

INSPECTION REPORT

ALSAGER SCHOOL

Alsager
Stoke-on-Trent

LEA area: Cheshire

Unique reference number: 111404

Headteacher: Mr. David Black

Reporting inspector: Linda Humphreys
7956

Dates of inspection: 26th-30th November 2001

Inspection number: 190349

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: Community

Age range of pupils: 11-19 years

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Hassall Road
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Appropriate authority: The Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Mr Ian White

Date of previous inspection: November 1996

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Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
7956	Linda Humphreys	<i>Registered inspector</i>		What sort of school is it? How well are students taught?
9652	Colin Herbert	<i>Lay inspector</i>		How well does the school care for its students? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
23246	John Mitchell	<i>Team inspector</i>	Physics;	The school's results and students' achievements. How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils or students?
8756	Pat Hanage	<i>Team inspector</i>	Mathematics; Equality of opportunity.	
8157	Pam Haezewindt	<i>Team inspector</i>	French.	
22906	Barry Hodgson	<i>Team inspector</i>	Physical Education.	
4417	Peter Stevens	<i>Team inspector</i>		Students' attitudes, values and personal development; How well is the school led and managed?
15940	Norman Godfrey	<i>Team inspector</i>	Art.	
19043	David Lewis	<i>Team inspector</i>	Biology; Chemistry.	
13189	Pamela Walton	<i>Team inspector</i>	Design and technology.	
18989	Bernard Mason	<i>Team inspector</i>	English; Theatre studies.	
4483	Jean-Pierre Kirkland	<i>Team inspector</i>	Business studies; Psychology.	
30216	Adrian Elliott	<i>Team inspector</i>	Politics.	
13122	Stephanie Matthews	<i>Team inspector</i>	History.	
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Alsager School is a mixed comprehensive school, larger than most schools, with 1600 pupils aged 11-19, an increase of about 100 pupils since the last inspection. It is the only secondary school in the town, and also draws about 20 per cent of its pupils from neighbouring Staffordshire. The school is over subscribed, and has relatively little difficulty in recruiting staff: there are no unfilled teaching vacancies. The school serves a relatively advantaged community, and only 5.5 per cent of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is lower than in most schools. There are very few pupils from ethnic minority groups, and a very small proportion has English as an additional language. The attainment of pupils when they enter the school is well above average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is broadly average, which is an increase since the last inspection, and although eight pupils have statements of special educational need compared with four in 1996 this is still fewer than in most schools. Since the last inspection the school has gained Training School status in partnership with another school in the area and Keele University, and has gained Investors in People, Investors in Careers, Sportsmark and Schools' Curriculum Awards.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a very good school. Standards are well above average and pupils achieve well. Teaching is good and pupils are confident, keen to learn and very well behaved. The school is very well led and managed. Since the last inspection, GCSE results have improved considerably and high standards have been maintained in the sixth form. As costs are about average, the school provides very good value for money.

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

- Standards of attainment are well above average and pupils achieve well.
- Attendance is well above average.
- Teaching and learning are good, and very good in the sixth form.
- Pupils are eager to learn and prepared to work hard; relationships are very good and pupils enjoy learning.
- The school cares for its pupils very well.
- The school is very well led and managed.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

- Statutory requirements for a daily Act of collective worship and for religious education in the sixth form are not met.
- Provision for spiritual development, which was a key issue at the last inspection, is still unsatisfactory.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made good progress since the last inspection. Results in GCSE examinations have increased significantly, improving faster than the national trend. Sixth form results in A-Level declined in 2000 after four relatively stable years but improved in 2001, and inspection evidence confirms that this rise is likely to continue. Good progress has been made with all the key issues identified in the last inspection, with the exception of a daily act of worship, religious education in the sixth form, and the planned provision for spiritual development.

STANDARDS

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

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

Key	
<i>well above average</i>	A
<i>above average</i>	B
<i>average</i>	C
<i>below average</i>	D
<i>well below average</i>	E

Pupils enter the school with above average standards of attainment. They achieve well and standards in Year 9 are well above average. Results in GCSE examinations are well above the average both nationally and in similar schools, and have risen over the past five years at a faster rate than the national trend. The school sets challenging targets, and standards have risen. Standards in the sixth form are also well above average. Drops in A-Level results in the last two years reflect the admission of a wider range of students, although results in 2001 are still above average.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils are eager to learn and keen to rise to the challenge of constantly improving their work.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships are very good. Pupils are responsible and show concern for the school and the wider community.
Attendance	Well above average.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Teaching is good in all subjects in Years 7 to 11, including English, mathematics and science. Literacy and numeracy skills are very well taught, and they support work in all subjects very well. The school meets the needs of all pupils well. The characteristic features of the effective teaching are teachers' good subject knowledge, effective structured planning, skilled questioning, the brisk pace and good use of time, high expectations of both behaviour and work, and good management of pupils. In the sixth form these strengths are augmented by good use of discussion, and good planning for the development of independent learning skills. There are no consistent significant weaknesses.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good. In particular, the sixth form curriculum matches students' aspirations and local circumstances very well.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Provision for special educational needs is good. Initiatives for support in literacy and numeracy are raising the standards achieved by these pupils.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	The very small number of these pupils requires no special provision and they are well served by what the school offers.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Provision is broadly satisfactory, but provision for spiritual development, a key issue at the last inspection, remains unsatisfactory.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school cares for pupils very well, making them secure and confident. Pupils' progress is monitored well, and promoted effectively through target setting and mentoring in Years 10 and 11.

The curriculum includes drama in Years 7 to 9, and most pupils in these years study two languages. There is no compulsory religious education in the sixth form: this was a key issue at the last inspection. However, there are AS- and A-Level courses, and a religious education element in the general studies course.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Leadership and management are very good.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors fulfil their responsibilities very effectively. They are active in monitoring the school's work and in planning for the future.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Arrangements for evaluating the school's work are very good, and they have improved teaching and learning and the standards attained.
The strategic use of resources	Resources are well used, and spending decisions have improved the curriculum and the building.

Governors, the headteacher, and senior staff have created an ethos which fulfils the school's aim to be a caring and achieving community school. The school is businesslike and efficient in securing best value.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school's high expectations. • The progress children make. • The way the school helps children to become mature and responsible. • The quality of teaching, extra-curricular activities and the approachability of the school. • The way the school is led and managed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The information about how their child is getting on. • Homework. • How closely the school works with parents.

The inspection team's judgements confirm parents' positive views. Some parents feel that too much homework is set, and that sometimes its nature is relatively trivial. Inspection findings confirm the concerns about the nature of a small minority of homework tasks but, in general, homework reinforces schoolwork well. The school's systems for informing parents, and for working with parents, are good.

ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM

ALSAGER SCHOOL

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

Alsager School sixth form is larger than sixth forms in most schools, with 172 students in Year 12 and 154 in Year 13, which is an increase of 65 students since the last inspection. Most pupils choose to continue into the sixth form, which offers AS and A-Level courses: those seeking vocational courses go on to local further education colleges, which offer a wide range of courses. The students in the sixth form reflect the nature of the school population as a whole. Attainment when students begin sixth form courses is above average, although in the last two years the entry requirements for AS courses have been lowered, and a greater number of students now stays on to follow the academic courses offered by the school.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The sixth form is very effective, provides very good value for money and is very well led and managed. Standards of attainment are well above average and students achieve well. This is because teaching and learning are very good, and the needs of all students are well met by the range of courses available, and by the very effective procedures for supporting students. The high quality of education has been sustained since the last inspection.

STRENGTHS

- Standards of attainment are well above average and students achieve well.
- Students are eager to learn and are prepared to work hard.
- The high quality of relationships underpins the success of the sixth form.
- Teaching is very good.
- Students are well supported and guided.
- Leadership and management are very good.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

- The quality of the provision for supported private study (which the school calls self study) in some subjects.
- Provision for spiritual development, including compliance with the statutory requirement for religious education.
- Procedures for comparing students' progress with national data could be developed further in some 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	Good. Standards are above average and achievement is good. Students enjoy mathematics and work hard, responding well to good teaching. Teachers make good use of assessment to help students improve their work.
Chemistry	Very good. Standards are well above average and achievement is good. The quality of education provided is very good. Students develop very good experimental skills.
Biology	Very good. Standards are well above average and achievement is good. Teaching is very good and, with students' excellent attitudes to work, leads to very good learning.
Physics	Very good. Standards are well above average and rising, and achievement is good. Teaching is good. Students' attitudes and leadership and management are very good.
Design and technology	Very good. Standards are consistently well above average and achievement is very good. Teaching, and the use of ICT, is very good. The subject is very well led and managed.
Business studies	Very good. Students achieve well. Teaching and learning are very good, with excellent use of ICT. Leadership and management are very good and focus on raising standards.
Physical	Good. Standards are average and achievement is satisfactory. Teaching

education	and relationships are good. The range of accredited courses is narrow.
Art	Very good. Standards seen are above average, students achieve very well, and teaching and learning are very good. Staff expertise provides a wide range of media.
Drama and theatre studies	Good. Teaching is very good and students achieve well. Students are very enthusiastic and the course is gaining in popularity. Facilities for sound and lighting are very good.
Geography	Good. A-Level results are below average, but improving, and achievement is satisfactory. Good teaching and good provision for key skills helps students to improve.
History	Very good. Standards are well above average and students achieve well. Teaching is very good. Students value the opportunities to take responsibility for their own work.
Government and politics	Very good. Results are above average and achievement is very good. Teaching is very good and the department is well led.
Psychology	Very good. Very good teaching, curriculum, and leadership and management ensure good achievement and well above average attainment.
English literature	Very good. Attainment is above average and students achieve well. Teaching and learning, and students' attitudes, are very good. The subject is well led and managed.
French	Good. Standards are above average. Students achieve well as a result of good teaching and very good attitudes to the subject.

The same high quality of teaching and learning was seen in the other sixth form areas observed, resulting in similar high standards. General studies lessons focused well on examination requirements. Key skills and non-examination lessons and activities were well organised and effective, with the exception of one tutor group session on target-setting, which failed to capture the interest of some students.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Procedures for monitoring and supporting students' academic progress are very good. Students receive good guidance on subject choices before they join the sixth form. Personal support and guidance by a secure and well organised tutor system is very good. Careers guidance, which had been a relative weakness, is now improving.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Leadership and management of the sixth form are very effective in promoting teaching and learning which lead to standards well above average. Governors and senior staff plan, monitor and direct the work of the sixth form very well. The relatively recent change in admission policy has enabled a wider range of students to continue their education at the school with evident success.

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">• Teaching is challenging and encourages high standards.• Relationships with teachers.• Good choice of courses to cater for a wide range of interests and aspirations.• The support for independent study.• The ambience in the sixth form.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Guidance for choice of courses on entry to the sixth form.• The quality of information about progress.

The inspection team agrees with most of what students like about the sixth form. However, the opportunities for supported independent learning are not of good quality in a few subjects. The guidance on choosing subjects was found to be good. Arrangements for keeping students informed about their progress are good: a relatively new system is developing well, but the negotiating of target grades is not consistently effective in every subject.

COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

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

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Standards of attainment are well above average and pupils achieve well.

1. Pupils enter the school in Year 7 with above average standards of attainment. They make good progress in Years 7 and 8, resulting in good achievement, and reach well above average standards in their work in Year 9. Results in national tests at age 14 are well above what is achieved nationally. There are several factors that contribute to this better than expected achievement. Attendance is well above the national average, and pupils come to lessons prepared for learning and work hard. Good teaching helps pupils to develop effective study skills and further enhances their positive attitudes to school. Conscientious completion of homework is another factor enabling pupils to consolidate and apply their knowledge and newly acquired skills. At the beginning of Year 7, all available information is used to identify any pupils who need additional support, especially with literacy and numeracy, in order that they have the necessary levels of basic skills to support their studies. For example, some pupils may need to improve their handwriting, others their spelling. The diagnosis is used to place these pupils in an effective programme of literacy and numeracy “catch up” and support groups, which are key factors in ensuring that all pupils achieve well.

2. During Years 10 and 11, teachers and pupils work hard to maintain well above average standards. Results in GCSE examinations in 2001 are well above the national average, and the proportion of pupils who gain at least five pass grades is very high. Most significantly, these results are well above average when compared both with those of schools with similar economic circumstances and with those of schools with similar results in Year 9 tests in 1999. This indicates just how successful this school is. Over the past five years, GCSE results have increased faster than the national rising trend. In addition to the key factors improving progress in the earlier years, an individual target-setting programme for each subject is introduced in Year 10. These targets are discussed with pupils, and their progress towards them is regularly monitored. Pupils who are not doing as well as expected are given the support of a mentor from the senior staff team. This early identification and prompt action, making good use of assessment data, is a contributory factor in the very good progress pupils make by the end of Year 11. Good teaching ensures individual attention, and an appropriate curriculum provides suitable challenge and variety so that the achievement of all pupils is very good.

3. Standards in the sixth form are also well above average. Results in A-Level examinations in 2001 are above average. Some very good results were achieved in AS-Level examinations, where, as yet, there are no data with which to make national comparisons. Retention rates are good. The standard of work seen during the inspection matches what the examination results would indicate and in some subjects is better.

4. Over the four years from 1996, when the school was last inspected, to 1999, the school sustained above average results. In 2000 there was a sudden drop, and, broadly speaking, results in 2001 are fairly similar to those of the previous year. This would appear to reflect the wider range of prior attainment of students entering the sixth form as a result of the school's change in admission policy. All students achieve well in nearly all subjects, reaching standards above those predicted from their GCSE results. This success is the result of very good teaching and of students' own commitment to succeed.

5. In all key stages, the very small number of pupils from ethnic minorities achieve as well as their peers. There is a much smaller gap between the attainment of boys and girls here than in most schools. The school successfully achieves its aim of encouraging each pupil to fulfil his or her potential.

Attendance is well above average

6. Attendance and punctuality are very good.

Teaching and learning are good, and very good in the sixth form

7. The high quality of teaching is a major factor in the high standards attained. There is no unsatisfactory teaching. In Key Stages 3 and 4, 69 per cent of teaching is at least good, with 35 per cent very good, and an example of excellent teaching. In the sixth form, where twice as many lessons were observed, 90 per cent of teaching is at least good, of which 40 per cent is very good and 10 per cent excellent.

8. The characteristic features of the effective teaching are teachers' good subject knowledge, effective structured planning, skilled questioning, the brisk pace and good use of time, high expectations of both behaviour and work, and good management of pupils. In the sixth form these strengths are augmented by good use of discussion, and good planning for the development of independent learning skills.

9. Teachers have good knowledge of what they are teaching, of how best to teach it and of how pupils learn. For example, in a technology lesson, the teacher's confidence in her knowledge provided a good role model for pupils and inspired enthusiasm. A science lesson with older pupils on the subject of the heart included a well-explained presentation of how the heart works, with skilful emphasis on scientific vocabulary, followed by an arresting demonstration. Teachers' knowledge is sometimes shown in the emphasis on the use of correct terminology in many subjects, including design and technology and mathematics, and in the choice of examples, such as the Robbie Williams song used to motivate pupils in a music lesson on note values. Sometimes this knowledge is evident in the quality of the written guidance provided.

10. Knowledge of the subject is often linked with good knowledge of the pupils' individual learning needs. In a literacy lesson for lower attainers in Year 7, pupils were given a range of activities which enabled all them to reinforce and consolidate their knowledge and understanding of adjectives at a level appropriate to the needs of each.

11. This awareness of what the group needs is used when teachers plan. Careful, structured planning is a feature of the best teaching. In most lessons, a sequence of varied activities keeps pupils interested and on their toes. In a swimming lesson, younger pupils worked through a series of progressively more difficult practices matched to their levels of skill, which helped them make good progress in improving their technique and the standard of their performance. A mathematics lesson presented a series of short, linked activities which helped pupils to make good progress in developing understanding of, for example, the generation of random numbers, and included very good provision for lower attaining pupils. In some of the lessons which are satisfactory rather than good, the planning does not take enough account of individual needs. In a lesson introducing desk top publishing software to a mixed ability group, there was not enough direct teaching to enable lower attainers to understand what the software was doing. In one or two lessons, the activities included were limited in scope and missed opportunities to include a wider range of skills.

12. This careful, structured planning is often linked to an expectation that pupils will get through a significant amount of work, and a brisk pace is usually engendered, to which pupils invariably respond very well. High expectations of the amount and quality of work are linked to high expectations of behaviour. Nearly all pupils are keen to learn and ready to concentrate and work hard. On the rare occasions where this is less evident, teachers usually manage pupils very well. Low-key intervention is normally sufficient to establish order, and the structure and variety of activities normally sustains pupils' interest. In a few cases, the difficult layout of accommodation presents a particular problem for supervising the whole class at one time.

13. A particular feature of the effective teaching is the skilled use of questioning. Teachers use questions to revise previous learning at the beginning of lessons, and to review learning at the close. A Year 9 mathematics lesson started with a very effective quick-fire question session, in which sharp, searching questions involved the whole class and covered a large amount in a short time. Skilled questioning is often used to develop knowledge and understanding of new work. This takes a variety of forms. In a mathematics lesson, questioning was low key to encourage Year 7 pupils to try to answer questions on difficult concepts. Clear, focused questions on each element of the Schlieffen Plan ensured that pupils understood each section clearly before progressing to the next. The subtlety of the range of questioning ensures that pupils develop confidence, greater knowledge, or deeper understanding. Questioning is particularly well used in the sixth form to probe the details of students' knowledge and to push their thinking still further.

14. In the sixth form, most subjects plan very effectively for the proportion of time given to supported self-study, which contributes very well to developing study habits and confidence in independent learning.

Pupils are eager to learn and prepared to work hard, relationships are very good and pupils enjoy learning

15. Pupils' attendance, behaviour, and attitudes to work are all very good. This is a significant strength of the school and a major factor contributing to the high standards achieved and the ethos of the school.

16. Pupils display very positive attitudes towards work and their learning. They are eager to come to school, and involve themselves enthusiastically in a wide range of activities, making good use of the variety of opportunities provided. They arrive promptly at lessons and settle quickly. Self-motivation is a feature of most lessons, whether in a literacy lesson in Year 7 or a biology lesson in the sixth form. This is also a key element in the success of the school's organisation by which a proportion of sixth form curriculum time is supported self-study rather than timetabled lessons. Pupils listen attentively, interest and concentration are well sustained, and enjoyment and involvement in learning are evident across subjects and throughout the different age groups. For example, Year 7 pupils thoroughly enjoyed a music lesson in which they were given a variety of tasks, carefully directed by the teacher. These tasks, which included evaluating each other's work and singing, led to significant progress. Pupils show a clear desire to improve their performance, rise to challenging tasks, and take pride in the finished product. This may be a lino cut print, an airline tray meal, the ability to solve linear equations, or a concerned understanding of the problems of homelessness.

17. Pupils collaborate effectively when engaged in group work; they listen carefully to each other's ideas and opinions, and express their own ideas with confidence. Whilst these features are strongly in evidence in the sixth form, many opportunities are provided for pupils to develop these skills as they move through the school.

18. The school is an orderly community, with a calm and purposeful atmosphere in which pupils feel safe and secure. Behaviour is consistently very good both in and out of the classroom and in all aspects of school life. Despite narrow, cramped corridors and staircases, movement around the school is calm and responsible. A minimum of unobtrusive supervision from staff is all that is required. Whilst exclusions have risen since the time of the last inspection, they are low when compared with other schools and do not indicate worsening behaviour.

19. Relationships between pupils and with adults are very good. Pupils show openness and warmth, and in turn they appreciate their teachers' encouragement and support, and the atmosphere of mutual respect. Students in the sixth form appreciate being treated like adults. Very good social relationships play a very positive part in enhancing the personal development of pupils. There is a wide range of extra-curricular activities, both at lunchtime and after school, and these are well attended. Activities are planned within year groups, and they provide opportunities for personal development and often reflect concern for the wider community. They include an adventure weekend in Year 7, and planning, preparing and serving lunch for parents at a local hotel. They also involve sponsoring a child in Kenya, and taking part in Christmas charity work in Year 8. Sixth form students help in aspects of the school's work with younger pupils, and work with a local special school. Pupils and students are willing to take on responsibilities and they carry out their duties well, whether as class monitor, member of the school council or member of the sixth form committee.

The school cares for its pupils very well

20. The school takes very good care of all of its pupils. This is particularly important in such a large school, and the school's systems ensure that all pupils feel secure and confident. The success of the school's care can be seen in how pupils enjoy coming to school, a fact remarked on by a large number of parents, and in their keenness to learn and willingness to work hard to achieve the high standards of which the school is proud.

21. This high quality of care is underpinned by the very effective pastoral system and the very good relationships that exist between all members of the school community. In this respect the school totally meets its aim to be a caring community. Parents also have very positive views about the care shown towards their children by the school. The foundation of care that is established when pupils arrive in Year 7 is maintained at the same high standard throughout their time in the main school. Members of the leadership group, senior tutors and form tutors all play an integral and very effective part in creating and maintaining the year group 'families' in school. The effect of this system is that all members of staff know their pupils very well and any concerns can be dealt with promptly, effectively and sensitively.

22. Assessment procedures are very good. There are detailed systems to track attainment. The analysis of examination and test results is now put to good use across each phase to monitor group and individual progress. Information is then used to set targets for improvement for individual pupils, and to inform teaching and learning and develop curriculum practice. Pupils know their targets and can talk about their progress. Practice in Key Stage 4 is very detailed and results in mentoring for underachieving pupils. However, there is little tracking against national comparators.

23. To support learning and to provide a safe and secure environment for the large community, there is a number of very effective procedures for health and safety and child protection, and these are well managed through clear allocation of responsibilities. A very good example of the thoroughness the school applies to safety is the process of risk assessment, which is completed before every school visit. A recent school visit to Barcelona

was analysed in depth before the departure date to identify and then minimise any likely problems.

24. The school also makes very good use of support agencies to work closely with its own staff, including the Visyon counselling organisation. The school has recently entered into a partnership agreement with Connexions, which will bring many aspects of pupil care, including careers advice, under one umbrella. Sixth form students, who felt that the school has not always been proactive in providing careers guidance, are now more confident with the arrangements for them.

The school is very well led and managed

25. Governors and senior staff are very effective in creating an ethos which fulfills the aims of being a caring and achieving community school.

26. The headteacher provides very good leadership and clear educational direction to the work of the school. He has a clear vision for the school which is shared by the governing body and the leadership team and is articulated in the school's aims and core values. In partnership with the rest of the leadership team, he has been very successful in developing a supportive environment for pupils' learning, and a unity of purpose amongst staff, governors, pupils and parents.

27. The governors undertake their responsibilities conscientiously and very effectively through a range of committees and an extensive programme of meetings. They monitor the work of the school effectively, through links to faculties, through presentations by staff, and through review of major policies. Governors are also actively involved in identifying priorities, both through their committees and through the strategy group, in which all chairs of committees are involved. They take their responsibilities very seriously and undertake regular focused training as a whole governing body at least annually, and they support new governors through mentoring and an induction programme. They place great importance on maintaining the school ethos, further developing the community perspective and sustaining high educational achievement.

28. The management structure is clear and effective for both the academic and the pastoral aspects of the school's work. Arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the work of the school have been further developed since the time of the last inspection and are very good. This has had a positive effect on the quality of teaching and learning, particularly in the sixth form. Systems for performance management are well developed, and arrangements for induction, training and support are good.

29. Planning for school development at all levels is very effective. It is clear and realistic, and carefully linked to financial planning, except in a few departmental plans. A good degree of delegation of funds is made to faculty heads, and spending is monitored by the leadership team and by the governors' finance committee. The budget is efficiently and effectively managed, and the school employs a very businesslike approach to securing best value. Spending decisions have been effective in improving the quality of both the environment and the curriculum, and have had a positive effect on pupils' attainment and progress.

30. The effectiveness of the school is evident in well above average standards of attainment and attendance, good achievement, pupils' positive attitudes and behaviour. There is good quality teaching and learning, which is particularly high in the sixth form, and very good care for pupils and students. This is a very effective school where costs are only average, and it therefore provides very good value for money. The school meets statutory requirements in all areas apart from religious education in the sixth form and in collective worship.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Statutory requirements for a daily act of collective worship and for religious education in the sixth form are not met.

31. This non-compliance was a key issue when the school was last inspected, and continues.

Provision for spiritual development is unsatisfactory.

32. This was a key issue when the school was last inspected. The provision for spiritual development is unsatisfactory. The school does not meet the statutory requirement to provide religious education in the sixth form, and, although there are weekly assemblies with a spiritual and moral dimension, there is no daily act of collective worship. This was the case when the school was last inspected, and there has been no change. There is little evidence of planning to provide for pupils' spiritual development. Most teachers do not take advantage of opportunities which occur spontaneously in lessons to raise pupils' awareness of the spiritual dimension to existence. The school has completed an audit of where such opportunities exist but does not plan for how advantage will be taken of them.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

33. In order to complement the very good provision in most areas of the school's work, governors should:

- Improve provision for spiritual development.

Sixth form

- Make provision for spiritual development, including compliance with the statutory requirement for religious education.
- Improve the quality of the provision for supported self-study in some subjects.
- Develop further the procedures for comparing students' progress with national data.

34. The last two issues are already acknowledged in the school's forward planning.

35. Governors should also reconsider the school's compliance with the statutory requirement for a daily act of collective worship.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 - 11	39
	Sixth form	80
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		70

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 7 – 11							
Number	1	13	15	10	0	0	0
Percentage	2.6	33.3	38.5	25.6	0	0	0
Sixth form							
Number	9	33	33	9	0	0	0
Percentage	10.7	39.3	39.3	10.7	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. [When the total number observed in either the main school or the sixth form is substantially less than 100, add] Care should be taken when interpreting the percentages for [enter Years [] – [] and/or the sixth form here] as each lesson represents more than one [two, three, etc] percentage point[s]. [Where the total is close to or greater than 100 in both, use only the first sentence.]

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7– Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1274	326
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	67	4

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	4	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	137	8

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	5

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	35
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	10

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	95
National comparative data	91.3

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.1
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year:	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
		2001	125	133

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	100	113	106
	Girls	126	111	111
	Total	226	224	217
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	School	88 (82)	87 (79)	84 (80)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 6 or above	School	51 (51)	53 (57)	48 (48)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	88	105	108
	Girls	121	110	116
	Total	209	215	224
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	School	81 (81)	83 (86)	87 (88)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 6 or above	School	58 (49)	58 (66)	45 (64)
	National	31 (31)	42 (39)	33 (29)

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year:	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
		2001	120	133

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	86	119	119
	Girls	103	132	133
	Total	189	251	252
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	74.7 (81.2)	99.2 (100)	99.6 (100)
	National	49.8 (47.4)	86.6 (90.6)	94.5 (95.6)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	50.1 (52.2)
	National	39.1 (38.4)

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

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

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-Level or AS-Level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
		2001	65	71

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	N/A (19.8)	N/A (19.2)	20.1 (19.5)	0.0(2)	4.0(1.5)	2.0 (1.8)
National	N/A (17.1)	N/A(18)	N/A (18.2)	N/A(2.6)	N/A(2.9)	N/A (2.7)

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	7
Indian	0
Pakistani	3
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	2
White	1587
Any other minority ethnic group	1

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	37	2
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

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

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	87.8
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	18.2

Education support staff:**Y7– Y13**

Total number of education support staff	21
Total aggregate hours worked per week	581

Deployment of teachers:**Y7 – Y13**

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	79.4
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Average teaching group size:**Y7– Y11**

Key Stage 3	25.8
Key Stage 4	23.3

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000-2001
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	£
Total income	4,033,780.00
Total expenditure	4,013,132.00
Expenditure per pupil	2,587.00
Balance brought forward from previous year	31,028.00
Balance carried forward to next year	51,676.00

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	17
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	21.28

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	0.9
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out
Number of questionnaires returned

1600
778

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	37	52	8	3	1
My child is making good progress in school.	45	49	3	3	3
Behaviour in the school is good.	31	55	6	1	7
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	26	54	15	1	2
The teaching is good.	36	55	2	3	6
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	27	49	18	1	3
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	46	45	5	4	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	62	35	2	2	1
The school works closely with parents.	24	54	13	0	5
The school is well led and managed.	40	50	3	3	6
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	40	52	3	1	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	50	41	3	1	5

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

36. Standards reached in the sixth form are well above average. In the GCE Advanced Level examinations in 2000, results overall were well above the national average. In several subjects, all candidates passed the examination. High overall standards were maintained in the 2001 A-Level examinations and an increased number of subjects had pass rates of 100 per cent. More than half of those entered passed in four subjects. Results in a number of subjects, including business studies, English literature, French, and general studies, are above average. In addition, results in chemistry, design and technology, history and physics are well above average, and economics results are very high. In all other subjects results are broadly in line with national averages, with the exception of sociology and physical education, where they are below average.

37. In the new Advanced Subsidiary (AS) examinations, taken for the first time in 2001 at the end of Year 12, some very good results were achieved. There are no data with which to make firm national comparisons, but pass rates were over 90 per cent in most subjects. In several subjects, more than two thirds of candidates gained grade A or B, well above the provisional national figures.

38. Over the four years from 1996, when the school was last inspected, to 1999 the school sustained well above average results. In 2000 there was a sudden drop, and, broadly speaking, results in 2001 are fairly similar to those in the previous year. This would appear to reflect the wider range of prior attainment of students entering the sixth form as a result of the school's change in admission policy.

39. Retention rates are good in most subjects. The majority of students who begin courses in Year 12 continue their studies into Year 13 and complete their courses. As the school encourages students to follow four AS courses in Year 12, not all students pursue all four subjects to A-Level.

40. The standard of work seen during the inspection matches, and in some subjects exceeds, that indicated by the examination results. In history and in politics, for example, students show depth and fluency in their written work and an easy command of discussion of complex political issues. The work of the highest attaining students in these subjects shows a very analytical approach and the ability to use apt quotations in support of their views. Students in Year 12 readily grapple with new ideas in quantum physics and show a mature and sophisticated understanding in chemistry. Some students are less confident in their sixth form work and need more support. For example, some students in French show greater difficulty in acquiring fluency in speaking and writing, owing to a weak grasp of grammatical concepts. In English literature, lower attaining students read only a limited range of texts, which inhibits their progress. There are no significant differences in the standards achieved by boys and girls, or by students from ethnic minority backgrounds, when account is taken of the numbers concerned, and fluctuations over time.

41. In many subjects, students show a high standard of literacy which contributes substantially to their achievement. In French, students in Year 13 have made progress from Year 12 in writing more accurately for a variety of audiences and purposes, and the standards of literacy are good among all students in biology. The well above average standards in mathematics attained by students at the end of Year 11 mean that students starting AS courses have strong skills in numeracy. These contribute to their achievement in

other subjects. For example, these skills are a key factor in their success in physics and design and technology. Many students reach high standards in their use of ICT, although there are variations between subjects. ICT skills are very well developed in business studies, in which students regularly make notes on computers in lessons, and make excellent use of software to make predictions and analyse market trends. The use of ICT in this subject greatly enhances learning and achievement for all pupils. In design and technology, the use of ICT is successfully embedded in all aspects of students' work, and students are confident users of graphics calculators in mathematics. However, students' use of ICT in their sixth form work is less effective in some subjects because it is not planned effectively into schemes of work, such as in French, history and psychology. Students' opportunities to use ICT in politics are limited by difficulties of access to computers.

42. All students achieve well in nearly all subjects in the sixth form. In most subjects, they reach standards above those predicted from their GCSE performance, and make good progress towards the targets set for them. This results from the very good teaching they receive, and from their own positive attitudes and commitment to succeed. In many subjects, nearly all the students following the AS course have continued to a full A-Level course. The work that students do in the sixth form builds effectively on their previous learning and they develop very good learning skills. For example, in design and technology, students write very well focused specifications for major projects, drawing skillfully on their previous experience in Years 10 and 11 and reflecting on their strengths and weaknesses in Year 12. In physics, students capitalise on the good grounding in scientific numeracy and literacy they receive lower down the school. This places them in a position to tackle demanding numerical problems and write intelligently about their work, particularly in their self-study projects. A key factor in the progress of students in mathematics is the effective identification of areas of weakness through good assessment procedures, which is then followed up by extra work on these topics, either for individuals or for a group as a whole.

43. All students, including boys and girls, and those with particular needs, make good progress. Gifted and talented students make good progress. However, there is no procedure in the school to identify those with particular gifts and talents, and no special programmes are provided. Subject teachers have high expectations of all students, and this ensures that these particular students are driven hard towards high targets. This group of students is also very mature and well motivated, and they contribute much to their own progress. However, in some subjects, such as history, very able students would benefit from more specific provision geared to raising their standards even further. The relatively very small number of students with special needs are equally well supported, and achieve as well as the rest. As the range of prior attainment of students entering Year 12 is widening, more careful thought could be given to making sure the needs of lower attaining students are met. This is well done in some subjects, such as mathematics, but not in all. For example, some of the materials provided in geography are not well designed for the needs of these students.

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES, VALUES AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

44. An undoubted strength of the school as a whole is the very good behaviour of pupils and their exceptionally positive attitudes towards work. It is only natural that as pupils move into the sixth form this strength is the cornerstone on which so much is built.

45. Students show extremely positive attitudes towards work and towards their learning. They respond positively to the challenges they are set. A major feature in lessons is students' self motivation, and the structure and content of lessons encourage students to take responsibility for their learning and develop independence, such as research skills. This is also a key element in the success of the school's organisation of a proportion of curriculum

time as supported self-study rather than timetabled lessons. The high standards attained owe much to students' keen desire to learn and their willingness to work hard.

46. Students arrive promptly at lessons and settle quickly. Enjoyment and involvement in learning is evident. Students show openness and warmth, and are sensitive to others. They appreciate their teachers' encouragement and support. Relationships between students and with adults are very good. Students collaborate to good effect when engaged in group work and listen carefully to each other's ideas and opinions. For example, in a chemistry lesson, the right degree of informality helped discussion and aided learning. In a music lesson, the quality of relationships helped students take part in discussions more confidently.

47. Students who join the school in the sixth form are appreciative of the help and guidance they receive prior to admission. All students appreciate the way in which they are treated as mature young adults, such as the school's trust in their use of swipe cards for registration purposes.

48. Students are friendly and helpful. They greet visitors confidently and very pleasantly. Students show particularly mature behaviour in lessons, about the school, and in the student common rooms. Very good social relationships play a positive role in the personal development of students. Members of the sixth form committee meet regularly to discuss a range of issues. Meetings are businesslike and responsibilities are taken seriously. The concerns discussed often bring about change in the school, such as the canteen menu or changes in uniform. Two members of the sixth form serve on the governing body, whilst others provide support for school council year groups. Students support the literacy programme in the lower school, and provide technical support in ICT lessons. The personal values of students are reflected in the willingness with which they involve themselves in a range of fund raising and community support activities, many of which they instigate themselves, and often focus on trying to help those less fortunate. Students are proud to be part of the school community, and they leave school as mature and confident young adults.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

49. Teaching is very good. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen. Ten per cent of teaching is satisfactory, 40 per cent is good, 40 per cent is very good, and 10 per cent is excellent.

50. The features which characterise the high quality of teaching in the sixth form are similar to those observed elsewhere in the school: teachers' good subject knowledge, effective planning, skilled questioning, good use of time, and high expectations of pupils. In addition, there is good use of discussion to drive learning forward, and most teachers plan well for students to develop independent learning skills. What makes the quality of teaching better in the sixth form is that these strengths are more consistently evident.

51. Teachers have very good knowledge, not only of the subject matter and of how best to teach it, but also of the requirements of the examination syllabuses. They can therefore prepare students very well for these demands. For example, the decision of the physics department to take part in pilot courses in advance of the introduction of the course more generally in schools has meant that the department understands very well what students need for success.

52. Teacher's knowledge is used to help students develop understanding. In a physics lesson on the motion of electrons, the teacher's very good subject knowledge gave intellectual authority to the lesson. In a German lesson, it helped Year 13 students make good progress in understanding the play they were studying. In a Year 12 physical education

lesson, the teacher's clear explanations of muscle action related the students' understanding of types of contraction to sporting activities. Good subject knowledge was also evident in an economics lesson, where clear explanations and very good use of illustrations from current circumstances enabled students to understand difficult concepts. In some instances, this knowledge was seen in skilful use of exemplars. In a biology lesson, the teachers' use of exemplars in the discussion ensured that students rapidly learned to evaluate when surface area to volume ratio is important for organisms. Use of work by students in the previous year as exemplars is a key feature of how design and technology teaching sets high standards.

53. Sixth form lessons are also very carefully structured, within longer term planning which is well thought out. For example, in a physical education lesson on energy systems a range of challenging tasks encouraged students to think. An English lesson comparing 'The Taming of the Shrew' and 'Waiting for Godot' started with a vigorous discussion to recapitulate on the last lesson, and showed video extracts of the plays. It continued with group activities focusing on various aspects and led to presentations of students' ideas at the end of the lesson. Often the structure leads students on to ever more difficult work. In a mathematics lesson on integration, carefully stepped examples gradually increased the level of difficulty. A physics lesson on circular motion provided progressively increasing challenge so that learning proceeded incrementally.

54. Planning often provides for the differing needs of students. For example, in an art lesson the teacher worked as a consultant to students working independently, offering guidance that was targeted at the varying levels of attainment in the group. In a mathematics lesson on partial fractions, higher attaining students were pushed on to harder examples more quickly, whilst lower attainers were well supported through watchful individual monitoring.

55. Sixth form teaching shows the same adept use of questioning as elsewhere in the school. It is well focused, and question and answer and discussion sessions are used to draw out students' knowledge. Sometimes this is deliberate revision of earlier work, and sometimes it draws out students' ideas and invites speculation. Probing questions often take thinking on to higher levels. Teachers have very good instinctive ability to intervene with a question or remark when necessary to move things along.

56. High expectations are a significant factor in the high standards achieved. All students are challenged to make rapid progress. Some students embark on sixth form courses with lower GCSE grades than was the case in the past, and they are carefully supported as they make the transition, to ensure that they make good progress. Some achieve remarkable success.

57. The school organises the sixth form curriculum with 80 or 90 per cent of the time allowed for each subject as taught lessons, and the remainder as supported self-study. In most subjects, this feature of the course is very well planned and contributes very well to developing study habits and confidence in independent learning. For example, psychology students learning about Freud had researched case studies which had led them to be evaluative. This was illustrated well by their analysis of Freud's theories. In physics, students' skills in independent working enable them to meet course requirements with well researched coursework, using the learning resource centre and the Internet. However, in a few subjects, this has been less well developed.

58. In lessons where teaching, although satisfactory, was not of as high quality as in the majority of lessons, there is no one significant weakness. Various minor shortcomings were noted, such as inadequate questioning technique and a lack of provision for the varying needs of the students in a group.

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

59. The quality and range of learning opportunities in the sixth form are good. The general studies course includes a module on religious education, and Advanced Subsidiary(AS) and Advanced Level (A-Level) courses are offered. However, there is no provision for compulsory religious education, and in this respect the curriculum does not meet statutory requirements. The breadth and balance of the curriculum is otherwise good. A wide range of courses is offered, leading to accreditation at AS and A-Level. No vocational courses are offered. The view of the school is that this vocational education is well catered for elsewhere in the area, although the school keeps the situation under constant review.

60. There is a good range of courses available within each curriculum area. In mathematics and science, students can study mathematics, biology, chemistry and physics, although within mathematics the choice of modules is limited, which means that students are denied the chance to follow particular interests in mechanics or statistics. Design and technology is offered in Years 12 and 13 and a textiles course is currently running in Year 12. Within the business area, both business studies and economics are available, and a small group of students in Year 12 undertake a Young Enterprise scheme.

61. There is a choice of art, music and drama within the visual and performing arts area and students can choose from English literature, French and German in the language group. There is a wide selection of subjects in the humanities area: geography, history, politics, sociology and psychology. Students can study physical education to A-Level. All students in Year 12 follow a key skills course in information and communication technology as part of an extension programme, and a course in numeracy is also available. The majority of students choose to study General Studies at A-Level and, for many, this means that they study four subjects at A-Level.

62. The allocation of time to sixth form subjects is adequate, with most subjects given 10 hours per two-week cycle. An innovative feature is the use of one of these 10 hours given over to supported self-study. There is an expectation that students in each of their subject areas will be given opportunities to develop their individual learning skills through a programme of work related to the subject syllabus. The effectiveness of this provision varies between subjects. In physics, good opportunities for extended self-study projects are built into the innovative new course, and some good quality materials are provided in psychology. In some other subjects, for example, politics and French, the aim of delivering 10 per cent of the course through supported self-study is not achieved.

63. Schemes of work are well developed in the majority of subject areas and offer learning opportunities for all students, irrespective of levels of prior attainment or gender. For example, long-term planning in politics shows a good balance between the acquisition of factual knowledge, discussion and debate, and students speak of the excellent fieldwork in biology. Some courses are very new, such as in physics, and schemes of work are not yet fully developed to take advantage of all the learning opportunities that the course offers.

64. Students have good opportunities to acquire the key skills of literacy and use of ICT. Careful attention is paid to the development of literacy within subjects, and all students in Year 12 are taught ICT. High standards of literacy and verbal communication contribute significantly to the achievement of high standards in many subjects, where students are given a good range of opportunities to develop such skills. There is high quality debate in, for

example, psychology, business studies and politics, and some written work of very high quality in, for example, biology and design and technology.

65. The school makes good provision for extending learning opportunities outside the A-Level curriculum through its Extension Studies programme, which is followed by all students. The Year 12 programme includes taught units on study and presentation skills, and an extensive range of presentations by outside speakers from, among others, the medical profession, the police and charity organisations. The taught units include sessions on health education and drug misuse. In Year 13, there is a strong focus on advice for students applying to higher education.

66. The advice available on future careers is improving from an earlier, and weaker, model in which it was largely left to students to ask for advice if they needed it. New arrangements, forming part of a more informative whole school system, are beginning to be much more proactive in determining students' needs. The criticism many students voiced through their questionnaire responses was retracted by them during the inspection, by which time the new system had begun to show its effectiveness.

67. Good opportunities exist for enrichment of the sixth form curriculum beyond the school day. Sixth formers make good use of the well-equipped learning resource centre. There is a wide range of extra-curricular activities linked to subject areas, such as foreign language exchanges, trips abroad, including to the USA, organised by the politics and history departments, and a good range of sports teams. Many individual students achieve regional and national representation in sporting events. In the performing arts, sixth formers make valuable contributions to music making and drama productions, some involving collaboration with the local community. Sixth formers organise the 'School Show', which involves a large number of younger pupils. They also raise considerable sums of money in a variety of ways for charities of their own choice.

68. The school has extensive links with the local community. Apart from input from local members of the professions into the sixth form Extension programme, there are good links with Keele University, which helps students with their higher education applications, and Lloyds Bank give advice on money management.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

Assessment

69. Procedures for assessing students' attainment and progress are good. Assessment procedures follow awarding body requirements. In most subjects assessment material is built into AS and A Level schemes of work. In all subjects there is regular testing and helpful marking of assignments, which enables teachers and students to know about their progress in relation to their target AS and A Level grades. Records of students' progress in each subject are kept alongside target grades. In some subjects, such as French, students do a self-assessment task which formally identifies students' views about their own progress in various skills. This is useful for diagnosing where individual support is needed and also where student confidence might be lacking.

70. Procedures for monitoring and supporting students' academic progress through the sixth form are very good. GCSE results are analysed, and predicted grades for A and AS Level are arrived at. These 'starting points' are then discussed by students and their subject teachers early in Year 12 and amended where necessary to form the student's target grade. A 'working at grade' is also arrived at. These grades, and an effort grade, are regularly

reviewed by students with their subject teachers and form tutors. All subjects follow these procedures. After the mock A-Level examinations, students needing mentoring are identified. Students are very clear about their progress and what they need to do to improve their performance. They are very appreciative of the continuous support given to them in lessons by their subject teachers to help them improve academically. When students' views were canvassed before the inspection, students expressed concern about the degree to which their progress was monitored and discussed with them. Some of these concerns were alleviated by the time of the inspection because a first round of target-setting discussions had by then taken place. However, some students still do not feel entirely confident in the target-setting procedures in a few departments. Reports to parents are brief but provide some guidance for improvement.

71. In all subjects assessment information is used to adjust and develop the work of the department. Assessment information is used to inform target setting and to guide curricular planning, both in the short term in lessons, to take account of class and individual needs, and in the long term. For example, changes were made to schemes of work in English after an analysis of the AS results. In maths there has been a change of examination board and amendments to schemes of work to provide a better grounding in algebra, particularly for lower attaining students. Occasionally in lessons, not enough account is taken of individual needs, for example in history.

72. The school analyses examination results in detail to determine trends such as any substantial differences in attainment between boys and girls. Additionally, the school receives from the local education authority information comparing the A-Level standards the students attain with their GCSE results, in relation to Cheshire schools at large. The school does not use national comparative data to compare their progress with that made by students in similar schools nationally. Similarly, few departments compare their individual students' results at GCSE with their results at A Level to determine what value they add. These are areas for improvement already acknowledged by the school.

Advice, support and guidance

73. Procedures for inducting students into the sixth form are good. A consultation period begins early in Year 11 and students and parents are well informed of the courses available. Course requirements for each subject are set out clearly, and individual cases discussed where appropriate. There is a settling in period at the start of Year 12, with some flexibility for students to move between courses.

74. Careers advice to students in the past has relied on students making individual approaches to the careers service, and some students have found this unsatisfactory. New, and more proactive, arrangements are now being put in place with the appointment of a new co-ordinator. During the inspection, students remarked on the improvement. During Year 13, the support given includes contact with a local university and a bank, to provide students with advice on university entry and on financial management respectively.

75. Students receive a good deal of advice on a variety of issues, such as drugs awareness, through the Extension Studies programme. Much of this is delivered by experts from the local community.

76. The support and guidance the school provides for its sixth form students is very good. There is a well organised tutor group system in which tutors monitor the same students through their two years in the sixth form. Tutors receive good guidance on their role and very good support from the two heads of year. Each group tutor has a working file. This gives good guidance on a wide range of issues relating to managing the welfare of a group of sixth

formers, such as, for example, the writing of references for applications for higher education or for jobs.

77. Group tutors are paired, so that those with less experience can benefit from the advice of more experienced colleagues. Year heads and tutors meet regularly, and tutor training sessions are held during professional development time. The heads of year have recently introduced a more formal system for monitoring the work of tutors by visits to Extension Studies lessons and to tutor periods.

78. There is a good system for monitoring sixth form attendance. In a system introduced this term, sixth formers use a swipe card to register their arrival and departure. The information received from this is used to produce a half-termly record of attendance, as well as to inform form tutors so that they can follow up the reasons for any persistent absence or unwarranted absence from lessons.

79. There is a secure process for mentoring those students who are likely to benefit from it. All students have a personal interview with their form tutor once in each half-term to review their progress and agree targets. Parents are kept informed of the outcomes of these consultations. Students falling short of their targets are identified and given appropriate support. Sixth form students are required to update their Record of Achievement from Year 11, which allows them to keep overall track of their progress in a variety of ways.

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

80. Parents of sixth form students have very positive views about the school, and they think that the arrangements for the transfer into Year 12 are particularly good. Parents feel that the consultation evening to discuss sixth form course options is well run, and they are impressed with the enthusiasm of the teachers to encourage students to take up courses. Parents also express satisfaction with a number of aspects of sixth form life, such as the provision of the learning resource centre and the opportunities their children have to take part in and run the school council.

81. Students also have very positive views about the school, and this is reflected in the responses of the high proportion of sixth formers who responded to the questionnaire. The great majority think that they are well informed about course options and that they are given the right kind of help and advice to settle into the sixth form. However, some concern was expressed in the questionnaire about information on careers and about the progress they are making towards their qualifications. These points were discussed with students and found to be largely no longer a concern. Since completing the questionnaire, which had been distributed early in the school year, students had made greater use of the careers advice service in school and they expressed far greater satisfaction with the information they had received. They had also been taken through the first round of the process to check progress and set further targets, and felt more secure in this area also.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

82. The management system for the sixth form has two leadership group members supervising the work of the heads of Year 12 and Year 13, and it is working very effectively. Roles and responsibilities are clearly identified and are carried out consistently and sensitively. Leadership and management of the sixth form is very effective in promoting effective teaching and learning which lead to standards well above average.

83. The governing body fulfills its responsibilities regarding the sixth form in the same very effective way that it approaches all its work. The system through which governors monitor the work of the school includes the function and performance of the sixth form.

84. The school tracks the trends in the take-up of subjects over a ten-year period, along with careful analysis of results. The drop in results in 2000 was thoroughly analysed and discussed, and action taken where causal factors were identified. There is a coherent development plan for the sixth form, which shows extensive consideration of priorities for development for the next two years, and beyond. Development planning is well linked with financial planning, and the sixth form is cost-effective, as the sixth form is self-funding and does not rely on any subsidy from other areas. The school's businesslike approach to securing best value is also evident in sixth form budget management.

85. The work of sixth form tutors is well monitored by the year heads, and working documents provide good guidance for their work with students. The school has very good arrangements for monitoring teaching and learning, which include sixth form work. Leadership and management of the work of subject areas in the sixth form is good overall, with several instances of very effective leadership and management of sixth form provision.

Resources

86. Resources for learning are good, and some subjects have very good resources. For example, business studies makes very good use of very well equipped computer rooms, such that students are able to take notes electronically throughout lessons and make excellent use of email and on-line access to materials. There are very good technical facilities in theatre studies for lighting and sound, and extensive support material on CD-ROM and the Internet for the teaching of physics. However, in French and history, not enough use of computers is planned into lessons. Access to computers is sometimes difficult in some subjects. The Learning Resource area supports most subjects well, but the resources for French are limited.

87. Accommodation is generally adequate, although many subjects have to fit large classes into relatively small rooms. One art room, which consists of two linked rooms, is not ideal. Theatre studies lacks adequate acting space, storage and changing facilities.

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

88. In the inspection, 15 subjects and courses were inspected and are reported on in detail. Work in other subjects and courses was sampled and contributed to the overall picture of teaching and learning in the school.

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2001

GCE AS Level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	34	91	N/A	40	N/A	3.0	N/A
Chemistry	35	97	N/A	74	N/A	3.8	N/A
Biology	36	94	N/A	58	N/A	3.2	N/A
Physics	31	100	N/A	74	N/A	4.1	N/A
Design and technology	22	96	N/A	59	N/A	3.6	N/A
Business studies	22	96	N/A	32	N/A	2.9	N/A
Physical education	19	79	N/A	16	N/A	2.0	N/A
Art	15	93	N/A	47	N/A	3.1	N/A
Drama and theatre studies	14	93	N/A	50	N/A	3.2	N/A
Geography	34	88	N/A	21	N/A	2.3	N/A
History	37	100	N/A	43	N/A	3.4	N/A
Government and politics	28	100	N/A	71	N/A	3.9	N/A
Sociology	25	88	N/A	28	N/A	2.5	N/A
Psychology	62	90	N/A	39	N/A	2.7	N/A
English literature	25	100	N/A	44	N/A	3.5	N/A
French	7	100	N/A	57	N/A	3.9	N/A

GCE A Level and AVCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	23	87	87	35	43	5.0	5.8
Chemistry	28	100	90	57	43	6.9	5.9
Biology	40	100	88	25	34	5.3	5.3
Physics	24	100	88	46	40	6.9	5.7
Design and technology	13	100	91	54	30	6.9	5.4
Business studies	14	100	92	43	32	6.3	5.5
Physical education	23	83	92	17	25	4.2	5.1
Art	8	100	96	38	46	6.0	6.6
Drama and theatre studies	5	100	N/A	0	N/A	4.0	N/A
Geography	32	84	92	31	38	5.3	5.7
History	19	95	88	63	35	7.3	5.5
Government and politics	16	88	N/A	25	N/A	4.5	N/A
Sociology	5	100	86	20	35	4.4	5.3
Psychology	50	76	N/A	38	N/A	5.1	N/A
English literature	22	100	95	45	37	6.6	5.9
French	15	87	89	53	38	6.1	5.6

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

89. Mathematics, chemistry, biology and physics were all inspected in detail.

Mathematics

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

Strengths:

- The standard of work that students produce is above national averages and achievement is good.
- Students' good study skills, hard work, and positive attitude make a strong contribution to their learning.
- There is good teaching, based on secure subject knowledge.
- Assessment is used effectively to help students make progress.

Areas for improvement:

- Increasing the amount of choice in the mathematics curriculum, especially for higher attainers.
- Improving the level of satisfactory teaching to that of the good and very good teaching, by widening the range of learning methods in regular use.

90. The inspection covered the AS and A2 mathematics course offered by the school. The modular course covers pure mathematics, mechanics and statistics. Numbers taking mathematics are increasing, and the great majority of students choose to carry on with mathematics in Year 13. There are 48 students in Year 12 and 30 in Year 13. The school also offers a taught GCSE re-sit course for those who wish to improve their previous GCSE grade in mathematics. There is currently an acting head of department in post; her effective transitional management is providing a secure, well-organised basis for teaching and learning. No major post-16 issues were raised in the previous inspection report.

91. In 2000, students gained results at A-Level that were below national averages. These results, which were well below those of previous years, were the first ones after the change to a modular course. The school took appropriate action, adjusting the delivery and pace of the course, and the 2001 A Level results are better, and the 2001 AS results much better. The 2001 AS results are above provisional national averages. These above average standards reflect the standards of work seen during the inspection in both Years 12 and 13.

92. There is no difference in attainment by gender. Male students are more likely than female students to take an active part in oral discussions, but written work shows no difference by gender in knowledge or understanding. The few students with special educational needs are well supported, and their achievement is similar to that of other students in the group.

93. Most students enter the sixth form with an above average base of mathematical skills and knowledge from their work in Year 11. Their continued hard work, combined with good teaching, helps them to maintain these above average standards and to achieve well. Some students, particularly those who followed an Intermediate course at GCSE, find the transition to AS Level work difficult at first. However, good teaching, linked to targeted individual support, helps them to deal effectively with the changes. Areas of weakness are identified through good assessment, of both oral and written work. Further work on these topics, either

for individuals or the whole group, is a key factor in helping students to make good progress and achieve well. The department has also adapted its curriculum, for example in making sure that students have a secure algebraic base to help them gain more confidence in the early part of Year 12. Students' skills in ICT help them to make faster progress in some lessons, for example using graphical calculators to help sketch diagrams when finding areas under curves.

94. Students feel that they are very well supported by staff. These very good relationships are clear in lessons, contributing to a classroom atmosphere, which encourages students to attempt new, and perhaps difficult, work with enthusiasm and confidence, knowing they will make progress. This progress is carefully tracked, so students know at what level they are working, and what they have to do to reach higher grades. Teachers' strong subject knowledge and examination experience are key strengths in this. All these factors contribute to good learning.

95. Overall, teaching and learning are good. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed; about half the teaching was very good, a third satisfactory, and the rest good. In lessons where teaching and learning is good, or very good, more time is spent in whole class discussions, getting students to think about and possibly demonstrate to others various ways of dealing with problems. Probing questions are also used effectively to make students think. This all helps students to learn by making them justify their methods and helping them to review their progress. In the lessons where teaching is very good, students are really pushed to think about difficult ideas, and an imaginative range of teaching and learning methods makes lessons lively, with a brisk pace. For example, in one lesson when teaching and learning were both very good, an imaginative starter activity, based on ideas from the National Numeracy Strategy, quickly got students thinking and improved their mental agility.

96. In all lessons, high attaining students had enough sufficiently challenging examples to set them thinking as to which of their extensive range of mathematical "tools" they would need to apply to particular problems. However, there are no opportunities at the moment for these students to study more advanced modules, leading to further mathematics accreditation. The school is currently working on curriculum developments, entering pupils in the main school for GCSE a year early, so that they have more time available to reach high standards. There is also no choice in A2 modules to allow students to follow particular interests in mechanics or statistics. As numbers studying mathematics are increasing, the school feels it may be in future be possible to extend curriculum choice.

Chemistry

Overall the provision in chemistry is **very good**.

Strengths:

- The richness of the curriculum in chemistry in the sixth form, including the use of ICT.
- Attainment in examinations.
- Relationships between staff and students in the department.
- Leadership and a clear sense of direction.

Areas for improvement:

- Support for gifted and talented students through schemes of work.
- The gathering and use of value added information directly in monitoring students' progress.

97. Forty two students study chemistry in Year 12, and 33 in Year 13.

98. Standards overall in chemistry are very good. Results have been consistently well above the national average, apart from in 2000, when they were only slightly above average. In June 2001, results in AS, when three quarters of students gained the highest grades, A or B, and in A-Level, are well above the national average. When students come into the sixth form, their attainment is above average, but not by a wide margin. The number of students electing to study chemistry is well above average for the size of the school, and this tends to widen the range of ability. In lessons, students in Year 12 working on oxidation numbers, or on moles and gaseous volumes, show that they have grasped all the principles, but all except the most able students are still working towards the depth of understanding which is needed to tackle problems confidently. As they come into the sixth form with attainment above the national average, and gain results which are well above the national average, achievement is good.

99. In lessons, the highest attaining students produce work of outstanding quality. They show a mature and sophisticated understanding of the subject, and can express their understanding confidently. Examples are in their individual investigations into the kinetics of oxidation of ethanedioate ions or in the use of ICT skills to investigate the properties of different formulations of petrol. If anything, the overall level of attainment in Year 13 lessons is higher than is indicated by the results in AS last summer, or in A Level over the last few years. This indicates that standards are improving.

100. Teaching and learning are very good. Two very good lessons and one good lesson were seen. In one very good lesson the teacher used a really good variety of activities and delivered a difficult topic with flair and enthusiasm. Students gained noticeably in their skills in manipulating oxidation numbers during this lesson and set about the task with real enthusiasm. The teacher very skilfully used a range of examples to carry the story forward at a pace which was very well judged for the students, whilst reinforcing what had already been learned. Learning in this lesson was correspondingly very good. Although a strategy was identified for gifted and talented students, it was insufficiently carried through. And there was a missed opportunity for highlighting the spiritual dimension when two aspects of the work of Haber were being contrasted: his development of the use of chlorine as a weapon of mass destruction in World War I, and his work on fixation of nitrogen. In the other very good lesson, devoted to individual investigations, the teacher's support led to every student working at the frontier of his or her ability. In this lesson, the ability of the teacher to challenge each student at his or her own level led to learning which was excellent. In the lesson in which teaching was good, the teacher developed the concept of a mole of a substance very clearly for the students, who gained significantly in their understanding. A particular feature was the development of the concept of size of a mole, which brought the subject alive for many students. Support for all students was good, but not enough was built into the lesson plan to support gifted and talented students in the group. In this lesson, a wider range of activity would have captured students' imagination more effectively, and learning would have been very good rather than good as a result.

101. Interpersonal relationships in lessons are outstanding, as are students' attitudes to the subject. These positive attitudes lead to a high level of commitment to the subject and contribute to the very good examination grades. Teachers know their students very well and give them excellent support, whether in challenging high attainers to do even better or in helping those who find the subject difficult. The schemes of work match well the Salters course which the school uses, though there is not enough provision in schemes of work to challenge students who are gifted and talented.

102. Overall, leadership is very good. There is a very clear ethos for the subject which says that nothing but the best is good enough. Resources are very well used, and staffing and accommodation are very good. There is a very clear sense of educational direction which is

well communicated to colleagues through regular meetings. The head of department monitors the work of the department most effectively, and ensures that staff are able to undertake professional development which is appropriate to their needs and in the best interests of students.

Biology

The quality of provision in biology is **very good**

Strengths:

- The richness of the curriculum in biology.
- The quality of teaching.
- The attainment of students.
- The quality of relationships between staff and pupils.

Areas for improvement:

- Support for gifted and talented students through schemes of work.

103. There are 60 students in Year 12 and 31 in Year 13.

104. Standards overall in biology in the sixth form are very good. Levels of attainment over the last four years have been well above average, though there was a dip in 2001. The level of attainment at AS in 2001 is also well above the national average, with 58 per cent of students gaining the highest grades, A or B. Currently, the standard of students' work is well above average. For example, they can explain the difference between light dependent and light independent organisms in proper scientific terms at a level appropriate to the higher levels of A Level pass. Standards of literacy are good, even amongst lower attaining students, and this enables them to do justice to their biological understanding in discussions and written work. Students' practical skills are good. On entry to the sixth form, they are working at levels which are slightly above expectation. Their achievement is therefore good.

105. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Three lessons were seen, of which two were outstanding and one was good. Lessons which were outstanding were characterised by the excellent relationships, outstanding subject knowledge on the part of the teacher, and excellent discussions which were almost continuous throughout the lesson. These enabled the teacher to challenge the students to the limit of their capability, to pick up points they raised in discussion and to elaborate on students' own enthusiasms. These features were evident in both the excellent lessons seen, one of which was on the structure of the mammalian eye. In this lesson, students carried out the dissection well, and showed an excellent understanding of the relationship between structure and function in their discussions with one another and with the teacher. In discussions with individual students, the teacher skilfully challenged the students to think, so that all were working to the limit of their ability. In a good lesson on surface/volume relationship in organisms, students understood the concept quickly; they were able, with practice, to calculate the ratio in specific examples, and could apply their findings to articulate the importance of the concept in a variety of contexts.

106. In general, teachers provide very good support for students. They mark work well, set good targets, and monitor students' progress towards those targets. End of topic tests are both valid and reliable, and support pupils' own knowledge of their progress very well. Teachers know their students very well, and this knowledge, and excellent relationships, enable them to support students academically.

107. The quality of the curriculum is very good. Students speak particularly appreciatively of the excellent fieldwork in which they have taken part. Although not enough is done to incorporate support for gifted and talented students formally in schemes of work, support for students of all abilities in lessons is very good.

108. Leadership and management of the department is very good. The head of department is clearly a first rate biologist who knows and supports his staff well. He has a clear sense of leadership which he communicates well to his colleagues. He has a good understanding of the strengths and aspirations of his department, and works with staff to ensure that the excellent work ethic is maintained. There is an overriding commitment to ensuring that pupils' enthusiasm for biology is fostered and maintained, and that each student reaches his or her potential. There is ample evidence for the success of this in the results gained at the end of the course.

109. Accommodation and learning resources are well managed to ensure that the best use is made of them to support learning. There is good attention to matters of health and safety.

Physics

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

Strengths:

- Standards are well above average and rising.
- Teaching is good.
- Relationships between students and with their teachers are very good.
- Students are well motivated and work consistently hard.
- Management by the course leader is very good.
- Procedures for monitoring the progress of students are good.

Areas for improvement:

- To continue to develop the delivery of the course to take full advantage of the wide range of learning opportunities.

110. The AS course is followed by 24 students, and 28 follow the A-Level course.

111. The standards achieved by students at the age of 18 are above the national average and rising rapidly. In the three years up to 2000, A-Level results were just above average. Results in 2001, when students took the examination for the pilot scheme of a new course, are significantly better than in 2000. The results of the AS examinations of students in Year 12 in 2001 are even better, with three quarters achieving the high grades of A or B and no-one reaching less than grade C. Although the number of girls taking A-Level physics is small, their results are similar to those of the boys.

112. The standard of much of the work is well above average and reflects the standards reached in the recent AS examinations. Students in Year 13 show very good thinking skills and capacity for logical argument in developing their understanding of such topics as circular motion and the trajectory of electrons in an electrostatic field. Work in physics is well supported by very good literacy and numeracy skills. In problem-solving exercises, students handle equations confidently and are comfortable with applying them to new situations, and the standard of writing in some coursework is very high indeed. An article on MAGLEV trains allowed students to demonstrate very good understanding of the

electromagnetic principles of magnetic levitation. Some lower attaining students find it difficult to deal with mathematical models of, for example, simple harmonic motion. Others write quite well working on self-study projects but have less capacity for critical analysis of the subject matter.

113. Students in Year 12, at an early stage of their course, show very secure knowledge of technical vocabulary and develop an above average understanding of the concepts of stress and strain when dealing with the properties of materials. Most can carry out extended practical activities with little or no support, and students with the highest attainment are grappling willingly with the newly introduced topic of quantum phenomena.

114. Achievement is good overall. From the start of the course, students quickly build up new knowledge and understanding of the concepts of physics. Scientific literacy and numeracy, already good for most at the age of 16, develop quickly so that students can tackle calculations with confidence and write intelligently about their work. They develop a good capacity for independent learning. Results at A and AS Levels are better than expected from students' performance in GCSE examinations. Consistently good teaching, students' own very positive attitudes, and the very good relationships they have with their teachers make significant contributions to the good level of achievement.

115. Teaching is good with some very good features, particularly in Year 13. Teachers have very high expectations, and have very secure subject knowledge that inspires confidence in students. Lessons are well planned, with progressively increasing challenge to make students think quickly and develop their ideas. Assessment, and the way in which results are fed back to students, consistently promotes good achievement.

116. Students learn effectively in lessons and from the work they are set. Learning is strongly promoted when teachers constantly interact with students and engage them with challenging questions. For example, understanding of circular motion was very well developed in a lesson that began with a clear discussion on the equation for centripetal force and continued a series of progressively harder questions. In a lesson on the motion of electrons in an electrostatic field, there was a major challenge to get students to appreciate similarities and differences between gravitational and electrostatic fields. The assessment of work is very good, and includes good feedback on performance, and this also helps students to learn. The good annotation of marked work gives very supportive guidance on how to improve.

117. The course being followed is very new and teachers are working very hard to deliver it effectively and to develop good schemes of work. Students learn less effectively where, for example, much time is spent with a whole class working through a long sequence of experiments when the activities could have been shared between groups. Not all students benefit equally from the wide opportunities the course offers for the use of ICT. For example, a demonstration of the 'many paths' approach to light transmission would have had more impact if all students could have used the modelling software simultaneously, rather than be left to try it out voluntarily away from the lesson.

118. The course is very well led. The teacher in charge of the course is strongly committed to it and his personal enthusiasm rubs off on the students, who clearly enjoy the lessons and work hard, both in and out of them. Relationships between students and staff teaching the course are very good, and all students adopt a most mature attitude to their work. As the school has been a pilot school for the project in recent years, staff development has been and continues to be very good. The course is very well resourced. Students have their own copy of the course textbook and a CD-ROM which contains a variety of support material.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

119. The school offers several courses in this area: design and technology product design, food technology, and textiles. Design technology product design was inspected in detail. Take-up of the subject is good: 22 students follow AS courses and 15 follow A2 courses. The majority of students who begin AS continue with A2 in Year 13. Results are high in all courses.

Design and technology

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

Strengths:

- Examination results are consistently well above average.
- Students have a very good grasp of design and production principles and apply them very well in both class and portfolio work.
- Students demonstrate outstanding sketching and annotation skills.
- Teaching is very good: lessons are very well planned. Activities effectively help students apply their design skills in the manufacture of good quality products.
- Information and communications technology (ICT) is successfully embedded in all aspects of students' work.
- This subject area is very well led and managed. High quality planning underpins all aspects of the subject.

Areas for improvement:

- Take advantage of opportunities for developing spiritual awareness through the superb quality of sketching and annotation skills in students' portfolios.

120. Standards of attainment are well above average. The factors which contribute to this are very good teaching and curricular planning, and students' very good attitudes and their very positive motivation. As a result of these, students' achievement overall is very good in relation to their attainment when they begin in the sixth form. Male and female students alike attain very good standards, and in 2001 the small number of girls did particularly well.

121. In GCE A-Level design and technology, examination results were well above average in both 2000 and 2001. Students achieve very well in relation to their GCSE results at the end of Year 11. Higher attaining students at GCSE maintained very high standards in A-Level, gaining A grades. Other students, whose results at GCSE were not as high, nevertheless went on to achieve very high grades in A-Level. Examination results in 2000 and 2001 in product design at A/S Level are well above average.

122. Although students in Year 12 are only in the early stages of their course, they are achieving well. Students work productively and respond well to the different learning styles that teachers provide. When students discuss their sketches they show great understanding of the need to reflect the specific needs of people in their designs. They show good knowledge and understanding of the design and manufacturing principles. They have good levels of skill in drawing and sketching, and higher attaining students have skills at a very high level.

123. In Year 13, students are achieving very well in relation to predictions based on their GCSE results. Teaching is very effective, and the high quality of interaction between

teachers and students has a significant effect on achievement and learning. These students are skilful in drawing on their previous technological experiences in Years 10 and 11, and in reflecting on the strengths and weaknesses of their work in Year 12. As a result, students are able to write very well focused specifications for major projects. The detailed planning carried out by teachers, which includes a good range of industrial involvement, enables students to gain insight into product design. Students' work shows the well-paced development of ideas through research, analysis, exploration and evaluation, as part of design principles. Students consider carefully the balance between the aesthetic and functional aspects of product design. By Year 13, the sketching and annotation of ideas is outstanding. The outstanding quality of much of the work would provide ample opportunity to develop spiritual awareness, but few such opportunities are seized.

124. Students have ample opportunities to use and develop key skills. Numeracy is very good. Students are also very competent in communicating design ideas, both orally and in writing, and with ICT. For example, Year 12 students confidently made successful presentations, using ICT, as part of a case study which involved working in pairs, scanning materials and raising questions. Very good use is made of ICT to enhance and support product design. In discussing their work, all students are well able to describe how they are applying their understanding of the principles of design.

125. Teaching is very good. Students gain many benefits from teachers' very good knowledge, both of the subject and of when to intervene in learning. Planning very skillfully matches work to students' particular needs, and students work productively until the very last moment of lessons. Work is very well assessed so that teachers can target students' needs in a focused way, and students have a clear idea of how to improve. Teachers use work completed by students in previous years to illustrate good practice and demonstrate the very high standards which they insist on, so that students learn precisely what is expected. Teachers also expect a high order of use of technical language, and students' terminology of product design is very well developed. Students rapidly develop the ability to work well independently, and they are well aware of the need to organise time carefully and meet deadlines. Another significant feature is the attention paid to the social and moral responsibilities of designers in society. Students are encouraged to take a wide view of these responsibilities, and all portfolios demonstrate reflection on the issues. The work of the higher attaining students shows a mature and reflective approach to these issues.

126. Since the previous inspection, examination results have been sustained at a level well above average. Students continue to demonstrate outstanding graphical skills. The number of students following this course has increased substantially. The subject is very well managed and the subject leader has a very clear vision of what has to be done to maintain and further improve standards. There is a close working partnership between the teachers of the course.

BUSINESS

127. The school offers AS and A-Level courses in business studies and economics. Business studies was inspected in detail. Standards in economics are good.

Business studies

Provision is **very good with many outstanding features**.

Strengths:

- Standards are above national averages at A Level, and have been consistently so over time;
- ICT is used extensively to raise the levels of achievement and learning;
- Teaching is very good, with many examples of excellent practice ensuring at least very good learning;
- Leadership and management of the department are very good with some outstanding features.

There are no significant areas for improvement

128. The AS course is followed by 34 students, and 30 follow the A2 course.

129. Results in A-Level examinations in 2001 are above average. Over the past four years, standards have been consistently better than the national picture, with results rising over the past four years at a greater rate than the national trend, and the results in 2000 were well above average. The very few pupils who received an AS award last year were above the provisional national standards. At A Level, there has been a 100 per cent pass rate over the past five years, with over a third of candidates attaining the highest A and B grades. The standards of work seen during the inspection are well above average. Achievement is good.

130. The staff makes excellent use of ICT, which is a central feature of students' learning, and there are two spacious and very well resourced computer rooms within the department. In these rooms students take notes electronically throughout lessons, and all are very proficient in this respect. Learning is greatly enhanced by presentations of very good quality and by the excellent use of programs. These are used to make predictions and forecasts in market trends, for example, or for producing scatter graphs to show the correlation between advertising and sales revenue. Learning is rapid in such lessons, with students letting the computer do the hard groundwork, so they can move on to interpreting and forecasting from the results. Students then save their work or email it home. They make further progress by having constant on-line access to their teachers' notes, which are used to check and correct their answers. The interactive whiteboard is used very effectively for presentations. Students enjoy this method, which also accelerates the rate of learning, especially for the students of lower capability, who have the additional support of the visual aid. All students are able to extend their learning significantly by accessing data bases and other stored information. Gifted and talented students make very good progress, as the use of ICT enables them to extend and widen their knowledge through the various programs available.

131. Teaching is very good overall, and there are many examples of excellent teaching strategies. Staff question their students in depth, and are not content with a superficial response. This effectively challenges the students' thinking, as, for example, when they were asked if there was any correlation between disposable income and the sale of consumer goods such as television sets. Using prior knowledge of the economic theory of market price, students were led into a debate about income elasticity of demand. Keeping the pace fast, the teacher then went on to help students explore the concept of negative and positive correlation, using ICT throughout, with notes being recorded on electronically prepared worksheets. Further learning took place as students learnt how to use a specific program to work out graph results and how to produce a scatter graph. Students learn to apply their skills of numeracy in such sessions very effectively. Teachers have very good levels of

subject knowledge and understanding. Their style of questioning leads students to make reference to past material and to broaden their learning into the real world, using pertinent examples from their own experiences. This was particularly effective when students were looking at gender differences between products and the effects of marketing strategies on sales. Students were able to draw on their own experiences in gaining a greater understanding of the various factors at work in the world of marketing.

132. The department is very well led and managed. There are many aspects which are excellent, including the vision of the head of department. He is resolute in his determination to raise standards, using the newest technology and techniques, and this vision is shared by other staff. All staff are very competent in using new methods and this has had a very favourable impact on standards. Work is very effectively marked, and very good pointers are given for improvement. Students are set aspirational targets from the start, and their progress is very well monitored over time. Weaknesses are identified through regular departmental meetings. The department's vision for success is centred on improving the performance of the students. As a result, high standards have been more than sustained, and students' achievement overall is good.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

133. No courses were inspected in detail. The school offers an AS-Level course in ICT, and a key skills course. This provision was observed to be effective in equipping students with ICT skills.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

Physical education was inspected in detail. No other courses are offered in this area.

Overall the provision for physical education is **good**.

Strengths:

- Good teaching.
- Teachers' subject knowledge and explanations.
- Good relationships between teachers and students.
- Students are interested in and have a positive attitude towards physical education.

Areas for improvement:

- Raise standards of A-Level results by building on the very good GCSE results.
- Share good practice in A Level teaching.
- Increase opportunities for students to research more of their work.
- Extend the range of accredited courses available to the sixth form students.

134. Thirty students follow the AS course, and 21 follow A-Level. There are opportunities for all sixth form students to take recreational physical education, choosing from a variety of optional activities.

135. Results in GCE A-Level examinations in 2000 are below average. This reflects a decline from the previous year, and results in 2001 show some improvement, although they are still somewhat below the national average. In AS-Level examinations in 2001, results are also below average. However, the standards of work seen during the inspection indicate that students taking the AS course are working in line with national expectations, and students taking the A2 course are above national levels.

136. AS students have a satisfactory understanding of muscle names, locations and prime movers at joints. They are able to relate movements at joints to specific sports such as hurdling. They understand concepts of skill classification, skill acquisition and psychological models of skill learning. In A2 work, students have a good understanding of anaerobic energy systems and the role of lactic acid and creatin in energy production. They know about specific training effects for their chosen sports, and are able to analyse sporting movements effectively, drawing on their understanding of different aspects of the subject. In both AS and A2 higher attaining students have better organised folders, clearer diagrams and more substantial notes, showing more in depth research into topics, than do average attaining students.

137. Students' achievement is satisfactory. Some students who opt for this subject find less accessible the emphasis on the theoretical rather than the practical work which dominates GCSE courses. Students make good progress in understanding the more complex anatomy and physiology required by the AS syllabus, and the more complex issues of anaerobic energy systems in A2. In the analysis of practical activity, students have learned to make wider use of their knowledge in order to identify strengths and weaknesses in performances. The work observed during the inspection indicates that, whilst the achievement of some students is good, that of the majority is satisfactory.

138. Teaching is good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and give clear explanations, which helps students make progress in their understanding of the subject. Teachers' knowledge of examination requirements helps students to have a clear view of how to gain marks in examination questions. Lessons are well planned and prepared, with a range of tasks and useful worksheets. The information sheets, which require students to research and make an input of their own, are more effective in promoting learning than those which simply present information. Informative marking of students' work helps them to improve its quality. However, students' folders are not regularly checked to ensure that work is completed and to evaluate the quality of students' notes and diagrams. One of the features of the very good teaching seen was the use of carefully structured pair and group discussions, which encouraged students to take an active part in learning. Students make better progress in the lessons where they are challenged to think hard and to respond in question and answer sessions, and in assignments where they research their work and relate answers to their own sport. Less learning takes place in lessons where students repeat work that they have already done for GCSE.

139. Students are interested in the subject, respond in question and answer sessions, and take pride in their work. Higher attaining students have better organised course work folders. Students are able to work both independently and collaboratively when required. There are good relationships between teachers and students and between students themselves.

140. The subject is well led and managed, and staff work with commitment. The curriculum is well planned to meet the requirements of the examination syllabus. Information about the syllabus was made available rather late last year, and staff are able to approach the current course with greater confidence. There is a good take-up of AS, with 30 students opting for the course this year. There are a number of school teams, which provide opportunities for higher attaining and talented students as a route to district, county and national levels. Just prior to the inspection, the under-19 girls netball team came fourth in the county national qualifying championships.

141. Since the last inspection, results in external examinations have remained broadly stable, with a sharp decline in 2000, but better results in 2001. The number of students choosing physical education has increased, as a result of increasing numbers of pupils taking GCSE and wishing to continue their studies in the subject. Teaching is good, there are good relationships, and students are very positive about the subject.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

142. Courses are offered at AS- and A-Level in art and drama and theatre studies. Both subjects were inspected in detail.

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

Strengths:

- Standards of attainment.
- Very effective teaching.
- Students' attitudes to work and relationships with teachers.
- The quality of leadership and management of the subject.

Areas for improvement:

- Further development of ICT equipment.

143. The department offers two courses: art, and art and design and graphic design. Numbers fluctuate a little, but, at present, 34 students follow the AS course, and 11 A-Level. A small number of students who have not followed art courses for GCSE have opted for the subject in Year 12.

144. Results in GCE A-Level examinations in 2001 are broadly average. Boys scored higher than girls in this year, although the reverse was true in 2000. Results in the recently introduced AS-Level examinations in 2001 are higher. The quality of work observed in students' sketchbooks and portfolios indicates that some is well above average, particularly in graphic design. Some students show exceptional flair and imagination in work of significant quality and originality. Portfolios demonstrate attention to detail and research skills which range from very good to excellent. Year 12 students are developing paintings and drawings from the interpretation of expressive words, basing their research on the work of significant artists who have used the written word in their work. In graphic design, students use the theme of architectural illustration to produce designs based on schematic drawings, and three-dimensional architectural models. There are some excellent examples of the use of computer-generated art applications, including features such as transferring and distorting images, mixing text and graphic illustrations, and experimenting with colour.

145. Students achieve very well. Attainment in GCSE examinations ranges from A*-C, with the majority of students in the middle range. A very small number of students have not followed a GCSE course. They make very good progress because a wide range of media experiences is available to them, teaching is very good, and their own attitudes to study are excellent. They discuss their work with confidence, and take evident pride in their work. The work students produce shows the development of knowledge and skills through the sixth form course.

146. Teaching is very good. The curriculum is very well planned for students to work through a series of themes, so that they can develop their personal response to each. Teachers offer complementary skills and expertise in three-dimensional studies, ceramics,

fine art and graphic design. Students learn to work independently, making good use of research. Lessons are challenging, and well planned to provide all students with opportunities to progress. Classroom organisation and management is very effective, and each student is given well-judged and detailed personal guidance. Excellent relationships enable students to work with confidence, and ensure that the individual guidance and support is very effective in developing students' work. The particular expertise of staff allows for a wide range of media and techniques to be demonstrated by them and developed by students. Excellent displays relating to the work of artists and cultures, and regular references to such work, raise students' visual and creative awareness and appreciation.

147. The department is very well led and managed. The head of department has a clear vision for its work, and the teachers work as an effective team. Assessment procedures are very well designed and used very effectively to adjust and develop the course on a regular basis throughout the year.

148. When the school was last inspected, ICT provision was limited, and this restricted pupils' access. Although the department does have a computer in each room, and students can use the Learning Resource Centre, demand means that access is still sometimes a problem. Some work of very good quality is produced with ICT, but better quality equipment is needed. Accommodation is good, with the exception of one teaching area, which is made up of two small classrooms separated by a corridor. This presents difficulties in terms of adequate contact with and supervision of all students.

Drama and theatre studies

The quality of provision is **good**.

Strengths:

- Teaching is very good.
- Students representing a wide range of aptitudes are enthusiastic about this subject.
- The number of candidates opting for this course is increasing.
- Determined leadership has raised the profile of theatre studies, and the number of dramatic productions has increased.
- Technical facilities for lighting and sound are of a high order.

Areas for improvement:

- There is a lack of suitable accommodation; acting space, storage facilities and changing facilities for actors are inadequate.
- Some students show weaknesses in their written work.

149. Theatre studies caters for 35 students: 23 in Year 12 and 12 in Year 13. GCE AS and A2-Level courses are offered.

150. In the GCE A-Level examinations in 2000, all but one of the seven students who were entered gained a pass grade, and nearly half gained grades A or B. There were only five candidates in 2001; results for that year indicate that, although no student succeeded at the highest grades, all candidates obtained pass grades. Fourteen students followed the AS-Level course in 2001. Fifty percent of candidates gained grades A and B, and all but one candidate attained a pass grade. Achievement is good.

151. Flexible entry qualifications to Year 12 reflect the department's policy of inclusion, and students of widely varying academic aptitudes study this course. Standards in practical theatre are good and at least match national standards. Students make accurate interpretations of texts to capture the spirit of the set plays. In one lesson on 'A Midsummer

Night's Dream', students made perceptive assessments of the comic characters and their confusions, and one student undertaking the role of director spoke convincingly to her cast of the playwright's intentions. In another lesson, actors rehearsing in groups confidently created comic moments from the same play, and then offered helpful judgements of one another's performances from an audience's viewpoint. Although a minority of students are less confident when required to write for examination purposes, students of all levels of attainment achieve good, and sometimes very good, rates of progress. Standards of attainment are rising, and a climate of encouragement and sense of purpose prevails.

152. The Year 13 group comprises a range of aptitudes. Although a minority of students are less confident with their written projects, attainment in the practical work of theatre is good. Students make careful textual analyses of plays. They read with good understanding of the writer's intentions. In one lesson, students worked as designers on scenes from 'The Glass Menagerie'. They successfully interpreted the mood of the scene, and designed a costume which was suggestive of the vulnerability of the innocent nature of the character portrayed. Students showed particular skill with lighting techniques to create the appropriate atmosphere on stage, and with sound effects. Students have learnt to always give consideration to what is practical when designing stage sets, but this training in no way suppresses the originality of their thinking; on the contrary, it fosters the best habits of working with self-discipline and a controlled enthusiasm.

153. Teaching is good, with some very good features. Students in Year 12 are provided with a firm foundation upon which to build good theatrical knowledge and confident practical skills, and learn to appreciate the unique quality of good drama. Teachers' expectations are realistic; the students undertaking the course represent a wide range of attainment and lessons are pitched at an appropriate level. Teachers are sure of their subject and enthusiastic in sharing their expertise. They listen with interest to students' ideas about performance, so students willingly share ideas with the group and listen to one another's suggestions. Astute questioning and well-timed advice challenge students to grasp more precisely the details of action, atmosphere, and posture. Teachers' management skills are good, so practical work continues apace in an atmosphere of controlled enthusiasm, and students learn the self-discipline required for successful teamwork. Each has the opportunity to develop particular talents while all learn to work constructively in corporate, creative effort. Students achieve very well. However, in one lesson, students had neglected to study their text in sufficient detail and their preparation for the lesson was inadequate.

154. The leadership and management of the department are very good. The department has responded positively to the new challenges posed by the AS and A2-Level courses, despite the continuing inadequacy of the accommodation. There is not enough space for storage or for practical work, and changing facilities are inadequate. However, the technical resources, lighting and sound facilities are of the highest quality. The head of department has a clear understanding of where improvements are needed and how they can be achieved. Schemes of work have been developed which make the courses more relevant to the aspirations and career choices of boys. Greater focus is being concentrated on improving students' writing skills: frameworks for writing help students develop their ideas logically. The department's worksheets supporting students' self-study tasks are of very good quality, but the use made of them by students is not monitored well.

155. The increasing number of dramatic performances organised by the head of theatre studies has raised the profile of drama within the school, and beyond into the local community. The school has performed 'The Crucible', and preparations are under way for the production of 'Our Country's Good', and for the later production of local author

Ormerod's 'Saturation Point'. Sixth form students play a large role in producing the 'School Show', involving 86 pupils and pupils from local primary schools, for an audience that includes residents from an old people's home. The department makes a good contribution to students' social and cultural development.

HUMANITIES

156. Courses at AS- and A-Level are offered in geography, history, government and politics, sociology and psychology. All except sociology were inspected in detail. Work seen in sociology indicated that standards match those of results in the last two years.

Geography

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

Strengths:

- There is very good provision for key skills teaching, including ICT.
- There is good, well planned, varied provision for fieldwork.
- Marking is good and provides the necessary guidance for students to improve.

Weaknesses:

- Schemes of work need more detailed planning, particularly the supported self study units.
- There is a need to develop the students' note taking skills and thinking skills, and to be more selective in the amount of information provided.
- A careful evaluation of A and AS Level results is required with reference to both past and present data.

157. The provision in geography caters for 65 students at present, 35 in Year 12 and 30 in Year 13. There are two groups in each year of AS and A2 students. There is an inclusive admissions policy, and students who join the sixth form from other schools make up about 8 per cent of the current cohort. Provision is also made for students who may not previously have studied geography.

158. Results are below national average. In 2000, 18 per cent of pupils gained grades A or B, compared to 37 per cent nationally, although all students obtained a pass. In 2001, only 85 per cent of pupils gained a pass grade, but the proportion attaining the higher grades rose to 31 per cent, compared with the provisional figure for the national average of 38 per cent. The student retention rate on the AS course is very good and only two students chose not to go on to study A Level last year. Girls generally do better than boys especially at the higher grades. The work seen in lessons and in students' files and work indicates that standards are mostly in line with the average, with some students attaining above average levels.

159. Students show good knowledge and understanding of the current topics under consideration, including soils, population issues and the intricate relationships involved with Trans National corporations. The work in files includes examples of good graph work and relevant, accurate calculations; these are accompanied by satisfactory to good interpretation of data. There is little variety in the form of students' note taking or in the presentation of information. For example, students make limited use of maps, atlas data, detailed annotation of diagrams and spider diagrams. There is, however, some good use of tabulation and highlighted text. Written work in Year 12 shows a range of attainment from average to above average, and standards in Year 13 are a little higher. Year 13 students demonstrated good oral work in discussion. The highest attaining students are able to write in detail about

processes or issues, and to use examples linked to their descriptions or conclusions. Recently the department has accepted a wider range of prior attainment than previously. When account is taken of their attainment at the time they begin the courses, students' achievement is satisfactory overall.

160. Overall, teaching is good and students learn well. Lessons are well structured and resources are used effectively. Teachers have good subject knowledge and give good support and encouragement to students, which helps to build their confidence. Essays are well marked, with useful advice added to help students improve. Basic communication skills are well supported and developed by role-play and discussion. However, there are occasional examples of poor quality written English in Year 12 work. Students are attentive and responsive. They can talk about their work and make good contributions in discussion. Role-play activities allow students the opportunity to listen as well as talk, and this is done well. In addition, the well planned decision-making exercises, which are clearly enjoyed by students, helps them to develop deeper understanding. Probing questioning is also a strong tool in the development of their understanding. Work seen on the indicators of development and correlation included written work and data analysis which ranged from satisfactory to very good in quality. Higher attainers write clear conclusions and use examples well. Lower attainers understand the data and the processes involved, but their ability to link information to provide good evaluations and conclusions is limited. One less effective feature of teaching was an example of too much input from the teacher, allowing for too little response from the students. This limited not only the degree to which students were able to play a part in their learning, but also restricted the teacher's knowledge of how much students were understanding.

161. One tenth of the course time is devoted to supported self-study. Units of work have been prepared for students, and the content is clearly explained and supports the remainder of the course. However, the quality of the reprographics and the quantity of material supplied are not well designed for the needs of lower attainers, who often find the materials overwhelming rather than stimulating.

162. Work in the subject is led and managed well and there is good departmental cooperation. Teaching group arrangements are well organised, and well planned fieldwork and the good quality of most teaching resources contribute well to students' learning. The course provides good overlap with GCSE skills and very good opportunities for using and developing numeracy, ICT, and communication skills. Students' performance, including the relative performance of male and female students, is monitored through target grades, but individual students' progress through the courses from entry is not tracked in enough detail. Meetings are held regularly to discuss the new AS and A2 teaching units, share ideas and standardise assessment. Involving students in self-assessment procedures is making students focus on study skills.

History

The overall provision is **very good**.

Strengths:

- Teaching is very good.
- Standards are high and students achieve well.
- Student response is very good because the department provides a very good learning experience for its students, including opportunities for independent research.
- The approach to the subject ensures that it contributes particularly well to the key skill of communication.
- Assessment procedures are good.

Areas for improvement:

- Computers are not used with sufficient regularity and frequency in the classroom.
- The school's learning resource centre could be used more effectively to promote reading and research.
- Some of the rooms used are too small for the number of students using them
- Assessment information is not being used fully to support students with noticeably higher or lower potential attainment. Data indicating the progress of students over time is not readily available.
- Resources are sound overall but could be developed further.

163. At present, 28 students study the AS course, and 29 students the A2 course. The department accepts students with a wide range of ability, and not all have high grades at GCSE.

164. GCSE A Level examination results are in line with national averages in 2000, and well above average in 2001. The majority of students were able to meet course requirements in both years. Results in 2001 show considerable improvement on those of the previous year. In 2000, 73 percent of students gained a pass and this increased to 95 percent in 2001. In 2001 63 per cent of students gained A or B grades compared to 47 per cent in 2000. These latest results are higher than in the previous two years and the overall trend is upward. Students did well in the new AS examinations, with 43 percent awarded an A or B grade and all at least a pass grade. The majority of students achieve appropriately in relation to their results at GCSE, and some achieve well, and there is no significant difference between the results of male and female students.

165. The standard of work in Year 13 is very good and all students achieve well. They have built on their experience in Year 12 and have gained in both knowledge and maturity in their approach to the subject. They can understand complex issues, for example when examining the impact of foreign policy on the domestic political situation in the USA during the presidencies of Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon. They all show a clear understanding of factors that affected the relationship between the executive and the legislature, with the highest attaining students being able to explain why Johnson dealt with congress so effectively. Average students show that they appreciate what is meant by a system of checks and balances and the term 'imperial presidency'. The written work of the highest attaining students shows a very analytical approach and the ability to use apt quotations well in support of their views. Students are confident in completing research tasks and in sharing their findings with others. The key skill of communication is developed well, and written work shows that students have the potential to develop the high level of skills in essay and document work required by the demands of the A2 course.

166. Students in Year 12 are now well into the course and have made good progress. They have an established understanding of political development in Britain in the early part of the nineteenth century. They experience little difficulty with unfamiliar vocabulary or concepts, and they are methodical in finding information to support or refute the statement that the parliamentary Reform Act of 1832 made major changes in our political system. The highest attaining students show very good skills in evaluation and in putting forward differing arguments, supported by very specific evidence. All students show a good level of knowledge, for example about the inconsistency of voting rights prior to the 1832 Act.

167. Teaching is very good and students learn very well as a result of the quality of teaching. Teachers use teaching strategies that promote a high level of participation. Students are encouraged to research and to make decisions about the past based on what they have read rather than to rely on class notes. They take responsibility for their own work by researching different themes and then reporting back to the group. Students plan their work well and their files of notes are well managed. A particular feature of work in both year groups is the ability of students to take responsibility for their own work as active participants in lessons. Teachers are really knowledgeable and their enthusiasm for the subject is infectious. Students share the enthusiasm and, because of this, they learn very effectively. Questioning is particularly effective because it focuses classroom discussion and is used to take forward the learning of all members of the group.

168. Some classrooms used for the subject are cramped, but displays are good despite the lack of space. Students have the opportunity to use a variety of carefully chosen textbooks. The department has produced good quality resources, and these have compensated for the lack of textbooks for certain areas of the course. For example, the main text for the work on the USA has only just arrived in school. Students use computers for their own research and word processing, but the department uses computers in classrooms only rarely. There is more scope for students to use them to manipulate statistical information, for example to help them gain a greater understanding of the relationship between political, economic and social trends. There is also scope for greater use of the facilities provided by the school's learning resource centre.

169. The high quality of teaching and learning are a result of the very good management and development of the subject. Procedures and documentation are very good. The five teachers work together effectively as a team. The head of department has planned the introduction of the new system of examinations very effectively and has ensured success for the first cohort of AS students. Assessment procedures are well developed and work is assessed in a way that is valuable to individual students. However, support systems for those who are exceptionally able or in need of extra help are not yet fully developed. Data showing individual students' progress in relation to earlier test and examination results is not readily available as yet. . Students have the opportunity to go on a range of valuable and carefully planned visits to Europe and the USA. It is clear that the subject has improved well since the last inspection. A new curriculum has been effectively introduced and standards have improved. Students are enthusiastic about their experience in the subject and judge it to be very good.

Politics

Overall provision is **very good**

Strengths:

- Attainment is well above average and students achieve very well.
- Teaching is very good, and a particularly successful feature is the encouragement for discussion.
- The subject is well led and managed by an enthusiastic, knowledgeable teacher.

Areas for improvement:

- Use of ICT is limited by difficulty of access to computers.
- Students' supported self-study does not fulfil the planned percentage of the course adequately.
- Students' progress is not monitored against their GCSE results.

170. The AS course is followed by 24 students and 28 follow the A-Level course. They are enthusiastic about the subject, and no students gave up the course at the end of Year 12 last year. The popularity of the subject is further indicated by the rapid growth in the number of students, from only five in 1999 to nearly 30 in the present Year 13.

171. The attainment of students taking A-Level politics is well above the national average. Candidates achieved an average points score of 8.00 from 1998 to 2000. This figure dipped to 4.5 in 2001, but the performance of Year 12 in the AS Level examination of the same year was outstanding, with over 70 per cent of students gaining an A or B grade and none failing to achieve a pass. The achievement of students is also high. This is demonstrated by the ease with which they discuss complex political issues and the fluency and depth of their written work. Whilst many enter the department with very good GCSE results, it is clear that they are prepared to meet challenging targets at 'A' level which indicates the high expectations of both teachers and students.

172. The quality of teaching is very good. Amongst teachers' strengths is an excellent command of the subject. In one lesson, this encouraged students involved in a stimulating discussion of third parties in the USA to consider the roles of both George Wallace in the 1960s and Teddy Roosevelt in 1912. Brisk pace in a lesson allowed Year 12 students to study the different functions of the House of Commons in outline before looking in more depth at its role in law making. Lessons are well planned with a clear structure that allows students to understand complex issues and the links between them, such as the nature of 'transient parties' in the USA and their effect on the main parties.

173. A particularly successful feature of the teaching is its encouragement of debate and discussion, something students appreciate and feel they benefit from. Students were encouraged to discuss the difference between political parties in the USA and Britain, or ways in which the House of Commons could be streamlined. Teachers listen to students' views: their interventions are normally timely, thoughtful and stimulating, with only an occasional missed opportunity. For example, a student's suggestion that the Committee stage of legislation should be abolished could have been used to raise questions about the role of Standing Committees in scrutinising legislation.

174. The good teaching stimulates written work of a high standard. Students demonstrate good literacy skills as they write on a range of political issues with clarity and fluency. Good verbal communication skills are demonstrated by their confidence in class discussion. Use

of ICT in the department is limited. Most students do, however, use word-processing effectively in the production of notes and written work.

175. The department has begun to develop supported self-study by encouraging students to research certain aspects of the course. The choice of political parties as a key topic here is a good one, which lends itself to investigation by students. Whilst students value the opportunity for personal research, they do not appear to place the same emphasis on it as the school does in the current development plan. The intention that 10 per cent of the total course in politics should be delivered through self-supported study is not realised at the moment. Students place a high value on the annual politics trips to New York and Washington or to Prague and Berlin, which have been carefully planned to offer good learning opportunities.

176. The leadership of the politics department is thoughtful, effective and energetic. The teacher in charge is enthusiastic about the subject, of which she has an excellent command. Departmental documentation is comprehensive and helps to inform the effective teaching. Students feel they are set realistic but challenging targets, and these are reviewed once a term. Teachers are clearly aware of the strengths and weaknesses of individual students. However, academic monitoring would be given an even sharper focus by greater use of information on prior attainment, such as GCSE results, in determining targets. Staff and resources are well deployed, and the induction of a teacher new to the subject has been effectively handled. Departmental resources are good, as is provision for the subject in the school library, although the regular purchase of quality daily newspapers would benefit students.

Psychology

Provision is **very good**.

Strengths:

- Standards are high and well above the national average at AS Level and at A Level.
- Teaching is very good overall, and this leads to very good learning in lessons and good levels of achievement;
- There is a very good curriculum which broadens and extends students' learning effectively;
- Leadership and management are very good, with clear vision for future improvements.

Area for improvement:

- Use of ICT as an aid to improved learning.

177. The AS course is followed by 22 students and 41 follow the A-Level course.

178. Standards in psychology are well above the national average, and examination results at AS and at A Level reflect this. Despite a fall in the students' performance at A-Level in 2000, standards rose again in 2001, with 50 per cent of students attaining an A or B grade. Results in AS Level in 2001 show students to be performing significantly better than the national provisional results, with 43 per cent gaining an A or B grade. Students' work and performance in lessons confirm these very good results. Achievement is good.

179. Teaching overall is very good, and results in very good learning. In most of the lessons observed, teaching was good, with many very good features. Very good levels of planning, marking and assessment raise the quality of teaching overall to very good. Teachers have very good levels of subject knowledge, which is used very effectively when they are

questioning students. Teachers ask probing questions which challenge students to think deeply about the issues being debated. In a lesson on psychological attachments, students were challenged very effectively by the teacher to think of the opposite of distress caused by separation. Using very good levels of technical language, students were then able to learn a complete picture of the various aspects of attachments and build up a wider overview. The constant use of correct psychological terminology learnt by students greatly enhances their literacy skills. All students are able to explain technical terms articulately when making presentations in front of their peers. Teachers also employ very good strategies for enabling students to learn through debate and critical analysis of, for example answers in examination papers, thereby improving their command of examination techniques. Very effective 'warm-up' sessions engage students' attention from the start, challenging them, for example, to think of gender stereotypes in preparation for more in-depth analysis of the various studies carried out on perceived gender differences. Students are taught the skills of analysis very well, and they develop a very good level of critical analysis when comparing research findings, or when looking for the shortcomings in psychological theories, such as those of Freud. Teachers have very good knowledge of their students' capabilities, and, through a thorough analysis of their work supported by very good marking, they ensure that students are aware of their areas of weakness and how to improve upon them.

180. The curriculum and the ways in which it is taught are very good, and they enhance learning effectively. Planning of individual lessons ensures that new knowledge and understanding are central to learning. Very good longer term planning shows a very good balance between acquiring factual knowledge, discussion and debate, research, and practical work, such as critical analysis and evaluation of theories. Much of the knowledge and understanding is acquired through the ample opportunities for debate and the presentation of students' own ideas, with frequent and regular sessions of evaluation. The skills of becoming evaluative and critical are developed very effectively over time, and this greatly enhances the good overall achievement of students. The subject is very popular and has a high take-up rate each year. There are 38 students in Year 12, and 24 in Year 13. Students claim that much of this is due to the very good way in which the subject is presented and taught. Inspection findings confirm this in that students get a wide range of very good learning opportunities, with good quality materials for supported self-study.

181. The subject is very well led and managed by a recently appointed head of department, who is well supported by her teaching colleagues. There is clear understanding of how the subject should be developed, guided by a clear set of aims and objectives. Regular and thorough analysis of students work' and examination performance are central to this, and have led recently to a debate on how best to support those students who perform less well than expected. The targets set for individual students are realistic, and based on prior attainment. There is very good monitoring and review of progress, and sections of the syllabus have been modified recently to take account of students' performance and changes in examination requirements. Regular departmental meetings ensure that any issues are shared and dealt with appropriately. The use of ICT as an aid to learning is a relative weakness. Some word processing and Internet research is encouraged, and the materials for supported self-study are technology based. However, little use of ICT was seen in lessons.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

182. AS- and A-Level courses are offered in English Language, English literature, French and German. English literature and French were inspected in detail. Standards observed in English Language match the good results in this course in 2001. Numbers in German are small, but standards are good.

English literature

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

Strengths:

- Standards are rising, and are above average in 2001.
- Teaching is very good: teachers know their subject well and convey their knowledge effectively.
- Students' attitudes to learning are very good.
- The subject is led and managed very well.

Areas for improvement:

- Some students, particularly less confident lower attainers, need to extend their range of reading.
- Not all students adopt the best practices for independent study; current strategies giving support to borderline students need to be more carefully monitored.
- Students should be encouraged to read poetry aloud.

183. The subject caters for 50 students, offering GCE AS and A2-Level courses.

184. In 2000, 20 students entered GCE A-Level examinations, twice as many as in 1999. The proportion of students gaining grades A or B is above the national average, although only 85 per cent gained a pass, compared with 96 per cent nationally, and the average points scored by students was just below average. In 2001, results are above average, and indicate a further rise in attainment, in that all students obtained a pass and the average points score rose considerably. Attainment in 2001 indicates that students achieved well in relation to predictions based on their GCSE results. Results at GCE AS-Level in English literature in 2001 indicate that almost half of the 25 candidates achieved passes at the highest grades, A and B. Moreover, all students achieved pass grades.

185. Year 12 students currently taking GCE AS Level English literature were in the first term of their course at the time of the inspection. Observation of their work indicates that the majority are consolidating their earlier successes at GCSE Level. The number of students admitted to the course is rising and the range of prior attainment is wide. Currently attainment matches expectations, and students at all levels of attainment are achieving good rates of progress. This indicates that, by the time these students reach the end of the course, attainment should rise above national expectations. Already, most students are reading for exact meaning; their written work shows the benefit of gaining a clear understanding of layers of meaning in texts. Students are achieving a secure platform for the confident exploration of ideas. Students speak convincingly of their personal responses to the 20th century play 'Waiting for Godot'. They make apt comparisons and references to the comedy in Shakespeare's 'The Taming of the Shrew'. In a lesson on 'The Clockwork Orange', students made perceptive comments on the moral issues in the novel, and were very critical of the concluding, violent scene of the film version, which ignored the moral lesson intended by the author. However, some borderline students have not yet formed the

habit of reading widely. The current strategy for supporting students' self-study work could be extended to encourage this.

186. Attainment in Year 13 is above average; students achieve well in relation to their earlier work at GCE AS-Level. Higher attaining students become autonomous readers, who speak about their studies in a mature and scholarly manner. However, lower attaining students have, as yet, not done sufficient background reading to make secure cross references to other texts. The majority shows a capacity to reflect sensibly on the subject, and present their arguments in a clear written style. For example, students write convincingly, comparing texts by different authors on similar themes. The best work shows students' sensitivity to nuances of meaning, but whilst a minority of students makes valid comparisons, they are not so precise in their evaluation of the authors' choice of language. A small minority of students confine their attention to the surface and obvious features of texts. In one very interesting poetry lesson students showed a developing appreciation of Coleridge's poetry, but their skill in the complex art of reading poetry aloud did not match the very high levels of their perception and understanding.

187. Almost all teaching is very good, with some touches of excellence. Teachers' enthusiasm and secure subject knowledge ensure that the pace of lessons is brisk. Students work with commitment and usually with enthusiasm. Challenging questioning by teachers draws out what students know. Teachers possess a skilful sense of timing; they offer fresh information at the appropriate moment when students are ready to assimilate it. Careful planning by teachers gives purpose and shape to lessons, and aims are made clear to students. Teachers vary their methods; for example they use appropriate worksheets to enable average attainers to achieve well and consolidate knowledge. Use of effective frameworks for discussion enables all students to organise their thoughts, and one group was surprised at the amount of knowledge they had. In another lesson, very good teaching fully engaged lively minds in the journey of Coleridge's 'Ancient Mariner'. Students' enjoyment accelerated rates of achievement at all levels of attainment during this hour.

188. The leadership and management of the faculty are very good. Entry requirements at AS and A2 Levels are kept as low as feasible to encourage a climate of inclusion, and an increasing number of students representing a wider range of attainment have recently joined the courses. The department's success at GCSE Level has encouraged more boys to study English than in the past, although girls continue to outnumber them. Moreover, all 24 students in Year 12 who took English literature at AS-Level in 2001 have continued their studies at A2 Level in Year 13, justifying the formation of two groups at A2-Level. Procedures for marking and assessing work are thorough. Students' progress is carefully monitored, and teachers keep accurate records of their students' rates of attainment. For example, careful monitoring of teaching and learning for the new AS Level course during the previous year has led to a thorough revision and sharpening of the induction course. As a result, current AS students are able to engage more promptly with their coursework projects. Revised schemes of work and a shortening of the time spent on trial tests will allow more time to be spent preparing pupils for their AS-Level examination.

French

189. The focus of the inspection was on French, but German was sampled. In German, take-up has been low in the past four years. A Level examination results are below average in 2000 and 2001. Two lessons were observed. In both, good teaching enabled students to achieve well. In Year 12, students made good progress in understanding complex

grammatical concepts and demonstrated good prior learning. In Year 13, students were carefully led to gain a sound grasp of a literary text and supported well to express themselves about it in German. Ten students follow German courses, and in French, 15 study AS-Level and 3 A-Level.

French

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

Strengths:

- Results improved this summer and are above average.
- Almost all the teaching is good and some is very good; teachers have high expectations of students and they plan and deliver lessons which enable students to reach their potential.
- There is a good range of opportunities for students to develop their speaking skills.
- Students' grammatical knowledge is developed thoroughly in the topic contexts.
- Students feel well supported by their teachers.

Areas for Improvement:

- The marking of written work does not consistently include targets for improvement.
- Students' pronunciation is not systematically improved.
- The use of ICT is not planned into sixth form French to raise students' attainment.
- Analysis of examination results is not used to evaluate how well students do at A level in relation to their GCSE results.
- Some subject policies and documentation have not been revised since the previous inspection.

190. There are 12 students in Year 12 and three in Year 13.

191. In 2000, only four students took GCE A Level, attaining results below average. However, the GCE A Level results in 2001 show a significant improvement on those in 2000, with a much higher number of students entered. The number of students gaining the highest grades, A or B, was above the national average. Students' results at AS Level in 2001 are also good, with 57 per cent gaining an A or B grade, and all students achieving at least a pass. Boys' results were better than those of girls, but the numbers involved are too small to be significant. With some fluctuations, standards have been maintained since the last inspection.

192. The standards of work by the large majority of current students, as seen both in their lessons and in their written assignments, are also above average. In Year 13, students are achieving well in relation to predictions based on a combination of their GCSE scores and AS performance. Although the inspection took place relatively early in the year, effective teaching has ensured that students have already built on their knowledge from Year 12 to enable them to achieve understanding of a literary text and to express their views about it orally with some support. They have made progress from Year 12 in writing much more accurately for a variety of audiences and purposes, using more complex constructions, giving more detailed opinions, and justifying arguments.

193. Year 12 students are only two months into their course, but their work already demonstrates good achievement and good progress made since their GCSE results. They show an understanding of spoken text and dialogue at normal and near normal speeds and they can extract detail from it to use for their own purposes of expression. They can express their own views relatively fluently in both in speaking and writing. Their errors do not impede

understanding or communication. This was demonstrated in a lesson where students discussed the effect of violence on television on younger children. Some students were able to express themselves fluently at a level already above the national average, whereas others were more hesitant and reliant on prompts, though they still had made progress from GCSE standards. Whilst all students show that they could manipulate the language through a growing awareness of grammar, a small number have greater difficulty in achieving fluency in speaking and writing owing to a weaker grasp of grammatical concepts.

194. Teaching is good overall and, as a result, students learn well. Students are attentive, work at a good pace and generally apply a lot of intellectual effort to reach their potential. Lessons have clear objectives and finish by establishing what pupils have learned. The pace of lessons is mostly good, and students are given every opportunity to express themselves. In two lessons in Year 12, teaching was very good, with high expectations of students' performance resulting in very good achievement in speaking and in understanding. In the best lessons teachers display very good subject knowledge and skills in planning, methodology and the use of resources. By these means they enable students to build on previous knowledge, develop it further and achieve their potential. A good example of this was a Year 12 lesson where students listened and took notes from a relatively complex discussion about family conflicts. They fed back what they had understood, and were led to relate it to their own circumstances. In two lessons the teacher used very good strategies to raise and develop grammatical awareness and knowledge in context. There are good strategies for teaching literature and furthering students' general language skills at the same time. Good questioning techniques encourage the less confident to respond. Teachers exploit and add to published resources, and homework is used consistently well to extend learning opportunities beyond the classroom and to maximise the time for language study. Students are developing, or have developed, good learning strategies. Occasionally, planning is more pedestrian and students' time less well used. Teachers do not consistently plan for, or make the most of, opportunities to improve students' pronunciation during lessons.

195. Procedures for monitoring students' academic achievement and progress are sound. Work is marked carefully, and some targets for improvement are given, but this is not consistently done by all teachers. Termly reviews of target setting have just begun in Year 12, and students' termly self assessments should provide a very useful tool for helping them to realise their potential and boost their confidence. Whilst analysis of examination results is used to support the prediction of target grades and develop curriculum practice, it is not yet used to evaluate how well students do at A Level in relation to their GCSE results.

196. Direction for French is satisfactory. There is a commitment to improving standards, and a good range of traditional resources. The new examination courses have been well implemented, and the subject plans set out properly what is to be taught, learned and assessed. Whilst the Internet is being exploited to broaden students' learning opportunities by some teachers, few other opportunities to use ICT are planned into sixth form work to help students raise their attainment. The supported self-study material for French currently relies on published documentation. It does not exploit the use of ICT, nor is it used in a sufficiently planned and sustained way to augment the time for language learning for all students. There are very few resources for French in the Learning Resources Centre. Subject policies and documentation need updating. The department has the advantage of a French Assistante to work with sixth formers, and thought needs to be given to ways of further extending students' first hand experience of the culture and contemporary society of France and Francophone communities.