme of work has ample guidance for all concerned, teaching is closely monitored to ensure the spreading of good practice, a co-operative ethos is being fostered and a team of very able and enthusiastic teachers have succeeded in improving standards significantly.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

The focus of the inspection was solely on design and technology. The provision in design technology caters for 36 students, some from other schools, following AS and A level courses in graphics and product design. The retention rate is good.

Design and Technology

Overall provision is **good**.

Strengths

- Very good leadership and management give a clear direction to the subject.
- Good teaching motivates students to achieve well.
- A good range of visits widens students' experiences and enhances their learning.

Areas for improvement

- Standards of attainment are not yet high enough.
- Displays of students' work are not used well to show high standards.
- The time allocated for technical support is inadequate.

Standards and achievement

71 Overall, results at A level in 2001 were below the national average. This shows a significant drop after good results had been attained in previous years and at the time of the last inspection. This was a result of the students' low levels of attainment on joining the course. The results in graphics were good, although the numbers taking the subject were small. In product design they were below national averages. Results in AS level in 2001 were good, with two of the four students gaining A to B grades. In graphics they were below average, with the majority gaining a D grade.

72 Standards of work seen during the inspection were good and are the result of consistently good teaching. The quality of presentation is variable, with very high standards for A level students, both in hand-drawn diagrams and computer-generated designs, such as those for a portable wind generator. Some AS students display unsatisfactory standards, as high level graphical skills are not used in their work. The quality of analysis varies from satisfactory to very good. For example, the product analysis of a low glass-topped table was excellent. Students' first ideas show imagination and individuality as revealed when developing ideas for a young child's toy. When students develop ideas for an outside client, standards are consistently high. Students respond to the demands and the tight specification given. This was seen in the design of an outside office facility. Students achieve well, many gaining higher grades than predicted. Students who join the school in the sixth form also achieve well. They make the adjustment quickly with the support of the staff and other students.

Quality of education

73 Overall, the quality of teaching is good, with two out of five lessons very good. All teachers have excellent subject knowledge, both of the design and making process and also of materials and the manufacturing processes. Students achieve well because the teaching is focused on the individual and promotes individual learning. For example, in a graphics lesson, students were closely questioned about their designs. Probing questions are used to enable students to explore ideas, for example, when discussing how an information sleeve would not slip on a supermarket trolley. Coaching sheets, which show the breakdown of the examination criteria, are used well as a focus of discussion. Comments given are detailed and clearly show the student how to improve. Relationships are very good; this further encourages students to explore issues and to raise questions for clarification. For example, a student wanted to know the principles of toy design and questioned statements made by the teacher until she was certain that she understood. Students are constantly encouraged to attain high standards, for example, by including quality control in their designs.

74 Students make good progress in their learning. They are attentive and work effectively. They are determined to succeed, attending even when about to succumb to illness. Students take pleasure in explaining their projects, about which they are highly enthusiastic. They bounce back with even greater determination when informed that an area of their work is not meeting the expected standards. For example, a student who was working for an outside client was told that his design did not meet the original specification for a board game, so rapidly made another, learning a great deal in the process and benefiting from the experience. Many intend to continue into higher education in design technology or allied areas such as film animation.

Leadership and management

75 The leadership and management of design technology are very good; this is based on very good teamwork and the recognition of individual strengths. Staff have very good expertise to cover the post-16 courses, but technician time is inadequate to meet the needs of the department. In particular, time is not allocated outside term time, which makes major departmental projects difficult to accomplish. Visits and visiting experts considerably enhance students' experiences, for instance visits to the Victoria and Albert museum and a visit from a local designer. The department has well documented schemes of work, but other areas, such as the handbook, are in urgent need of updating. The department has exciting new developments in information technology which assist students in their learning. Students' work is not displayed effectively.

BUSINESS

The inspection focused on the two subjects offered. These are A/AS level economics and AVCE (formerly GNVQ Advanced) business. Both subjects function as different departments.

BUSINESS AND ECONOMICS

Overall, the quality of provision in business and economics is **unsatisfactory**.

Strengths

- The curriculum has been enhanced by the provision of the Young Enterprise course, which offers students a range of relevant opportunities and the possibility to gain further accreditation.

Areas for improvement

- There is an unclear management structure, with the consequence that both departments work in isolation from one another.
- Teaching in both subjects is not monitored rigorously enough to ensure that all lessons are suitably challenging and that theoretical concepts are accurately taught.
- The progress and attendance of all students is not monitored effectively.
- Completion rates in business are unsatisfactory.

Standards and achievement

76 In 2001, standards achieved by A level economics students were well below average. The average points score achieved was over a grade below the average recorded nationally. Few students gained A and B grades and the overall pass rate was well below average. Many students gained grades below the forecast based on their GCSE performances. Such an outcome represents an unsatisfactory rate of achievement. These results were also below those recorded in 2000. No comparisons with national figures based on gender can be made because the entry

level was too small. Some encouragement, however, can be taken from the 2001 AS level results, as nearly 40 per cent of the entry gained either A or B grades. Though this outcome is pleasing, the overall pass rate was only 80 per cent suggesting that the work of lower-attaining students is not rigorously monitored.

- 77 Standards recorded by GNVQ (Advanced) business students were similarly well below average. A major issue is that over half the students following this course failed to complete their studies and did not gain any accreditation. This skews the results for the group. Those students who did complete the course did very well. One candidate gained a merit; three others gained distinctions. The results in 2001 were a small improvement on those recorded in 2000, when over 40 per cent of the group failed to complete the course. These outcomes show that the progress of individual students was not monitored with sufficient rigour.
- 78 For present students, attainment is below average in both subjects, but in economics there are some students in both years, mainly boys, who are recording standards that are above average. In the AVCE course, especially in Year 12, absence is impeding the standards being recorded. During the inspection an absence rate of 35 per cent was recorded in Year 12 lessons. Economics students are making satisfactory progress during their course. They are able to use correct language and are developing their understanding of basic terms such as disposable income, but only a minority of higher-attaining students are making good progress. These students have a better understanding and are more analytical in their work. The progress made by business students is unsatisfactory because of the high levels of absence. This problem affects all students because the quality of group work suffers. Students who do attend regularly make satisfactory progress. These students are keen and enthusiastic, but are frustrated by the conduct of their peer group.

Quality of education

- 79 The quality of teaching is satisfactory, though in a minority of lessons it is unsatisfactory. Where teaching is effective, staff explain key terms and use diagrams well to explain theoretical concepts. This approach helped Year 12 students to improve their understanding of some demanding statistical ideas. In business, good planning allows the Young Enterprise scheme to be run as part of the AVCE course. This helps students to learn key ideas by running their own businesses. In most lessons, however, the pace of learning is not fast enough. Teaching mainly consists of the teacher imparting facts and the students playing passive roles and doing little more than making notes. Such lessons lacked challenge. There were few opportunities for the students to work independently and their intellectual effort was stifled. This was especially apparent in economics. Students learn basic theory, but their ability to apply and refine their knowledge and understanding and to analyse unexpected or unusual situations is limited. For example, in a lesson on exchange rates it was generally accepted that a fall in the rate of sterling was desirable because imports would become more expensive, while exports would become cheaper. This statement was not challenged or developed. Other possible outcomes were not considered. In some lessons there were inaccuracies in the theory taught. In both subjects, students are presented with too few opportunities for individual research. This means that certain skills, such as the ability to analyse, evaluate and synthesise are not being fostered. In addition, students get too few opportunities to make presentations of their work to their peer group. Standards in economics also suffer because not enough emphasis is placed on essay work or other forms of writing that will require research and attention to detail.

Leadership and management

- 80 The leadership and management of both departments are unsatisfactory. Both departments are working in isolation and this limits opportunities for sharing and co-operation. These problems are deep seated and, though they have not been helped by recent staff changes, they are having an adverse effect on the standards. There are some strengths. The provision for the key skills of the application of number, communication and the use of information and communication technology is satisfactory overall, but it is good for information and communication technology in business and for the use of numeracy in economics. A number of areas need developing. The school library, for example, has some good features, but the range of resources available is limited and there are too few opportunities for students to use the library for research.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Information and communication technology did not form a special focus for the inspection. However, evidence from all inspectors revealed that students did not sufficiently apply or extend their skills in the subject-specific applications of information and communication technology.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

There is no course offered in the sixth form in this area.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

The only course offered is the GNVQ Advanced Level (AVCE) in Health and Social Care. This course consists of three units in the first year, one of which is tested by external examination. A further three units are taken to make up an A level, although only the AS level is accredited after the first year. The additional three units are accredited in the second year, where students take six further units to make up their second A level. This gives students qualifications for university or the health and social care professions. The child development GCSE course provides good preparation for the subject, although the AVCE course is open to all students. Very few students drop out of AVCE courses they start.

Provision in health and social care is **very good**.

Strengths

- Standards are very high. Examination results reflect very good achievement.
- Students have a good grasp of basic theory and use visits to local healthcare situations well to develop their skills.
- Teaching is very good. Teachers have excellent subject expertise and excellent relationships with students.
- Students are very well motivated and make very good progress in lessons and out of school.
- The leadership and management of the subject are excellent.

Areas for improvement

- Students do not use information and communication technology enough to present and analyse their work, including graphs and statistics.
- Students' work placements in healthcare situations are limited in scope and duration.

Standards and achievement

81 Standards are well above average. Students' achievement is very good in relation to their average GCSE points scores. Results in the former GNVQ Advanced course in 2001 were well above average both for successful completion of all course units and quality of work. Results for the first year of the new double award AVCE course, equivalent to A level, showed very good achievement for all Year 12 students from their starting points at GCSE. Students' course completion rates in 2001 were good. The quality of work as reflected in merit and distinction grades was high. Teachers expect students to complete the AVCE course successfully and achieve well above the national average in summer 2002. Health and social care courses had only just begun at the time of the last inspection.

82 In Year 12 lessons and in work seen, students revealed high standards, making very good links between their experiences from visits they organised themselves to local health and social care settings, such as nursery schools, to theory learnt in school. Students showed very good skills at evaluating their own progress in successfully relating to clients in health and social care. In lessons seen, students developed very good skills of communication in their class presentations on disability, which they videotaped and then used to analyse their own strengths and weaknesses very constructively. Students used information and communication technology well to research dysfunctions of the digestive system on the Internet. They do not use information and communication technology enough to develop numeracy skills, for example, by recording and analysing health care statistics or evaluating their fitness levels using spreadsheets. The ability to use these applications is important where students are preparing for further health studies. Most students read around topics well in textbooks and newspapers. All students use action planning very effectively to prepare for their new topics and prioritise their tasks efficiently.

83 In work seen, Year 13 students consider alternative theoretical approaches that they might use and evaluate clearly practical methods they use when relating to the people they study, including local infant children and old people. Students relate very well to nursery children in classes with which they are helping, according to witness statements from supervisors. Following their visits, they videotape role-plays in class and use them well to evaluate their own body language with their peers. They make good recommendations to improve their interactions with the children. Following a project, when they organised a no-smoking campaign for Year 9 pupils, students

analysed the interviews very effectively by drawing graphs from spreadsheets on a computer and explained the results of the survey clearly to the pupils.

Quality of education

- 84 The overall quality of teaching and learning is very good. Teachers' enthusiastic methods create a very positive environment for learning. Teachers have very supportive relationships with students. Teachers, very experienced and expert in the subject and with good knowledge of local healthcare providers, clearly know their students very well. Students readily bring ideas from outside school into the classroom and frequently exchange original ideas and well-informed views with each other and teachers. Students support each other very well in role-plays and group work. Teachers make their high expectations very clear in lessons. In a very good Year 13 lesson seen, the teacher very ably monitored individual students' action plans to plan and present diets for various groups, following extensive research they had carried out from web sites and leaflets obtained from local food companies.
- 85 Teachers' excellent expertise helps Year 13 students to plan their own tasks very well to consolidate their understanding of dietetics. They enthusiastically join in class discussions about methods they could use to display their information for their chosen client groups. They are helped by the teacher's probing questions, which reinforce their knowledge of the ethical considerations of dieting. In lessons, students show very good interest in dietetics when working individually on their projects or when working with each other to solve problems. Most express an intention to go on to higher education courses to prepare them for careers in the health and social care sector. Students' work is constructively and regularly marked so they know how to improve their assignments.

Leadership and management

- 86 The subject is excellently managed. Staff work very well as a team with specialist roles in different subjects such as dietetics and biology. They use a good range of books, videos and leaflets obtained from relevant agencies and organise very good links with providers to keep well up to date with the latest developments in health care. Teachers meet frequently to check the quality of students' assignments and the examination board checks their marking thoroughly. There are very good plans for further improvement, which include comparing students' current standards to predicted grades to rigorously monitor individual students' progress. The new AVCE course is popular and is well placed to improve further.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The subjects inspected in this area were art and design and music.

ART AND DESIGN

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

Strengths

- AS and A2 level results are above the national average and have been maintained since the last inspection.
- The quality of teaching is good with high quality individual help given to students, who achieve well.

- Students show high levels of interest, enthusiasm and motivation through their AS level course and the majority convert to A level study.
- Relationships among students and teachers are very good.
- Good management of the subject to overcome staffing difficulties has maintained and improved standards.

Areas for improvement

- Not enough students gain A and B grades.
- The accommodation and staffing for art and design is unsatisfactory.
- The resources to generate and modify images with the use of information and communication technology are unsatisfactory.

Standards and achievement

- 87 The standard of achievement in art and design has been maintained at above average levels since the last inspection. Due to the increasing numbers of students and the department having to rely on too many part-time staff there are not enough students achieving the higher A and B grades in line with their above, and in some cases well above, average attainment on joining the course. A much higher number of female students follow the course than male students. However, there is no significant difference in attainment between male and female students.
- 88 In Year 12, students sustain and develop their skills from their GCSE course and translate these skills in drawing and painting to greater depth. Sketchbooks demonstrate a wealth of research and experimentation that is transferred into final projects. Work in folios, in both Years 12 and 13, is of a high quality, showing a very good development of ideas and a good understanding of design and composition. There is a wealth of experimentation and students apply their well-developed skills with a feeling and sensitivity for the media used.

Quality of education

- 89 Teaching is good overall with some teaching being very good. It has improved since the last inspection. Most teaching is on an individual basis within the small groups. Teachers, applying their good expertise and knowledge to teach AS and A2 level courses, show a good awareness of the ways individual students work. They analyse effectively, evaluate and support the development of the students' work with a good awareness of how it can be improved. Many opportunities are provided for students to visit exhibitions of artists' work, both locally and further afield. For example, a forthcoming visit has been arranged to the Louvre in Paris. Students are given an extensive range of opportunities to see and practice the development of the styles of their work. Here, they make a detailed analysis of a wide range of artists' work before developing their own style. The regular monitoring of progress and achievement helps students to improve. Teachers provide opportunities for students to use the art rooms at any time they wish, including at lunch times and after school. Here teachers are available to help them. These arrangements make a good contribution to the students' learning.
- 90 Students respond very positively to the high quality sensitive help given. They use their time well, showing independence and maturity in their approach. The high quality teaching they receive adds to their high levels of motivation and interest. They work very well together and benefit from challenging targets and activities. They show high levels of interest, motivation and enthusiasm for their work. Approximately one-third of the students goes on to higher studies in art and design when they leave the school. Good links are established with the local art college while they are at school, where students benefit from a variety of courses.

Leadership and management

- 91 The good management of the sixth form course ensures varied teaching styles and gives the students good levels of individual help to check progress and suggest development and research needs. The opportunities for students to use information and communication technology are far too limited. The unsatisfactory accommodation does not allow students sufficient opportunities for three-dimensional work and to store their work suitably or to leave it out while it is being developed.

MUSIC

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

Strengths

- The subject is well led and managed.
- Teaching is good; teachers are enthusiastic and understand a good range of music.
- Students' performing skills are above average.
- The dynamic music staff are an inspiration to students.
- Students are highly committed to a wide range of musical ensembles and events in both the school and local community.

Areas for improvement

- Accommodation is unsatisfactory.
- There is insufficient performing integrated into the composing, listening and understanding units of the AS and A2 Level courses. Students have insufficient guidance on how to improve their work.

Standards and achievement

- 92 The department is rapidly improving following a decline since the last inspection. Music was without a music specialist for much of last year. In the past, numbers entered for A Level were low. Taking the last four years' results overall, standards were around the national average. The proportion achieving the higher A and B grades was also average, though there were twice as many B as A grades. Females achieved a grade higher than males and half a grade above the national average. Since 1999, females' music results have been in line with their other subjects. Males, though below the male average, did better in music than their other subjects.
- 93 The standards of work of current students in both Years 12 and 13 are above average. This is partly the result of the students' advanced performing skills. Males and females do equally well. Year 12 students are developing a good knowledge and understanding of a wide range of music. Progress is good, especially considering three-quarters of the students lacked a music specialist in Year 11; they are working hard to make up for this. The GCSE grades of all the Year 13 students were considerably above average. Their AS Level results were only average, resulting from the poor staffing situation. That they did as well as this is mainly due to their strong commitment to independent study. To improve their grades, the majority are re-taking some of the AS Level units this year alongside their A Level examinations. Most of these talented students are now working at an A Level standard that reflects their high performance at GCSE. Music A Level is now seen as a popular option. There are twice as many students as three years ago, with more than double the number of Year 12 applications for next year.
- 94 Students learn well because they are highly committed and the teaching is good. In one lesson seen, there were a variety of demanding activities to support training in

listening, including successful sight-singing in four-part harmony. In another lesson, previous good learning was reinforced with skilful questioning on the development of the orchestra. This then led to a deeper exploration of issues concerning the same topic, in which students made perceptive comments on change and continuity. Students' performing skills are above average owing partly to the significant contribution of instrumental teachers. About half of students use information and communication technology effectively to compose, arrange and notate music, to research set topics and to present assignments.

Quality of education

- 95 Teachers are enthusiastic about their subject. They expose students to a wealth of musical repertoire and music-making opportunities. On occasion, students require greater guidance on how they can improve their work. This is particularly noticeable with listening and compositional techniques. Students correct their work by being given the right answers, but are not always shown how they can do better and work it out for themselves.
- 96 Students are well motivated and have renewed confidence in music with the arrival of a new and dynamic leader for the subject. They have supported a number of community events, such as playing for the opening of the Novi-Sad Bridge and presenting their A Level recital in a Norwich arts venue. For many, music plays a big part in their lives. Nearly half plan to study music in higher education.

Leadership and management

- 97 Music has made remarkable progress since September 2001. The department is now well led and managed. Resources have improved, though the school acknowledges the provision for information and communication technology is inadequate. As yet there has been no staff training in this area. There are two good-sized classrooms. A hole in the wall and poor soundproofing result in sounds from each class disturbing the other. The practice rooms are unsatisfactory. They have no windows or natural light source. The soundproofing from neighbouring rooms and the hall above is inadequate. One room is affected by the smell of diesel. These conditions are affecting the quality of teaching, learning and independent study.

HUMANITIES

The main focus of the inspection was on history, psychology and sociology. Classical civilisation and geography were sampled. In a classical civilisation lesson, there was evidence of high standards, excellent teaching and a real enthusiasm for the subject. The strength of this subject lay in the teacher's excellent knowledge of the subject and his capacity for communicating to the students its value in their other studies, particularly English literature.

HISTORY

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

Strengths

- Very good teaching helps all students to learn.
- Examination results are outstanding and are improving.

- A very effective learning environment has been established; students attending history lessons expect to work hard and to be challenged.
- Retention rates are very good.
- History makes an outstanding contribution to developing students' key skills, especially their analytical and evaluative skills.

Areas for improvement

- The library is not used enough as a resource for independent research and enquiry.

Standards and achievement

- 98 The standards achieved by A level students in 2001 were well above average. For grades A and B, results were significantly above average and for grades A to E they were above average. Male students did better than females in the attainment of grades A and B. The results in 2001 were a further improvement on the very good results recorded in 2000, especially for A and B grades. The average points score in 2001 was higher than that recorded the previous year and the school's own analysis shows that the vast majority of students gained final grades that were in excess of those predicted based on GCSE results. AS results were also very good. All students gained at least an E grade, with 60 per cent of students being awarded either an A or B grade.
- 99 Present students are recording standards that are above average, but in Year 13 standards are well above average. Most students are emerging as independent learners who enjoy and respond well to the intellectual challenges offered. In lessons and over time all students make very good progress in their learning. For example, Year 12 students have developed their knowledge on the causes and consequences of the 1929 Wall Street Crash. They also distinguish this episode from the economic slump in the USA in the late 1920s/early 1930s, but highlight links between the two events. Year 13 students develop a very good knowledge and understanding of the Anti-Corn Law League of the nineteenth century. They identify the various protagonists and draw parallels with the activities of present day pressure groups.

Quality of education

- 100 Learning in history is very good because of the very good teaching that is provided. Teaching was at least very good in all lessons seen; in two lessons it was excellent. Numerous strengths of teaching can be identified. Staff are knowledgeable, enthusiastic and have thought carefully about how students learn and how different ideas, concepts and theories can be presented. The range of strategies used provides variety and fosters very good learning. In all lessons, expectations were high and students were continually presented with challenges that helped them to refine and extend their learning. Such techniques lead to students acquiring knowledge and skills as well as developing their intellectual effort and curiosity. All students develop their research skills and their abilities to evaluate, synthesise and to express their ideas convincingly, both orally and in writing. Learning is significantly enhanced by the emphasis that teachers place on students doing oral presentations, as well as through the emphasis on essay writing skills. For example, in an excellent Year 13 lesson on the Anti-Corn Law League, students were put into pairs to research particular aspects of the underlying arguments in favour of both retaining and abolishing the Corn Laws. All students worked with maturity and enthusiasm. The quality of the oral presentations was extremely high. The content was accurate, the students were articulate and the depth of knowledge displayed was highly impressive with references to moral and humanitarian arguments, the influence of the Quakers and why the views of the established Church differed from those held by the

non-conformists. All the students made significant advances in their knowledge. Such detailed and thoughtful planning successfully stimulated interest, intellectual curiosity and high quality learning.

Leadership and management

- 101 Leadership and management of the history department are excellent. A successful team of teachers who are committed to raising standards has been established. History is a popular subject, with very high retention rates, which is enjoyed by students. Teaching makes a very strong contribution to the development literacy, numeracy and skills in information and communication technology. Very good efforts are made to enhance the curriculum. For example, at the end of each spring term, the department participates in an Historical Association conference hosted by the University of East Anglia. Assessment procedures are detailed and students benefit from the quality of both the formal and informal assessments offered. The main area for development involves the school library. This facility has some good features, but some of the history stock is dated and the opportunities for students to use the library as a research centre for their studies of history are limited.
- 102 The previous inspection report referred to good standards in the history department. Through a combination of excellent leadership and management and strong and consistent staff commitment, the department has continued to improve and is now excellent.

PSYCHOLOGY

Overall, the provision for psychology is **very good**.

Strengths

- Standards are high.
- Students make very good progress and achieve very well.
- Teaching is very good.
- Planning and the preparation of resources to support students' learning are very good.
- Teachers assess students work thoroughly, communicating to them their strengths and what they need to do to improve.
- Students have very positive attitudes to learning and show a very strong commitment to the subject.
- Leadership and management are very good.

Areas for improvement

- There is an insufficient use of display to celebrate students' work and to enable them to review the work of others.

Standards and achievement

- 103 Standards reached in A Level examinations have been maintained as at least above average levels since the last inspection. A higher than average proportion of students attained grades A and B in 2001. Evidence from samples of previous work and lessons seen indicate that standards are now rising towards being closer to well above average levels of attainment. This results from the very thorough preparation of learning resources by the teacher. These resources, together with the use of carefully chosen texts, aid very well the students' achievements and attainment.
- 104 In Year 12, students show a very good awareness of the main authorities that have contributed to developmental psychology, individual differences, disorders and the influence nature and our up bringing has on the way we function. In a Year 12 lesson, students used very well their A level textbook, the very comprehensive range of notes provided by the teacher and their own detailed notes. This enabled them to distinguish, under relevant headings, statements for the causes of deviation from ideal mental health and social norms and a failure to function properly.
- 105 In Year 13, students achieve very well in relation to predictions based on their AS results. In lessons, they are highly motivated to do well and work effectively in pairs or larger groups to complete taxing and challenging tasks. Teachers have high expectations and support the students' learning very well. For example, in a lesson as part of a series of studies of psychiatric illness, causes and the various ways disorders are viewed through the world, students showed a clear understanding of what influences a person's behaviour. They justified clearly forms of behaviour that might be universally recognised disorders, already known and classified, from those that are mainly influenced by the person's culture. The teacher's most thoroughly prepared worksheet provided them with a wide range of sources to aid their understanding.

Quality of education

- 106 Teaching is very good overall. Teachers, applying their very good expertise and knowledge to teach AS and A2 level courses, show a very good assessed awareness of their students' needs. The use of very good resources to aid the students' learning is supported with a very good analysis of how students can improve their standards. Relationships are excellent and lessons proceed at a brisk pace. The students receive high levels of support to develop their independent learning skills. They respond very positively to the help they receive. They use their time very well, showing independence and maturity in their approach. They show very high levels of enthusiasm and motivation to learn. Some students are already considering careers that involve psychology. They all speak very highly of the teaching and support they get to further their psychological knowledge.

Leadership and management

- 107 The subject is very well led and managed. The head of department has prepared an excellent range of videotaped material to aid the students' understanding. She provides a most extensive library of resources to aid independent study. The psychology room is also used for the teaching of subjects other than psychology. This means that there is an insufficient use of display to celebrate students' work and to enable them to review the work of others.

SOCIOLOGY

Provision is **very good**.

Strengths

- Standards of attainment are high, being well above average in examinations.
- Teaching and learning are very good.
- Teachers have very good and supportive relationships with individual students.
- Teachers' marking is very prompt, detailed and constructive, which helps students improve.
- Students' attitudes to learning are very good.
- The subject is well led and managed.

Areas for improvement

- Computers are not used enough in lessons, particularly for statistical evaluation, because they are not easily available.
- Students do not go on visits to enrich their learning of sociological concepts.

Standards and achievement

- 108 A level sociology results in 2001 were well above the national average for the proportion of students achieving the top grades of A and B.
- 109 High results were obtained in 2001 by students in the new AS-level examination. The pass rate was above average and the proportion of the top grades A and B was nearly twice national average. Male and female students did equally well. Students attained in line with other school subjects and achieved well in relation to their attainment on joining the course. They are predicted to perform very well in the new A2 examination in summer 2002. Very few students drop out of sociology and a high proportion move on from AS level to A2.
- 110 Standards seen in lessons and work are above average for Year 12 students, who showed a very good critical understanding of essential concepts and considerable ability to evaluate sociological terms, theories and relationships. Students show a very good understanding of ways that gender affects subject choices in school and how gender differences are reinforced by the media. Students' notes on the functionalist perspective and the work of Durkheim are comprehensive. Their well-argued essays show good critical awareness of methodology, such as the differences between quantitative and qualitative research, and the strengths and weaknesses of longitudinal research studies. In lessons, most students explain key concepts fluently and give relevant practical examples. Most students readily recall theories learnt. In an excellent lesson seen, students put in the role of news editors developed very good insight into the concept of 'newsworthiness' when discussing the way stories are dealt with by the media. Those students who also took business studies related 'newsworthiness' particularly well to marketing strategies.
- 111 Year 13 students drafted and discussed effective evaluations of the contribution of functionalist and Marxist perspectives to understanding of criminal and deviant behaviour. Most students had well-indexed folders that included well-written essays for their mock A2 examinations. These showed a clear understanding of the uses and limitations of crime statistics. In lessons, higher-attaining students evaluate theories well, though some are not always clear about ways theories of subculture fail to address crime and deviance. Weaker students sometimes struggle to remember concepts they learnt at AS level. Most students in Year 13 are beginning to link different sociological themes together very effectively. Students' knowledge of research methods and data handling is above average, although all but the highest-attaining students do not make enough use of information and communication

technology to model statistical problems because computers are not readily available.

Quality of education

- 112 Teaching and learning in sociology are very good, with some excellent teaching. Students make very good progress in consolidating previous theory in new topic areas such as religion, where they are very ably taught to apply functionalist and Marxist perspectives to case study examples. The teacher's excellent subject knowledge enables him to give students clear explanations of concepts and theories. Lessons are very well planned, so students made very good progress. Discussions are lively, relevant and challenging. Students' literacy skills are consolidated effectively through discussion and through written summaries of key points from articles
- 113 A good mix of theory and practical tasks engages the students' interest and increases the pace of learning. Students co-operate very readily with each other when working in small groups. For example, in an excellent lesson in Year 12, students took on roles as news editors to put topical stories in order of newsworthiness. The teacher accurately predicted groups' running orders and then used his predictions to help students critically discuss Marxist and functionalist perspectives in the media.
- 114 Due to the very good teaching, students show great enthusiasm to learn, read around topics well and supplement the very good worksheets and textbooks provided by research in libraries and on the Internet outside lessons. Students also make good use of topical material provided by the teacher on the school's intranet. Students do not usually contribute their own materials but tend to rely on those provided, including articles from sociology periodicals. Appropriate homework tasks extend work in lessons. Students' essays are very thoroughly and promptly marked and they clearly appreciate constructive comments given to help them improve. Very good support is given to students' Year 13 course work projects, which cover a very wide range of topics including a study of domestic violence, secularisation within Roman Catholicism and portrayals of women in magazines.

Leadership and management

- 115 The subject is very well led and managed. Although new to the school, the experienced teacher's schemes of work cover the requirements of the new AS and A2 syllabuses very effectively and have been well received by students. Individual students are very carefully monitored and the teacher plans more rigorous individual target-setting based on predicted grades. Improvements over the last year have been excellent. The subject has a very good capacity to improve further.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus of the inspection was on English, French and German. Spanish was also sampled. In the lesson seen standards were good and the students were taught well.

English

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

Strengths

- The department is very well led and managed.
- Standards of attainment are well above average.

- The quality of teaching is very good.
- Students display excellent attitudes towards the subject and make very good intellectual effort.
- The curriculum is very good and enhances students' personal development.

Areas for improvement

- The marking of some students' work is not as helpful as it could be in showing them how to improve.
- The monitoring and assessment of progress is not shared with students on a regular and systematic basis.

Scope of provision

The provision in English caters for some 144 students. GCE AS and A-level courses are offered in English literature and English language and literature.

Standards and achievement

- 116 Standards in the 2001 GCE A level examinations in both English literature and in the combined English language and literature courses were above average. In English literature half of the candidates gained A and B grades and in the combined course over a third of students gained A or B grades. As in the previous three years, students' performance was broadly similar to their performance in other A level courses.
- 117 The standards of work of students currently in Years 12 and 13 are well above average. Students now in Year 13 achieved very high standards in the AS level examinations taken at the end of Year 12. Three-quarters in the combined literature and language course and over half in the literature course gained A and B grades and all students achieved a pass grade.
- 118 Standards observed in lessons and in students' work reflect and confirm these high standards. Students demonstrate very good historical and contextual knowledge about literature; they read widely and gain an overview of a wide range of texts. They develop a sophisticated critical awareness and, in expressing their views and opinions, employ with confidence a range of technical and critical vocabulary. This vocabulary is embedded in teachers' and students' language in normal classroom discourse. Their files demonstrate good note-taking and planning skills and they reach high standards in their critical writing. In language units, students understand and use effectively an analytical framework to unravel and analyse a wide range of literary and non-literary texts, and show a systematic and rigorous approach to their work.
- 119 Discussion skills are very good. Students are articulate and poised and they respond to the very good teaching with very good intellectual effort, relishing the challenge of demanding texts. They are able to present alternative interpretations, supporting them with extensive textual knowledge. They show persistence when work is difficult. For instance, in a Year 12 lesson on Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*, students worked hard to tease out their understanding of who or what *Beloved* represents. They were supported by the teacher's subtle questioning, but were expected to find their own way through Morrison's dense and sometimes difficult prose.
- 120 Students display excellent attitudes to the subject, demonstrated by thorough preparation for lessons, high levels of participation in debate and good independent study skills. Students on the combined language and literature course had spent

time and effort in preparing high quality presentations of their analyses of tabloid newspaper articles. Students praise the enjoyable lessons, the enthusiasm and commitment of their teachers and the intellectual challenge. Students new to the school at the start of Year 12 value the way in which they are welcomed, supported and assimilated into their English groups.

Quality of education

- 121 These high standards of work and attitudes are promoted by consistently very good teaching. A feature of all lessons seen is the way in which students are helped and encouraged to think and learn for themselves. Teachers' probing questions guide students to consider hypotheses, to weigh conflicting or alternative views. They constantly expect students to go beyond initial or superficial responses, broadening, deepening and extending their understanding of language and literature and relating these to the wider world. Group talk is used very effectively to enable students to learn from each other and so to increase their knowledge and sharpen their critical and analytical expertise. Students are expected to lead seminars and discussions and to make more formal presentations. These methods also contribute very effectively to the improvement of their key communications skills. The emphasis is on higher order skills, as in a Year 13 lesson on Toni Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye*. Students used skimming techniques to track the chronologies of various characters and analyse the author's complex and rich metaphorical style.
- 122 The curriculum offered to students is very good. The texts and methodology interest and engage students and are relevant to them. Both courses aim to develop and extend students' critical faculties, to equip them to deal with life in the community beyond school. Students deal with the complex nature of relationships through the study of literature. For instance, in a Year 12 lesson students explored the nature of relationships between men and women in their study of Scott Fitzgerald's short stories. The courses encourage students to develop open and enquiring minds and an insight into the human condition. The curriculum is further enriched by the department's links with the University of East Anglia, the residential writing course at Holt Hall and theatre visits, locally and further afield.
- 123 An area for further development is the way in which teachers share with students the monitoring and assessment of their work and progress. Students praise teachers' commitment and their willingness to give of their time to support students who have problems with their work, but some recognise that this process is mainly reactive and that students are the ones who initiate such sessions. Some lower-attaining students feel that the comments on their work are not always clear enough for them to understand and act upon. They value the very helpful tutorials during course work units and would like these to be a more regular feature of the guidance and support they receive. The effectiveness of these tutorials was observed during the inspection when the teacher skilfully adjusted the level of challenge and support for each individual student.

Leadership and management

- 124 The department is very well led and managed. The head of department sets a very good example through his own teaching and commitment to high standards. A particular strength is the teamwork that results in all students receiving a high quality experience in the classroom. The department constantly evaluates its own practices and has already identified the monitoring and assessment of students' work and progress as the area in which procedures in Years 7 to 11 might usefully be extended into the sixth form. The department, in increasing the number of students taking English courses and in ensuring that the new AS and A level courses have been introduced effectively and efficiently, has demonstrated its ability to bring about

change and improvement. The commitment to developing the whole person within the Christian ethos of the school permeates the whole of the department's work.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES FRENCH AND GERMAN

A level results in 2001 were in line with the national average in all three languages. The proportion of students gaining the highest grades, A and B, was slightly below average in French and broadly in line with the average in German and Spanish. Male and female students did equally well. In relation to GCSE results, students achieved satisfactorily. AS level results were also in line with the average in all three languages with no significant differences between male and female students. These students also achieved satisfactorily in relation to GCSE grades.

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

Strengths

- The leadership and management of the subject are good.
- The teachers have good subject knowledge.
- The quality of spoken French and German, both by teachers and students, is very good.
- An increasing number of students are opting to study languages in the sixth form.
- There are excellent relationships between students and with their teachers.

Areas for improvement

- Overall, the quality of written work is not as high as in the other three aspects of the subject.
- The number of boys opting for the subjects is low.

Standards and achievement

125 A level results in 2001 were in line with the national average in all three languages. The pattern was similar in AS level results.

126 Evidence seen in lessons and in students' files suggests that standards in Year 13 are in line with those expected for the course. Standards in Year 12 are above those expected. Students in Year 12 are now gaining the benefits of languages college status and there is an encouraging rise in the number of students studying languages in Year 12 and in their standards. Students achieve satisfactorily in Year 13 and well in Year 12. Male and female students and those from minority ethnic backgrounds do equally well. In both languages, students are competent and confident speakers. They discuss such topics as animal experimentation and euthanasia with confidence, using a range of vocabulary and good pronunciation. Students understand the detail of authentic French and German from magazines and newspapers and summarise the main details or translate accurately. In Year 13 they are competent readers of their set plays and books. The quality of students' written work is satisfactory, but not as good as their oral and reading work. Students produce a good range of work such as job applications for work experience, and descriptions of the local area and its amenities. However, the range of vocabulary used and the accuracy of grammar are not always as good as they might be to attain higher grades, especially in Year 13.

Quality of education

127 The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teaching is good or very good in nearly three-quarters of lessons seen. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen during the inspection. This pattern is consistent across all three of the main languages in the sixth form. Teachers have good subject knowledge particularly of the technicalities

of grammar required for examination success at this level. Students are given plenty of helpful hints to aid their preparation. Teachers' spoken language is good and this is clearly evident in the rapid improvement in students' spoken language that takes place between Year 11 and this stage in Year 12. Students' work is regularly marked and corrected and the use of marking to give students hints on how to improve is good. Where teaching is satisfactory rather than good or very good, the pace of the work is not sufficiently high to make students work really hard and maximise learning. Often the teacher's spoken language is rather slow for work at this level. Lessons also tend to lack variety. Typically a lesson consists of some spoken French or German, some reading and some associated writing activities and this does not provide a wide variety to make students really think about their language use. The information and communication technology centre attached to the languages department is an excellent resource, which is used well by teachers and students for research and to find authentic materials to add realism to lessons. Students also make very good use of information technology to edit, refine and produce their work.

- 128 There is a happy, relaxed but businesslike atmosphere in all lessons and excellent relationships between students and with their teachers are a strong feature of the subject. Students are keen to take part in discussions and can sustain and develop their views well. They develop satisfactory individual and research skills. Students work hard and show sensible and mature attitudes to the languages they study.

Leadership and management

- 129 The leadership and management of the department are good. The school is making satisfactory progress towards the ambitious targets that have been set for it as a languages college. There is a committed team of teachers in place and standards, particularly in Year 12, are rising. There are clear and realistic priorities for development. The subject has made good progress since the previous inspection.