

# INSPECTION REPORT

**SEXEY'S SCHOOL**

BRUTON

LEA area: SOMERSET

Unique reference number: 123902

Headteacher: Mr S Burgoyne

Reporting inspector: Dr Barbara Hilton  
3228

Dates of inspection: 17 - 21 September 2001

Inspection number: 190216

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 students:	11 to 18
Gender of students:	Mixed
School address:	Cole Road BRUTON Somerset
Postcode:	BA10 ODF
Telephone number:	01749 813393
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr M Penery
Date of previous inspection:	28 October 1996

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities (sixth form)	Aspect responsibilities (sixth form)
3228	Barbara Hilton	Registered inspector	Biology	What sort of school is it?  How high are standards?  How well are subjects taught?  How well is the school led and managed?
9561	Husain Akhtar	Lay inspector		
13734	Harold Davies	Team inspector	Business	
1779	David Leonard	Team inspector	Chemistry	
19925	Margaret Price	Team inspector	Mathematics	
10288	John Richards	Team inspector	Art Design and technology	How good are curricular and other opportunities offered to students?  How well does the school care for its students?  How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
23030	Caroline Runyard	Team inspector	Physical education	
11720	Philip Winch	Team inspector	Drama English	

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## **REPORT CONTENTS**

	Page
<b>PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT</b>	<b>6 - 9</b>
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Students' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
<b>ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM</b>	<b>10 - 12</b>
<b>PART B: COMMENTARY</b>	
WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL	13 - 19
WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED	19
WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	19
<b>PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS</b>	<b>20 - 24</b>
<b>PART D: THE SIXTH FORM</b>	
RESULTS AND STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS	25 - 26
STUDENTS' ATTITUDES, VALUES AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT	26 - 27
TEACHING AND LEARNING	27 - 28
CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS	28 - 29
THE SCHOOL'S CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS	29 - 30
THE SCHOOL WORKS IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS AND STUDENTS	30
THE EFFECTIVENESS OF LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT IN THE SIXTH FORM	30 - 31
<b>PART E: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM</b>	<b>32 - 45</b>

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

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Sexey's School is a Church of England voluntary-aided comprehensive boarding school which is much smaller than most secondary schools, with 394 students, including 169 in the sixth form. All students aged 11 to 16 and about one third of the sixth formers board: in all, 282 are boarders. Boys outnumber girls in Years 7 to 11 by about 5 to 3. Small numbers of students benefit from eligibility for free school meals (four) or financial support for boarding by social services or trusts (six). The great majority are white of UK heritage; just a few come from other backgrounds, including Chinese (seven), black African (six) and European (seven). One student is at an early stage of learning English. Students enter from a wide range of schools; few of those aged 11 to 16 live locally. Attainment on entry in Year 7 is average. The proportion of students with special educational needs is broadly average; the needs of most concern basic skills and the organisation of their work.

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

Sexey's is a very good school. The school is led and managed very ably. It has improved significantly since the last inspection. Good teaching enables students to do very well. GCSE results are outstandingly good and sixth form results are good. Relationships are very good and commitment to the school is strong among governors, teachers, house and administrative staff. The ethos for learning is very good. The school provides good value for money.

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

- Students achieve very well: results at GCSE are outstandingly good and they are good in the sixth form.
- Good teaching enables students to learn and progress well.
- Residential experience contributes very well to students' learning and personal development.
- Very good relationships and students' attitudes to learning are strengths and contribute strongly to the ethos of the school.
- Leadership is very able, enabling all staff to contribute well to students' academic and personal development.

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

- Accommodation in several areas is inadequate and detracts from the generally very good support for students' learning and personal development.
- The use of the library and computers to support more strongly students' independent learning and progress.

*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 28 October - 1 November 1996, and since then good improvement has been made. GCSE results have risen at a faster rate than nationally and are now outstandingly good. Sixth form results have improved with more higher grades obtained than nationally and they reflect good achievement by the students. Teaching is better than at the last inspection. The school sets challenging targets and generally exceeds them. The school's leadership and governors have responded well to the last report. Improvements have been made in the main issues identified - concerning accommodation in houses, for music and the library - and many other smaller weaknesses tackled conscientiously. All staff work hard to help students to do their best.

## STANDARDS

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

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

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

Sexey's students achieve outstandingly good results at GCSE. In 2000 they were placed eighth in national GCSE league tables. Results were almost as good in 2001. Results are improving at a faster rate than nationally. Both boys and girls do much better than boys and girls nationally. Results in all subjects are well above national averages, including English, mathematics, art, design and technology, geography and science: in these subjects almost all students entered gain grade A\*-C and substantially more gain grade A\* or A than nationally. Students' success at GCSE represents very good achievement, relative to their capabilities on entry and at the end of Year 9. At the start of Year 7, students' attainments are broadly average. By the end of Year 9, their results in national tests are well above average and results in science are consistently high. Standards of literacy, numeracy and students' computer skills are good, though opportunities to use computers in Years 10 and 11 are not developed across all applications. Sixth form results are good. Students achieve well in the subjects they take and more high grades (A, B) are achieved than nationally. Overall, males and females achieve equally well at A level. Students with special educational needs progress and achieve well in the main school and in the sixth form.

## STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Students' attitudes to learning are a strength.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Excellent. Students are courteous and considerate of others.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships are very good. Students develop mature and responsible outlooks.
Attendance	Students in the main school all board, and attend fully; attendance is very good in the sixth form.

The ethos for learning is very good. Students enjoy learning and being in school. The warm relationships in houses permeate school activities. Sixth formers attend classes very reliably and stay for the full length of their courses. They are supportive of younger students, both academically and in houses. Students of all ages participate well in the very wide range of activities provided.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Teaching and learning are good throughout the school. Students are confident about asking for help because relationships are very good. They learn systematically because lessons are well structured and teachers' explanations are clear, based on very good subject knowledge. Students try their best as they are keen to learn and they respond to teachers' high expectations. Support for students with special educational needs is very good. In English and science, teaching is as good as in the school overall. In mathematics, while it is mostly good, a few inconsistencies occur - for example, in marking, and the presentation of work by students. In history, geography and music, students' progress is satisfactory and sometimes good in the main school. Teaching in art, computing, design and technology, French, German and physical education is consistently good, often very good. Literacy, numeracy and information technology are taught as part of English, mathematics and computing (in Years 7 to 9) and in other lessons as need arises. Opportunities are missed to promote students' independent learning, for example, by use of the library and computers. Homework, which is regularly set and supervised each evening, extends learning opportunities effectively.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	A reasonably broad range of subjects is provided, well suited to students' abilities. Information technology needs strengthening in Years 10 and 11.
Provision for students with special educational needs	Very effective: students appreciate the help they are given and develop good learning habits. Support is given in all years, including the sixth form.
Provision for students with English as an additional language	Only one student, recently started in Year 7, is at an early stage of learning to speak English and support is planned.
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good, with strengths in moral and social development. Staff are very good role models.
How well the school cares for its students	Pastoral and assessment arrangements are very good. Students are known well individually, by teachers, house staff and the headmaster.

The school provides a good range of subjects for its students: they achieve well. Personal, social and health education is satisfactorily provided through lessons and house activities. Extra-curricular activities are a strength. A wide range of opportunities is available, including many different sports. Students learn to take responsibility in houses and to live alongside others: their social development is very good. Activities provided in houses greatly extend opportunities available for students, who use their time purposefully. Students feel the residential experience is enjoyable and helpful in their everyday lives. The use of assessment information for guiding students' progress and helping them do well is very good, especially in the sixth form. Parents receive regular information on their children's progress. In addition to termly reports, parents of students in the main school receive effort reports every quarter term.



## HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher leads and manages the school very ably, enabling staff to contribute well to students' academic and personal development.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors play a strong and supportive role in steering the school. Although students use computers in many ways, aspects in Years 10 and 11 need strengthening, in order to fully meet requirements, and improvements are planned.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Results are thoroughly and effectively analysed to set targets for further improvement.
The strategic use of resources	Very effective. The bursar contributes well to budget planning.

Leadership and management are very good. Several staff carry multiple responsibilities, which are fulfilled well. Arrangements allow teaching and administrative staff to develop a broad overview of the work of the school and a strong loyalty to it. The sixth form and support for students with special educational needs are managed very well. Governors, the bursar and senior staff keenly seek best value in decisions they take, for example, in tendering and through the use of comparative information on performance and costs in other schools. Materials and equipment are generally sufficient in lessons, but there are not enough books in the library. The most significant weaknesses are in accommodation. Staff work hard to overcome disadvantages which limit teaching in art, biology, business studies, drama and design and technology. The sixth form centre is small. Older students do not have much privacy in houses and there are not enough showers.

## PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Their children like the school and are becoming mature and responsible.</li> <li>• Expectations are high.</li> <li>• They feel comfortable about approaching the school.</li> <li>• The school is well led and managed.</li> </ul>	

Parents, in response to their questionnaire and at the meeting with the registered inspector, were very supportive of the school: they feel its excellence should be recognised. At the meeting they commented that many of them cannot work closely with the school because they do not live locally and their children are resident at the school. They like the Christian ethos and the focus on high standards. Inspectors agree with parents' overall very favourable views of the school.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

Sexey's School is a Church of England voluntary-aided co-education boarding school with a sixth form of 169 which is comparatively large, the school having a total roll of 394 aged 11-18. Numbers of male and female sixth formers are about equal. Most Year 11 students in Sexey's continue in the sixth form and they generally board. They are joined by many from other secondary schools: about two-thirds of the sixth form join Sexey's in Year 12. Students meet entry criteria (usually at least five higher grade GCSEs, and B may be required for some subjects, plus references from their school). The school provides AS and A-level courses in about 20 subjects and an advanced vocational course in business. About 17 per cent of the students need support in their learning. The sixth form community is similar to that at the time of the last inspection. Almost all students continue with their studies at university.

## HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The sixth form is good. Students achieve well at the higher grades in examinations. Results have improved markedly over the last few years. Teaching and learning are consistently good. Courses meet the needs of students. Cost-effectiveness is good and the sixth form is strongly led.

### Strengths

- In 2001, Year 13 results were high in English language, chemistry, sociology, history, French and German and good in many other subjects.
- Well planned and challenging teaching enables students to do well: results are above average.
- Students are kept informed of their progress, and assessment is very effectively used to set targets for results.
- Relationships are very good and support students' development well.
- Students participate extensively in the life of the school and in a very good range of extra-curricular activities.

### What could be improved

- The use of short-term subject targets to strengthen students' independent learning and contribution to their progress.
- Aspects of accommodation and the availability of books in several subjects.

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

## THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

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

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	<b>Good.</b> Well-structured lessons help students to participate and achieve well.
Biology	<b>Good.</b> Students learn and achieve very well because of rigorous and effective teaching.
Chemistry	<b>Very good.</b> Students build well on prior learning: in recent years results have been exceptionally good.

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Design and technology	<b>Very good.</b> Students benefit from regular review of their practical work and achieve well. Results are usually very good.
Business	<b>Good.</b> Students make good progress in understanding business and draw well on links with local businesses.
Physical education	<b>Satisfactory.</b> Achievement in practical aspects is good though understanding of principles underlying performance needs strengthening.
Art	<b>Good.</b> Challenging and well-planned lessons enable students to learn effectively. By Year 13 they have developed personal styles.
Drama	<b>Good.</b> Teaching is very good and relationships are excellent. Students' willingness to collaborate has a positive impact on standards, while accommodation hinders learning.
English	<b>Good.</b> Teachers' very good knowledge leads to effective questioning, and students' attitudes are good. The course is well co-ordinated but inadequately resourced.

Inspectors found standards in sixth form lessons to be above average, overall, and students entering the sixth form from Sexey's and from other schools do equally well. In addition to the subjects reported on in detail other subjects were sampled and standards were notably high in sociology. The sixth form includes a substantial minority of students who need support in their learning; they progress and achieve well. Teachers work hard to minimise the effect of inadequacies in accommodation in art, drama, biology, business studies and design and technology.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Staff know students well as individuals. Pastoral and guidance arrangements contribute strongly to students' success.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Leadership is strong and very effective. Day-to-day arrangements are well co-ordinated. Planning takes good account of students' preferences: they are helped to do their best and have equal access to the opportunities provided. Assessment information is used very well to set targets for improvement.

## STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They enjoy the sixth form and advise others to join.</li> <li>• Teaching is challenging and good.</li> <li>• Teachers are accessible for help.</li> <li>• Students are helped to achieve their aspirations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advice about what to do in the sixth form.</li> <li>• Opportunities to research and study independently.</li> <li>• The school's approach to smoking: they would like a compromise.</li> </ul>

Thirty-five replies were received from the students' questionnaire, all from students with one year's experience of the sixth form. Inspectors endorse students' favourable views. In discussion with sixth

formers many said that advice before joining Year 12 and at the school had been good - which matches inspectors' findings - though they do not appreciate what subjects are like until they are following sixth form courses. In most subjects, lessons include opportunity for learning independently but study space for sixth formers and shortage of books limit research and study opportunities. Inspectors agree with the school that smoking should not be allowed, for reasons of health and safety.

## **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

#### **Students achieve very well: results at GCSE are outstandingly good and they are good in the sixth form**

1. In recent years, Sexey's students have achieved outstandingly good results at GCSE. In 2000 they were placed eighth in national GCSE league tables. Nearly all students in the year group (98 per cent in 2000) achieve five A\*-C grades although national data count only those students aged 15 years, which means that a slightly lower figure is reported in the press (93 per cent in 2000). Results were about as good in 2001 - 91 per cent achieved five A\*-C grades and all students achieved at least one GCSE certificate (an improvement on other recent years). Both boys and girls do much better than boys and girls nationally. In 2000, girls' results were very high, and the boys' well above, respective national averages; in many years boys do as well as girls. At the last inspection, GCSE results were much better than the national average and they have improved since then at a faster rate than nationally.
2. GCSE results in all subjects are well above national averages, including in English and mathematics, art, design and technology, geography and science: in these subjects almost all students entered gain grade A\*-C and a good proportion gain grade A\* or A. While boys do not do quite as well as girls in English, their results in science, mathematics, design and technology and geography are very good.
3. Standards in lessons in Year 11 are above average, overall: students are in line to do well at GCSE. Standards of literacy are very good. Written work in English is mostly accurate and improved through judicious use of drafting, as observed, for example, in a class of able Year 11 students who were identifying how the author warns the reader about the consequences of time travel in passages of *A Sound of Thunder*. In science they have many opportunities to write in their own words and they present their work well - better than in mathematics where, although exercises are neatly set out, the covers of many books are decorated with graffiti. Presentation and accuracy are good in French and German - students learn to proof-read, to check grammar for accuracy, and to avoid being too simplistic. They read widely and make good use of texts in work in English and many other subjects, including quality literature and reference books. In discussion with inspectors and in class, students are articulate: they speak with conviction and confidence. They listen to their audience and give reasons for their views - on poetry, for example, as in a Year 11 English lesson when they were working on a poem, translated from Gujarati; in geography, where Year 11 students confidently explained their choice of project and methodology and, more generally, about why they like the school.
4. Numeracy standards are generally good and developed systematically in mathematics. At the start of Year 8, for example, students confidently calculate the areas of complex shapes using the formulae for rectangles and triangles. By Year 9, most can multiply and divide (with the aid of calculators) large numbers to find percentages. By the time they start Year 11, mental arithmetic is good; most students can solve simple equations in their head. Students use computers competently. At the start of Year 7, they make rapid progress in understanding the functions of the computer, the school network and available software. By the end of Year 9, overall capability is above average. They use computers for research in most subjects though computers are relatively little used in lessons and aspects of the National Curriculum (notably programming) are not covered to the expected depth for all students; there is no systematic monitoring of students' capabilities in Years 10 and 11. The school has plans to strengthen computing in Years 10 and 11 and all teachers are receiving training, which is provided nationally.
5. Students' success at GCSE represents very good achievement, relative to their capabilities on entry and at the end of Year 9. The results of standard tests for Year 7 students are broadly average. By the time they reach the end of Year 9, their results in national tests are well above average. Test results in science have been more consistently high than in English and mathematics in recent years, although some year groups are small which blurs comparison. Teacher assessments in most subjects show above average attainment by Year 9 and, in design and technology and information and communication technology, standards are very good. Assessments in music show attainment to be a little above average, which is consistent with inspection observations - students at the start of Year 8 reflect on the intention of pieces of music, for example, Dohnany's *Variations on a Nursery Tune* and understand the position of the soloist

in relation to others in the orchestra. Recent assessments in French at the end of Year 9 have been below average. The teacher has an extremely rigorous approach towards assessing standards. Inspection evidence of lessons at the start of Year 9 suggests standards are above average: students can talk about themselves using good vocabulary and satisfactory accents and make themselves understood with no difficulty. In physical education, overall attainment at Year 9 is average, although many students achieve well in individual sports through practice and activities at the end of the school day and at weekends.

6. Sixth form results are good. At the end of Year 13, most students take examinations in three subjects at advanced level and achieve well in these. In 2000, female students did better than males, though results of males and females were about the same in 2001. Results are better now than at the last inspection, when they were a little below average. Distinctive good features of the advanced level results are the proportion of A and B grades achieved (44 per cent in 2000 and 43 per cent in 2001, compared with 35 per cent nationally in 2000) and the high proportion of passes across grades A to E (97 per cent in 2000 and 99 per cent in 2001, compared with 90 per cent nationally in 2000). More detail on sixth form results is included in parts D and E of this report.

### **Good teaching enables students to learn and progress well**

7. Teaching and learning are good throughout the school. The quality of teaching is good or better in 84 per cent of lessons, very good in 37 per cent, excellent in three per cent and satisfactory in the rest. Learning follows a similar pattern. Teaching is better now than at the last inspection - more is good or very good. The benefit to students of the good quality of teaching in lessons is augmented by the accessibility of teachers through activities at the end of the school day and in the residential life of the school.
8. Marked strengths of teaching include teachers' use of their subject knowledge and understanding, lesson planning and high expectations. Teachers manage students very well. Relationships are exceptionally good, so students are confident that if they ask for help it will be forthcoming and other students are supportive. The climate for learning is very good.
9. Very good subject knowledge enables teachers to give clear explanations and emphasise important points. English teachers have very good knowledge of the books and poetry students study. Both French and German teachers use the spoken language fluently and clearly, helping students to develop their own speaking skills. In art, students benefit from using a wide variety of media because of the teacher's breadth of subject expertise. In physical education, a pooling of expertise among members of school staff as well as tuition by external coaches means that students have access to a very good range of activities - including judo, trampolining, golf - in addition to those usually provided in the school curriculum. Similarly, in music, students have opportunities to learn a wide range of instruments - keyboard, string, woodwind and brass. Science teachers draw on their subject knowledge to give straightforward, accurate accounts of complex ideas as observed, for example, in a Year 9 lesson about genetic engineering, when students learned how bacteria can be modified to provide insulin, and in a Year 11 lesson, when students gained a clear understanding of how electromagnets work and could explain how to find out which is the stronger of two magnets.
10. Lessons are well structured, with varied activities so that students build well on their learning. In information and communication technology, effective use of a touch-typing programme has helped students to develop good keyboard skills. In the best mathematics lessons, ideas are systematically introduced and students are given opportunities to practise before they are introduced to more complex tasks - as observed in a Year 10 lesson with able students who learned quickly about the use of standard form for expressing large numbers. Occasionally, tasks are not well matched to the stage at which students are learning, as in a Year 9 lesson on percentages, when some who were learning more slowly found it hard to cope with large numbers. A wide range of activities is included in drama. In a well-planned Year 11 lesson, focused on GCSE requirements, very well-sequenced activities led to improvisations on the theme of 'trust'. Students hot-seated characters and their success was captured in freeze-frames. Effective emphasis on the design process helps Year 7 students to appreciate the distinctive features of design technology and to evaluate the biscuits they make. Consistent emphasis on design principles is a strength of design and technology teaching and underpins good learning in graphics (observed with Year 9 students) and research in preparation for the design of storage units (by Year 11).

11. Teachers present challenging ideas. Students respond well - they are keen to learn - and progress quickly. In a Year 7 music lesson, the class was formed into a choir and with direction from the piano by the teacher about stance, tone and volume, they improved the quality of their singing. Within 50 minutes they achieved a good performance of the twenty-third Psalm; it might have been an established choir. Expectations were equally high in a Year 8 music lesson observed, and though students made reasonable progress in responding to recorded orchestral music, their progress relative to the National Curriculum could have been faster if more emphasis had been placed on standard musical vocabulary. At the last inspection, weaknesses were reported in music. Planning is better now, students progress satisfactorily in lessons and have good opportunities to appraise music. Opportunities for extra-curricular activities in music are good.
12. High expectations lift attainment in art - the teacher constantly reminds students about accuracy and technique, as observed in a Year 10 lesson on drawing natural forms. In science, among older classes, much of the teaching builds on students' existing knowledge and is directed towards achievement at the higher grades, as observed with a Year 11 lesson on aerobic respiration, when all made good progress. Full use is made of lesson time and homework (or prep), which is regularly set and supervised each evening, extends learning opportunities effectively. In many lessons, good use is made of computers as observed, during the inspection, in geography and design and technology. However, while computer applications are systematically taught in Years 7 to 9 (separate lessons are provided), there is no coherent approach in older years: opportunities are being missed to provide independent learning in subjects. Videos are used in several subjects - for example, in history, they provide context and broaden students' understanding. The refurbished music room contains very good quality video equipment which brings taped musical performances to life.
13. Questioning is well used by many teachers to assess students' understanding, as in history and geography, to help students to recall recent work. Teachers build effectively on students' answers to challenge them further, as in art and drama where effective questioning helps students to reflect on their work and how it can be improved. In physical education, teachers give clear instructions and tasks challenge students physically, but sometimes opportunities are missed to question students about factors affecting fitness and endurance, which would help to develop their understanding of the physiology of sport.

### **Residential experience contributes very well to students' learning and personal development**

14. Students benefit greatly from the boarding experience and they appreciate it. Students of all ages speak warmly to inspectors of friendly relations among people in the house. Year 7 students like being with friends after school and sharing rooms. Older students agree there is trust among everyone in the house and they say it is like a big family. Their views are more favourable than at the last inspection. From time to time they move dormitories or others join them and they accept this easily as an opportunity to know and be friendly with others. While routine shapes life in the houses, this is relaxed on occasion, for example, for Saturday morning breakfast. The overwhelming view of students is that the residential experience is helpful in their everyday lives and enjoyable.
15. Activities provided in houses greatly extend opportunities available for students: they use their time purposefully. The range of sports and physical education activities is exceptionally good, including swimming, canoeing, squash, rock-climbing and aerobics, as well as team games, such as football and hockey. Hobbies are encouraged, such as horse-riding and dry-skiing. Clubs include fashion design, mechanics, cadets and computers, and students are prepared for the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. Students have opportunities to sample a wide range of activities but, because of age limits or rotas, this can mean having to relinquish one activity and start another, though the school does its best to accommodate wishes. Opportunities to learn musical instruments are good - visiting teachers provide tuition in wind instruments, keyboard and strings. The choir sings on school and outside occasions. Productions are regularly planned, at Christmas *Scrooge* will be performed, and allow opportunities for team work and the development of musical and dramatic abilities.
16. Students learn to take responsibility in houses and to live alongside others: their social development is very good. On arrival in Year 7, students join Walwin House, later they move into Coombe or Cliff and students in Year 11 upwards are accommodated in Lisbury House. Some sixth formers and older students, from a school in Australia with which Sexey's has links, are

resident in the houses of younger students. House activities at weekends further extend opportunities for personal development, with local visits, walks and physical activities, for example, surfing. Within the ordered atmosphere, there is a strong sense of consideration for others and behaving well. Moral development is very good and reinforced by school rules which take account of the school's residential life as well as the classroom. Incidents which justify exclusion hardly ever occur during the school day. Recent exclusions (which are about average in number, for the size of the school) stem from misdemeanours in houses which could be typical of family life. The school is caring about transgressors but firm about the need to keep rules. The general tenor of life in the houses is harmonious and happy.

17. The overall quality of school food is very good. The weekly menus provide a well-balanced and nutritious diet. Students choose sensibly and enjoy exceptionally good lunches, which provide a good range of energy-giving food, protein and fresh fruit and vegetables, as well as a good selection of puddings which even includes banoffee pie. Breakfast includes a cooked dish. The tea menus, while less extensive than at lunchtime (fewer students use the dining facilities because non-boarders go home), provides tasty and nutritious two-course meals. Occasional grumbles about food seem to be due mainly to its predictability or, perhaps, to an occasional mishap. Queues form, in spite of a planned rota system according to houses or year group. At teatime, eating is time-tabled among activities and prep. Staff discreetly monitor eating habits. During the inspection the atmosphere in the dining room was very congenial.
18. For the most part, students enjoy living in close proximity with their friends. Aspects of the boarding accommodation are cramped, however, and in places drab. Improvements have been made since the last inspection and more are needed. The school has plans to enhance facilities for older students and increase their privacy. Shower facilities are rationed and more are needed. Opportunities to practise music are limited. Drying facilities are very good for wet clothing. The school is vigilant about security and the safety of students. While social services has not inspected the boarding accommodation, changes in legislation mean that a visit is anticipated, shortly. The medical centre is well-appointed and welcoming to those in need of help. Trained staff are in attendance 24 hours each day. Students enjoy much freedom in the grounds of the houses and the school. Older students have opportunities to visit Bruton, to shop and socialise. House staff establish very warm relationships, look after students well and supervision is very good. The trust, which develops among students and house staff, engenders a very strong sense of community, which is a strength of the school.

**Very good relationships and students' attitudes to learning are strengths and contribute strongly to the ethos of the school**

19. Relationships are very good. In lessons, students of all abilities are confident about asking questions because they know teachers will be helpful and other students are supportive. In a Year 9 English lesson, more able students, who were learning about persuasive writing, confidently explained their ideas and through experimenting in group discussion developed good expression and apt tone. In modern foreign language lessons, students are willing to experiment and develop their use of language - in Year 11 French, for example, they say they need to avoid being simplistic and "try to make it a bit different". The good quality support given to students who have special educational needs encourages them to try and builds their confidence. Students know they are progressing and appreciate the support they are given. The teachers' planning and range of activities provided are very good - particularly for literacy, and numeracy is being developed. The school is arranging support for a student in Year 7 who is starting to learn English. Year 11 students, who need help with their coursework for GCSE, have an excellent relationship with their teacher. They are taking responsibility for their own learning and negotiating the help they are given. Guidance is in the form of individual targets (for example: remember to plan, use teachers in lessons). School records show that students with special educational needs make very good progress and most achieve several A\*-C grades at GCSE.
20. In lessons, students are keen to learn - they concentrate on their work and participate fully in activities. In science, they work hard in practicals and try to be accurate in their observations - as observed in a Year 7 class (learning about energy) and in Year 11 (a lesson about electromagnets). Occasionally, if they complete an activity and they have nothing to do their concentration drifts, but they remain well-behaved. Students are quick to get on with their work and sometimes need reminding about the use of safety precautions - goggles, for example. Students participate very well in physical education activities - both in lessons and after normal school hours. In the judo club, for example, rapt attention to detail and to the tutor's instructions is enabling the students to develop very good control of their movements.



21. Students are known well individually - by house staff, teachers and the headmaster. Their academic ability is assessed on entry and regularly through the school. Written reports to parents are frequent (two short reports and one full report annually) and every quarter term parents receive an effort report. A few parents find effort reports confusing (for example, the report may say effort is high, though parents consider attainment is modest), but generally effort reports are welcomed. The school may wish to state on effort reports, the group in which students are placed (where they are organised by ability). Students' work is usually checked, though marking is variable - for example, good in English, and uneven in mathematics. Work is continually assessed in art lessons, with constructive comments on how to improve. Records and monitoring arrangements for students with special educational needs are good.
22. The ethos for learning is very good: students enjoy learning and being in school. This good feature has been sustained since the last inspection. The warm relationships in houses permeate school activities. Many house staff are also subject teachers or have administrative roles. Pastoral arrangements are very good. Students' progress is supported by academic and house staff. Personal, social and health education is provided in several ways: through early morning form time, a programme of lessons in Years 10 and 11 and talks and activities arranged in houses. Medical staff supplement the health, sex and drugs awareness education and factual aspects are covered in science and physical education. National Curriculum requirements are met, though the school is aware that it needs to take stock of the overall programme in planning to cover citizenship (a requirement from September 2002). Careers guidance is provided in lessons, especially in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form, and through the careers service. The school's link careers officer has changed several times recently, which has dislocated advice given - a point commented on by parents at their meeting. A regular cycle of events ensures students have access to a suitable range of information - for example, careers conventions and consultation meetings. The school takes good care overall of its students though it is about two years since all staff attended training on child protection. Two potential hazards were drawn to the attention of governors - a loose panel in the wall of the swimming pool and the lack of any barrier to prevent students walking into the road when they return down the footpath from the upper playing field.

**Leadership is very able, enabling all staff to contribute well to students' academic and personal development**

23. Overall leadership is very good and its strengths are more evident now than at the last inspection. The headmaster, with a quiet touch and good humour, has achieved substantial improvement in standards - especially in GCSE results, which are outstandingly good, and in the proportion of high grades achieved at A-level. Relationships are very good. Students are happy at the school and parents are well satisfied.
24. The management arrangements, in many ways, are like those in most schools. Responsibilities are clearly delineated, a regular cycle of meetings is held for people with particular responsibilities and an appropriate range of policies informs various aspects of the life of the school, including child protection, more able students, special educational needs, behaviour, equal opportunities, sex education and assessment. The school's development plan is well organised; the sense of purpose underlying each section of this is clearly expressed and students' achievement and success are central. The overall plan shows awareness of the need for marketing, efficiency and striving for high standards. Planning is better now than at the last inspection. The development of value added approaches was just starting at the last inspection and is much better now. In parallel with development planning and the budget cycle, results are reviewed annually with heads of departments. The analysis of results which informs this discussion is of very good quality and it is well used to set targets for improvement.
25. A feature of the management arrangements at Sexey's is the multiple - and often, very significant - responsibilities which several staff carry. For example, the head of chemistry is head of the sixth form; the heads of music and of design and technology are house masters of Walwin and Cliff Houses respectively; the head of information and communication technology co-ordinates assessment and work on value added. Several house staff have important administrative roles. For example, house mistresses of Walwin and Coombe Houses have responsibilities for admissions and marketing, and as librarian respectively. While pressures on many staff are considerable, they have a broad overview of the work of the school and strong loyalty to it. Information travels quickly. Every Monday, senior boarding staff meet to review the last week, the recent weekend and plan for the week ahead. The atmosphere is brisk and friendly: this is an

efficient use of time. It allows staff and the headmaster to take into account a myriad of factors and personalities in promoting the smooth running of the school.

26. Responsibilities are fulfilled well. The head of the sixth form co-ordinates arrangements very effectively, enjoys excellent relationships with students and has overseen marked improvement in results. To a large extent, sixth form teaching is seen in departments as an extension of subject teaching lower down the school. While subject expertise is paramount at sixth form level, there is scope for placing more emphasis on the distinctive features of very good sixth form teaching and to disseminate good practice - in particular, to strengthen opportunities for students to learn independently. Work with students who have special educational needs is co-ordinated well. Record keeping is good and liaison with subject departments is very good. Staff do their best to maintain contact with parents of the children who have special education needs: learning support is deployed very effectively.
27. Governors, working in partnership with the headmaster, play a full and very effective role in steering the work of the school. They have taken significant initiatives - for example, in the move to voluntary aided status within the Church of England Diocese of Bath and Wells, in improving accommodation (including the library, sixth form centre and new medical centre) and the development of counselling (including peer counselling) for students. They are constructively critical about the work of the school; they interrogate results and have been conscientious about implementing improvements since the last inspection. They meet informally with students and the chair of governors scrutinises the minutes of management meetings to see where help is needed. Best value is sought in tendering arrangements, for example, for building improvements and insurance, and in managing the budget. Governors tour the premises and have reviewed arrangements with the architect. They are aware that accommodation for several subjects needs improvement and of changing expectations regarding boarding accommodation and developments are planned.
28. Progress since the last inspection has been good - as is evident in the school's outstandingly good GCSE results and the quality of teaching, which is better, now. Significant improvements have been made in music accommodation and in provision for the subject. The library accommodation is much improved, with study facilities lining the balcony, but the library stock has lagged behind and needs to be improved - particularly for English, drama and the sciences. The sixth form centre has improved study and social areas for the sixth form, though there is hardly enough space for the number of students.
29. School finances and budget planning are ably managed by the bursar who works closely with the headmaster and governors. She chairs meetings of colleagues across the local education authority and compares school costs with those in other state boarding schools and with all schools nationally. When account is taken of boarding and necessary staffing costs, the income for the school, while above average, represents good value for money, because students achieve so very well - at GCSE, particularly. The school cannot take more boarding students - all accommodation is fully utilised. However, some day students could be accepted in Years 7 to 11 and the school is consulting formally this autumn with a view to achieving this. Bearing in mind the school is very good, this would seem appropriate.
30. Resourcing is adequate, overall. The number of computers is above average for the size of the school, though they are not yet fully utilised in departments. (Many subject teachers are participating in computer training this year.) Equipment and materials for lessons are generally satisfactory. Marked problems with accommodation persist - some in houses (for example, lack of privacy in bedrooms, especially for older students, and inadequate numbers of showers) and in some subjects. Accommodation weaknesses in subjects affect sixth form lessons mostly and are described in later sections of the report.

## **WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED**

### **Accommodation in several areas is inadequate and detracts from the generally very good support for students' learning and personal development**

31. The school copes well with cramped accommodation. Very good relationships assist students and staff to live and work together amicably. The grounds are very pleasant and sports facilities are very good - though two hazards were drawn to the attention of governors (a loose panel in the

swimming pool and lack of any barrier to prevent students returning down the footpath from the upper playing field from walking onto the road).

32. Since the last inspection, substantial improvements have been made in the library and sixth form centre - though both are small for the number of students who use these facilities. More telephones have been installed in boarding houses, though the availability of mobile phones has removed the pressure on these. Weaknesses persist in the following areas: art (no studio space is provided to allow students to work independently on projects); business (the room used does not model a modern business environment); biology (the hut is inadequate); drama (where the workshop is separate from the main teaching area) and design and technology (the workshops need refurbishment or replacement). Accommodation in houses is cramped: the most significant weaknesses are the lack of privacy for older students and a shortage of showers, though facilities are better than at the last inspection.
33. The school has plans for improvements in several of these areas - and they are fully justified.

### **The use of the library and computers to support more strongly students' independent learning and progress**

34. The library has been rehoused since the last inspection but is not yet adequately stocked. Most subjects are poorly represented by books for sixth form research (though in some classrooms there are collections of books suitable for students' use). Library records show extensive borrowing by a minority of younger students and few books taken out by most other students. Overall, the library is under-utilised to support learning: many more books are needed. Computers are used by students for the presentation of their work and for research, but not as widely as in many schools. Developments are in hand which will increase their use, including training for all teachers. They could be used much more extensively to support students' independent learning and progress.

### **WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?**

- (1) Work collaboratively with the local education authority and diocese and vigorously pursue opportunities to improve accommodation (see paragraphs 31 to 33).
- (2) Improve the library stock and the opportunities teachers provide for its use and the use of computers, as resources for learning in their subjects (see paragraphs 4, 30 and 34).

### **Sixth form**

- (1) Develop the use of short-term subject targets to strengthen students' independent learning and contribution to their progress (see paragraphs 51 and 56).
- (2) Improve sixth form accommodation and the availability of books, in the context of whole school development plans (see paragraphs 66 and 67).

## **PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS**

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

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	49
	Sixth form	55
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students		61

### ***Summary of teaching observed during the inspection***

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
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**Years 7 – 11**

Number	1	20	15	12	1	0	0
Percentage	2	41	31	24	2	0	0

#### **Sixth form**

Number	2	19	30	4	0	0	0
Percentage	4	35	54	7	0	0	0

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

### **Information about the school's students**

#### **Students on the school's roll**

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of students on the school's roll	225	169
Number of full-time students known to be eligible for free school meals	6	3

#### **Special educational needs**

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of students with statements of special educational needs	2	0
Number of students on the school's special educational needs register	59	26

#### **English as an additional language**

	No of students
Number of students with English as an additional language	1

#### **Student mobility in the last school year**

	No of students
Students who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	3
Students who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	7

## Attendance

### Authorised absence

	%
School data	n/a
National comparative data	5.9

### Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	n/a
National comparative data	0.4

*Absence data do not apply because Sexey's is a boarding school.*

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2001 (2000)	24 (31)	9 (18)	33 (49)

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	20 (22)	22 (28)	22 (30)
	Girls	9 (14)	8 (14)	7 (12)
	Total	29 (36)	30 (42)	29 (42)
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	88 (73)	91 (86)	88 (86)
	National	(63)	(65)	(59)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	47 (31)	55 (49)	55 (47)
	National	(28)	(42)	(30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	14 (27)	23 (28)	20 (29)
	Girls	7 (15)	8 (16)	8 (16)
	Total	21 (42)	31 (44)	28 (45)
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	64 (86)	94 (90)	85 (92)
	National	(64)	(66)	(62)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	42 (41)	57 (73)	39 (61)
	National	(31)	(39)	(29)

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	2001 (2000)	31 (39)	15 (19)	46 (58)

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of students achieving the standard specified	Boys	27 (34)	31 (35)	31 (35)
	Girls	15 (20)	15 (21)	15 (21)
	Total	42 (54)	46 (56)	46 (56)
Percentage of students achieving the standard specified	School	91 (93)	100 (97)	100 (97)
	National	(47.4)	(90.6)	(95.6)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per student	School	52 (52)
	National	(38.4)

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
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	2001 (2000)	30 (32)	28 (44)	58 (76)

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	16.6 (17.5)	20.6 (20.0)	18.5 (18.9)	(4.0)	6 (2.5)	6 (3.0)
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.

### ***Ethnic background of students***

	No of students
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	5
Black – other	1
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	7
White	381
Any other minority ethnic group	0

### ***Exclusions in the last school year***

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	15	1
Other minority ethnic groups	1	0

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

### ***Teachers and classes***

#### **Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	32.4
Number of students per qualified teacher	12,2

#### **Education support staff: Y7 – Y13**

Total number of education support staff	8
Total aggregate hours worked per week	239

#### **Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13**

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	70.4
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#### **Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11**

Key Stage 3	20.0
Key Stage 4	18.5

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

### ***Financial information***

Financial year	2000-1
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	£
Total income	2,870,989
Total expenditure	3,014,331
Expenditure per student	7933
Balance brought forward from previous year	538,697
Balance carried forward to next year	395,355

### ***Recruitment of teachers***

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	6.4
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	6.8

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	1
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

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

### **Questionnaire return rate**

Number of questionnaires sent out	375
Number of questionnaires returned	93

### **Percentage of responses in each category**

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	67	28	5	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	64	31	2	0	3
Behaviour in the school is good.	43	51	2	0	4
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	28	52	3	0	17
The teaching is good.	50	43	2	0	5
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	57	33	5	4	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	76	18	2	3	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	82	18	0	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	49	36	10	4	1
The school is well led and managed.	68	24	3	0	5
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	71	24	1	1	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	59	34	4	0	3

### **Other issues raised by parents**

Twenty-two parents attended a meeting with the registered inspector before the inspection. Their views were generally very supportive of the school, as reflected in their responses to the questionnaire. Individual parents commented on provision in some subjects though the general feeling was that the school does very well for its students and very strongly promotes good attitudes and high standards. Students care for each other, as in a family. Boarding makes a strong contribution to students' personal development. Comments on several matters were made by parents: mostly they cannot know about their children's progress on a daily basis, because their children are resident at school; they like the Christian ethos of the school; they feel the school deserves recognition for excellence. When parents were asked their views on sixth formers being allowed to smoke they strongly endorsed the school's no smoking policy.



## **PART D: THE SIXTH FORM**

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

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

35. Sixth form results are above the national average. Students achieve higher grades in the subjects they take than nationally. Nearly all stay for the full length of their courses and attendance at classes is very good. In 2000, female students achieved particularly well: their results were well above average, while male students' results were above the national average. In 2001, the results of males and females were similar. However, over the last few years, students at the end of Year 13 have taken examinations in fewer subjects (usually three) than most students nationally. As a result of this, while achievement in individual subjects has often been better than predicted on the basis of GCSE, total achievement is only a little better than predicted. Results are better than at the last inspection: the proportion of high grades (A, B) achieved has improved markedly. At the last inspection, results were slightly below the national average. Students who attended Sexey's up to GCSE and those from other schools do equally well. Students of ethnic minority backgrounds achieve in line with the rest. The sixth form includes a significant minority of students who need support in their learning; they progress well and achieve satisfactory results
36. Over recent years, A-level results have been particularly good in sciences (biology, chemistry and physics) and, though they were not quite so high in 2001, they were still above the national average. This year, results in design and technology dipped to below average: up to 2000 they had been among the best in the school. Results in mathematics are above the national average, as they are generally in art and geography. Results in English in both 2001 and 2000 were very good in language and about average in literature. Drama results in both years were broadly average. Results in history and sociology were outstandingly good in 2001, and a little improved on 2000. French results in 2001 were very high and better than in recent years. Students have taken German and Latin and they usually achieve in line with expectations. In business studies, results are average; in 2002 students will complete, for the first time, courses leading to advanced vocational qualifications.
37. Students' relative performance in their different subjects fluctuates year by year. They have usually achieved very well in sciences and design and technology, but this was not the case in 2001. Performance in English language, French and history was good in both 2000 and 2001. While performance in physical education has been well below the national average and lower than in other subjects up to 2000, this year results improved: students did about as well as in their other subjects, though results remained below average. A few students have taken AS-levels in recent years. In 2000, results were broadly average for business studies, drama and mathematics and they were good in sociology. Many more subjects were taken at AS-level in 2001 by students in Year 12, with high results in art, German, history, physics and sociology, though results were not so good in business studies, English language and literature and biology. In most cases, courses had been taught for the first time. Students have opportunities to resit AS-examinations and improve their grades.
38. In most sixth form lessons, standards are above expectations for the courses being followed. Students achieve well. In chemistry, for example, students starting Year 12 make rapid progress in understanding electronic structure and by the time they are in Year 13 they can describe the structure of compounds they are studying and use their understanding of structure to explain reactions. An individual talented student in music is achieving outstandingly well. In project work in art, students develop very good research skills and explore and develop ideas in a variety of media, including painting, sculpture, printing and perspex engraving. In business, students show good knowledge and understanding of their case studies and draw on links with the business world. Projects in design and technology are above average in standard with some high standards of presentation. Standards in history and sociology lessons are good - in line with examination results. Students are articulate and present well-reasoned arguments on the topics they study. Standards are above average in sixth form games and practical physical education activities. The sixth form includes a number of very talented sportsmen and women and they are helped to do their best. However, in examination classes, there is a clear difference between the knowledge and understanding of students who have followed a GCSE course in physical education and those who have not - and generally the former have better knowledge of physiology, for example, they know about muscle groups and factors affecting performance: they have a head-start. While students in English and drama do well in tasks set, their learning over time is held back because

of disadvantages in terms of cramped accommodation, poor time-tabling and insufficient texts to support their individual research.

39. Communication skills are good. Students are articulate. Orally, most communicate very well. Examples of very effective student presentations in front of the whole class were seen in Year 12 biology, Year 13 history and Year 13 careers and in many subjects discussion is a regular feature in lessons. Written work is mostly good. Notes are well organised, writing is generally accurate and well structured. Students' files in drama are very good: they write with authority on a variety of works and evaluate performance well. Projects for biology and for art are well presented and structured, and include much evaluation. Files in mathematics tend to be untidy, however, with some scribbling on folders. Written work in physical education varies in quality. The best is very good, though a few students seem little inclined to read around topics and do not write extensively. Students read competently, though the breadth of their reading is constrained by the paucity of library books in several subjects, including English, biology and chemistry.
40. Numeracy skills are good, on the whole. There is no systematic approach to developing these across the sixth form: teachers explain basic mathematical skills, as and when the need arises. Students cope with mathematical concepts and handle ideas effectively in class. For example, Year 13 students made good use of graphs in a physics lesson on radioactive decay and evaluated different mapping techniques in geography. Students' computing skills are satisfactory. Many individuals make use of information technology in presenting their course work (as seen, for example, in drama and biology). However, computers are little used in mathematics and chemistry - opportunities are being missed to enhance students' learning through information technology.
41. The school makes very good use of assessment information in predicting results overall, results in subjects and the achievement of individual students. The predictions provide a base line for targets, which, while challenging, are generally met, or exceeded. The analyses produced by the school are sophisticated and used in reviewing its overall work, performance in subjects and the progress of individual students, which is reviewed termly. The system is effective and has contributed to the overall improvement in sixth form results. Students' targets, however, are expressed in terms of final examination grades. The opportunity of setting short-term targets for achievement in subject terms, as steps towards the final grade, is being missed.

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

42. Sixth formers attend Sexey's very reliably and well. Attendance in classes during the inspection was high - 96 per cent, overall. The school monitors attendance by class and follows up absence conscientiously. Nearly all students stay for the full duration of their courses: retention is high. Students' behaviour is excellent. They are courteous, trustworthy and show respect for all around them. Exclusion is rare.
43. The students are keen to come to school. They appreciate the opportunities the sixth form bring. About one third have progressed into the sixth form from Sexey's main school and as boarders they have extra freedom and privileges. All use the sixth form centre which is central in the school and well decorated - though cramped for the numbers who use it.
44. Students' personal development is very good. They develop mature, very responsible attitudes and are supportive of younger students. Many mentor younger students, some supervise prep and have responsibilities in houses, which they fulfil well. Younger students say that houses are like one big family: relationships are excellent among all groups. Sixth formers participate very well in the range of activities the school provides, including a great variety of sports, Duke of Edinburgh's award and the Cadet Force. In lessons, they develop skills of independent learning. They research independently as part of their work in many subjects (including, for example, in biology projects and to support course work in design and technology and art). In several subjects their research is constrained by the limited book stock in the library (for example, in English and chemistry) though increasing use is made of the Internet. Students comment on a surfeit of prepared notes occasionally in humanities lessons, which require little participation and feedback from them. Such instances were observed during the inspection, but overwhelmingly lessons invite participation and students have much to give: their attitudes, values and personal development are a strength.

## HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

45. The quality of teaching in the sixth form is good - as it is in the school overall. All teaching is satisfactory or better, 93 per cent is good or better, 35 per cent is very good and four per cent is excellent. Learning follows a similar pattern. The strengths common to sixth form teaching are those of the school overall: teachers' rigorous use of their knowledge and understanding, good planning and incorporation of challenging ideas and very good management of students.
46. Teachers' very good knowledge and understanding underpin students' good progress in English, in literature, particularly. For example, in a Year 13 lesson on *Othello*, the teacher helped students to understand how Iago manipulates Othello, who sees Desdemona as his possession. Similarly, in a Year 13 mathematics lesson on complex numbers, the teacher's knowledge and clarity of use of subject vocabulary helped the students to develop understanding of complex roots of polynomials. In chemistry, students make rapid progress because the teacher uses his own knowledge to judge students' understanding and build on it precisely - as observed when students at the start of Year 12 were learning about electronic structure and configuration. Lessons in art are challenging and varied so students investigate a wide range of media and processes. Year 12 students, for example, have drawn self-portraits which will be made into prints using plastic engravings with the purpose of showing the expression of emotion. Case-studies and links with local businesses help students in business studies to apply their learning to real-life situations, for example, about operations management or production. In design and technology, teachers draw well on their subject knowledge to convey difficult ideas - for example, about the properties of composite materials with Year 12 students and the range of design influences (Art Deco and fashion, for example) with regular reference to the work of past students who have made A-grades.
47. Teachers have high expectations and plan well for their classes - as a result students maintain a good pace in their learning and work hard. In a sixth form drama lesson observed, for example, they made excellent progress through warm-up activities to appreciating the value of observation and then to short performances, including from Beckett's *Come and Go*. Similarly, in a Year 13 chemistry lesson, students progressed very well in understanding carboxylic acids in a good-humoured and well sequenced lesson which built systematically on their understanding. Physical education students enjoy a wide range of demanding practical activities - both team games and individual sports. Students' contributions are used very effectively in most subjects to clarify and deepen their understanding - as observed, for example, in a Year 12 sociology lesson, and Year 13 careers. At times, more could be expected of students' contributions to discussion, to extend their capacity to reason for themselves (for example, about the psychology of performance, in physical education) and to develop their ideas (as in art). In modern foreign languages, students develop good accents and fluency in French and German because teachers require good preparation and themselves present good role models in the spoken language.
48. Questions are well used in many lessons to challenge students and to make them think. In the best science lessons, teachers prompt students to think for themselves - as observed in Year 12 physics, when students were being introduced to lenses. They were asked to find out whether formulae actually work and they learned to test lenses in different ways. In some biology lessons, the use of questions could be developed, to ensure all students maximise learning opportunities. Opportunities are taken in biology to make students contribute to their own learning as, for example, in the production of booklets on cell organelles, in the presentations made by Year 12, and in individual projects which contribute to examination grades. Use of such strategies could be extended to promote participation - for example, during long explanations of biochemical pathways. In some chemistry lessons there are not enough opportunities for students to find out for themselves. Opportunities for students to learn independently are limited by shortages of books in several subjects. Homework is effectively used and generally marked with helpful comments.
49. Relationships are very good, throughout. Students learn well, assisted by their very good attitudes to their work: they are keen and interested and usually concentrate well. In drama, excellent group ethos and enjoyment provide a very good climate for learning. Coupled with a finely balanced mixture of practical activities and ideas, students learn quickly, as observed in a lesson with Year 12 and 13 students together on the *Theatre of the Absurd*. Good relationships in English help students to make a good response and they are confident about discussing their ideas in front of others.

50. Students are known very well as individuals in the sixth form. Teachers make effective use of the very good assessment system (known as levels, by the students). The school is flexible and helpful in meeting the needs of individuals; for example, a talented musician in Year 12 is being supported very capably. Support for students with special educational needs in the sixth form is good. All sixth formers communicate satisfactorily in English (none is at an early stage of learning the language). Overall, students' skills and use of literacy and numeracy are good - they cope well with requirements in most subjects. Individual students generally seek help with written work, if needed, and this is tactfully and supportively provided. In a few instances, written work is scrappily presented and does not do justice to students' understanding (as in mathematics), and in physical education lessons some students need help in organising their work. A more systematic approach to study skills could help these students. Students use computers capably, when given the opportunity. In most subjects, information technology is used by individual students in the presentation of work and for research but few applications are used in teaching, though more are planned.
51. As a result of strengths in teaching, students learn well. They develop systematic understanding and skill in the subjects they study. There are no aspects of teaching which justify description as weaknesses. Features less evenly developed are independence in learning and knowledge by students of what they could do (in subject terms) to accelerate their progress. In several subjects teachers are valiant in coping with deficiencies in accommodation which detract from the overall very good climate for learning; these are described in the section on resources.

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

52. The curriculum is well planned and organised for the students in the sixth form. A reasonably wide range of subjects is offered and the choice is broader than at the last inspection, the advanced vocational course in business and the introduction of AS-levels, so that now almost all students study an extra subject in Year 12, in addition to the three which they continue to the end of Year 13. Staff accommodate students' wishes as far as possible and are honest with them about those subjects in which they are likely to be most successful. The sixth form is part of Somerset's post-16 provision and students in the main school are guided to other places if this seems in their best interests. In recent years the subjects studied have allowed students to progress to a wide range of higher education and job opportunities. Overall, individual subjects are effectively planned and organised to meet examining board requirements and to enable students to do well. Almost all students achieve pass grades and the proportion gaining high grades is greater than nationally.
53. The sixth form includes students who have needed support in learning lower down the school and they seek help on an individual basis. The school is very responsive and students make good progress, keeping up with the rest, though provision could be strengthened through more emphasis on literacy and study skills in form-tutor time or personal, social and health education. Key skills have not been formally introduced. Overall, students' literacy and numeracy skills are good and used effectively with teachers' help in lessons. Students use computers capably for a range of applications, though more opportunities could be provided as part of sixth form work.
54. The curriculum is enriched in a wide variety of ways. Lessons in general studies have been lost, because of pressures due to the introduction of the new post-16 curriculum (AS-levels, especially). However, the range of extra-curricular activities is vibrant. Sports are especially good. The Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme, Army Cadet Force and a wide range of activities enhance opportunities at the end of the day. Clubs develop learning in many subjects - for example, the Atelier Francais, computing, history, music and engineering. Links with the community benefit project work in many subjects including drama, biology, business studies, design and technology and physical education; strong links develop through music and the Neighbourhood Engineers Scheme. The extra-curricular opportunities support students' development and, additionally, those who board participate in many weekend activities in houses.
55. The cultural life of the school is very good. At the time of the inspection, sixth formers were auditioning to take part in *Scrooge* and they regularly contribute to drama and musical events. Along with other students they visit the theatre and see musicals and opera. Students' opportunities to appreciate the richness of a wide variety of cultural backgrounds are satisfactory. Several students live abroad, Australian GAP students are resident in houses and the school has

a Zambian link, including reciprocal visits. Parents value the Church of England status of the school and the sixth formers participate attentively in assemblies which have a spiritual dimension. Appreciation of universal values is developed in art, through books and poetry in English and in humanities subjects. Support for students' moral development is very good. Staff are very good role models and treat students as young adults. They respond with courtesy and respect. Careers education is well organised; a very good lesson was seen during the inspection. Overall, the school supports students' personal development very well.

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

### **Assessment**

56. Assessment arrangements are very good: the school has been ahead of many others in its analysis of data. GCSE results are used to predict progress and students are encouraged to exceed levels indicated. Teachers have information on the performance of groups they teach. The levels towards which students are working are assessed three times annually, shared with students and reported to parents. The system is well used to set targets for results in subjects and by the school overall. Teachers use the information in many ways to guide students about their progress and they can easily spot anyone who seems to be underachieving. Further benefit could be derived from the system by using a more systematic approach to setting targets for improvement - for example, by agreeing with students steps they can take to improve their performance, at monthly intervals or every quarter term.
57. Marking is generally good, though sometimes comment on how to improve detail is missed, as in mathematics and business. Most teachers continuously assess students' competence in lessons and through adroit questioning and observation of work - as observed in design and technology, drama and chemistry. Occasionally, planned activities, while suited to the majority in the class, do little to help those who are learning more quickly or slowly, so learning opportunities are not maximised. In an excellent lesson with a talented musician, the teacher quickly assessed the students' understanding of how different instruments are used in orchestration to provide colour and how instruments themselves make sound. The rapport which developed in discussion enabled the student to review his composition and progress rapidly in understanding.

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

58. The advice and support provided for students are good. Annually, the school arranges an induction day for Year 12 students at the start of the autumn term, which students appreciate: they feel it is very helpful. Before admission to the sixth form, interviews are arranged and subject choices are discussed. Arrangements for Sexey's students are the same as for those who have attended schools elsewhere. Form tutors and subject teachers know students well and provide regular day-to-day support. Early morning form times are good humoured, notices are shared and they provide a business-like start to the day; time is also used to provide tutorial support. For example, in a form time observed during the inspection, the use of the school assessment system to establish levels and set targets was explained to Year 12 students. Students are well informed about how well they are doing. They understand the levels system and find it helpful.
59. Guidance on careers is provided through weekly personal, social and health education lessons and also the careers service. Information is available through prospectuses, the Internet and videos from universities and other organisations. They have access to independent careers advice, though changes in careers service staffing has interrupted this. Year 13 students gained much from a lesson on careers observed during the inspection, when the theme was "What will you do when you leave?" Forms for university application are well in hand and most students have clear ideas about their immediate future as well as their long-term aims, which they express clearly to the whole class. As a measure of success of the guidance and support they receive, students almost invariably take up places at the colleges or universities of their choice. Hardly any need to use the clearing system.
60. The sixth form is an important (yet distinct) part of the whole school. Sixth formers have access to the support and guidance available to all. For example, sixth formers attend whole-school assemblies. Topics related to health, sex and drugs-awareness are covered in personal, social and health education lessons in Year 12, discussed in houses, and specific advice is available from resident nursing staff. However, there is no overview of topics covered, and this would

strengthen provision. Students can consult a trained counsellor who attends Sexey's regularly. The sixth form centre (originally a headteacher's house) is a wing of the main school building. It provides social and work areas, which are valued by students and brightly decorated, though the amount of space, bearing in mind the number of students, is inadequate. The school has appropriate health and safety arrangements in place, though a number of potential hazards were reported to governors. The residential accommodation used by sixth formers (and also Year 11 students) - Lisbury House - is set in pleasant grounds. A number of sixth formers live in other houses and take on responsibilities there. Relationships in houses are very good. The sense of community and family is strong, and very supportive for students.

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

61. Parents, in response to their questionnaire and at their meeting, expressed very favourable views of the sixth form. They say that sixth formers are treated as young adults and take good care of younger students. The atmosphere is friendly and homely. Standards are consistently high. They told inspectors that the sixth form, like the rest of the school, should be recognised for its excellence. Individual parents commented on careers guidance and inspectors found that there had been discontinuity in the careers service, though provision by the school in sixth form lessons is good. Parents were strongly supportive of the school's no smoking policy.
62. Students, in discussion with inspectors, were well satisfied with the sixth form. Year 12 appreciated induction and feel the sixth form is caring. Choices were carefully discussed and they had opportunity to negotiate their subjects (for example, a student opted to take design and technology in place of chemistry). However, some feel that they would have understood the advice better if they had had opportunity to sample lessons in subjects. A few students commented that the signing-in arrangement at the reception has lapsed (attendance is registered in subjects and monitored carefully). Year 13 students expressed pride in their work and the school. Relationships are good among boarders and non-boarders. They were satisfied with the guidance they have on careers though they were not certain how much advice they could receive on medical matters (though they know the medical centre provides treatment effectively). Almost all students feel that they are treated as adults and that the school listens carefully to their suggestions. Many believe that freedom of the individual is important and, that if students wished to smoke, a compromise could be reached with the school to accommodate them. Several students commented on the no-smoking policy of the school so inspectors pursued this with parents, governors and teachers. The inspectors' view is that the school's approach is right, because otherwise considerable concerns would be generated about health and safety.

## **HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?**

### **Leadership and management**

63. Leadership of the sixth form is charismatic and strong. Two factors contribute well to the provision of high standards. First, there are very good relationships in the school. Students are treated as young adults and are confident that they are being helped to do their best. They have equal access to the opportunities provided. Second, there is very effective monitoring by teachers of students' progress, using assessment information based on GCSE grades, so that students have target A-level grades to achieve. Information collected centrally is used to review results in subjects and plan for improvements. The monitoring of attendance in classes is also used to identify concerns about support that students might need. Teaching and learning are supported and monitored in subjects, by the leadership team and the headmaster. For the most part, the arrangements work well: teaching and learning are good. There is scope, however, for placing more emphasis on the distinctive features of very good sixth form teaching; for example, making students participate and learn independently and sharpening the emphasis on key aspects of subject knowledge or skill.
64. The governing body has very good awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of the sixth form. They review results, the work of departments and visit houses, for example. They have funded improvements in the sixth form centre and are planning ways to enhance boarding accommodation. They are closely involved in the school's plans for development and contribute

well to them. Many have a long association with the school and represent its interests effectively with the diocese and local education authority. Statutory requirements are met.

65. Governors, the headteacher and the bursar have a keen sense of best value. In practical matters they have been astute, as in working with architects. In staffing decisions they have successfully engaged staff who can carry a complex range of responsibilities - teaching (or administration) and boarding - effectively. Bearing in mind the amount spent on the sixth form, students' progress (which is good) and their personal development (which is very good), the sixth form provides good value for money.

## **Resources**

66. The amount spent on the sixth form is satisfactory: as a proportion of the school's budget it is in line with the amount intended by the local education authority. Staffing levels in the sixth form are satisfactory, overall. Some large groups (as in chemistry and biology, for example) off-set others which are smaller. Weaknesses are evident in time-tabling, however. In several subjects, double lessons are planned across break time, which means that teachers have to remind students about the purpose of the lesson and practical work is limited, affecting standards in drama, for example. Learning resources are adequate, overall, though better use could be made of computers by sixth formers in lessons and to support their independent learning (and improvements are planned by the school). A shortage of books in the recently refurbished library affects students' capacity to research in subjects, including the sciences and English.
67. The most significant weakness in resourcing is in accommodation. Staff work hard to overcome disadvantages which limit teaching and learning in several subjects. These include art, where there is no studio space for students to work individually on their projects; biology, which makes use of an inadequate hut; design and technology, where workshops are inadequate; business studies, where the accommodation does not model a modern office environment and drama, which is allocated a workshop separate from the main teaching accommodation. The sixth form centre, while bright and attractive, is small for the number who use it. Residential accommodation for sixth formers is cramped and few have privacy. Overall, however, the site is spacious and the surrounding environment is a very pleasant one in which to live and work.

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

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

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2000 (the latest year for which national comparisons are available).

### ***GCE AS-level courses***

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Business studies	1	100	78	0	16	2.0	1.9
Drama	2	100	93	0	19	3.0	2.6
Mathematics	2	100	63	0	17	2.0	1.6
Sociology	1	100	54	0	12	3.0	1.3

### ***GCE A-level and AVCE courses***

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	11	100	96	46	43	7.1	6.4
Biology	26	100	88	54	34	6.9	5.3
Business studies	31	97	91	23	30	5.6	5.3
Chemistry	13	100	89	92	42	9.2	5.9
Drama	10	100	99	30	36	6.4	6.5
English literature	5	100	96	100	36	8.8	5.9
English language	11	100	92	27	31	5.8	5.4
Design and technology	8	100	92	100	29	9.5	5.4
Mathematics	10	100	89	40	45	6.4	6.0
Physical education	10	70	91	10	25	3.4	5.0

## SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

### **MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES**

The inspection covered both A and AS-level courses in mathematics, including mechanics, statistics, pure and further mathematics. In sciences, the focus was on biology and chemistry, but physics was also sampled. In physics, examination results at A-level in 2001 were above the national average (for the previous year) and students did as expected considering their GCSE results; results at AS-level were also as expected. During the inspection, two physics lessons were observed; one was good while the other was very good. The teachers used very good subject knowledge to explain clearly and build on students' prior learning. In Year 13, for example, this led to their developing a secure understanding of the concept of half-life in radioactive elements.



## Mathematics

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

### Strengths

- Results are above average, overall.
- Teaching is generally good; lessons are well structured and students are encouraged to participate, which improves their confidence and self-esteem.
- Relationships between teachers and students are very good. Teachers work hard and care about their students and the students appreciate this.

### Areas for improvement

- Students would benefit from more regular marking of class work and higher expectations about its presentation.
- Opportunities for teachers to view each other's lessons would further enhance teaching skills in the department.

68. The mathematics department does well for its sixth form. While students number just under ten in most groups, all students complete courses. Notable features of the A-level results in the last two years are the 100 per cent pass rate and a high proportion of the highest (A, B) grades. Standards are above the national average. Students perform as expected, in relation to their GCSE results and about as well as in their other subjects. Over the last few years, results for different mathematics papers (statistics and mechanics, for example) have fluctuated and the teachers responsible for the Year 13 groups have varied. Many more boys than girls study mathematics in the sixth form, but girls who take mathematics do well. A small number of Year 13 candidates took AS mathematics in 2001. Results were mediocre: all passed, though only one (of five students) achieved a grade above C. Results for AS-levels taken by Year 12 students in 2001 were very good overall, though grades were polarised, with a good proportion of the highest grades, but some students did not pass. (They have opportunity to resit and improve their results.)
69. Standards of work seen in lessons in Year 13 are at least satisfactory and good in statistics and further mathematics. The overall quality of the students' oral contributions is above average. They apply their knowledge well, as observed, for example, when they used the standard formula for solving quadratic equations to determine all roots of a polynomial. Students are confident in using algebra. For example, Year 12 students who have just started AS-level courses competently use 'completing the square' to solve quadratic equations; they are attaining in line with expectations. Students have very good attitudes to work, including a determination to understand and succeed and they generally progress well in the tasks they are set. They have opportunity to work independently in most lessons.
70. Teaching is good overall and students learn well, as a result. Lessons are carefully planned; they are well structured and maintain a good pace, in keeping with the students' capacity to learn. Teachers' knowledge and understanding of the subject are very good, enabling them to explain the work so that students understand. Consequently, students are well motivated and enjoy the challenge to succeed. Most teachers use good questioning techniques and prompts as well as group activities to ensure all students participate in the work of the lessons, both orally and in writing. For example, in a statistics lesson, students discussed in small groups whether the use of the binomial distribution was appropriate in given situations, and then pooled their ideas in a whole group discussion. Occasionally, the pace slips, and the teacher concentrates on helping an individual, while other students wait. Students' class-work is not often marked. It needs to be marked more regularly, with guidance on how best to improve. However, regular use is made of past examination papers to review students' progress. The presentation of students' work would be improved by insistence on the regular use of headings and a date as well as ensuring work is always completed.
71. Results have improved since the last inspection: more high grades are achieved. Teachers are enthusiastic and keen to promote high standards. They work hard and share in the responsibilities of the department. They meet regularly and changes have been introduced to improve results - for example, in the syllabus followed. Day-to-day management is satisfactory. The monitoring and evaluation of the department's work needs to be more frequent and rigorous. An agreed marking

policy would better inform the students how well they are doing. There is no planned approach to the teaching of key skills. To ensure consistency of approach in teaching, opportunities should be found to observe one another. This would enhance the teaching skills of all members of the department.

## Biology

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

### Strengths

- Students achieve well in biology: results are good.
- Students learn well because teachers have good subject knowledge and present ideas clearly.
- Very good use is made of assessment information to provide high standards.
- Individual projects provide good opportunities for research by students.
- Biology is well led and increasing use is made of computers.

### Areas for improvement

- Increase the consistency with which questions are used to prompt individuals and all students to think and make progress.
- Increase the range of library books.
- Replace the hut used as a laboratory which is inadequate.

72. A-level examination results are good and represent good progress from GCSE. The subject is popular and over the last few years students have achieved relatively better in biology than in other subjects, often achieving high results. Males and females achieve equally well. Results of Year 12 AS-level, taken by Year 12 for the first time this year, were a little disappointing, though students have the opportunity to resit.
73. The standard of work of current students in Year 13 is a little above average, overall. Many students are achieving in line with expectation, based on their GCSE performance and some are exceeding this; there is virtually no low achievement. In Year 13, students are drawing on their earlier knowledge to develop understanding of the biochemistry of aerobic respiration. Most understand the function of coenzymes and electron carriers and can work out the ATP yield of the Krebs cycle. A few are forgetful and need reminding of earlier work. Written work is generally good: files are well-kept and organised and provide a good basis for revision. Marking is satisfactory. Students in Year 12 have only just started their course. Many are learning very well and are extending their understanding of the basics of biology - for example, about cell organelles. Impressive presentations were seen of projects on particular organelles. Students were articulate, gave good accurate detail and their talks were well received by other students.
74. Teaching is good overall, leading to good learning. Strengths of teaching include very good subject knowledge, good organisation of lessons and often sharp emphasis on important points. Teachers are enthusiastic about their subject, which engages students' interest. In a lesson seen, a computer presentation was used effectively to illustrate the main stages of biochemical pathways. Students work keenly, listen attentively and most confidently participate in question and answer sessions. They work well collaboratively and are supportive of each other. Lessons usually proceed with good pace. In the best lessons, effective interjection by the teachers makes students think - they are asked challenging questions and reminded about applying earlier knowledge, and prompted to make links, for example, between the structure and function of cell constituents. Occasionally, 'broad brush' guidance, while keeping students on track, does not help them maximise the use of their time for learning, as observed in a lesson on food tests, where not all reactions worked. Students' contributions and knowledge are assessed in lessons through teachers' effective use of questions. Occasionally, teachers talk for too long in lessons, without changing activities. However, students have opportunities to work independently in a variety of ways, notably through individual projects, which contribute to their A-level grades. Projects are of good standard and are highly varied. All include use of statistics and evaluation, for example, of the seasonal variation of fairy shrimp in a local pond and of wildflower populations on a variety of soil types.
75. Biology is well co-ordinated within the science department. Results are better than at the last inspection: more high grades are achieved. Staff are committed to helping students achieve as well as they can. Target-setting, based on GCSE results, is well-established and students are

regularly informed of their progress, in termly reports. A reasonably good range of books is available in teaching rooms though the library is not extensive enough. The use of computers is being improved. One of the two rooms used for biology is a hut. This is inadequate: surfaces vary in height, there is no independent control of the gas supply (when switched off the supply to another room is also affected) and the temperature is difficult to control, making it hard to keep living things. It also presents a hazard for technicians who need to carry materials for lessons around the outside of the building.

## Chemistry

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

### Strengths

- Results are well above average.
- Students have a sound grasp of concepts, which they apply well.
- Teaching is good overall; teachers build well on students' prior learning and make frequent checks to ensure that new work has been fully understood.
- Students' progress is reviewed regularly and targets negotiated in the light of their performance and aspirations.
- Students are very attentive and often help each other; they enjoy their work.
- The department is well led and results show good improvement since the last inspection, particularly for the higher grades at A-level.

### Areas for improvement

- Students are not given enough encouragement to find things out for themselves or speculate about reasons for the phenomena they observe; they do not make sufficient use of computers to help their learning.
- Teachers do not always make sufficient use of visual aids to bring the content alive.
- Comments in marking are not sharply enough focused on what students need to learn in the short term.

76. A-level results have been well above national averages for the last four years, and often in the top twentieth of results for all maintained schools. In 2000, results were outstandingly good. In 2001, results were a little lower, though still well above average: all except one of the students who took the examination gained a pass, with more than half gaining the highest A and B grades. Female students did rather better than their male counterparts. Only one student failed to complete the course. In relation to their GCSE results, students did a little better than expected. Nearly half the students in Year 12 who took the AS-level examination in 2001 gained A or B grades. Overall, the results were a little lower than expected, largely because two students (out of 28) did much less well than they should have done bearing in mind their GCSE grades a year earlier.
77. Standards of work observed of current students in Year 13 are also well above average. They are achieving well in their lessons, and often very well. In one of the lessons seen they made very good progress because the teacher praised them for 'having a go' at explaining the reactions of carboxylic acids that they had just observed. Through their responses to well chosen and carefully directed questions, students were led step-by-step towards an understanding of the similarities and differences between ethanoic and benzoic acids. Almost all students have a sound knowledge of basic concepts, such as neutralisation, and this gives them the confidence to try out their ideas, for example, when predicting the outcomes of reactions.
78. Students in Year 12 are only a little way into their course, but are achieving well in most lessons. In one of the lessons observed, they made very effective use of their prior knowledge about electron arrangements in atoms to speculate about why there are energy changes when electrons move between levels. Students remained very attentive throughout the lesson because the teacher used anecdotes effectively to help them remember, and related the work to their own experience, for example, connecting the coloured light produced when electrons change levels in sodium atoms with street lighting. In some other lessons students' progress is less good, though still satisfactory, because they have too few opportunities to apply their learning or there is insufficient variety in the approach.
79. Teaching is good overall, with many strengths: half the lessons observed were very good. Students learn well as a result. The principal features of the very good teaching include the very

effective use of subject knowledge to give clear explanations; building new learning on what students already know; high expectations of what they can achieve; using praise to encourage involvement in lessons and very good rapport between the teacher and students. During a lesson on carboxylic acids in Year 13, the teacher helped the learning of lower attaining students by explaining clearly how acids react with alcohols to form esters, while at the same time expecting higher attaining students to speculate about possible reaction mechanisms. However, students are given too few opportunities to find things out for themselves, for example, by using information and communication technology or textbooks, and in some lessons the subject matter is not enlivened by the use of visual aids. In part, this is because appropriate resources are not readily available in the department and the range of books in the library is limited. Marking of students' work is up-to-date and teachers usually write detailed comments to help them improve their work. However, some comments are not helpful to lower attaining students because they do not focus sharply enough on short-term learning targets, such as 'know how ionisation energies give evidence for electron arrangements'.

80. Students learn well because they are keen and attentive; they want to do their best for their teachers and to succeed. Attention is held because teachers use good subject knowledge effectively, as when conveying the tentative nature of some theories about the shielding effects of electrons. Very good relationships stem from teachers demonstrating their interest in each student's progress.
81. The independent work undertaken by students is too limited. Though this is partly due to pressure of time following introduction of the new AS-level course, some opportunities are missed in lessons to encourage students to find information for themselves, for example, using texts to explain differences in the flame colours produced by metal compounds.
82. Good teaching and learning result from good leadership. The department is already responding to some of the points made during the inspection. A particular strength of the department is in finding out what students already know - and encouraging them to build on this by negotiating realistic target grades based on teachers' assessments and students' aspirations. A-level results have improved significantly since the last inspection.

## ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

Design and technology is studied at AS and A-level. Food technology, engineering and manufacturing courses are not provided, though elements of work in these courses are covered in design and technology.

### Design and technology

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

#### Strengths

- High standards; results in recent years have been good and they were outstandingly good in 2000.
- Students achieve well: they have good understanding of syllabus requirements and learn quickly through investigating a wide range of technological materials and processes.
- Students have mature attitudes and their independent learning skills are good, benefiting from regular review of their practical work.

#### Areas for improvement

- Take steps to ensure students following the new syllabus make effective progress and achieve well.
- Accommodation and resources: refurbishment of workshops and development in the use of information technology are needed.

83. A-level results up to 2000 were good; they had improved markedly up to 2000, when results were very high: all students gained grades A or B. In 2001, results dipped: they were well below average and no A or B grades were awarded. They were below expectations based on students' GCSE grades and a little below students' results in other subjects. Several students had found completion of design portfolios difficult. Assessment was complicated by two groups of students being entered for different examination boards. Over recent years, males and females have achieved broadly similar results.

84. The work of current students is above average for the beginning of the academic year. Both Year 12 and Year 13 students are achieving well in relation to their GCSE grades and their predicted A-level results. Students have good understanding of designing for functional products and production methods. Large scale 'point-of-sale' promotional advertising stands are both well designed and extremely well made. Shapes and overall form are well proportioned and attractively coloured. Use of colour in design sheets shows a clear understanding of colour theory, the impact of certain colour combinations and the value of colour-coding. 'Tiffany' lamps, designed and made by Year 13 students, show accurate measuring, marking out, cutting and joining. Design sheets show advanced understanding of graphical communication. Designs are strongly individual yet draw on students' knowledge of the work and styles of modern art and craft movements. The best work shows strong influence and understanding of style, such as that of the Art Nouveau, Art Deco and the Bauhaus movements.
85. Year 12 students have made a good start to the course. They identify opportunities for technological activity, are developing an awareness of spatial concepts and how materials and processes influence the strength of joints. Students speak knowledgeably about their work. For example, they understand the influence of technological change on design and the use of new materials. When questioned, they are able to give cogent definitions and explain subtle differences in meaning as, for example, between 'taste', 'fashion', 'style' and 'form'.
86. Teaching is never less than good and often very good. Carefully prepared resources, clearly illustrated demonstrations and well communicated subject knowledge result in effective learning. Expectations are high. Target-setting and regular review of progress help to engage students closely in the improvement of their work. A high level of individual support is given at all times and challenging questions are asked in and out of lessons. Students work safely in the workshops; teaching is rigorous in setting high standards of conduct. A major strength is the reliable, mature attitude of the students. Most are confident, independent learners. They have good study skills and many are dedicated to the subject. Good use is made of information and communication technology for research and for developing designs.
87. The department is well led and managed. Staff have a wide range of expertise and their skills have been enhanced by a recent appointment. Students also benefit from mentoring by a specialist Neighbourhood Engineer. Development plans are good: they identify the main areas which need improvement, including the use of computers for design and for manufacturing. Workshops are inadequate and need replacement. Results are carefully analysed and teaching and syllabuses are reviewed within the school to help students do consistently well. Bearing in mind the good quality of work students are producing this year, it is expected that results will be much better in 2002.

## **BUSINESS**

The focus was on business studies, both A-level and AS-level courses and also the advanced vocational course, for which the first certificates will be awarded in 2002. While a separate course in economics is not provided, elements of the subject are included in geography and sociology.

## Business studies

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

### Strengths

- Teachers have secure subject knowledge and lessons are carefully prepared.
- Students are making good progress in their basic knowledge and understanding of business.
- Effective links are made with local businesses.
- The subject is well led and managed.

### Areas for improvement

- Marking is regular but does not consistently indicate how standards can be improved.
- Access to computers is limited in the business studies room.
- Accommodation in the business studies room does not model modern business environments.

88. Standards overall are good. In the GCE A-level business course, the results in 2001 were above the national average. This is an improvement on 2000 when they were average. While female students generally attain more highly than the majority of males, in 2001, the male students achieved well in relation to their predicted grades. The standards reached by students currently in Year 13, as seen in lessons and in written work, are above average for both male and female students. When account is taken of the students' GCSE grades at the start of the course, this represents good achievement. In Year 12, students were only just completing their third week of the course at the time of the inspection, but already they showed good understanding of the central ideas of the subject, including those related to opportunity-cost, added-value and the stages of production. They were beginning to apply their understanding to the business environment through case studies. Students in Year 13 are progressing well in their current work and achievement is good.
89. The first students to be enrolled on the advanced vocational course, started in 2000 and have completed one year. The proportion of students achieving higher grades on units so far completed is low. The school is still waiting for final grades from the awarding body. When judged in relation to predicted grades (based on GCSE performance), achievement is satisfactory. The standard of students currently in Year 12, at this very early stage of the course, is above average. Both male and female students show a good understanding of business objectives and organisational structures and they use both the Internet and visits to local companies to develop research and independent learning skills. Year 13 students, all male, were observed holding a Young Enterprise directors' meeting and they showed a satisfactory understanding of the concepts associated with setting up a business. A relative weakness is the lack of higher order analytical and evaluative skills.
90. Across the business courses provided, the quality of teaching is good. The teachers' secure subject knowledge underpins discussion and lends clarity to explanations provided. Lessons are carefully planned and case studies are well used to show students how to apply their learning. Students work very well and show considerable interest in the subject and learn effectively. Teachers have developed good links with firms both in the locality and in France, to provide an understanding of how theory is applied in practice. Lessons are conducted at a good pace and expectations are high. Frequent opportunities are provided for the development of independent learning skills. Teachers carry out appropriate assessments and marks are discussed between staff and with students to improve student performance.
91. In the advanced vocational courses a feature of the good teaching is the motivating range of activities provided. A very good example was observed in a lesson on the organisational structure of a local firm where students were clearly motivated by the opportunity to examine business concepts in the real work place. Opportunities are good for group work, for personal involvement with business and the development of independent research skills. The use of business simulations in Year 13 enables students to consider business ideas in realistic way.
92. The leadership and management of the department are good. The staff work closely together and continually review their practice to seek improvements. Courses in business have expanded since the last inspection, and results at A-level have improved. Resources of up-to-date textbooks and business journals within the department are good. The staff work very hard to establish and maintain good links with the world of work. To help students raise the standard of their work, there

is a need to improve the consistency and quality of helpful written comments and to introduce the use of written short-term targets. Problems are created in lessons by the lack of computers in the department. The business education room does not model a real business environment and the present furniture seriously inhibits group work.

## INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

This subject was not included in the detailed inspection of the sixth form. Only two students took the subject at A-level in 2001 (the first time candidates had been entered). Results were satisfactory. Both passed, though no grade higher than C was obtained. Two very good lessons were observed - one in each of Year 12 and Year 13. These indicated well planned and structured courses. The subject was presented with confidence and enthusiasm; teaching showed very good command of the subject. Students' capabilities cover a wide range, with most showing the potential to match course expectations by the end of the year. Many sixth formers make effective use of information technology to help them with their course-work in other subjects.

## HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

The inspection focused on physical education. Courses in leisure and recreation, hospitality and catering, travel and tourism are not provided, though elements of these subjects are satisfactorily covered in other subjects, for example, in geography, sociology and design and technology.

### Physical education

Overall, the quality of provision in physical education is **satisfactory** with some very good qualities.

#### Strengths

- Students' performance portfolios (produced for AS-level) show competent and effective application of a range of theoretical principles to physical performance.
- Teaching is good: the teachers have good subject knowledge and lessons are interesting.
- Sixth form games provision and the standard of individual performance are very good.

#### Areas for improvement

- The range of activities to stimulate independent learning, and more confident use by students of technical language in writing and speaking, need enlarging.
- Acceleration of catching-up on background knowledge for those students who have not taken GCSE physical education.

93. A-level results improved in 2001 but still remain below the national average compared with all schools. However, students achieved grades similar to those in their other subjects and in line with expectation (based on GCSE results). It is difficult to establish a trend as the class-size is generally small and is made up of a wide range of ability. Results for AS-level in 2001 also improved and were a little better than the school average; only a few students achieved below their expected grades.
94. Overall, the students currently in Year 13 produce work that is below expectations for A-level but achieve satisfactorily relative to personal expectations. A few students work at standards above A-level. A particular strength is students' ability to link physical performance with theoretical aspects. This is evident in their personal performance portfolios submitted as AS-level course work. Many portfolios seen included extremely detailed work with accurate use of technical vocabulary and an excellent grasp of principles, intelligently interpreted in relation to students' chosen activities. In other homework assignments, however, many students do not show the same understanding and their notes are poorly organised and often incomplete. They do not provide good material for effective revision.
95. Students in Year 12 have made a satisfactory start to the AS-level course and are achieving satisfactorily, relative to course expectations. Within the group, there is a wide range of abilities partly due to half of the students not having taken GCSE physical education. This is particularly evident in their files, where the standard of note-taking and homework is affected by their lack of background knowledge. The current schemes of work for Years 7 to 11 do not include sufficient

tasks which develop the students' understanding of anatomy, skill acquisition or evaluation of each other's performance.

96. Overall, the teaching of AS and A-levels in physical education is good. The most effective teaching involves interesting explanation of facts, reflecting the teachers' good subject knowledge. An example of this was seen in a lesson on the history of sport, where the students had to determine the difference between reliable and hostile evidence in relation to an account of 'bull running' in the middle ages. This also sparked an interesting debate about the moral aspects of the sport. At this point, the students' debating skills, though emotive, lacked depth of thought and the ability to reason through the argument using technical language. At present, there are too few teaching strategies to develop these skills or to stimulate independent study. Tasks do not always take into account the students' differing starting points in this subject. The lower attaining students struggle and the more able are not fully extended. Homework assignments are regularly and constructively marked, but the students' notes are not checked for completeness or quality.
97. The students respond well to all aspects of examination work and the sixth form programme of games, in which all are expected to take part. The skill level of many students is notably high in games such as netball, football, rugby and hockey. They use advanced strategies and tactics and their fitness is good. They practise in order to refine their skills. Between the teachers and the students there is a caring, mutual respect which creates an effective and supportive learning environment. Students work well in small groups and teams. The more able students work well independently. A few students do not work as diligently as could be expected, especially in the theoretical modules. Some students make good use of computer skills in their homework but information technology skills could be used more effectively within the teaching programme.
98. All courses are well managed and there is determination to improve further the teaching and the standards achieved. A careful analysis of examination results has led to changes in revision techniques and some teaching styles. Standards are about the same as at the last inspection. The lack of a permanent base for theory lessons creates difficulties in establishing a subject-stimulating environment and also in the transportation of resources. The school has an excellent range of extra-curricular activities which contributes very effectively to developing the students' confidence and skills.

## **HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE**

The school does not teach courses in this area, but aspects of health and social care are taught elsewhere, for example, in biology, physical education and sociology.

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

The inspection focused on art and drama; in both subjects GCE courses are studied at AS and A-level. Lessons in music and media studies were also sampled. Few students have taken A-level music recently and the last results (in 2000) were below average. Inspection evidence suggests that the next results will be high. In the Year 12 music lesson observed with a talented student, teaching and the student's progress in composition were excellent. A small number of students took media studies at A-level in 2001 and their results were in line with the national average; five students took AS-level and results were reasonably good. Standards were above average in the Year 12 lesson observed: students developed good understanding of the use of colour to convey meaning.



## Art

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

### Strengths

- Results are above average and improving.
- Work by current students is very good and by Year 13 they have developed personal styles.
- Challenging and well-planned lessons enable students to learn very effectively.
- The curriculum is rich in depth and breadth, including two- and three-dimensional work, textiles and print-making.
- The subject is well managed; the needs of students and syllabus requirements are well met.

### Areas for improvement

- The use of discussion to enable students to develop their ideas further.
- Accommodation: students do not have space to work uninterrupted on large-scale items.

99. A-level results are above the national average. In 2000, all students gained grade C or above and, in 2001, no student achieved less than grade D. In 2001, the proportion of students gaining the highest grades (A, B) was about average; students' results in art were a little better than in their other subjects. Results for AS-level in 2001 were above average. More females than males take the subject and their achievements are broadly similar.
100. Current work is of a high standard: students are achieving well. Year 13 students study the art and styles of modern artists and movements in a very critical and analytical way and develop work of their own for prints and sculpture. Much of their work is based on sound drawing skills. For example, detailed drawings of natural forms provide rich pattern quality which students develop for textile screen-prints and fashion items. Tasks challenge and develop students' independent research skills as they investigate the lives and work of major artists. Their findings often result in exquisitely illustrated personal studies, demonstrating deep insight into the aims, objectives and methods used by artists. Students in Year 13 have developed personal styles; their work shows independence of mind and aesthetic awareness.
101. Year 12 students build well on their drawing skills and knowledge of the art elements gained during their GCSE courses. The process of exploration, investigation and documentation is extended and developed to include more advanced skills, for example, selected parts of self-portraits are adapted to make engravings on acrylic sheet material. Prints from these show good technical knowledge and lively, expressive line quality. Work on display and in folders demonstrates an above-average understanding of a wide range of media and crafts. The range of scale is also impressive, from detailed cleverly constructed ceramic reliefs, to large abstract mixed media compositions, using striking colour combinations.
102. The quality of teaching is very good. Inspirational, enthusiastic teaching provides rich experiences for students. Courses and lessons are well planned to cover examination requirements and assessment criteria. Challenging work and targets are set which extend students' visual and spatial awareness. Expectations are high and related to the considerable experience and varied technical knowledge of the teacher. Evaluation and assessment are rigorous and very good one-to-one tuition, based on knowledge of individual needs, results in secure learning.
103. Students respond well to the teaching style and richness of media. They use their time effectively. They have a good knowledge of materials and processes and problem-solving techniques. Good working relationships are formed among peers and with teaching staff. Students are clear about how well they are doing and what is needed to improve their work; however, they could be given more opportunity to develop their ideas in open group discussion. Study skills in relation to the subject are good. Students make good use of information technology and the Internet to extend their learning.
104. The work is extremely well planned and managed. Results are better than at the last inspection, and are improving. The new courses offer a wide range of opportunities and scope for individuality in art and design work. Unfortunately, the accommodation is cramped. The department does not have a designated room for sixth formers to use as a studio, which limits their opportunities to work for sustained periods on individual projects and thereby their creativity and achievement.

## Drama

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

### Strengths

- Teaching is very good and learning good.
- Students show enthusiasm in practical work.
- Schemes of work are carefully planned to deliver the new syllabus.
- Extra-curricular opportunities are good for all sixth form students.

### Areas for improvement

- Accommodation is unsatisfactory and restricts what teachers can do and how much students learn.
- The splitting of double lessons by break or lunchtime leads to inefficient use of time.

105. In 2001, results in A-level drama were broadly in line with the national average, though few students gained the highest grades (A, B). Results have been similar over the past few years, though student numbers are small which makes comparison difficult. In 2001, students achieved results in line with predicted grades, with a few exceeding them. The results of male and female students are similar and in line with their results in other subjects. In Year 13, one student gained an AS-level. All eleven students in Year 12 achieved an AS grade, doing a little better overall than in other subjects. While half of the group did much better, a few did not achieve quite as highly as in their other subjects.
106. In lessons and work seen during the inspection, standards in drama were average. The group in Year 12 is much larger than the one in Year 13 and there is a wide range of ability in both classes. In Year 12, the students are only in their second full week of the school year and two-thirds are new to the school. They have settled in well and already form a cohesive group. It is too soon, however, to assess their written work. In practical tasks, students can read from a script fluently and accurately, paying good attention to pause for effect. More able students adopt a role easily in rehearsal, while the less able find concentration more difficult and their voice projection is weak. Students show excellent collaborative skills. They listen to one another and share ideas, which lead to improved performance. They understand the purpose of repetition in a piece of dialogue – the ‘oh’ in Beckett’s *Come and Go*, for example – and the basic concepts of the theatre of the Absurd. Students are beginning to see the importance of non-verbal communication, such as gesture and facial expression, and the powerful effect it can have on an audience.
107. In Year 13, students enter a role and sustain it well. They use space effectively and work together closely, as when creating a human cage. In group work, they use body language well in developing a piece, and realise the value of silence. Less able students are less imaginative and are reluctant to take risks. Orally, they evaluate their own and others’ performance, often developing critical points constructively. In writing, students reflect in depth on performance and how to improve. For example, one student wrote sincerely about how he found it difficult to sustain concentration when not involved in the play’s action and how, by focusing on a chosen object, he overcame this weakness. Students review productions visited, such as *Noises Off* (Frayn) and *Bedroom Farce* (Ayckbourn). They evaluate performance in clearly structured sentences, exemplifying their views, though the less able express themselves vaguely and more briefly. Their learning about the theatre of Brecht, Beckett and Stanislavsky helps them in planning their own devised pieces. Students make effective use of the Internet in research to assist coursework – on schizophrenia, for example.
108. Teaching in drama is very good, with excellent features, while learning through individual tasks is good, sometimes better. Weaknesses in accommodation and in timetable provision limit students’ consolidation of their learning, while the teacher works very hard to minimise the difficulties. The teacher has very good subject knowledge, which enables her to ask key questions about students’ performance. This leads to rapid improvement. Lesson planning is excellent, with activities well sequenced to take students from safe to challenging tasks. For example, a Year 12 lesson began with a number game, which assessed students’ powers of observation and concentration, and concluded with groups performing their own creations, inspired by Beckett’s *Come and Go*. As a result, students acquired drama skills rapidly, gained in confidence and excelled themselves in performance. Very good opportunities to evaluate performance were provided, as in most lessons. The teacher uses this evaluation to help students to improve.

109. A strong feature of drama lessons is the excellent relationship between teacher and student, and amongst students themselves. This means students support one another, take risks without fear of ridicule and collaborate very effectively, respecting one another's views. Written work is conscientiously marked - the teacher's comments showing students how to do better.
110. Learning is not always as good as teaching. To a large extent, this is because of deficiencies in accommodation. The drama studio is small and remote from the main school (near one of the boarding houses). Most drama classes take place in a classroom or the hall, shared with physical education classes, where the acoustics are poor. The teacher plans very carefully to lessen the disadvantage. Another factor affecting learning is the time-tabling of double lessons either side of a break or lunchtime. The teacher has to remotivate the students, who need to warm up again, and this is an inefficient use of time.
111. The subject is well co-ordinated. Schemes of work include good detail, in line with the examination syllabus, giving appropriate time to both practical work and theory. Extra-curricular opportunities to take part in house drama competitions or the school musical enrich the sixth form curriculum for all students. Written and practical work is regularly assessed and information used in future planning. The teacher is very enthusiastic and committed to helping every individual do as well as possible.
112. Since the last inspection good standards have been maintained, and now all students obtain a grade. The school recognises the need to improve accommodation and there are plans for a new drama studio in the school development plan.

## **HUMANITIES**

Of the humanities subjects, none was the feature of a focused report. (Religious education was inspected separately because of the Church of England status of the school.) Recent A-level results for humanities subjects have been very good. For several years, results in sociology have been well above the national average and they improved further in 2001 (six of eight students gained grade A and all passed). Results in history and geography are generally above average and in 2001 history results improved - they were very good. In recent years, a few students have taken other humanities subjects - for example, Latin and ancient history. Generally they have achieved as well as in their other subjects.

During the inspection, Year 12 lessons were sampled in history, psychology (newly introduced this year) and sociology. Learning was satisfactory in psychology, in which a substantial number of students are enrolled. They were still coming to terms with the discipline of the subject, which is novel to them. In history, learning was good and in sociology very good, in response to challenging teaching, which encouraged students to think for themselves - about contemporary families, for example. Year 13 lessons were sampled in geography and history. Students contributed and learned well in both lessons. Attainment was in line with expectations for A-level in geography and high in history, in which students showed good analytical skills in understanding Anglo-German relations between 1918 and 1939.

## **ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION**

The focus was on English language and literature, but French and German were also sampled. In French, examination results in 2001 were very high (the four students who took the A-level examination achieved results at grades A and B) and better than in recent years, when results have been broadly average. Two students did much better than expected considering their GCSE results, and two did a little less well. After one year in the sixth form, the seven students taking AS-level French all achieved grades which were not quite as good as their grades in other subjects, though they have opportunity to resit and improve their grades. Few students take German at A-level. In recent years, the results of individual students have been in line with expectations; all have passed and, in 2001, grades A and B were achieved at A-level. In both Year 13 lessons observed, teaching was good. The teachers' very good subject knowledge, of French and of German, helped students to make good progress in improving their skills in oral and written work.

### **English**

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

### Strengths

- Teaching and learning are consistently good.
- Students have positive attitudes and work hard.
- Schemes of work for the new syllabus are well focused on examination requirements.
- The co-ordination of sixth form work is efficient and systematic.

### Areas for improvement

- Resources, including library provision, are inadequate to deliver the new course effectively.
- The splitting of double lessons by break or lunchtime leads to inefficient use of time.

## English language and literature

113. In 2001, the proportions of students achieving pass grades (A-E) and the higher grades (A, B) at A-level were well above the national averages (compared with 2000 results for English language), and an improvement on the results in 2000. In literature, results have improved steadily over the past three years, but fell back in 2001, and matched the national average for 2000. Few obtained the higher grades (A, B). In 2001, the grades achieved in language were much better than predicted, while those in literature were in line with expectations. In comparison with other school subjects, results in literature were a little below average, while results in language were better. (However, comparison should be treated with caution, because of the low numbers entered.) Two Year 13 students gained good grades in AS-level language and literature, but results in Year 12 were not as good as expected and the school has queried them. In sixth form English examinations, female students do better than male students, as nationally.
114. In lessons and work seen during the inspection, standards are in line with expectations of sixth form work in both Years 12 and 13, where classes encompass a wide range of ability. In Year 12, the 26 students are only into the second full week of the school year so it is not possible to judge standards of written work. However, orally they achieve well. They discuss their work fluently, listening courteously to others and responding appropriately. While less able students find it difficult to develop an argument, the more able have a wide enough vocabulary to express sophisticated ideas, as in a lesson on the brochure *School for Grooming*. Students use knowledge of prior reading – such as *Animal Farm* and *The Long and the Short and the Tall* – to help them understand their new work on the literature of World War One.
115. In Year 13, students achieve well. They examine speeches from *Othello*, commenting on linguistic features and what these reveal about the character of Iago. While more able students read beneath the surface for deeper meaning, the less able adopt a more literal approach. When reading aloud, students of all abilities read fluently and with expression. In discussion work, students speak clearly and many develop a point of view with clarity. Written assignments show students have a sound knowledge of the history of language and how it was affected by invasions from overseas. Essays on the poetry of Wilfred Owen, and the students' own poetry, show a sensitive appreciation of language and how it achieves its effect. In some essays, punctuation is missed and spelling inconsistent. Technical accuracy, however, is satisfactory overall. While many achieve a formal tone, as when writing about the origins of language, others write as they speak. Students have developed a good range of writing skills to suit literature essays, comments on films and newspapers, discussions of children's literature, such as *The BFG*, and their own creative writing. Work is well presented, assisted by word-processing.
116. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge, which enables them to pose telling questions about the linguistic features of a text to assess students' understanding. As a result, students learn rapidly and develop an interest in their work. Lessons are very well planned to involve all students in activities. For example, group discussion is a feature of lessons, as in a Year 13 class where students discussed how Iago manipulated Othello's mind. Because they collaborate well, students learn much from one another and work hard. Teachers provide good stimulus material. In a Year 12 lesson, students were given an image of Picasso's *Guernica* and this resulted in lively discussions on the pain of warfare. The teacher's follow-up reading from a *Child's Diary from Bosnia* led students to reflect further on human suffering. Marking is good. Comments help students to see how to raise their grade. Regular written assignments give practice in using the technical vocabulary of linguistics and in developing a style suited to literary criticism. This is helping to raise standards in writing.

117. The head of department provides good leadership and management. She has planned well for the new course in combined language and literature and given considerable thought to the choice of syllabus, which links well with GCSE work, and the department's strategy of teaching language through literature. Schemes of work are good because they provide for full coverage of examination requirements. Sixth form work is well co-ordinated. The three teachers involved meet regularly and minutes are recorded. As a result, students' progress is well monitored and there is continuity between activities. Teachers' strengths are considered when apportioning the examination work and this helps students' learning. Within the department there is a very clear commitment to raise attainment.
118. Teachers use resources well, but there are insufficient texts available – both in the classroom and the library – to support the new courses, and not enough overhead projectors to enable the close-text study to be taught effectively. The department has no office and so information and materials for English teachers are not centralised. A further hindrance to learning is the time-tabling of double lessons split by break or lunchtime. This means the teacher has to introduce the lesson objectives twice and re-engage students' concentration, which is an inefficient use of time.
119. Since the last inspection, improvement has been good. It is difficult to make direct comparisons since syllabuses have changed markedly, but standards have been maintained, all students have obtained a pass grade in recent years and a good proportion achieve the highest grades (A, B). Groups continue to fluctuate in number and ability.