

INSPECTION REPORT

THE LEVENTHORPE SCHOOL

SAWBRIDGEWORTH

LEA area: HERTFORDSHIRE

Unique reference number: 117588

Headteacher: Mr P C Janke

Reporting inspector: Mr Brian Rowe
1695

Dates of inspection: 4 – 8 February 2002

Inspection number: 191283

Full 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:	Foundation
Age range of pupils:	11 - 18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Cambridge Road Sawbridgeworth Hertfordshire
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr R Beeching
Date of previous inspection:	13 January 1997

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1085	John Laver	Team inspector	English English post-16 Drama	
1068	Janet Allcorn	Team inspector	Mathematics Mathematics post-16	
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2495	Brian Munden	Team inspector	Design and technology	
14446	Barry Simmons	Team inspector	Physical education Physical education post-16 English as an additional language	
11838	Derek Cronin	Team inspector	Modern languages French post-16	
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10895	David Wasp	Team inspector	Religious education Sociology post-16 Equal opportunities	
31660	Marianne Young	Team inspector	Music Music post-16	
30518	Mike Johnson	Team inspector	Art Art post-16	
8070	Joe Haves	Team inspector	History History post-16	
10561	Angela Fraser	Team inspector	Physics post-16	
11969	John Hardy	Team inspector	Information and communication technology Business studies post-16	How good are curricular and other opportunities?
3755	Trevor Hulbert	Team inspector	Psychology post-16	
15606	Christine Hill	Team inspector	Special educational needs Community links	

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REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	6
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Pupils' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM	
PART B: COMMENTARY	14
HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?	
The school's results and pupils' achievements	
Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development	
HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?	19
HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO PUPILS OR STUDENTS?	21
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?	25
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?	26
HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?	27
WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	34
COMMUNITY LINKS	36
PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	38
PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4	43
PART E: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM	72

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

The Leventhorpe School is a mixed comprehensive school for pupils aged 11 to 18 years, situated in Sawbridgeworth in the county of Hertfordshire. The school draws its pupils from the local area, the larger towns of Harlow and Bishop's Stortford and also further afield. The school enjoys a positive reputation in the area, is very popular with parents and is over-subscribed. Pupils have a wide range of backgrounds, but the proportion from advantaged backgrounds is much higher than average. There are currently 1078 pupils on roll, making it an average sized secondary school. There are fewer boys (498) than girls (560). There are 238 students in the sixth form and numbers have increased in recent years. About 4 per cent of the pupils come from minority ethnic groups, a lower proportion than average. These pupils represent a wide range of ethnicity and there is no predominant group. The majority are students in the sixth form who have joined after attending other schools and none of the pupils speak English as an additional language. There are no refugees or traveller pupils on roll. The proportion of pupils (3.2 per cent) receiving free school meals is very low when compared to the national average. Pupils' attainment on entry to the school is above the national average. About 7 per cent of the pupils have been placed on the special educational needs register, of whom 4 per cent have been assessed as having a high level of learning difficulty. Both these proportions are much lower than most other secondary schools. Five pupils have statements for special educational needs; this is well below the national average. During the last two years over 40 per cent of the staff have either left or joined the school.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

The Leventhorpe School is a good and effective school that provides its pupils and sixth form students with a good quality of education. It makes considerable effort to ensure all pupils are fully involved in all aspects of school life. By the time pupils reach the end of Year 11 they attain academic standards that are above the average for all schools nationally. Although attainment is below average for schools with pupils of a similar background, they make satisfactory progress. Standards in the sixth form are mostly well above average. Pupil attendance rates are above average. They have very positive attitudes to school and to their learning. Pupils' behaviour is invariably very good in class and most develop very positive relationships with the teachers and other pupils. The quality of teaching and learning is good throughout the school. Teaching in the sixth form is very good. The overall sixth form provision is financially cost-effective. The quality of management is good overall, although there is some variation between subject departments and faculties. The headteacher provides purposeful and measured leadership that has ensured good improvement since the last inspection. The school provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- Pupils achieve high standards and make good progress in Years 7 to 9 and the sixth form.
- A high level of care ensures pupils' personal development is good so they attend regularly, develop very good relationships with adults and each other and have very positive attitudes towards their learning.
- Teaching and learning are good in Years 7 to 11 and very good in the sixth form.
- A very good quality of education is provided in the sixth form.
- The school maintains parental confidence and sustains a very positive reputation in the community.

What could be improved

- The attainment in Years 10 and 11, ensuring that all pupils achieve their full potential.
- All teachers making greater use of assessment information to track pupils' progress and set them challenging targets.
- Raising attainment in information and communication technology (ICT) and increasing the opportunities for its use throughout the curriculum.
- The quality and use of the library.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was previously inspected in January 1997 and has accomplished significant improvements since then. The recommendations identified in the last inspection have mostly been successfully addressed, but the use of ICT is still underdeveloped. The school has also made improvements in many other important areas. These include: raising attainment throughout the school, strengthening leadership and management, improving the quality of teaching and learning, and providing greater curriculum opportunities for pupils and sixth form students. The school has also considerably increased the number of sixth form pupils on roll and improved the resources for ICT. A number of building projects have been completed.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1999	2000	2001	2001
GCSE examinations	A	B	B	D
A-levels/AS-levels	A	A	n/a	n/a

Key

well above average A

above average B

average C

below average D

well below average E

very low E*

By the time pupils reach the end of Year 9 they attain overall standards that are well above the national average. In the 2001 test results, attainment in English, mathematics and science is well above the national average. For the three years prior to 2001 standards have mostly remained unchanged in mathematics and science, but they have fluctuated in English. Standards in mathematics are well above the average for similar schools, above average in science and in line for English. Over the last four years the overall results have kept pace with national rising trends. Girls mostly outperform boys, but to lesser extent than national trends. The high attainment reflects very good progress and is due to a number of factors, but especially to the good quality of teaching and the pupils' positive attitudes to learning. Pupils of all ability make good progress. Attainment in art and music is especially good. Overall, the standards achieved are sufficiently high.

In 2001, the GCSE examinations results were above the national average, but below those of similar schools. Results have improved significantly since the last inspection. However, since 1999 they have declined, while remaining constantly above the national average. The reason for the declining success in examinations is related to the ability profile of pupils, a narrow option choice of subjects, insufficient academic monitoring and mentoring of pupils and inappropriate teaching strategies, especially for the lower attaining pupils. Girls have achieved better results than boys, at a similar extent to the national trend. In most subjects, the achievement of pupils in the GCSE examinations is as could be expected based on their prior attainment when measured in Year 7. The most successful subjects are those that are managed effectively, embracing changes to the curriculum and focusing clearly on improving the quality of teaching and learning. The extent to which pupils' performance is improved from Year 9 to Year 11 is satisfactory, but the overall trend of improvement in examination results is below the national average. Many pupils do make spectacular progress and a high proportion achieve eight or more A* to C grades. Given the high standards that the school sets itself, attainment of pupils at the end of Year 11 is not high enough. The standards in the sixth form have been above the national average for several years. Many students achieve examination results that are better than predicted by their GCSE grades and make very good progress. During the last two years the school has found difficulty in meeting its targets in Years 10 and 11 for the reasons outlined above. Evidence from recent Year 11 GCSE mock examinations and other assessment information indicates that results will improve again next year.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils come to school in a positive frame of mind and their attitudes to the school and their work are very good.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Pupils' behaviour during lessons and around the school is very good. They know exactly what is expected and the result is a lively but harmonious community.
Personal development and relationships	Personal development and relationships in school are very good. Pupils appreciate being given a voice in the running of the school and relish responsibilities when they are offered
Attendance	Attendance is good and the level of unauthorised absence is almost half the national 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.

The overall quality of teaching is good throughout the school and frequently very good. The teaching of sixth form courses is very good. In Years 7 to 11 the teaching in mathematics and science is good. Teaching in most other subjects is of a high quality, but some less effective teaching was observed in a few English and ICT lessons. Teaching in religious education and modern foreign languages is usually very good. Teachers have especially good subject knowledge and manage the pupils well. These qualities promote learning and pupils make good progress in the skills, knowledge and understanding of subjects. In some subjects the pupils are not sufficiently encouraged to learn independently of the teacher and develop their own research skills. The school is at an early stage in developing the teaching and development of pupils' literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum.

The school makes considerable effort to meet the needs of all its pupils. There is well-structured provision for pupils with special educational needs that ensures they make good progress. In most subjects the more able pupils are sufficiently challenged to achieve high standards, but teaching strategies to support the most gifted and talented pupils is as yet insufficiently developed. The provision to ensure support for pupils with English as an additional language is not a significant issue and pupils from minority ethnic groups achieve to their full potential.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The quality and range of the curriculum are good. The curriculum is very well supported by many visits and activities. Statutory requirements are not fully met in design and technology and ICT in Years 10 and 11, or in religious education in the sixth form.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Very good. The school provides very effective support for pupils with special educational needs.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good overall. This has improved since the last inspection. Spiritual development is satisfactory. Moral, social and cultural development is very good.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The care and support for pupils has improved since the last inspection and are now good. Health and safety procedures are very good and child protection procedures fully meet statutory requirements. The house system is the cornerstone of the pastoral care for pupils. There are good procedures in place for assessing pupils' progress.

Parents have very positive views about the school and give it a great deal of support. They receive good information about school life and are always made to feel welcome.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher provides purposeful and measured leadership that has ensured good improvement since the last inspection. The school is well served by a hard-working and dedicated senior management team who are mostly aware of the areas that have to be addressed.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governing body is very well informed about school issues. They fully understand their responsibility and contribute well to the school's strategic development
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school has established good review and monitoring procedures that help to identify both its strengths and weaknesses and provide information about future developments.
The strategic use of resources	The school applies good principles of best value for major spending items. It makes good use of a number of specific grants. Financial planning and control systems are very good

The school has sufficient appropriately qualified staff to teach the curriculum effectively and to meet the needs of pupils and sixth form students. Overall, learning resources are satisfactory. The accommodation is cramped given the present numbers on roll.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

The school sent out 1050 questionnaires of which 220 (21 per cent) were returned. Approximately 40 parents attended a meeting prior to the inspection to express their views about the school.

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children like school • Children make good progress • Behaviour is good • The teaching is good • The school has high expectations of the pupils • They feel comfortable in approaching the school with problems • The school is very well managed and led • The school helps children to become mature and responsible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The amount of homework • More information provided about their children's progress • The school working more closely with parents

The inspection team fully endorse the positive views expressed by parents. They do not agree with the views concerning homework and the information provided about children's progress. In both these aspects they found the provision to be good. The partnership between school and parents is very constructive.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form of this average-sized school has 238 students. It offers an extensive range of AS, A2 subjects and some vocational courses. About 65 per cent of students from the main school continue their education in the sixth form and a significant and increasing number enter it from other schools. Most students entering the sixth form pursue AS and A2 level courses, or a mixture of AS/A2 and vocational courses. Entry to the sixth form is open to all students who gain five or more GCSE A* to C grades or for whom there are appropriate courses and who are committed to further study. Nearly 90 per cent of students enter higher education when they finish their sixth form studies.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

This is a very good sixth form, which is cost-effective and provides good value for money. The overall standards achieved have been above national figures because teaching is very good and students have very positive attitudes to their work. The sixth form caters well for its students through a wide range of courses. Support available for students' personal development is good, but currently too restricted. This is mostly due to a vacancy for the post of assistant head of sixth form not being filled. Teachers are committed to their students and this shows in the high standard of teaching which is very good in the majority of subjects. The main strengths and areas that could be improved in the sixth form are:

Strengths

The very good quality of provision in most subjects
Teaching and learning are very good
The very good relationships and positive attitudes of the students
Students develop maturity and confidence and are an impressive group of young people
Students achieve examination results that are above average

What could be improved

Meeting the statutory requirements for teaching religious education
The lack of dedicated space for private study
Increasing the specialist provision for careers advice and monitoring the level of pastoral support and guidance for all students.

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
English	Very good. Students are very positive about the subject and achieve good examination results at A2 level as a result of very good teaching. There is very good leadership and management, especially in encouraging a wider range of teaching and learning styles.
Mathematics	Very good. Results at A level, for the last three years, have been well above national averages. Results for the new A Subsidiary Course for Year 12 students are just above average. Teaching on all courses is good and students have very positive attitudes to the subject that lead to high standards.
Physics	Very good. Results are above average. Students achieve very well because enthusiastic teachers foster critical thinking and have high expectations. The number of students reaching the highest grades has been above average for the past three years. Management and leadership are very good.
Business Studies	Good. Examination results are above average. Teaching is good and enables students to make good progress. Positive attitudes and commitment to succeed are evident in both years. The subject is led effectively.
Geography	Very good. Standards in the A level and AS level courses are very high. Results last year were well above average, particularly at the highest grades of A and B. Students achieve very well because of the very good teaching they receive. Excellent relationships exist between teachers and students.
Music	Very good. Results at AS and A2 are above average with an increasing number of students taking the examination. Teaching is consistently very good. Students' instrumental skills are a particular strength. The department is very well led and managed.
PE	Very good. Results at A level are in line with national average. Teaching is consistently very good and ensures considerable progress. Students are very committed to their work. Good relationships exist between students and teachers. The quality of leadership and management is very good.
History	Good. Standards achieved in 2001 are above average. Teaching and learning are very good and students make good progress. The management of history is very good.
Psychology	Good. Examination results are consistently above the national average. The good use of perceptive open-ended questioning promotes the quality of understanding and extends students' learning in a supportive and good-humoured environment.
Art	Very good. Examination results are above the national average. The quality of teaching is very good and ensures very good learning by all students. The quality of leadership is very good.
French	Very good. Results at A level in 2001 were above average and the rate of progress from GCSE is improving. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Management is good and numbers taking French are increasing.
Sociology	Very good. Standards are high and students are making very good progress, despite the fact they do not study the subject before Year 12. The quality of teaching is very good. The number of students studying the subject is very high in both years. Management and leadership are very good.
Biology	Good. Results in A2 level were below average, but at AS were above. The teachers enable the majority of students to reach their potential at both AS and A level. The relationships between teachers and students are very good.

Work was sampled in some other subjects during the inspection week. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning was very good. The provision in **theatre studies** is very good. Students are very enthusiastic and despite limited facilities they achieve very good results. The provision in **Spanish** is good. Results at A level in 2001 were below average and represented unsatisfactory progress from GCSE. However, results for a small number of students in two previous years were above average. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Many more students are now taking Spanish in both Years 12 and 13. Management of the subject is good. The provision in **German** is good. Results at A level in 2001 were average. With low numbers taking the subject it is not possible to identify a trend, but grades achieved in recent years represent satisfactory progress from GCSE. The quality of teaching, learning and management is good. The provision in **chemistry** is good. In A2 level

chemistry, results were average last summer and the AS results were good. Almost all students did as well as, or better than, expected when compared to their GCSE scores. The provision for **human biology** is good. A level examination results were well below average last summer. The school has put in place good developments to take account of the attainment range of students taking the course. As a result, the AS results show students are now making expected or better progress when compared to their GCSE examination results. The provision in **economics** is good. The AS level examination results are in line with national averages. The school has put detailed monitoring procedures in place to ensure the better tracking of pupils' progress. Teaching and learning are good and the improvements in management are having a positive impact on standards. The provision in **general studies** is satisfactory. The AS level examination results are in line with national expectations. Students are taught well and the management of the subject is satisfactory. The provision in **textiles** is very good. Examination results at AS level are good, with the majority of students gaining A to C grades and all gaining a pass grade. The quality of research and practical work is often outstanding. Teaching and learning are very good. Students are very enthusiastic about their work and apply their knowledge and skills very effectively. The quality of leadership is very good and this results in high standards.

The provision in **religious education** is excellent. Standards are very high and in the most recent A level examinations, two-thirds of those entered gained the highest A and B grades. The subject is becoming increasingly popular. The quality of teaching ranges from very good to excellent. A key feature of the teaching is the excellent subject knowledge and very high expectations of the teaching team. As a result, students are thoroughly motivated and make very good progress. Standards remain very high, both in terms of students' oral contributions and in their written work. Relationships are excellent in the classroom, creating a very positive learning environment. Management of the subject is excellent and students are given a very clear idea of how to improve their work. This is a very strong area of sixth form provision.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	<p>Students are positive about the sixth form and the range of courses available. The strengths identified by the students are justified. Good quality support and guidance are provided in Years 12 and 13. Information about all sixth form courses is good. Many students stated they would like information about higher education and other careers to be more readily available. Students' progress is well monitored and they are provided with appropriate academic support. However, there is insufficient time given to providing support and mentoring to students in order to inform them of their progress and to consider their concerns.</p> <p>The school recognises students' increasing maturity in the way the sixth form is organised and the responsibilities they are given around the whole school. Students have good opportunities to develop the key skills of literacy, numeracy, ICT and communication in English, business studies, economics, geography and mathematics.</p> <p>Overall, the progress of students is well monitored by the teachers, but staff shortages mean that they receive a limited amount of regular personal support and mentoring. The facilities for independent study are inadequate for a school of this size due to a shortage of accommodation for the large numbers in the sixth form.</p>
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	<p>The management of the sixth form is successful in providing a very good range of academic courses. The number of students has significantly increased over the last few years, but commendably examination results have remained above average. There has been a strong emphasis on raising standards through very good teaching across all subjects. There is a clear vision of the educational direction that the sixth form should take to further raise standards. The daily administration, the recruitment of students, promotion of standards and reviewing of overall progress are good.</p> <p>The governing body fulfils its responsibilities towards the sixth form. Provision and overall performance are well monitored. The governors have effectively supported the strategic development and best interests of the sixth form. The sixth form is cost effective and gives good value for money.</p>

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">• They are taught very well and are expected to work hard• Teachers know them well and provide help when it is needed• There is a good range of courses• They are encouraged to study and to do independent research	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• They receive too little personal support and careers advice• Information about the progress they are making• The school does not fully respond to the views of the sixth form

The strengths identified by students are confirmed by the inspection evidence. The very good relationships between teachers and students provide a supportive ethos, in which students can fulfil their academic potential. Teachers know their students well and are attentive to their individual needs. The inspection team agrees that more could be done to enhance the amount of careers advice and personal support. However, this is most likely to be accomplished when current vacancies for an assistant head of sixth form and librarian post are filled.

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

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

Main school

1. The attainment of pupils on entry to the school varies between year groups, but overall it is above average when compared with the intake of other comprehensive schools. The school has a lower proportion of pupils with statements of educational need than average and fewer pupils on its register for special educational need. The school also has many pupils who are academically very able and, consequently, there is a wide profile of ability in each year group. By the time pupils reach the end of Year 9, their attainment is above average when compared to all secondary schools, but for the last two years has been below the average for schools that have pupils from a similar background¹. Pupils make good progress and achieve very well in Years 7 to 9. They make satisfactory progress in Years 10 and 11. Their overall progress from Year 7 to Year 11 is satisfactory as they move through the school. In 2001, the post-16 results from A/AS Level and GNVQ examinations were mostly well above the national average and many students exceeded their predicted examination grades.

Years 7 – 9

2. The 2001 national tests taken at the end of Year 9, revealed that the combined average points score for English, mathematics and science were well above the national average. Results over the last three years, previous to 2001, have been sustained at a level well above average and improvements have kept pace with the national trend of rising scores. The school has been very successful at sustaining high standards considerably above the national average in Years 7 to 9. This is due to the good quality of teaching and the positive attitudes of the pupils to their learning. Over the last few years, girls have outperformed boys, but to a lesser extent than the trend nationally.
3. The average points score² in 2001 for English, mathematics and science when compared with all schools is well above average. Compared to similar schools, the points score for English was broadly average, for mathematics well above average and for science above the average. During the last few years there have been some differences in the performance of boys and girls in the individual subjects. For example, in English girls have outperformed boys, but to a lesser extent than the national difference and results have fluctuated each year. In mathematics, girls have outperformed boys and this is contrary to the national trend. In science, there is a similar picture to mathematics. Over the three subjects combined, the girls have outperformed boys, but to a lesser extent than the national trend. Results from the Year 2001 tests indicate an improvement in the overall point score and the school

¹ OFSTED compares the attainment to schools with less than 5 per cent of pupils eligible for free school meals

² The average points score provides schools with a single statistic to compare the overall grades attained by their pupils with the grades attained by pupils in another school. At Key Stage 3 the Level attained by each pupil, for example, in mathematics, is given a score. A Level 4 = 27 points, a Level 5 = 33 points and so on. Therefore the average points score in mathematics is worked out by adding up all of the points based on the Level attained by pupils and then dividing by the number of pupils who took the test. Therefore, a school whose average points score for mathematics in the end of Key Stage 3 tests is greater than 33 is one whose pupils are performing above that expected for their age. The calculation is similar for the GCSE points score. The only difference is the value of the points assigned to an individual grade, for example, an A* grade is worth 8 points, A is 7 points, B is 6 points and so on until grade G which is worth 1 point.

recorded its best ever results. During the inspection, the evidence confirmed that the level of attainment now being achieved is similar to that indicated by these results.

4. By the time pupils are at the end of Year 9, attainment is well above expectations in English, mathematics, science and music. Attainment is above expectations in art and design, design and technology, geography, history, ICT, all modern foreign languages, physical education and religious education. This results in attainment being above average in all subject areas and consequently standards are sufficiently high. Pupils' achievement³ in subjects is due to the quality of teaching and their very good attitudes to learning and to the school. However, information and communication technology skills used in other subjects are under-developed due to difficulties in obtaining access to computers and a lack of staff confidence and competence in some subject areas. Overall, pupils' achievement is good in many subjects. Students with special educational needs make good progress as a result of the high quality support they receive and the targets for improvement they are set. The very few pupils with English as an additional language also make satisfactory progress and their competence in using language skills is good.

Years 10 and 11

5. In 2001, the school's total GCSE/GNVQ points score was above the national average. Girls have outperformed boys to the same extent as the national trends. Examination results have improved significantly since the last inspection. However, since 1999 they have declined, while remaining constantly above the national average. Over the last five years, the trend in the school's average point score per pupil has not kept pace with the rising national trend. The reason for the declining success in examinations is related to the varying ability profile of the pupils, some difficulties with staffing, a narrow option choice of subjects, recent insufficient academic monitoring and mentoring of pupils' progress and inappropriate teaching strategies, especially for a group of lower attaining boys.
6. By the time pupils are at the end of Year 11, the proportion of them gaining five or more GCSE A* to C and A* to G grades in the 2001 examinations was above the national average. However, when compared to similar schools the results were below average. The number of pupils gaining five or more A* to C grades has declined steadily from 71 per cent in 1999, 61 per cent in 2000 to 57 per cent in 2001. In recent years, the numbers achieving A* to G grades has remained well above the national average and indicates the success of pupils of all ability. The number of pupils gaining at least one GCSE is high and this is a testament to the school's commitment to inclusion. The school has made satisfactory progress in raising the attainment of both boys and girls during the last few years and has ensured pupils of all abilities gain examination success. The school did not meet its GCSE points score target for the Year 2001. However, targets are sufficiently challenging and based on detailed records of students' prior attainment. Evidence from recent Year 11 GCSE mock examinations and other school assessment information indicates that results will improve significantly again next year.
7. Pupils' attainment in English, as indicated by the 2001 GCSE examination results, is above the national average. Girls outperformed boys to a considerable extent, but overall results have declined during the last two years. This was partly accounted for by disruptions in the staffing of lessons for the more able sets. While girls between Year 9 and Year 11 achieved well, boys overall made at best satisfactory progress in

³ Achievement reflects the accomplishments of students in relation to what might be expected of them in relation to their prior attainment.

relation to their prior attainment. The results in English are not as good as those for mathematics and science.

8. The percentage of pupils in mathematics achieving GCSE examination grades A* to C is well above the national average, as has been the case for the last three years. Boys have performed better than girls except for summer 2001 when girls did significantly better. The slight drop in results in summer 2001 reflects the lower attainment of this year and the lower than expected performance of a group of boys who were not committed to their work. Pupils do better in mathematics than they do in English and science.
9. In science, the attainment of pupils as indicated by 2001 GCSE examination results was just above the national average by Year 11. The attainment of boys at GCSE is below the national figure whereas girls are above the national level. Results are below average when compared to similar schools.
10. In most subjects, the achievement of pupils in GCSE examinations is as could be expected based on their prior attainment when measured at the end of Year 9. This is an indication that pupils make satisfactory progress in Years 10 and 11. In art and design, modern foreign languages, music, physical education and religious education the attainment of pupils is well above average. The overall trend of adding improvement to pupils' performance is satisfactory, but attainment overall is not as high as it should be, especially in relation to the standards achieved by similar schools. In information and communication technology, achievement in Years 10 and 11 is unsatisfactory for a variety of reasons that are highlighted in the specific report for this subject found in paragraphs 163 to 169. There are relatively few pupils from minority ethnic groups and none who use English as an additional language; however, these pupils make progress in line with their peers.

Sixth form

11. Most students entering the sixth form pursue AS and A2 level courses or a mixture of AS/A2 and vocational courses. Entry to the sixth form is open to all students for whom there are appropriate courses and who are committed to further study. A high proportion of students who attended the main school stay on to undertake post-16 courses. Nearly 90 per cent of students enter higher education at the completion of their sixth form studies.
12. The average points score for students taking two or more GCE A/AS courses is above the national average. The school has achieved this same high level of attainment for at least the last four years. Although boys have frequently outperformed girls with regard to the total points score, both perform well in examinations. Most students achieve very well in their chosen subjects and gain better results than could be predicted from the grades of GCSE examinations. The level of improvement is frequently very good. Students are making good progress with developing their key skills, although the opportunities to use computers at school is limited.

Literacy and Numeracy

13. Overall, pupils have good literacy skills, but boys' writing is not as well developed as girls. The school has recently begun to implement a co-ordinated approach to improving literacy. This is building on the implementation of the National Literacy Strategy that has been started in the English faculty. The impact of this approach has thus far been satisfactory, with some subjects, such as history and religious education, having more developed and effective strategies than others. Pupils have very good

numeracy skills and use them well in other subjects of the curriculum. They work out averages accurately in geography and construct graphs competently in science. Their good algebra skills enable them to substitute and manipulate formulae in both science and design and technology. Students on A level courses have very good numeracy skills. They very effectively support work in business studies, sociology, science and geography. This includes the use of percentages and the illustration and interpretation of data.

Special educational needs

14. Most pupils who join the school with special educational needs have basic skills in English and mathematics that are below standards nationally. Standards of these pupils at the end of Year 9 are better than their prior attainment when they were in Year 7. There are many examples of pupils in Year 9 achieving results in English, mathematics and science that are close to the national averages due to the effective support they receive. The standards achieved by pupils at the end of Year 9 are good and they make good progress in relation to their individual targets.
15. During Years 10 and 11, pupils with special educational needs continue to make good progress. In some cases, excellent progress is made between the time pupils enter the school in Year 7 and leave in Year 11. These pupils pass GCSE examinations, in a broad range of subjects, some at the higher B and C grades.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

Main school

16. The last inspection found that although there was a wide variation, pupils' attitudes to school were satisfactory and the standard of their behaviour was good. Over the intervening five years, there has been a marked improvement; pupils' attitudes and behaviour are now very good. Relationships are also very good and the level of permanent exclusions is low. Pupils respond well to the school's provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and their personal development is very good. Pupils' attendance continues to be good and has been consistently above the national average for at least the last five years.
17. Pupils with special educational needs have very positive attitudes to school. They are keen to learn and respond well to lively teaching and the very good support they receive in lessons. They get on very well with each other and with members of staff. They enjoy learning and doing well and this raises their confidence and self-esteem.
18. Pupils come to school in a positive frame of mind and their attitudes to work are very good. They are conscientious and can be relied upon to complete their homework on time. Relationships between pupils and with members of staff are very good and they enjoy an open rapport. This encourages pupils to feel confident about asking for help when they need it and this joint commitment to learning helps pupils to make good progress in their work. Although there are only a few pupils from ethnic minorities, pupils mix freely and all races and religions are equally respected and valued. Pupils are tolerant of each other's beliefs, cultures and backgrounds. Racial harmony is good and this is a testament to the school's successful policy of social and educational inclusion. Pupils' very positive attitudes to their work and to each other help to create a purposeful atmosphere within which pupils make good progress.
19. Pupils' behaviour during lessons and around the school is very good. The majority know exactly what is expected and the result is a lively but harmonious community.

This school has a good atmosphere which has a very positive impact upon pupils' learning. Members of staff provide good examples of how to behave and the school pursues an effective policy of mixing high expectations with praise. Teachers use their sense of humour well and the good-natured banter that follows spurs pupils on to work hard and make good progress in their work. For example, this was the case during a mathematics lesson Year 7, when pupils were very interested in learning how they could use bearings to get from one place to another. The teacher explained how bearings are used to guide hill walkers and that a good understanding would help them to find their way if they were to take part in the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme. Although parents and pupils indicate that bullying does occasionally occur, they both agree that such behaviour is dealt with firmly and very effectively. This school is very popular and some of the staircases and corridors are not wide enough for the number of pupils on roll. However, pupils behave with consideration, making allowances for the lack of space and holding doors open for each other. Pupils can be relied upon to settle down quickly at the start of lessons and to undertake practical work sensibly and safely. When in large groups, such as assemblies, pupils behave very well; they listen attentively and are polite and friendly towards visitors. At lunchtime, the dining room becomes very crowded and several long queues form. Although they find this frustrating, pupils tolerate the delays well and patiently wait for their turn. This high standard of behaviour is reflected in the number of exclusions. Although the number of fixed period exclusions is higher than would normally be expected, pupils rarely re-offend and the number of permanent exclusions is low, at around one third of the national average.

20. Pupils' personal development is very good. They help to identify and review their personal and academic targets and they are, therefore, able to keep close tabs on the progress they themselves are making. Pupils in Year 10 undertake one week's work experience and pupils in Years 9 and 10 have the opportunity to go on exchange trips to France and Spain. These visits help pupils to become independent and to become more aware of the wider world. Pupils appreciate being given a voice in the running of the school and relish responsibilities when they are offered. For example, at the start of the school year pupils in each class elect their house and sports' representatives and a school council has just been set up. During lessons, pupils work well together in pairs or small groups and readily offer each other help. For example, during a Spanish lesson Year 11 pupils rehearsed the language they would use when going to the dry cleaners. Working in pairs, and supported by a large bag of clothes, pupils enjoyed practising their vocabulary as well as using expressions they already knew.
21. Attendance is good and the level of unauthorised absence is almost half the national average. Parents provide very good support for their children and the majority avoid booking holidays during the school term. Although one of the school buses is often late, most of the pupils arrive in good time for the start of the school day. Punctuality during the day is good and this helps pupils to make the most of their time at school.

Sixth Form

22. Sixth form students have very good attitudes to the school and to their work. They are very motivated individuals and this is reflected in the fact that two-thirds of the pupils from Year 11 stay on to the sixth form. They take personal responsibility for much of their learning and can be relied upon to get on with their work both at home and at school. During lessons and other times during the school day, students behave very sensibly and they are polite and helpful towards visitors. This very positive approach is reflected in the very good progress they make and the fact that there have been no permanent exclusions from the sixth form for many years.

23. Students' personal development is very good; they are mature, confident and articulate. They willingly undertake the work that is asked of them and many use their initiative and do more. Students are helpful and co-operative and relationships with each other and with members of staff are very good. They are keen to take on a wide range of responsibilities around the school such as participating in the sixth form council and becoming house and sports' captains. As far as time permits, students also help younger pupils; for example, they help prospective Year 7 pupils during the open evening and, later on, during their induction day. In addition, students help pupils during tutor periods and during physical and religious education lessons.
24. Attendance is good. Year 12 students are expected to be present at all times, whereas Year 13 students have permission to be absent some of the time provided that they have no lessons during the afternoon session. Students respect these conditions and willingly comply.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

Main school

25. The quality of teaching and learning is good throughout the school. During the inspection the quality of teaching in Years 7 to 11 was good in 41 per cent of lessons, very good in 26 per cent, excellent in 7 per cent, satisfactory in 23 per cent and unsatisfactory in the remaining 3 per cent (four lessons). Consequently, this represents a good profile of teaching. The quality of teaching is a significant strength of the school and has contributed to the raising of standards in the school since the last inspection and ensuring pupils perform well in their examinations. Teaching has a direct and positive impact on pupils' learning and ensures they acquire knowledge and skills and develop their understanding of subject content and concepts. In addition, the teaching has a positive impact on the very good attitudes and behaviour of the pupils. Teaching has improved since the last inspection. In Years 7 to 11 the teaching in English, mathematics and science is good. Teaching in most other subjects is of a good quality, but very effective teaching was consistently observed in art, modern foreign languages, music and religious education. Examples of excellent and very good teaching were seen in most subjects throughout the school.
26. In literacy, the quality of teaching is often good, but there is an inconsistency of practice across departments. The English department has made a good start in developing the literacy strategy, especially in Year 7. There is a very well developed policy in religious education: pupils are encouraged to debate and they contribute to a termly newsletter. Good oral work is also a feature of history. In some subjects, such as science, there is careful attention to the correction of spelling and writing frames are used to help the less able, helping them to improve their extended writing skills. In some other subject areas, the approach to developing literacy is less developed; for example, in mathematics key words are not used sufficiently in lessons. Many teachers have a secure understanding of the school's literacy strategy and they plan thoroughly, identifying clearly how expectations for different abilities are to be covered. Most teachers plan effectively with support staff and they give good support to individuals and groups of pupils in developing literacy skills. Many teachers recognise the primary importance of literacy and create effective links between English and its application to other subjects.
27. The quality of teaching in numeracy across the curriculum is satisfactory and pupils use their numeracy skills effectively in many subjects. The numeracy strategy is having a positive effect on the teaching and learning and the standards pupils achieve in

mathematics lessons. However, little has happened since the last inspection on the development of a whole school numeracy policy. A training session for staff is planned for the near future. Nevertheless, good opportunities occur across other subjects of the curriculum for pupils to practise and develop their numeracy skills. These are in design and technology, geography, history, modern foreign languages and science.

28. Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge, which is passed on to pupils with interest and enthusiasm. The purpose of the lesson is shared with pupils and contributes well to their understanding of their own learning. Planning is good, matching the scheme of work and ability of the pupils. Teachers use demonstration and explanation skills well to put across key teaching points. Lesson introductions are usually challenging and require pupils to think and give answers to teachers' questions; for example, in mathematics, where they are expected to explain how they find answers to mental arithmetic problems. In a Year 7 lesson pupils practised rules for multiplying and dividing by 10 before moving on to work with metres and centimetres requiring these skills.
29. A strength of teaching is the successful management of pupils' behaviour. This is a result of the very good relationships between the teachers and pupils and also the high expectations for pupils' attitudes to learning. In most lessons the pupils know exactly what is expected of them. Pupils, especially girls, take care in presenting their work. Teachers' effective planning means that work is matched successfully to pupils' learning needs and pupils are challenged in their learning. Because relationships are very good, pupils are confident and secure with their teachers and support staff.
30. Within this positive profile of teaching and learning there are still elements that are underdeveloped. For example, the use of assessment data for setting pupils individual targets to achieve and the development of pupils' skills in self-assessment are at very early stages of development. In some subjects there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to learn independently of the teacher, as too many are reliant on adult support. However, there is good practice evident in school, especially in English.
31. Teachers usually try to use resources, accommodation and time well to support pupils' learning. In some subjects, the allocation of non-specialist teaching rooms makes this more difficult. Some subjects find it difficult to access accommodation and use resources for information and communication technology and this affects how well pupils are taught and how they apply those skills in other subjects.
32. Teachers mark pupils' work thoroughly and their constructive and helpful comments guide pupils in their future learning. Teachers use the results of marking to plan future lessons as well as the assessments they make of pupils' learning. Little of the pupils' work in ICT is marked in Years 7 to 9 and this restricts the progress they make. Homework is used well to support the development of pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding.
33. Through effective teaching the school meets the needs of pupils with special educational needs very well. Pupils' individual education plans contain clear targets that are sufficiently practical for class teachers to implement when support staff are not present. In the very best lessons, pupils know their targets and how to achieve them. However, not all pupils are aware of their targets as the practice is inconsistent. Support staff are effective because they know the pupils very well and frequently set specific targets for learning with a very good blend of help and challenge. The quality of teaching ensures that pupils with special educational needs make good progress.

Sixth Form

34. The quality of teaching and learning is very good throughout both years of the sixth form. During the inspection the quality of teaching was good in 44 per cent of lessons, very good in 38 per cent, excellent in 10 per cent and satisfactory in the remaining 8 per cent. Consequently, there were no unsatisfactory lessons and this represents a very good profile of teaching. The high quality of teaching is a significant strength in the sixth form and has contributed to the success in examination courses at a higher level than the national average. In addition, the very good teaching has a positive impact on the support and guidance given to students and prepares them very well for the next stage of their educational career or employment. The school is teaching key skills effectively through a well-organised programme and subject courses. Teaching was reported as 'at least satisfactory' in the last inspection and the quality has improved considerably since that time.
35. In the sixth form, teaching is very good in English, physics, art and design, drama, textiles, geography, history, physical education, religious education, French, music and sociology. In mathematics, biology, business studies and psychology it is good. Examples of excellent teaching were seen at Year 12 in English, art and sociology, and Year 13 in history, theatre studies and religious education. Examples of very good teaching were seen in most subjects in both years.
36. The particular strengths of teaching are the high level of staff's subject expertise, the very good relationships between the teachers and students and the effective preparation for examination courses. Teachers have high expectations of the students and provide very good support and guidance for them. In return the students respect this commitment by their teachers and respond by working hard in lessons and on their course work assignments. The quality of learning is restricted at times by a lack of focus on developing students' independent study and by the inadequate accommodation for private study. The school is aware of this and making an effort to remedy the current shortfalls.

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

Main school

37. Overall, the quality and range of learning opportunities are good. Since the last inspection the school has addressed some of the issues identified. Provision for pupils' personal development has improved markedly, as has that for religious education. However, while pupils in Years 7 to 9 receive their ICT entitlement, requirements for those in Years 10 and 11 are not met. Monitoring and assessment of work in the lower years are still under-developed, as is the co-ordination of ICT across the whole curriculum.
38. The curriculum in Years 7 to 9 is good. The school offers its pupils a good range of subjects that cover most of the requirements of the National Curriculum. Provision for modern foreign languages, design and technology, geography, science, art and physical education is good and very good in religious education. Most pupils have the opportunity to take a second modern foreign language, Spanish or German. Design and technology covers resistant and compliant material options. Information and communication technology is taught in the first three years as a separate subject within the design and technology rotational programme. The ICT lesson reduces the amount of time available and flexibility to teach design and technology. ICT lessons are planned so that some pupils will have a term with no separate ICT and this is not

satisfactory. Time allocation and distribution of lessons across the week are good in other subjects.

39. The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is at least satisfactory and mainly good with the exception of ICT where for two thirds of the pupils there is no specific provision or co-ordination across other subjects. In addition, not all pupils take a design and technology subject. Therefore, the statutory requirements for ICT and design and technology are not being fully met. The school offers 26 GCSE examination courses, which includes five technology options. Business studies and business and communication systems are also available to pupils. The range of options has been extended with the inclusion of GNVQ engineering. Most pupils take nine subjects at GCSE at the end of Year 11. The school provides certificate of achievement courses depending on the needs of pupils. A small number of pupils are disapplied⁴ from the requirements of National Curriculum in Year 11, receiving their education through a programme at the local college. The programme is designed to meet the individual needs of the pupils concerned.
40. The school offers a good quality, inclusive curriculum for pupils with special educational needs. They are only withdrawn from mainstream lessons in extreme circumstances. Provision is organised so that pupils have the same curriculum, but matched to their needs. The planned curriculum is sufficiently varied and relevant to the learning needs of all pupils who present the school with a wide range of special needs to be met. Certificates of achievement have been introduced for pupils in Year 9 in English, mathematics and geography. A modular science course has been successfully introduced for lower-attaining pupils which is more relevant to the pupils' needs and ability.
41. Personal, social and health education for Years 7 to 9 is taught through five one hour sessions and in some discrete subjects, for example in physical education and science. In addition, there are a number of special events, including visiting theatre groups addressing issues such as self-esteem and relationships. Although tutor time is available to cover other personal development issues, not all tutors take up this option. The provision for personal, social and health education is adequate, but the inconsistency in the way tutors use their tutor time means that not all pupils get the same entitlement. Plans for the teaching of citizenship are well advanced in the school and pupils in Year 7 are currently receiving aspects of the national requirements. The work carried out so far by the enthusiastic co-ordinator will undoubtedly place the school in a strong position to fulfil the statutory requirements in September.
42. The school makes good provision for the work-related curriculum. Pupils in Year 8 can be involved in 'Take your daughter to work' days. Pupils in Year 9 take part in 'Insight into industry programmes', making extensive use on the schools good links with business and industry. Careers education and guidance, including work experience, are a well-established part of the curriculum available to all pupils. Pupils in Year 9 receive talks from the careers service prior to making option choices for Year 10. Pupils in Year 10 have one week of work experience and those in Year 11 receive advice on post-16 options. The school has established good links with some feeder primary schools. Pupils from Years 5 and 6 attend the school gaining ICT experience prior to joining the school in Year 7.
43. The school's strategy for improving literacy is satisfactory. A co-ordinated whole-school approach has only recently been implemented, following the appointment of a literacy co-ordinator for the current academic year. There has been good progress within the

⁴ Exempt from following a national Curriculum subject.

English faculty in implementing the recommendations of the National Literacy Strategy: for example, progress units have been set up for those younger pupils whose literacy skills are relatively undeveloped and the concentrated teaching they receive in small groups is beginning to have a good impact on improving particularly the accuracy and range of their writing.

44. The numeracy strategy is developing well within mathematics lessons and has been implemented effectively in Year 7. It is having a positive effect on the teaching and learning and the standards pupils achieve in mathematics.
45. There is a very good programme of activities available to pupils throughout the lunch break and after school, covering sports, music, drama, ICT, photography and other subjects. In addition, there are numerous opportunities for pupils to visit places of educational and general interest both in this country and abroad. For example, visits to the World War One battlefields, St Albans to study the influence of the Romans, Nakuru, Kenya, and the London Museum for Jewish Life to meet and talk with survivors of the holocaust. Pupils from Years 7 to 13 benefit from the very extensive extra-curricular activities.

Sixth form

46. The post-16 curriculum is designed to build on the experiences of earlier years. Students receive good impartial advice about the sixth form provision. Particular care is taken to ensure that school programmes match the requirements and aspirations of the students who enter the sixth form. Opportunities and expectations are fully explained during an induction programme developed and delivered to ensure a successful transition into post-16 education. It also enables students to get to know those who have joined from other schools. Every effort is made to accommodate students' subject choices within the relatively large range on offer. The school provides advanced level courses in 24 A-level subjects and 24 AS levels. There is very good provision in English, mathematics, physics, music, physical education, art, French, sociology, textiles and geography. There is at least good provision in all other subjects. In addition to the academic route, the school also offers an Advanced Vocational Certificate in Education, in Business, GNVQ Leisure and Tourism intermediate, Microsoft Office User Specialist certificate, CISCO certificated network associate and key skills. The school has good links with alternative providers to meet the needs of students not suited to the school's post-16 curriculum. The sixth form curriculum does not meet statutory requirements in relation to the provision for religious education.
47. The range of compulsory and optional activities linked to students' chosen subjects provides them with a rich, full and demanding curriculum. The programmes offered make a strong contribution to their continuing personal and social development. All students have equality of access to all aspects of the programmes in the sixth form. Within their individual programmes there is a good balance of taught and study time. The school operates a demanding schedule, but one which the students appreciate and fully subscribe to. The planned careers programme guides students and assists them in making the transition to the next stage of their education. They have the opportunity to develop skills in interview processes, preparing a curriculum vitae and a personal statement for university applications. However, the growth in numbers in the sixth form has not been matched by a growth in the support systems. The students do not receive an appropriate level of personal support. The school is aware of this and is currently planning to increase pastoral support for students in the sixth form.

Equal Opportunities and educational inclusion

48. The school demonstrates a strong commitment to equality of access to the full range of the curriculum for all pupils. There is an effective equal opportunities policy in the school that was drawn up by a working party in consultation with pupils and students. This is implemented well through the departments. Public examination results are monitored closely in terms of gender. The small number of pupils and students from ethnic minority backgrounds and those with English as an additional language are supported well. The school places considerable emphasis on social inclusion. A recently appointed co-ordinator for gifted and talented pupils has begun the process of identifying such pupils. Programmes are to be designed and implemented to extend their educational experiences.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

49. Provision for the spiritual development of pupils is satisfactory. Significant improvements have been made to address the key issues highlighted in the previous report concerning the limited provision for spirituality and the lack of subject contributions in this area. There is now a full programme of house and year assemblies based on a weekly theme. The way this programme is taught, however, varies too much. On some occasions, assemblies provide opportunities for reflection on wider issues and for pupil participation. In a sixth form assembly, for example, two students showed considerable maturity in addressing the whole student body on their commitment respectively to Christianity and to Islam. Form tutor times, however, are rarely used to follow up these themes. The school still fails to comply fully with the requirements for a daily act of collective worship. Within the curriculum, the spiritual development of pupils is fostered particularly well in religious education in all year groups. Opportunities for spiritual growth are also provided in science, where the issues surrounding genetic engineering are fully discussed, as well as in English, geography, art and music.
50. The provision for moral development is very good. There is a very strong sense of shared purpose throughout the school with a clear code of conduct to help pupils distinguish right from wrong. Sixth form students and teachers provide very good role models for younger pupils. Charity events are organised both by sixth form students and through the house system to promote moral understanding. The personal, social and health education programme deals with moral issues, but this programme is limited in scope. Within subject areas, moral issues are debated and discussed fully, for example, in geography with a strong focus on environmental and globalisation issues; and also in religious education, science, history and English.
51. The provision for social education is also very good. The previous inspection noted that the house system had little impact on pupils. This is no longer the case and pupils' social development is now fostered very well through the house and school council system, which gives pupils and students a clear sense of identity. The school council, however, is still at an early stage of development. Sixth form students, in particular, are a strength in the school. The sixth form committee organises many social events and students help younger pupils in their reading and in the form groups.
52. Relationships throughout the school are very positive and this creates a safe and harmonious atmosphere for all. There are many opportunities for pupils and students to take responsibility through a wealth of lunchtime and after school activities, including bridge, chess, sailing, art, science, music, drama and sports clubs. Opportunities for social growth are provided in most subjects with an emphasis on group work and pupil

participation in lessons, most especially in music, art, physical education and modern foreign languages.

53. There is very good provision for the cultural development of pupils and students. There is an impressive programme of visits, exchanges and other activities to widen horizons, including visits and exchanges to France, Spain and Germany. Pupils from Years 9 and 10 have visited Kenya and there have been visits to Europe for sixth form students in physics, modern foreign languages and art. Field trips are undertaken in history, geography and biology and the cultural awareness of pupils and students is enhanced by numerous trips organised by English, religious education and music departments. Other opportunities for cultural development are provided through the many sports clubs and representative matches, as well as through music and drama productions. There are also opportunities for pupils and students to celebrate the cultural diversity of Britain and that of the wider world. Letters have been exchanged with schools in Mali and Ghana and the religious education department in particular makes excellent provision for multi-cultural and multi-faith education. There are also opportunities for such development in art, music, history and geography. This aspect of personal development was considered weak in the previous report and considerable improvements have now been made in this area.
54. Overall, the school makes good provision for the personal development of all its pupils and students and there has been a significant improvement in this area since the previous inspection. However, provision for personal development is not sufficiently co-ordinated and monitored at a whole school level in order to build upon the very good practice shown in many departments.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

Main school - *pastoral support*

55. The previous inspection found that this school provided satisfactory support and guidance for its pupils. Over the intervening five years, the house system has become fully established and it is now an integral part of school life. It forms the cornerstone of the pastoral care system and good teamwork helps to ensure that pupils are well looked after during the school day. The standard of day-to-day pastoral care and support have improved since the last inspection and they are now good. Health and safety procedures are very good and child protection procedures meet statutory requirements in full.
56. The system of allocating pupils and their siblings to a particular house is popular with pupils and their parents and it contributes towards a strong sense of school identity. Pupils are placed in one of four houses when they enrol and their tutor and tutor group are also drawn from their designated house. Pupils stay with their form tutor for at least two years and this continuity helps to ensure that members of staff and their pupils get to know each other well. Relationships between pupils and members of staff are very good and this helps to ensure that teachers are sensitive to pupils' needs. During discussions, pupils say that they like coming to school and that they feel well looked after. The pastoral system works well and heads of house liaise very closely with each other and with their individual form tutors. They are in a very good position to monitor pupils' personal development and procedures are very effective. The good standard of educational and personal support provided plays an important part in encouraging pupils to work hard and to make the most of their time at school. Form tutors and heads of house are well supported by the senior management team and by a conscientious and dedicated education welfare officer. There are good links with

contributory schools and good induction procedures help pupils to settle down quickly once they arrive in Year 7.

57. Procedures for monitoring and promoting good behaviour are very effective. Members of staff provide good examples of how to behave and their expectations are very high. Pupils know exactly what is, and what is not, acceptable and they behave accordingly. In recognition of particularly good work or effort, teachers award individual merit points and these may also be converted into house points. Pupils and their parents indicate that procedures for dealing with bullying and other anti-social behaviour are very effective. Should a pupil behave inappropriately, or be persistently late to lessons, they may be placed on report or given a lunchtime detention. This system is tailored to suit the individual misdemeanour and is very effective.
58. The school has good procedures for identifying and assessing pupils with special educational needs. The review and monitoring procedures that are in place ensure the school is very effective in meeting the needs of all pupils with special educational needs. The school liaises very well with other agencies, parents, pupils and teachers. Teachers know their pupils very well and support them effectively. The school complies with the Code of Practice; statements and reviews are up-to-date and the provision in the statements is being fully met. The school is successful in meeting the targets identified in the Individual Education Plans and annual reviews. Overall, very good arrangements are in place to support low achieving pupils. There is very good monitoring of pupils' achievements by support staff.
59. Procedures for monitoring and promoting attendance are very good. Teachers complete a register at the start of every lesson and any absentees are quickly followed up. In this way, the school monitors the attendance of individuals very closely and emerging trends are quickly identified. Any pupil whose attendance gives cause for concern is reported to the relevant head of house and he or she may relay these concerns to the education welfare officer during their weekly meetings. This liaison is very effective and is reflected in a level of unauthorised absence, which is around half the national average.

Sixth Form - *Advice, support and guidance*

60. Sixth form students receive good educational and personal support and guidance. Most of the students who completed the pre-inspection questionnaire agree that the range of courses suits their talents and career aspirations well. They also feel that the standard of teaching is high and that teachers are very willing to help them if they have difficulties with their work.
61. Attendance in the sixth form is good and students who arrive or leave during the school day all sign in and out. This ensures that, in the event of an emergency, the school is able to identify exactly who should be present. The school employs an external advisor who oversees health and safety procedures and these are very good.

Assessment

Main School

62. At the time of the last inspection, the use of assessment to develop pupils' understanding and determine future learning was insufficiently developed. There are now good procedures in place for assessing pupils' attainment and progress. The use

of this information has improved and is now satisfactory, but it is still in need of further development by senior management and in some departments.

63. Information on pupils' attainment on entry to the school is now much more readily available than previously. The school has initiated new assessment procedures that provide National Curriculum and GCSE examination levels reached and overall target grades for every pupil in every subject studied. This information is made available to parents, heads of house, heads of department and form tutors. However, heads of department do not yet have direct access to the data and the process of monitoring the use made of it across the school is at a very early stage of development. Most departments now have good procedures in place for assessing pupils' attainment and progress. There are secure procedures in place for identifying and assessing pupils with special educational needs.
64. Assessment procedures are used inconsistently throughout the school. In some departments, good systems are in place in order to guide planning and to support pupils. In science, for example, results are used to target individuals, to monitor the performance of different sets of pupils and to evaluate the structure of the curriculum. Strategies are also in place to tackle differences in the attainment of boys and girls. In modern foreign languages, pupils have an unusually good awareness of their progress relative to national expectations and how to improve their work. However, this good practice of involving pupils in their own learning and giving them precise targets for improvement is not followed throughout the school. Although some pupils have opportunities to assess their own work and set themselves targets, for example in history and geography, there are no signs of this in other departments. Very thorough systems of diagnostic marking are in place in art and religious education, but pupils in music in Years 7 to 9 are unaware of the level they have reached in relation to national standards. Procedures in ICT for assessing and monitoring pupils' progress are unsatisfactory, as they were at the time of the last inspection.
65. There is very good monitoring of the achievements of pupils with special educational needs, especially by support staff. The school is successful in meeting the targets identified in pupils' individual education plans and in their annual reviews. The school has recently started to use assessment data to identify pupils who are gifted and talented in Years 7 and 10.

Sixth Form

66. Procedures for assessing students' attainment and progress are good. The use of this information for subject planning and for guiding and supporting students is also good.
67. A review of students' attainment in all internal and external assessments and examinations, their expected progress and their effort and punctuality is carried out regularly. Students are able to add information to this database which is then shared with parents, form tutors and subject teachers. A comprehensive picture of all students' achievements is, therefore, readily accessible and any concerns can be identified quickly by the head of the sixth form and by form tutors.
68. The use of assessment procedures is good in most departments and in some it is very good. Teachers know their students very well, develop very good relationships with them and offer good support through the marking and monitoring of their work. In music, for example, individual tutorials identify strengths and weaknesses in students' work and teaching is adjusted accordingly. In modern foreign languages, students like the fact that the department sets challenging targets above the grades predicted by their performance at GCSE. Good examples of self-assessment have been developed,

which encourage individual reflection and responsibility. Very thorough monitoring in sociology tracks students' progress and gives very clear advice on how to achieve higher grades. This very good practice is not yet shared across all departments. The school is very successful in assisting a student with special educational needs to make excellent progress.

The views of sixth form students

69. As part of the inspection process, students were asked to complete a questionnaire and many also spoke to inspectors during lessons and in both formal and informal discussions. Although there are some areas of school life that cause dissatisfaction, their overall views of the school are very positive.
70. Parents indicate that they too are very pleased with many aspects of the sixth form and this shared confidence is reflected in the fact that over two-thirds of the pupils in Year 11 choose to stay on for Years 12 and 13. Students are pleased with the standard of teaching and particularly appreciate the fact that teachers are available to provide help when they need it. Students, however, would like to have more personal support. The school is currently experiencing difficulty in recruiting a deputy head of sixth form and this has significantly reduced the extent to which the school is able to provide students with the pastoral support they feel they need. Students, however, are pleased with the range of courses available and their satisfaction is reflected in the very low drop out rate during Years 12 and 13.
71. Around one third of the students who completed the questionnaire feel that they are not well informed about the progress they are making. Inspectors do not agree. Each term, students receive very clear cumulative reports about how they are getting on, as well as details of their predicted target grades at A-level. During their two years in the sixth form, students also have one-to-one interviews with their tutors and the head of sixth form helps out if there are any major problems. This support helps to provide students with high quality academic advice and this is reflected in their examination success at AS and A-level.
72. Around two-thirds of the students who completed the questionnaire feel that they are not provided with enough information about the various options available once they have left school. They would like help and advice to be more readily available and say that it is very difficult for them to find the time they need to conduct their own research. In addition, around one quarter of students feel that they are not treated as responsible young adults and feel that the school does not respond to their views.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

73. This school places great emphasis on working closely with parents and views a close partnership between home and school as being absolutely fundamental to its work. Links with parents are indeed very good and the overwhelming majority supports their children very well. Attendance at consultation evenings is very good and few families book holidays during the term. Parents ensure that their children attend regularly and their help and encouragement help to ensure that their children work hard and achieve their very best.
74. This school enjoys a very good reputation within the local area and it is always over-subscribed. Around one quarter of parents completed the pre-inspection questionnaire and their responses indicate that they are pleased with virtually every aspect of the school's work. Views expressed by those who attended the pre-inspection parents' meeting were equally positive, although there are few specific concerns - around one in

five parents would like more information about the progress their child is making. Although there is only one formal consultation with teachers during the school year, parents indicate that they would feel able to approach staff at any time if they wanted to discuss their child's progress. They are also encouraged to play an important part in setting their children's targets for improvement. Although all parents receive a comprehensive interim report each term, pupils' annual reports do not always include all the information they should. For example, teachers vary over whether or not they include details of the National Curriculum level at which each individual is working and an indication of the effort they are putting in. In addition, some of the teachers' comments about subjects are very general, often referring only to the individual's behaviour and attitude to work. Although the governors' annual report contains all the information it should, there are several omissions from the school prospectus. Some parents have misgivings about the amount of homework set and the closeness of the partnership between home and school. Inspectors do not agree with these concerns. They think that teachers use homework to good effect and that the partnership between home and school is constructive and mutually supportive.

75. The impact of parents' involvement on the day-to-day life of the school is very good and they encourage their children to work hard and to do their best. The parent teacher association is well supported and it organises various fund-raising and social activities. These include a May Ball and very popular quiz evenings. A significant sum of money is raised each year and these funds are used, for example, to co-fund the school mini-bus and to provide additional resources, such as computers and strips for the school teams.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

Main school

76. The previous inspection report was critical about several aspects of the school's leadership and management. Many of these aspects have now been successfully addressed and the overall quality of management in the school is good. However, some aspects still need further development. For example, the line management structure does not always ensure that monitoring is sufficiently rigorous in promoting change and ensuring a consistency of practice throughout the school. This is the case with managing whole school curriculum and assessment initiatives, promoting an evenness of provision within faculties and ensuring the satisfactory development of ICT. Leadership and management are now more effective, but in some areas the improvements have been slower than expected. For example, the school is at a very early stage in beginning to evaluate assessment information to track pupils' attainment, monitor their progress and provide support where any underachievement has been identified.
77. The headteacher provides purposeful and measured leadership that has ensured the school has made good improvement since the last inspection. He has a clear vision for the future of the school and is determined to ensure a continual improvement in the quality of education provided for the pupils and sixth form students. He has worked hard to promote a culture that embraces change and development. The school has a clear set of aims and objectives that are expressed in the school's documentation. It is mostly successful in implementing its aims to ensure the educational and personal progress of its pupils and sixth form students. The school has a very strong moral and cultural ethos and this permeates all aspects of school life.
78. The school is well served by a hard working and dedicated senior management team who are mostly aware of the weaknesses that have to be addressed. Management is

now more effective and the school has established clear roles within the senior and middle management teams. The work of all academic and pastoral managers is supported by an appropriate structure of meetings that ensures good communication. The heads of faculty and department are efficient and have ensured improvements have taken place within their departments, although management needs to be strengthened in information and communication technology.

79. The planning for the house system, which had been recently established at the time of the previous inspection, was criticised for its lack of clarity and the inadequate decision-making procedures. The house system is now working very well and is an important feature in the personal development of pupils and a positive ethos in school. Further criticisms of management included the ineffectiveness of the tutor periods and the inconsistency of the implementation of procedures for assessment and marking. Each of these aspects has improved, but there is still a level of inconsistency between departments and tutors and the best practice is still not assured throughout the school.
80. At the time of the previous inspection the communication systems between the governors and senior managers were under-developed and governors were not in a position to fulfil their responsibilities. This has now changed and communication is very good. Consequently, the governors are now fully aware of their responsibilities to meet all statutory requirements and for the overall performance of the school. However, currently, they do not make sure that the school fully complies with all curriculum requirements in design and technology, information and communication technology and religious education in the sixth form. In addition, the school does not meet requirements to provide a daily act of worship and there are a few minor omissions in the school prospectus.
81. The governing body has developed a strategic view of the school's progress due to the active involvement of many governors who are regularly in school. Governors are confident about fulfilling their role. They are committed to the school's improvement and work well in well-organised committee structures to ensure continuous development. These committees meet frequently and communication between the chairs of committees is very good. The governors are now well informed about the school's successes and areas for development and have a good range of procedures to monitor the school's performance. One noteworthy development is the perceptive evaluation of the responses from staff at an exit interview when leaving the school. The information gained places the governors in a good position to judge the effectiveness of the school and any issues to investigate further.
82. The governors maintain close monitoring of finances and make informed decisions based on accurate budget information. The chair of finances works closely with the school's manager and responsible officer to keep track of all expenditure. Both senior managers and governors are clear about the cost of developments and the identified targets in the development plan. The strategic use of resources, including specific grants is good. The school applies value for money principles effectively to purchases, but governors have less developed systems to measure the impact of spending on pupils' attainment. A recent independent financial audit judged financial management and cost control systems as very good. Currently, there is a substantial amount of money held in reserve. These funds are earmarked for major building projects, including improvements to the library, design and technology facilities and other adaptations to the buildings.
83. The quality of the school's development planning and the systems for monitoring have improved considerably since the last inspection and are good in many departments. The school development plan has been written after a process of review involving the

staff and the governors. It identifies appropriate targets to raise attainment through the development of various curriculum initiatives and a process of regular review and monitoring. The planning is linked to staff appraisal and their training needs. Consequently, the school is in a good position to maintain the current high level of pupil achievement and secure further improvements.

84. The procedures for review and monitoring were criticised in the last inspection as they lacked clarity and a specific focus. These procedures and the effectiveness of the action taken to ensure developments have improved and are now satisfactory. The curriculum deputy has the responsibility to line manage all departments and ensure developments to the quality of teaching and learning, curriculum initiatives and implementation of whole school policies. Much responsibility for review and monitoring has been delegated to the heads of faculty and house. Some have very good skills and understanding of the requirements for effective management. The successful introduction of performance management has provided many with the experience to develop their leadership and management skills. However, some still need further training and support in order to carry out their responsibilities and monitor and review the quality of work in their departments. There were very good examples of effective management in English, science and religious education. Developing the school as a self-evaluating institution is correctly a focus of the current school development plan. The rigour and effectiveness of review and monitoring procedures to improve teaching and learning are inconsistent between faculties. There are too few systems to share the very good practice that exists in school.
85. The management of pupils with special educational needs by the special educational needs co-ordinator is very good. Under her leadership the department makes a very valuable contribution to pupils' learning and progress. All the learning support staff are sufficiently qualified and very experienced in ensuring pupils' needs are met. The department benefits from the support of a very experienced and well-informed governor. The department's use of ICT to inform and support teaching and learning is good. Through regular meetings and informal discussions there is good monitoring of the work in the department and a commitment amongst all the staff to meet the needs of the pupils.

Sixth form

86. The leadership of the sixth form is successful in providing a very good range of academic courses for students. The number of pupils has significantly increased over the last few years, but commendably examination results have remained above average. The provision for vocational courses is limited and so does not meet the needs of all pupils at the end of Year 11. There has been a strong emphasis on raising standards through very good teaching across all subjects. There is a clear vision of the educational direction that the sixth form should take to further raise standards. Currently, there is a vacancy for a deputy head of sixth form and this is adversely affecting the provision for students' personal support and guidance and for some aspects of monitoring the quality of education provided. The day-to-day administration, the recruitment of students, promotion of standards and reviewing of overall progress is good. Careers advice is available and the school uses the services of past students and members of the community to support students in their future choices. However, the information about career choices is not readily available to students. There is insufficient time given to providing careers advice and the mentoring of students in order to inform them of their progress and to consider their concerns.
87. Sixty five per cent of Year 11 pupils continue their studies into the sixth form and 35 per cent of the present group are from other schools. As a result of its large size, the sixth

form has a positive impact on the overall ethos of the school. There are some opportunities for students to exercise responsibility around the school.

88. The governing body fulfils well its responsibilities towards the sixth form. Provision and overall performance are well monitored. The governors have effectively supported the strategic development and best interests of the sixth form.

Staffing

89. The school spends considerable time and effort on the recruitment and training of staff. As a result, staffing levels are good overall. The school has sufficient teaching staff and is well supported by a strong team of non-teaching staff. There are sufficient specialist teachers in most subjects, but in spite of continuing efforts the school has been unable to recruit specialist teachers for all of the design and technology subjects. The number, qualifications and experience of teachers and support staff are generally well matched to the demands of the curriculum in both the main school and the sixth form. In most subjects, staffing levels and expertise are judged to be good or very good. However, the level is slightly lower in the main school because non-specialists teach a small number of classes and in ICT there are a large number of teachers from other subjects contributing to the teaching of ICT.
90. The school has provided a good range of training that is linked directly to the needs of the school, subject requirements and individual teacher development. An agreed policy for performance management has been developed and is being implemented successfully. Outcomes of this procedure, together with needs identified in the school and departmental development plans, are used as a basis for supporting training. Training is monitored and evaluated in order to get good value for money.
91. The school has an effective programme for supporting recently appointed and newly qualified teachers. The school has successfully supported several graduate teacher trainees and this well-organised programme continues to provide good opportunities in the science and design and technology departments.

Resources

92. The overall level of learning resources has improved since the last inspection and is now satisfactory. Within individual departments, there are no significant shortcomings and many are well resourced. The situation is particularly positive with religious education and sociology and these departments are very well provided for. Although the level of resources within individual departments is never less than satisfactory, there continue to be major shortcomings with the library. At present, many of the books and other learning resources are out-of-date and few students use the library for independent study. The school is well aware that this facility is under-used, however, and a major overhaul and update is planned for the near future. It is hoped that students will use the library much more often once this has taken place.
93. Although the school has invested heavily in computing equipment, the popularity of the school and the number of students on roll mean that individuals enjoy only limited access, particularly in mathematics and music.

Accommodation

94. Overall, accommodation is unsatisfactory. The number of pupils now on roll means there is considerable pressure on buildings with several departments, for example, business education, history, music and religious education, teaching in non-specialist

rooms. This results in teachers having to move equipment between rooms and a lack of adequate storage facilities. Rooms lack specialist display in order to provide a stimulating learning environment. The physical education department benefit from good outside facilities; however, there is a lack of indoor activity space that means they are unable to offer the full range of options for GCSE examination. The English department is enjoying new rooms built since the previous inspection. However, there is inadequate provision for the number of students wanting to study theatre studies. This is a popular subject, but the school does not have sufficient space in order to accommodate all pupils. Some lessons are taught in temporary classrooms. These are untidy, shabby, are difficult to ventilate adequately and give a poor impression to pupils. The design and technology rooms have been refurbished and are very good. Several laboratories in the science department have also been refurbished and these contrast starkly with those waiting to be done. Despite an attractive display of pupil work in the foyer, opportunities are missed generally to celebrate and promote work in other areas of the school. The library is small compared to the size of the school and at present is under-used. Despite having a dedicated social area for sixth form students, they do not have adequate private study rooms. This means that for some subjects, especially English and mathematics, students are unable to share learning between lessons.

Value for money

95. Taking into account:

- the progress made by pupils and the high standards achieved in Years 7 to 9 and the sixth form;
- the improvements since the previous inspection;
- the overall good quality of teaching and learning;
- the arrangements for personal development;
- the behaviour and attitudes of the pupils;
- the leadership and management;

the school gives good value for money.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

96. In order to further improve the standards of education, the governors, headteacher and staff, should:

Main School

- 1 raise attainment in Years 10 and 11**, ensuring that all pupils achieve their full potential by:
 - developing a greater range of teaching strategies, particularly to involve pupils more actively in their lessons and ensure they can learn independently of the teacher;
 - developing a relevant curriculum to maximize the achievement of pupils of all abilities and aptitudes;
 - providing pupils who are at risk of not achieving their full potential with additional support by frequently mentoring their progress;
 - ensuring that the school's review and monitoring procedures are rigorously applied throughout all departments;
 - ensuring heads of departments/faculty insist that all their staff follow the agreed policies to ensure a greater consistency of good practice;
 - sharing the very good management practice and teaching that exists in the school;
(paragraphs 26, 30, 39, 40, 76 and 84)
- 2 ensure that all teachers make greater use of assessment information to track pupils' progress and setting them challenging targets** by:
 - providing staff with appropriate training;
 - improving computer access to the assessment information;
 - developing pupils' understanding of assessment criteria and how to improve their grades;
(paragraphs 62-65, 84)
- 3 raise attainment of ICT, and increase its use, throughout the curriculum in Years 10 and 11** by:
 - ensuring all National Curriculum statutory requirements are fully met;
 - improving the overall management and co-ordination of ICT across the curriculum;
 - regularly monitoring pupils' progress in all subjects;
(paragraphs 159-165)
- 4 enhance the library provision** by:
 - improving the quality of resources;
 - encouraging greater use as part of an overall strategy to develop independent learning;
(paragraphs: 92 and 94)

Sixth form

- 5 meet the statutory requirements to provide religious education;
- 6 enhance the opportunity for private study by providing more dedicated space;
- 7 increase the specialist provision for careers advice and monitor the level of pastoral support and guidance for all students.
(paragraphs 47, 80 and 94)

OTHER ISSUES WHICH SHOULD BE CONSIDERED BY THE SCHOOL

Governors may consider including the following less important issues in their action plan:

- improved planning for, and monitoring of, the use of tutor time.
- (paragraph 41)

****** These issues are already identified in the school's development plan

COMMUNITY LINKS

97. The school has extensive links with the local and wider community which contribute significantly to pupils' and sixth form students' learning. They include constructive relationships with partner institutions, links with local businesses, a wide range of educational and cultural visits and meeting and working with a number of visitors to the school. For example, the school takes advantage of the options from Hertford Regional College, for pupils in Years 10 and 11 to continue their education at the college with other pupils from the locality. There are twilight courses involving other schools to support learning in history, art and law. The benefit of the links with Curwen Print Studio for art students is very evident in their work. Funding from the art department and the parent teachers' association supports this initiative.
98. The wide range of different links, established by the school, include links with several local industries. The programme is very well co-ordinated by an enterprising leader, who maximises all opportunities to support pupils' learning and career opportunities. In Year 7, pupils studying science have the opportunity to work for a day with GlaxoSmithKline who also organise courses for sixth form students. The school has recently worked with the community to design the cover for the Sawbridgeworth Millennium CD. Past students and others from the local community work in school to help students prepare for making university choices. There are established projects for students with local Neighbourhood Engineers as part of the Crest Award. The school is also very well supported by local businesses in its 'work experience' programmes. In Year 10, pupils have the opportunity to consider environmental issues when working in Hatfield Forest on conservation work.
99. Students and pupils have enriched opportunities to link with others around the world through access to the Internet and planned visits. Opportunities provided by individual subjects include links with European countries. Physics and modern foreign language students visit the CERNE laboratories in Paris. There are reciprocal arrangements with Bry-sur-Marne in France with pupils performing in concerts. Pupils in Year 9 can enrich their studies in history by visiting the First World War battlefields. There are established links with Africa that include raising funds for a school in Kenya.
100. The school is frequently involved in sporting and cultural events. For example, there are supportive links with Sawbridgeworth cricket and tennis clubs. Coaches from those clubs come into school to work with pupils and help develop their games skills. Sixth form students provide coaching and instruction at the school's swimming pool that is a community facility. In music, pupils are also involved with the Youth Centre Theatre group, taking part in a consortia concert. Pupils entertain residents at 'Silver Wing', a local residential home.
101. The students have good opportunities for visits out of school and many interesting guests regularly visit the school. Representatives from the community come to share their lifestyle and experiences with the pupils. Hertford Regional College provides accredited courses at the school twice a week. These are in information and communication technology for staff, students and members of the community.
102. Primary schools regularly use the swimming pool facilities and the information and communication technology facilities. The school's constructive relationships with partner institutions include the contributory primary schools. The information they provide to the school is especially useful when pupils enter in Year 7. The school informs the main contributory primary school about the progress pupils make at the school. There are no sixth form consortia time tabling arrangements and the pressure

on students, especially in Year 12, means there is very little time to study additional courses. The new AS courses are restricting the time for community links and related projects in the sixth form.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	128
	Sixth form	61
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		72

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
Years 7– 11							
Number	10	33	51	30	4	0	0
Percentage	7	26	41	23	3	0	0
Sixth form							
Number	6	23	27	5	0	0	0
Percentage	10	38	44	8	0	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	840	238
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	34	0

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	4	1
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	74	1

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	17

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	14
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	14

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	6.8
National comparative data	8.1

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.6
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2001	83	85	168

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	63	70	65
	Girls	70	72	72
	Total	133	142	137
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	School	80 (76)	85 (84)	83 (79)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 6 or above	School	45 (38)	65 (66)	56 (52)
	National	32 (28)	43 (41)	34 (29)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	63	73	67
	Girls	70	76	71
	Total	133	149	138
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	School	80 (82)	90 (90)	83 (78)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 6 or above	School	37 (41)	73 (68)	58 (52)
	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	88	78	166

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	42	83	87
	Girls	53	75	76
	Total	95	158	163
Percentage of pupils achieving The standard specified	School	57 (61)	95 (98)	98 (98)
	National	49.8 (49.2)	86.6 (86.8)	95.7 (95.5)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	43 (43.5)
	National	39.1 (38.9)

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and The percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	0	N/A
	National		N/A

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

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	57	39	96

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Male	Female	All
School	Number of candidates	60	44	104
	Average point score per candidate	17.6	18.1	17.8
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	18	17.5

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS examinations			For candidates entered for Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	Number of candidates	57	39	96	3	5	8
	Average point score per candidate	17.9	19.6	18.6	6.4	12	8.5
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.9	17.4	9.8	11.4	10.6

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	4
Black – African heritage	5
Black – other	2
Indian	8
Pakistani	2
Bangladeshi	7
Chinese	6
White	1039
Any other minority ethnic group	5

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	33	1
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)	71
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	15.2

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	18
Total aggregate hours worked per week	392

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	73.2
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y13

Key Stage 3	23.75
Key Stage 4	20.93

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000-1
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	£
Total income	3,225,200
Total expenditure	3,185,428
Expenditure per pupil	2,974
Balance brought forward from previous year	294,051
Balance carried forward to next year	333,823

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	27
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	32

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	1
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	2
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	2

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate 21%

Number of questionnaires sent out

1050

Number of questionnaires returned

220

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	44	49	6	1	0
My child is making good progress in school.	56	40	2	0	2
Behaviour in the school is good.	28	63	3	1	5
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	23	58	14	4	1
The teaching is good.	33	62	2	0	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	29	51	16	1	3
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	49	46	3	2	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	67	31	1	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	27	51	17	1	4
The school is well led and managed.	46	48	3	0	3
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	40	55	2	0	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	35	46	7	1	11

Other issues raised by parents

- The level of support given to trainee teachers regarding pupil behaviour management.
- Problems regarding information about Year 10/11 option choices and the lack of time to make choices.
- Shortage of drinking fountains. Pupils have to buy water or bring it in from home.
- Parents are concerned about the lack of sporting facilities for indoor sport and lack of extra curricular sport.
- The dining area is too small for the number of pupils in school.

PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

ENGLISH

Overall, provision in English is good.

Strengths

- The leadership and management of a developing faculty are good.
- There is a good range of effective teaching methods used in many lessons, resulting in good learning.
- Pupils have good attitudes and relationships in many lessons.

Areas for improvement

- Raising the attainment of boys, especially by the end of Year 11.
- Raising teacher expectations and further developing the range of teaching and learning strategies across the whole faculty.
- Developing the use of information and communication technology in English.

103. The results in the national tests for Year 9 pupils in 2001 continued the upward trend from the previous year, with standards above the national average for pupils attaining Level 5 or above, and above the average for similar schools nationally at the higher levels. Girls attained higher standards than boys. Standards overall were below those achieved in mathematics and science. The inspection confirmed that standards of pupils in English by the end of Year 9 are above the national average, with girls continuing to attain better than boys. Since most pupils join the school with standards just above national expectations, this represents satisfactory achievement overall for pupils between Years 7 and 9. Where they receive specialist support, pupils with special educational needs make good gains in acquiring basic skills; where they do not receive this support, they make satisfactory gains in learning, as do more able pupils.
104. The proportion of girls achieving an A* to C grade in English in the 2001 GCSE examinations was well above the national average, but the proportion of boys acquiring these grades was below this level. The overall results represented a decline in performance on the previous two years and a considerable decline in standards in relation to similar schools nationally, compared to the previous year. This was partly accounted for by disruptions in the staffing of lessons for the more able sets. While girls achieved well between Years 9 and 11, boys overall made at best satisfactory progress in relation to their prior attainment. The inspection confirmed that overall attainment by the end of Year 11 is still above national expectations in knowledge, understanding and the skills of critical analysis. Girls continue to achieve better than boys, although the gap in attainment is less significant now than a year ago, partly due to new strategies put in place by the English faculty to raise boys' attainment. Pupils with special educational needs achieve at the same rate as the majority. The most able pupils make the most gains in knowledge and skill. Overall, the achievement of pupils by the end of Year 11 is satisfactory in relation to their prior attainment.
105. The standards of pupils' work between Years 7 and 9 are highest in speaking, listening and reading. Pupils are good listeners and develop good speaking skills. Even younger pupils engage confidently in debate and enjoy performing, as in dramatic presentations of scenes from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in Year 7 and *Macbeth* in Year 9. Many also read with confidence, fluency and accuracy and able readers cope with challenging texts such as the novels of Wilkie Collins and Henry James. Progress in developing good writing skills is more variable: although many girls achieve well,

many boys make only satisfactory progress, particularly in maintaining accurate punctuation, grammar and the correct spelling of high-frequency words.

106. By the end of Year 9, pupils increase the range and depth of their writing well. Even in Year 7, pupils show an interest in evocative language, as evident in poems they composed on *Night*. The continuing interest in powerful descriptive writing is continued through into Year 9, as witnessed in pupils' imaginative efforts on *The Forest*. A good standard of creative writing is supplemented by an appropriate range of autobiographical and factual writing and in a range of genres such as gothic. Critical and analytical skills are developed well through reviews of challenging texts such as *Oliver Twist* and a particularly pleasing feature of language work is the insistence on close reference to text when studying classics such as *Macbeth* in Year 9. Less able pupils sometimes find the subsequent written tasks difficult, but they persevere and often achieve pleasing results, although they continue to make technical errors in their writing. Pupils in the small progress units make good progress in developing basic literacy skills, for example in learning to use compound sentences more effectively to sustain interest in the reader.
107. Between Years 9 and 11, pupils continue to develop their speaking, listening, reading and writing skills at a satisfactory level overall, although girls achieve well. Pupils continue to enjoy oral work in class, as seen in a Year 10 lesson in which pupils were exploring the theme of prejudice through a study of *Othello*. The quality of writing improves satisfactorily. Pupils improve their ability to consider the context as well as the structure of texts such as *An Inspector Calls*. Many show a mature appreciation of narrative poetry such as the *Lady of Shalott*, develop an empathetic understanding of the war poet Wilfred Owen and develop the skill of persuasive writing.
108. The overall quality of teaching in English is satisfactory. In Years 10 and 11, teaching is good. Between Years 7 and 9, teaching is variable, but is satisfactory overall. There are inconsistencies within and between year groups. Some of the teaching is excellent and there are several strengths in the better lessons. Class management is usually good, and combined with the positive attitudes, good motivation of pupils and good relationships evident in the majority of lessons, allows very focused learning to take place. Teachers make the objectives of lessons very clear to pupils and adopt a range of imaginative strategies that challenge pupils appropriately and keep their concentration. Most of these strategies involve pupils developing independent and collaborative research skills and the ability to think for themselves, and teachers also use resources skilfully to improve learning. For example, when studying *Macbeth* in Year 9 and *Othello* in Year 10, teachers use a combination of drama, audio readings by professional actors, brainstorming activities, class readings and other devices, which together provide good variety and keep pupils focused well on the text. The results are seen in the good progress made by pupils, for example, in furthering their understanding of the characterisation and persuasive techniques in *Macbeth*. Teachers encourage debate on sensitive issues and Year 11 pupils responded very well to an opportunity to discuss arguments for and against the killing of animals. Teachers manage these sessions well, so that the pupils learn the conventions of effective debate. Teachers also use questioning well to reinforce and extend learning. This was very evident, for example, in a Year 11 lesson in which the teacher got pupils to discuss various travel writing extracts and the sharply focused questioning helped pupils to understand that the significance of the writing lay more in the treatment of character than of place.
109. Where teaching is less effective, teachers are sometimes over-directive or set unchallenging tasks, restricting the learning opportunities for more able pupils. The quality of assessment is variable. Although teachers often give constructive feedback,

sometimes the assessment criteria are too vague and pupils do not know how well they are doing and how they can improve. This was witnessed, for example, in a lesson in which Year 8 pupils were being asked to prepare presentations based on their own reading.

110. Teachers are conscientiously trying to introduce the National Literacy Strategy for younger pupils and literacy standards are rising, but not all teachers have come to terms sufficiently with the structure. For example, the introductions to lessons can lack sufficient pace or challenge, as witnessed when able pupils in Year 9 were given a relatively simple punctuation exercise that did not lead to progress. In a small minority of lessons, teachers have limited strategies for dealing with the mildly disruptive behaviour of a small minority of pupils, which restricts the pace of learning.
111. The department is well led and managed and significant recent improvement has been achieved. Attainment in English remains good overall, as at the time of the previous inspection. There is now a much greater range of teaching strategies and a focus on active and independent learning, including the use of drama. Although the overall quality of teaching has not improved significantly, the evident vision of the new head of faculty and the strategies already in place to improve provision mean that there has been good progress in English since the previous inspection.

MATHEMATICS

Overall, the quality of provision in mathematics is good.

Strengths

- Pupils make good progress and achieve standards that are well above national averages.
- Teaching is good overall and ensures pupils have very positive attitudes to learning, work hard and want to do well.
- The National Numeracy Strategy in Year 7 has been well implemented and is proving very effective in developing further the faculty's work.
- Teachers' have good subject knowledge, high commitment to the pupils doing well and a love of mathematics.

Areas for improvement

- Teachers do not always question pupils enough to check their understanding of the topic being taught or to explore pupils' own methods of approach to a problem.
- The monitoring of teaching and learning and the analysis of the performance of different groups of pupils, especially girls and boys, are not yet rigorous enough.
- Approaches to topics for some lower attaining pupils in the middle ability sets are not set in sufficiently practical situations to support pupils' understanding.
- The development of the whole school numeracy policy, as its implementation has been slow.
- The use of computers in teaching mathematics, especially for pupils in Years 10 and 11.

112. Overall, standards are well above those expected nationally. Pupils make good progress from the time they enter the school in Year 7. Performance in National Curriculum tests for pupils in Year 9 is consistently well above that achieved nationally and in summer 2001 it was well above that of pupils in similar types of school. GCSE examination results are also well above national averages and have been so for the last three years. The proportion of pupils gaining the higher A* to C grades is significantly better than it is nationally and nearly all pupils achieve a pass grade. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 make much better progress than other pupils nationally.

Over the last three years the performance of boys and girls has varied in national examinations. In National Curriculum tests in Year 9, girls have done better than boys overall, although boys did better than girls in summer 2001. At GCSE, however, boys have performed better than girls except for summer 2001 when girls did significantly better. The slight drop in results in summer 2001 reflects the lower attainment of this year group in Year 9, but also the lower than expected performance of a group of boys who were not committed to their work. At the end of Year 9 and Year 11, pupils do better in mathematics than they do in English and science.

113. The standards achieved by pupils currently in Year 9 and Year 11, due to take national examinations in summer 2002, continue to be well above those expected nationally. Numeracy skills for pupils in Years 7 to 9 are very good. Most have a secure knowledge of their times-tables and work confidently with decimals and percentages. Pupils' algebra skills are particularly good and reflect the well-planned teaching of this area of the mathematics curriculum. The very lowest attaining pupils make good, and sometimes very good, progress in lessons because of the very good sensitive teaching they receive. The most able pupils achieve very well, but are not always fully stretched by being allowed to develop their own approaches to problems in lessons.
114. Older pupils in Years 10 and 11 also have well above average numeracy skills, although they are not always as confident as younger pupils in undertaking mental calculations. The work of the highest attaining pupils in Year 11 is at the level expected of GCSE A*/A candidates and well over half the pupils in the year group are on course to attain GCSE A* to C grades. These pupils show very good recall of previous work, such as techniques for finding different sorts of average, expressing numbers in standard form and calculating the angles of complex figures. Algebra skills are particularly good, with a significant number of pupils confident at solving quadratic equations, a demanding area of work. The lowest attaining pupils, including those with special educational needs, make good progress. Since the last inspection the achievement of pupils in these lower sets in GCSE examinations has risen. Recall of previous work is weakest for pupils in the sets above. Difficult topics such as ratio are not taught in a sufficiently practical context to enable these pupils to apply the techniques successfully to solve problems.
115. Pupils make effective use of their very good numeracy skills in other subjects of the curriculum. They competently use algebraic formulae in science and design and technology. In geography, Year 11 pupils use bar charts and pie charts well to display and interpret information as part of their coursework studies. Year 7 pupils use scale accurately when developing their map reading skills.
116. Throughout the age range pupils behave well, work hard and say they like mathematics. These very positive attitudes make a significant contribution to the good progress made. Pupils listen carefully even when lessons are less interesting. No significant differences were seen in the performance of boys and girls in lessons and their work. The small number of pupils from different ethnic groups are well integrated and no language difficulties were observed. The most able pupils have opportunities to enter national competitions and this year these pupils in Year 10 are studying GCSE statistics as well as GCSE mathematics.
117. Pupils with particular learning needs, including those with dyslexia or behavioural difficulties, make good progress. Teachers know them well and ensure they receive appropriate support in lessons. Smaller teaching groups and, where needed, good support from the special educational needs faculty make a valuable contribution to meeting these pupils' needs. The support from the special educational needs faculty can be in lessons or through lunchtime/after school sessions that help pupils to

organise their work and to complete homework. As a result, these pupils achieve well for their abilities.

118. Teaching is good overall. The teachers have very good subject knowledge, structure lessons well and have high expectations of what the pupils can achieve. They often communicate their own love of mathematics to their pupils. Consequently, pupils have confidence in their teachers. This, together with the pupils' own positive attitudes towards learning, means the pupils take full advantage of the good teaching they receive and learn well. The National Numeracy Strategy not only has a positive impact on teaching in Year 7, but also in Years 8 to 11. Starter activities, a feature of the strategy, are well used across the ability range to check on pupils' understanding of previous work. In a Year 8 lesson, the teacher started by recapping the previous work on corresponding and supplementary angles before moving on to the new topic of bearings. The use of individual white boards meant that by using diagrams all the pupils could show the teacher that they had understood the previous work on angles, a necessary skill for the new topic. Any misunderstandings were corrected. Hence the lesson built well on what pupils already knew and could do and the pupils made good progress in learning a new topic.
119. The very best teaching is lively, interesting and moves at a quick pace. In a Year 7 lesson on probability, a lower attaining group of pupils found the lesson fun and worked hard for the full 60 minutes. This was because the lesson had an appropriate range of oral, written and practical activities and used effectively the National Numeracy Strategy materials designed for this group of pupils. The first half of the lesson started with quick-fire questions to check the learning from the previous lesson. This led to work on finding simple fractional probabilities that pupils completed successfully. The last half of the lesson was a well-prepared practical activity aimed at giving pupils an early understanding of relative frequency. Pupils were motivated through having to find out which colour sweet occurred the most often in a tube. All this resulted in good achievement by this group of pupils. The teacher praised them constantly throughout the lesson and this had a positive influence on the pupils' attitudes and behaviour.
120. Occasionally, lessons, while satisfactory, are not as effective as they could be. Because of their enthusiasm for the subject, teachers spend too long explaining a topic without involving the pupils. They do not use questions enough to check the pupils' understanding. Pupils have too few opportunities to suggest methods of approach to a problem, in particular the highest attaining pupils who often have excellent strategies. At the end of lessons, the best teaching recaps on what has been learnt with, for example, pupils showing the teacher answers to questions on their individual white boards to check understanding. However, teachers do not always leave enough time to revisit the objectives for the lesson and consolidate what has been learnt.
121. Pupils' achievements are well recorded. Teachers are beginning to use them effectively to plan future work. For example, in several Year 11 classes after the recent GCSE mock examination, individual pupils' scores for each question were recorded on a spreadsheet. This enables the class teacher to pinpoint important areas for revision prior to the summer examinations. Individual pupils also know where they personally need to improve. However, although pupils' work and homework are regularly marked, not all teachers provide sufficient feedback to pupils on how they can improve their work. Target setting, beyond pupils knowing their expected examination grades, is not in place.
122. The faculty is well organised and the teachers work hard and well together. The implementation of the National Numeracy Strategy is a good example of joint working with a clear and appropriate scheme of work now in place for Year 7. However, the

development of a whole school numeracy policy has been slower. In spite of pupils using their numeracy skills well in other subjects, an audit of methods and approaches when topics are required in other subjects would be helpful for pupils' learning. In geography, some Year 9 pupils had difficulty in using percentages. The faculty is starting to make a good contribution to the teaching of computer skills in Years 7 to 9. Teachers use spreadsheets to develop trial and error methods, and LOGO and CABRI for work on angles. The contribution is much more limited in Years 10 and 11 and is mainly due to difficulties in accessing computer facilities. Opportunities exist for pupils to develop their literacy skills, but they are not yet fully developed. Although key technical words are displayed in classrooms, they are not always sufficiently large and clear enough to be seen by all pupils. Teachers do not always remember to refer to them in lessons.

123. While the head of faculty manages the work of the faculty soundly, the monitoring of teaching and learning in mathematics is not yet rigorous enough. For example, lesson observations are not sufficiently focused on how to improve teaching and learning. Insufficient emphasis is placed on the analysis of the performance of different groups of pupils, in particular the performance of girls and boys, to ensure there is no underachievement.
124. Standards since the last inspection have risen in Years 7 to 9. In Year 11 GCSE examinations, results have continued to be consistently well above average, with more lower-attaining pupils gaining a GCSE grade. Teaching has improved, although on occasions some teachers still talk too much and do not involve pupils as much as they could do in lessons through questions that probe their understanding. Nevertheless, overall, progress has been good.

SCIENCE

Overall, the quality of provision in science is good.

Strengths

- The teaching is good and promotes positive relationships between teachers and pupils.
- The pupils behave well and have a good attitude to the subject.
- The teachers are well qualified and enthusiastic.
- Attainment is very good in Years 7 to 9.
- There is a suitable range of GCSE courses that match pupil requirements.

Areas for improvement

- The use of information and communication technology is insufficiently developed.
- There is a limited range of teaching strategies to develop more individual and independent work.
- The attainment of boys at GCSE.

125. The attainment of pupils at the end of Year 9 last year was well above the national level. In the school, 83 per cent of pupils gained a Level 5 or above compared to the national figure of 66 per cent. There was no difference between the percentage of boys who gained a Level 5 or above compared to girls. The number of pupils who gained a Level 6 or above was well above the national figure. When compared to the other core subjects, pupils do as well in science as they do in English, but they achieve higher levels in mathematics.
126. Pupils in Year 7 are achieving high standards and were able to explain inherited characteristics on the basis of recessive and dominant genes. In Year 8, lower

attaining pupils could describe the basic properties of light and understood the need for light in photosynthesis. Pupils in Year 9 have progressed and were able to describe such topics as the major groups in the periodic table. Higher attaining pupils in Year 9 were able to describe the process of gaseous exchange in the lungs in detail, showing that their attainment was above national expectations.

127. The number of pupils in science obtaining a GCSE grade A* to C is above the national level. At the end of Year 11, most pupils took double certification with some higher attaining pupils taking the three separate sciences at GCSE. Lower attaining pupils were entered for a double certification modular science GCSE. Overall, the number of grades A* to C in these examinations was close to the national average. The attainment of boys at GCSE is below the national figure, whereas girls are above the national level. The department has reacted in a positive manner to the disappointing results in 2001, especially with regards to the results obtained by boys, and has put into place several strategies to raise attainment. The extensive assessment data and modular test results indicate these strategies have had a positive effect and the achievement of boys has now increased. All indications are that the results at GCSE in 2002 will be significantly higher than last year. In each year group, pupils with special educational needs make good progress, in line with the rest of the year group. No pupils have English as an additional language.
128. Pupils in Year 10 were confident when discussing such topics as rock formation and the structure of the eye. In Year 11, pupils were able to perform all aspects of scientific investigations including design, evaluation and drawing conclusions to a high standard. This was seen when pupils were investigating the effect of temperature on reactions involving enzymes. Lower attaining pupils in Year 11 were achieving well and were able to interpret graphs of continuous data in a constructive manner.
129. There is a good relationship between the pupils and staff in science. Pupils behave well and work hard, especially in Years 7 to 9. Pupils are keen to join in with class discussions, have the confidence to answer questions and use their speaking and listening skills constructively. Pupils work in a safe and enthusiastic manner when performing practical work. A good example of this was in a Year 11 class where the pupils were performing an investigation on electromagnets, taking great care to ensure accurate results. Girls, regardless of their attainment, produce work that is complete and well presented. Higher attaining boys have complete notes but, at times, a lower standard of presentation. A few lower attaining boys show a relatively poor attitude by producing work that is often incomplete and of a low quality.
130. The teaching in science is good overall. It is well planned and delivered by a suitably qualified and enthusiastic staff. In most of the lessons observed, the teaching was good or very good. There was no unsatisfactory teaching observed. In most lessons registers were taken formally and this helped start the lesson in an ordered manner that was then followed by the teacher describing the aims of that lesson. The most successful lessons were those where there was good lesson planning. This included a structure that ensured the lesson had sufficient pace with a practical basis linked with effective class control. One very effective lesson on the pinhole camera with a Year 8 class involved a review session, and a practical supported by good resource material that enabled all pupils to achieve the lesson objectives. Homework is a structured and integral part of the lesson plans and is used as an effective means of reinforcing learning. Most teachers use narrative comments and the setting of targets in a constructive manner when marking books.
131. Pupils make good progress in Years 7 to 9. Pupils in the upper school, overall, make satisfactory progress, with the higher attaining pupils making good progress. The

pupils are aware of their progress from the assessments made on end of topic tests and are informed of their potential level or grades on a regular basis. As pupils are streamed in all years, it allows teachers to plan work that is suitable and challenging. Pupils who have special educational needs are well supported in science with additional staffing and make good progress. In Years 10 and 11, the department is able to organise the group sizes so that the lower attaining pupils are in smaller classes allowing the teachers to give greater support. The more able pupils in the upper school have the opportunity of following all three sciences to GCSE. There is a wide range of opportunities for pupils to use their literacy and numeracy skills both in written work and class discussions. The use of computers is not widespread in science and easier access to whole class facilities is needed to allow this to increase. The department has recognised this problem and has recently taken delivery of some computers. The department intends to use the newly acquired data-logging units together with the computers to enhance the limited range of teaching styles used by teachers. At the moment there are not enough computers to allow efficient class use throughout the department.

132. The management of the department is good. The head of department is very experienced and has been responsible for the introduction of many new effective initiatives. These include a review of the courses offered to provide a relevant experience for the pupils and to ensure the department has sufficient resources for their delivery. These courses will allow for an increase in the range of teaching styles and activities of the pupils. The good monitoring and support from the head of department for the teachers teaching science have been major factors in raising the standard of teaching and learning even higher in the department. The department has also ensured that the majority of points raised in the previous inspection have been addressed. This includes the introduction of a range of investigation opportunities for the pupils linked with centrally held records of attainment. The assessment of pupils' progress and attainment is good and is now starting to be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the courses. When this is implemented fully it should assist in the further development of the curriculum and teaching styles. The department is aware of the issues needing to be addressed and has the development plans to ensure the recent further improvements seen are continued.
133. The accommodation for the science department is good. Some of the laboratories are in a very good condition while others need refurbishment to raise the quality of the facilities. The department has sufficient resources and a team of support staff, who are efficient and well organised, to ensure the equipment and resources ordered are present at the start of lessons.

ART AND DESIGN

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

Strengths

- Teaching and learning are very good in Years 10 and 11; lessons are well planned with very good integration of theory and practical work.
- Standards, particularly in recent GCSE examinations, are well above average.
- The subject is very well led.
- The use of sketch books for research and development in Years 10 and 11 is very good.

Areas for improvement

- ICT is under-used in Years 7 to 9.
- Three-dimensional work is under-developed.

134. Teacher assessment shows that attainment at the end of Year 9 is above the national average. The proportion of pupils at the end of Year 11 gaining higher grades, A* to C, in GCSE examinations in 2001 was well above the national average. One hundred per cent of girls achieved A* to C grades, with over 50 per cent achieving A* or A grades. Although boys perform less well than girls at the higher grades, their scores are still in line with national averages.

135. Standards of work seen during the inspection were above average in Years 7 to 9. These standards are achieved because the teaching is very good and pupils' attitudes to learning are very positive. Pupils are able to use line, tone and texture effectively in their drawings. They observe well from direct observation and understand three-dimensional concepts. They are able to explore ideas and access visual information, including images from different historical and cultural contexts. In a Year 9 lesson on composition in landscape, the pupils showed the ability to arrange shapes well and had a good understanding of spatial layout. They experimented with colour mixing and showed the ability to create distance with scale and tonal variations. Work shows greater perceptual depth when pupils use first hand observation as a basis for their work. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well, benefiting from individual attention. By the time pupils reach the end of Year 11, much of the work seen is well above the standard expected: pupils can develop and sustain a chosen theme in their work. They show the influence of important movements in art and design or particular artists. They demonstrate personal interests, ideas and responses to their own and other cultures through the work they produce. Very well annotated sketchbooks are used most effectively and technical language develops well. In a Year 10 lesson, pupils were able to speak confidently about their work and demonstrated good knowledge and understanding. Work from direct observational studies of natural forms was being developed well using the medium of clay. Good connections were made to the work of contemporary potters. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very good throughout. This is a direct result of the high expectations and enthusiasm that the teachers bring to their work. Pupils enjoy their art and design lessons and are eager to explain their work to classmates and visitors alike. There is an effective working ethos and pupils behave and do their best and apply themselves purposefully to their work.

136. The quality of teaching and learning is good in Years 7 to 9. It is very good in Years 10 and 11. The difference between the year groups is mostly explained by teachers using a greater range of teaching strategies and making better use of homework in Years 10 and 11. Teachers know pupils well and plan their lessons to meet individual requirements. They use their knowledge and subject expertise to very good effect and lesson preparation is very good at all stages. The implementation of individual

education plans for pupils with special educational needs is most effective. The use of clear introductions to lessons and time spent reviewing and reinforcing the work of the previous lesson enables pupils to build upon prior learning and recognise the continuity of topics. Teachers make very good use of praise to encourage the participation of all, and good use of question and answer ensures that pupils are actively involved. ICT is used as a research tool; its full potential as a learning aid has not yet been fully developed. There is good emphasis on procedure, methods and care of equipment. In a Year 7 lesson on textural surfaces, the teacher showed the class a good example of interpretation in clay-work, using studies of natural forms as a starting point. The pupils fully understood the processes involved and the concept that recording information can be in any media. In a Year 11 lesson on coursework for the GCSE examination, pupils developed ideas from various resources and made personal choices. They demonstrated very good knowledge and understanding of the connection made with artists that had influenced their work. Reference to Holbein's 'The Ambassadors', was studied most effectively for perspective, pattern and texture, portraits and still life. A well-structured pattern of homework is in place in Years 7 to 9 and pupils are becoming more aware of their levels of work. Homework is very good and appropriate in subject matter, being used to support project work well in Years 10 and 11. Well-constructed assessments make a significant contribution to the development and progress of pupils' work.

137. An enthusiastic and dedicated teaching team is led by a very capable and astute head of department. Departmental meetings are used well to share ideas and good practice. Teaching schemes and departmental policies are clear and provide good guidance for staff. The head of department monitors effectively the work of the department through classroom observations and work sampling. Assessment is most effective and informs curriculum planning well. There is very limited access to computers within the department. There is insufficient use made of working with clay and three-dimensional study. The stocks of reference materials held within the department are good. Accommodation does not allow for work on a large scale and storage and preparation spaces are still inadequate. Extra-curricular activities and visits to galleries and museums have a positive effect upon the quality and range of pupils' work. The library provision for good quality reference books is satisfactory, meeting some of the elements of knowledge and understanding needed for a subject with such a wide cultural base. Improvements since the last inspection have been very good. Assessment procedures have been refined in order to ensure pupils have systematic opportunities to discuss their achievement and to set targets for future development more effectively. Study into the history of art and research elements have improved since the last inspection.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

The school has worked hard to try to reinforce the team of teachers currently teaching design and technology, but it continues to have difficulty in recruiting a full team of design and technology specialist teachers.

In spite of this, the overall quality of provision for design and technology is good.

Strengths

- Pupils' achievements and GCSE examination results, particularly in textiles, graphics and electronics are high.
- The quality of teaching promotes pupils' positive attitudes and behaviour.
- There are well-structured courses and programmes of work.
- Departmental management has ensured a strong team of committed teachers who are enabling all pupils to achieve well.
- Accommodation and resources are very good.

Areas for improvement

- Planning is insufficiently detailed for the progressive development of knowledge and skills, including literacy, numeracy and use of computers.
- The system for recording and presenting pupils' coursework in Years 7, 8 and 9.
- Raising expectations by setting clearer criteria for the marking of pupils' work.

138. The results of teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 have been consistently well above those reported nationally, but from analysis of work and lessons, current work indicates that standards are above national expectations.

139. The overall GCSE results for design and technology subjects have been consistently above the national average with individual results for textiles technology, graphics and electronics being well above the national average. In 2001, the proportion gaining A* to C grades continued to be above the national average and for food, textiles and graphics was well above. While boys' results were above the national average for boys, the proportion of girls gaining A* to C grades was well above the national average for all pupils and the national average for girls. Higher attaining pupils continued to achieve well. Boys gained a higher proportion of A* and A grades than the national average for boys and girls gained almost three times the national average for girls. Girls and boys achieved a higher proportion of A* to G grades than national averages and did as well in design technology as in their other subjects.

140. Pupils' current work in Years 7 to 9 shows standards are above national expectations. Pupils achieve good standards in both designing and making, because the curriculum for design technology subjects is well structured and well taught. Pupils are developing good levels of technical knowledge, communication skills and skills in designing and making. The quality of research, analysis, development of ideas and presentation improves as pupils' progress through Years 7 to 9 and is very good for the higher attaining pupils. All pupils, including those with special educational needs, respond well to the structured learning activities and, as a result, make good progress and achieve well. Practical work is good in all materials and there is good application of knowledge, sound use of tools and equipment and an emphasis on good quality outcomes, which are appreciated by pupils.

141. Current work in Years 10 and 11 indicates that standards are good overall. The structured approach used by teachers to address coursework is enabling all pupils to access the requirements of the examination well. In the best folders, the quality of

research, analysis, and development and evaluation of ideas is very good and sometimes excellent. Pupils understand how materials and components can be used safely, effectively and sometimes creatively while developing their ideas and skills. Presentation of work is often very good and the use of computer-generated work is used well in many coursework folders. Practical work is often very good because a range of skills is used well to produce high quality finished products which meet the specifications set out in design work. Overall, all pupils, including those with special educational needs and pupils of lower prior attainment, make good progress because they are well supported by the structured programmes of work and assessment procedures used and because they apply their technical abilities well.

142. When compared to their earlier attainment, pupils' achievement is good throughout the school. In Year 7, pupils learn how to make pewter key rings to their own design. Year 8 follow the complete design process by developing their own ideas, modelling and then making a puppet complete with a stand and packaging. Pupils research their work by using both books and the Internet and often produce well-presented drawings of their ideas. The annotated drawings of higher attaining pupils are often very good, for example the fabric designs produced for a Year 8 cushion project. In Year 9, pupils extend their designing and making skills and in some projects have good opportunities to become more independent learners. For example, in the 'hat' project, pupils investigate materials, produce patterns and make individual, and sometimes complex, novelty hats. In a moving-toy project, pupils are required to organise the use of their own time and relate some of the methods they use to those used in industry. Pupils' recorded work shows increasing depth of research and good drawing, presentational and evaluation skills. However, the overall quality of pupils' work in Years 7 to 9 is limited by the way it is presented in exercise books. Pupils continue to make good progress as they move through Years 10 and 11. All courses are well structured and enable all pupils to address the requirements of the examination systematically. All pupils gain and apply knowledge very effectively in well researched and presented design folders. Most achieve a good standard and the work of higher attaining pupils is sometimes outstanding.
143. Overall, teaching is good in each year. In a vast majority of lessons it is good and sometimes it is very good. All teachers have good technical knowledge, which is reflected in demonstrations and their individual support of pupils. Teachers give clear explanations and ask focused questions that reinforce pupils' learning well. Overall, planning is good. However, the planning of individual lessons could be improved by setting more clearly defined targets that are based on proposed marking schemes. Teachers use time well. Pupils are managed well and teachers use a range of teaching methods very effectively. For example, in a Year 8 textiles technology lesson, a good demonstration by the teacher clearly reinforced pupils' prior knowledge. Targeted questions enabled informed responses to be made before pupils moved quickly and effectively into their practical activity, sharing workspaces well and demonstrating good use of materials and equipment. Some basic literacy and numeracy skills are being addressed through oral and written work but more could be done to identify more detailed learning opportunities in planned programmes of work. The use of computers is increasing as teachers plan more opportunities for recently acquired equipment to be used and this is having a positive effect on pupils' work. For example, pupils taking electronics often use a computer simulation program to try out their circuits and the computer-controlled sewing machine is used spontaneously to enhance work in textiles. Good marking and assessment procedures are in place and include good support and discussion with pupils about their work. In Years 9 to 11, the regular assessment of pupils' work with written comments is very effective in enabling pupils to improve their work.

144. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very good. Pupils settle quickly in most lessons. They respond very well to teachers' high expectations of behaviour and are keen to do well in their work. They respond to good teaching and generally feel secure and supported. Levels of concentration are high and pupils respond well when given opportunities to organise their own work and act more independently. Many Year 10 and 11 pupils spend considerable time and effort outside lessons in improving their work. The success of lower ability pupils is a positive reflection of the effort and concentration that they give to their work.
145. In Years 7 to 9, programmes of work are developing well and good use is made of the limited time available within the rotation of design and technology subjects and ICT. In Years 10 and 11, not all pupils take a design and technology subject and, therefore, statutory requirements for design and technology are not being fully met.
146. Leadership and management are very good and close co-operation between teachers is enabling good courses to be developed and standards to be raised. Departmental documentation is good and there is a very positive approach to monitoring the development and improvement of the subject. Very effective use is made of current staffing, but difficulties with recruiting design and technology specialist teachers are affecting the range of design and technology subjects that can be offered. Accommodation is very good. It is used well and there are very good displays of pupils' work. The recent considerable increase in provision of computer equipment is very good. This, together with good management and planning, has led to learning resources being very good. There has been good improvement since the last inspection. Although the school has not been able to recruit specialist teachers to cover the full range of design and technology subjects, teaching has improved, there is now good specialist teaching for electronics and the environment has been considerably improved.

GEOGRAPHY

Overall, the quality of provision in geography is good.

Strengths

- Standards of work are above average in Years 7 to 9.
- Fieldwork helps pupils to achieve well, especially in Year 11.
- Teaching is good; pupils are given good opportunities for personal development.
- Relationships between teachers and pupils are very good.
- The department is well led and managed.

Areas for improvement

- Assessment data does not give a clear picture of achievement over time for all year groups.
- Individual lesson plans are not combined into comprehensive schemes of work.

147. Standards of work at the end of Year 9 are above the national average and are improving. Girls achieve higher standards than boys, reflecting the national picture. However, boys' attainment is well above the average achieved by boys nationally, particularly at the highest levels. Pupils enter the school with above average attainment in this subject. Girls and boys build steadily on their knowledge and understanding, achieving well during the first three years in school.
148. In the GCSE examination at the end of Year 11, results have fluctuated recently, but they have improved since the last inspection when they were a cause for concern.

There has been no significant difference in the relative performance of girls and boys during this time. In 1999 passes at grades A* to C were well above the national average for all pupils. Since then they have declined to a level that is in line with national expectations. However, in 2001, passes at the highest grades of A* and A were well above average and all pupils obtained a pass grade.

149. At the end of Year 9, standards are above average in oral work, written tasks and in the use of essential geographical skills. Many pupils take great care in the presentation of their work and are keen to do well. They respond quickly to teachers' questions, work co-operatively and respect each others' views. Occasionally, achievements are limited by the nature of the work that they are given. For example, in a Year 7 lesson, pupils had difficulty finding information and some boys lost interest in the tasks. More capable pupils develop their powers of expression and debate very well. For example, pupils in Year 9 produce passionate arguments that support the cancellation of debt incurred by less developed nations. They show empathy with poverty-stricken people as they explore patterns of inequality in the world. In a very good lesson in Year 7, some pupils could write fluent sentences, using accurate vocabulary, as they described the importance of rivers. Those with special educational needs were helped by the teacher to express their ideas and then record them successfully using resources adapted for the purpose. Generally, pupils with special educational needs make good progress because they are well supported by their teachers who are well aware of their individual circumstances.
150. Current teacher assessments indicate that examination results at the end of Year 11 this year will be significantly better than those achieved last summer. In the recent school 'mock' examinations, results in geography were higher than the predictions based on pupils' prior attainment. Higher attaining pupils show a curiosity about the world and can use skills that go well beyond the syllabus requirements. They have a good understanding of the physical processes that shape the landscape and many can write at length on the interactions between people and their environment. Pupils with a fairly wide range of prior attainment are able to exchange ideas and work together in a mature way. In a good lesson in Year 10, for example, groups of pupils used their local knowledge to think about solutions to traffic congestion, then they presented articulate arguments to the whole class. In Year 11, the quality of the course work produced is very high and contributes significantly to all pupils' achievements. Pupils use ICT extensively in order to process and present original data and statistics from secondary sources. They are able to examine their own hypotheses, draw conclusions from their work and evaluate their findings. Clear deadlines, help and feedback from teachers enables pupils to refine their work. This good programme of monitoring course work has been established by the department as a means of tackling the under-achievement of some boys in the recent past.
151. Teaching and learning are good overall. Three quarters of the lessons observed were at least good and, of these, one was very good and one was excellent. This represents a significant improvement since the last inspection. Only one lesson was unsatisfactory because the tasks set were inappropriate and poorly explained. The best lessons proceed at a good pace and include a wide range of activities that build on pupils' learning and catch their imagination. For example, in an excellent lesson in Year 8, pupils applied their knowledge of earthquakes to a real example and they understood its dramatic impact. The teacher used all kinds of material, including original newspaper articles, a stunning film extract and poems that this group had written previously, to enable pupils to assemble a wide range of evidence very rapidly. Very clear instructions, including details of how to reach higher National Curriculum levels, meant that pupils could respond very effectively to the challenges set. Teachers build up their knowledge of their pupils' progress through regular marking and

assessments that use national levels and cover a wide range of activities. The occasional use of self-assessment sheets gives pupils the chance to comment on their work and to set themselves targets for the future. However, teachers do not always use sharply focused individual targets that show pupils exactly how to improve the quality of their responses. Not all lesson plans recognise the need to provide for pupils with a range of capabilities.

152. The department is well led and managed. There is now much more active learning than before, with a greater emphasis on the use of ICT to extend pupils' understanding and enjoyment of the subject. The task of updating syllabus requirements has been completed and the units of work have been improved through the shared efforts of all teachers. These developments have not yet been incorporated into comprehensive schemes of work. Methods of assessing pupils' progress have advanced considerably, but the data generated is not yet used to provide a clear view of individual achievement over time and across all year groups. Classrooms are decorated with colourful displays of work and items of topical interest that catch and maintain pupils' enthusiasm for the subject. Overall, there have been good improvements since the last inspection.

HISTORY

Overall, the quality of provision in history is good.

Strengths

- The standards and achievement of pupils in Years 7 to 9 are high.
- The quality of teaching in all years is of a high standard.
- The leadership of the head of department is very good.
- The subject documentation is of good quality.

Areas for improvement

- The standards and achievement of pupils in Years 10 and 11.
- The use made of ICT, by building on current good practice.
- There is not enough independence in learning, especially in Years 10 and 11.

153. In 2001, the teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 showed pupils' attainment to be above national averages. At the end of Year 11 in 2001, the pupils' GCSE examination results broadly match the national average. Evidence from the inspection, including the quality of work seen in lessons, confirms these results in all years. There is no significant difference between the attainment of boys and girls. Pupils' achievement in Years 7 to 9 is good. They enter Year 7 with standards that are above average and make good progress as they move through Years 7 to 9. Pupils with special educational needs also make good progress because of the support they receive from their teachers. Pupils' achievement in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory. Significant numbers of pupils commence their GCSE examination courses from a lower than average level of attainment in Year 9. Because of the good teaching in Years 10 and 11, these and the other pupils achieve national standards of attainment in Year 11. A small number of pupils exceed these standards. The overall standard of teaching and learning in all years is good. Most pupils display positive attitudes towards the subject and behave well in class.

154. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 benefit from a good standard of teaching. In some lessons, teaching is very good and at times excellent. Most pupils respond positively and the learning progresses at a good pace. The pupils in Year 7 make a good start in developing historical skills. They are carefully taught how to examine change over time and to sequence events. They note that progress is sometimes reversed, for example

from Roman roads to medieval tracks. Good use is made of documents, as pupils are taught the importance of sifting evidence. In Year 8, carefully chosen illustrations enable pupils to identify differences in the homes of the rich and poor during the 16th century. During an excellent lesson in Year 9, the teacher's enthusiasm, knowledge and skilful questioning led into a lively discussion on slavery. Pupils make excellent gains in their understanding of why such diverse viewpoints were held by people in the 18th century. Pupils select different quotations and understand they represent differing viewpoints. They use appropriate language to describe events, for example 'abolitionist'. Challenging tasks stimulate the pupils and promote effective thinking. Pupils in Year 9 make good use of ICT by working on data for Sawbridgeworth from the 1861 Census Report.

155. The strengths of teaching in Years 7 to 9 include secure subject knowledge and the teaching of basic skills. This ensures that pupils rapidly identify the important facts of a question. In a very good lesson, they quickly worked out the differing rivalries in Europe leading to the outbreak of the Great War. They learned to use mapping skills to locate this information and acquired key language, such as 'alliance', to describe events. On occasion the teaching is too directed and opportunities are missed to promote learning through discussion. This can lead to groups of pupils being too passive, where insufficient demands are made upon them. Overall, most teaching is of a high standard. This ensures that pupils make good progress in many lessons and has a direct impact upon the high standards achieved. Because relationships are positive and through effective pupil management, attitudes and behaviour are good and most pupils develop appropriate study skills for their age. Pupils with special educational needs are well supported through carefully graduated tasks and in Year 7 appropriate extension work is planned for gifted and talented pupils. Numeracy and literacy skills are promoted successfully, for example the consolidation of chronological skills and the development of empathy skills through written work.
156. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 achieve satisfactory progress over time because of the good standard of teaching. In Year 10 they make good use of their ICT skills to investigate the dilemmas facing the German government after the Great War. Through a decision-making activity they interrogate information and improve their understanding of cause and effect. Pupils use self-evaluation effectively to measure their success in the task. This activity provides very good value in developing a range of wider skills, including thinking skills. In another group, lower attaining pupils improve their understanding of chronology and sequencing of events by studying Hitler's life. Pupils in Year 11 study a contrasting range of topics. Through good teaching, they investigate a range of propaganda posters and gain useful insights into these. Pupils make good progress when considering the successes and failures of the Civil Rights movement in America. Because of careful lesson planning, pupils are able to work effectively in pairs to manage the source material provided. They quickly identify a range of discriminatory behaviour and assess the impact upon social and economic change.
157. A strength of teaching in Years 10 and 11 is the effective link made between the teachers' knowledge and understanding and the use of primary source material. This helps bring history to life and sustains pupils' interest and enthusiasm. Pupils gain confidence through developing a range of skills. They become more aware of bias by identifying the origin of information. They are able to make judgements and reach conclusions on the relative merits of conflicting arguments, for example the rights and wrongs of American involvement in Vietnam. In most classes, relationships are good and pupils work hard. There is a small minority of pupils who can be disruptive and this tests the staffs' pupil management skills. During the inspection, such incidents were rare and were handled quite skilfully by staff. Pupils with special educational needs are well supported, either through specific tasks or by one-to-one support from a classroom

assistant. In Year 10, gifted and talented pupils are identified and their needs are met through extension tasks. There are a number of significant strengths in the quality of teaching. However, there is not always sufficient emphasis on independent learning and there could be more challenge in group tasks. On occasion, pupils are given information which they could more profitably research for themselves. Appropriate homework tasks are set on a regular basis.

158. A key factor in the effective teamwork in the department is the very good leadership of the head of department. She is an excellent teacher, has clear priorities and works hard to ensure all pupils benefit from good provision and entitlement in the subject. This has led to a substantial increase in the numbers of pupils choosing to study history at GCSE level. Currently, pupils of all ability have access into examination classes. Subject documentation is of good quality and assessment procedures are effective. This ensures the staff are well supported and pupils have clear targets for improvement. The curriculum is of good quality and offers varied learning opportunities. It is enhanced by a wide range of educational visits and is well resourced with textbooks, artefacts and video material. The curriculum promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development effectively. There are useful developments in the use of ICT, but not always sufficient access for pupils. While reported standards are lower at GCSE than at the time of the last inspection, there has been satisfactory improvement in a number of areas, including the quality of teaching, assessment procedures and the use of ICT.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Overall, the quality of provision in information and communication technology is unsatisfactory.

Strengths

- Teachers' knowledge of the subject is good.
- Pupils are managed well so that their good behaviour and positive attitudes to learning are promoted.
- Standards of work and achievement of pupils in Years 7 to 9 are good.

Areas for improvement

- Statutory requirements for ICT in all subjects in Years 10 and 11 are not met.
- The management and co-ordination of ICT across subjects are unsatisfactory.
- Attainment in Years 10 and 11 does not improve sufficiently.
- Procedures for marking pupils' work and assessing their attainment and progress are not satisfactory.

159. Standards of work and achievement of pupils at the end of Year 9 are good. Pupils come into the school with a wide range of ICT skills. By the time they reach the end of Year 9, pupils' knowledge and understanding are above average. Standards were satisfactory at the time of the last inspection, but for the majority of pupils they are now good. Teacher assessments indicate that 80 per cent of boys and 90 per cent of girls achieve at or above the national average. The difference between the performance of boys and girls in the school is similar to that seen nationally.

160. Pupils at the school taking GCSE information and communication technology attain average standards. Those taking Office Applications attain below national expectation. For GCSE in 2001 the number gaining A* to C marginally exceeded the national average. The responsibility for the delivery of the National Curriculum programmes of study to the majority of Years 10 and 11 is with subject areas. As at the time of the last

inspection, not all departments teach the required ICT elements and, therefore, statutory requirements are not being fully met.

161. The standard of work seen in Years 8 and 9 is good. Year 7 pupils are at a very early stage in their development and standards are often below that expected of similar pupils across the country. The separate lessons are organised as part of the design and technology rotational system that impacts on the allocation of time given to the subject. Pupils receive the equivalent of one lesson per fortnight. Some pupils have no ICT during one term in the year. However, during their first three years in the school pupils make good progress. Year 7 pupils can log on to the system and manipulate the mouse and keyboard with some degree of accuracy. Their knowledge of the software is basic, although the higher attaining pupils have a greater understanding of the range of generic software being used. This was especially true of those who made use of home computer systems to produce work for school. Year 8 pupils working on the construction of a spreadsheet relating to a school visit, used a paper-based approach to help them understand the importance of accurate design. By the end of Year 8, pupils have made considerable progress, being confident and competent users. They access Internet sites easily, regarding computers as the means to promoting good learning and not simply as an end result. Year 9 pupils are able to use a good range of software. For example, one group, having spent a number of weeks exploring a large spreadsheet, moved on to create their own. The higher attainers applied their knowledge well and during a lesson completed all tasks, including the comparison between manual and electronic methods. In other Year 9 lessons, pupils created their own website, having first produced a layout on paper. Most pupils understood the need for planning and the use of links between different applications of ICT. Examples of completed work are retained in folders that pupils can access, but the work is not formally marked. Pupils are unclear about how well they have done in any task and this is a weakness in their learning.
162. A range of cross-curricular opportunities enhances the good learning that takes place in the first three years. However, while pupils are encouraged to record what they have done electronically, provision is inconsistent across and within departments. There is currently no systematic planning of cross-curricular ICT. Pupils in Year 7 mathematics work competently with spreadsheets and pupils create television guides in French gaining information via the Internet. In science, pupils use data-loggers and in history they work with databases. Very recent increases in equipment levels in design and technology are ensuring more and varied ICT experiences. Most subject areas have planned programmes to meet their statutory requirements for ICT. In specialist ICT lessons the good progress made by pupils is the result of non-specialist teachers working hard to develop their own ICT skills. This is in spite of having considerable commitments in other subjects. Pupils benefit from the support provided by teachers. Equally, they are helpful and supportive to one another.
163. Standards do not improve sufficiently for all pupils in Years 10 and 11. Approximately one third of pupils achieve some form of accreditation, most at a level which is in line with the national average. The remainder of pupils have to rely on experiences provided in subjects. Many have satisfactory experiences, but departments do have problems getting access to the specialist ICT rooms despite the considerable increase in good quality equipment. The ratio of computers to pupils now matches the national average. Pupils taking the GCSE course are able to use technical language in context when comparing the merits of spreadsheets and databases. The higher attaining pupils recognise that databases are better at validating information. Examples were seen of well-planned data capture forms enabling good levels of analysis. In discussion, most pupils can recognise when and where the use of computers is most appropriate. They are made aware, through soundly planned lessons, that along with

ICT skills come responsibilities, such as maintaining confidentiality and the impact that computers can make on society. There are occasions when a lack of clarity in outlining the learning objectives means that pupils do not fully understand the purpose of the work they are set. Some lesson introductions are too long and do not involve pupils enough. However, overall teaching within the subject is good. Teachers provide good oral feedback in lessons which helps pupils to develop their understanding and improve their coursework.

164. The subject lacks a clear management structure and co-ordination is unsatisfactory. The absence of a systematic approach to cross-curricular developments results in inequitable development opportunities for pupils. No satisfactory procedures are yet in place to monitor the progress of all pupils in all years. There have been considerable increases in equipment and facilities. These developments are continuing. The school is well aware of the shortcomings in provision. These are identified in the development plans, which include the appointment of specialised staff.
165. The main problems with provision highlighted in the last inspection - meeting statutory requirements, cross-curricular development and monitoring progress, and management structures - although recognised, have not been resolved. The school has made unsatisfactory progress in ICT since the last inspection.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

French

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

Strengths

- Attainment is above average at the end of Year 9.
- GCSE examination results are above the national average.
- The quality of teaching and learning is very good, overall.
- Extra-curricular provision is very good and improves attitudes and learning.
- Leadership and management are effective in raising standards further.
- Assessment procedures and amendments to schemes of work are helping more pupils to gain access to higher grades.

Areas for improvement

- GCSE results, as they have declined over the last three years.
- The attainment of boys at GCSE, which is inferior to that of girls by more than the difference nationally.
- Provision for individual reading.
- Opportunities to communicate with native speakers.

166. At the end of Year 9, teachers' assessments show attainment to be well above average with a steady trend of improvement. Girls do better than boys, in line with the difference nationally. The number of pupils achieving the higher levels is only marginally above the national expectation, suggesting that not all higher attaining pupils do as well as they should. At the end of Year 11, GCSE examination results at grades A* to C were a little above the national average in 2001. Girls did better than boys by much greater than the difference nationally. Whereas boys' results were close to the national average for boys, girls' results were well above the average for girls. There has been a falling trend over the last three years, with results much lower than those achieved in German and Spanish. To some extent, this reflects the school's decision

that its lowest attaining pupils are obliged to do French in Years 8 to 11, and can not choose other languages. The number of pupils gaining the highest grades, A* to A, was a little below average, again indicating unsatisfactory progress by some of the most able pupils. Almost all pupils gained a grade across the full range, A* to G, indicating at least satisfactory progress and attainment by lower attaining pupils, including those with special educational needs. Pupils did slightly better in French than in most other subjects.

167. Attainment by the end of Year 9 is above average, suggesting that teachers' assessments for 2001 were a little high. However, it is clear that the department is responding effectively to the comparative underachievement of higher attaining pupils. Schemes of work have been amended to accelerate the progress of all pupils from Year 8 onwards so that progress is now good. Higher attaining pupils in Year 9 are already achieving very high levels and are making excellent progress. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory and sometimes good progress in appropriate sets. The few pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds are well spread across the range of teaching groups and make the expected progress within those groups. Pupils acquire vocabulary steadily from the beginning of Year 7 through prescribed topics. They keep notes on language structures and higher attaining pupils apply these well to produce quite complex language. For example, a Year 9 class was able to describe their recent, normal and planned weekend activities, orally and in writing, using a range of tenses and opinions. Despite a lack of provision for personal reading, comprehension skills are well developed. By the end of Year 9, all pupils identify key details in what they hear and read. Higher attaining pupils understand most of the meaning in longer extracts. Average and lower attaining pupils speak briefly, but pronunciation is usually good and they convey meaning well. They write less ambitiously, but show acceptable accuracy in descriptions of people and places.
168. Standards of work seen in Years 10 and 11 are well above average, indicating that, at the end of Year 11, good progress has been maintained. Evidence shows that standards have improved considerably compared to the GCSE results in 2001, especially among higher attaining pupils, who are making very good progress. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in some lessons and satisfactory progress overall, taking into account modest standards in their written work. Throughout Years 10 and 11, pupils improve their reading and listening skills. The department has responded to the fact that listening is the weakest skill at GCSE by making tapes available for pupils to take home for independent work. The adoption of coursework has improved performance in writing for all pupils. Average and lower attaining pupils make good use of writing frames to improve the content of their work, though its accuracy remains very variable. All pupils cover the same topics and convey information despite errors. Higher attaining pupils write at greater length and with commendable accuracy. At best, they use sophisticated language to write imaginatively about recent holidays, plans for a pen-friend's visit, moving house and to describe their local area. Oral skills are generally well developed. Higher attaining pupils speak confidently and converse on a range of topics. Average and lower attaining pupils speak more briefly and need more support. However, they participate well and communicate information despite errors. A Year 10 group, consisting largely of pupils with special educational needs, spoke acceptably about their favourite television programmes and what they were going to watch that night, with reasons.
169. The quality of teaching and learning is very good, overall. It is very good or excellent in two-thirds of lessons and good in the remainder. There is no unsatisfactory teaching. All eight teachers have very good command of French. They use this very well to conduct lessons, showing high expectations, providing very good models and having a positive impact on oral and listening skills. Their knowledge and use of National

Curriculum levels and GCSE criteria enable them to motivate pupils and encourage them to higher standards. The teaching of basic skills is satisfactory. Through the use of writing frames and the systematic recording of language rules, teachers make a good contribution to the improvement of literacy skills. However, the approach to literacy is not well supported by the display of key words in classrooms. The contribution to numeracy skills is less obvious, though bar charts are used to collate survey results. There is an increasing commitment to the inclusion of new technology to support learning, though there is little actual teaching of skills. Planning for lessons, and for sequences of lessons, is good. Lessons begin routinely with the sharing of objectives and nearly always end with a recap of what has been learned. This helps pupils to evaluate their progress and see a point to what they are learning. In almost all lessons there is a range of activities, conducted briskly and involving all pupils, irrespective of ability or ethnicity. This accelerates pupils' learning and improves their level of confidence, especially in oral work, which is the main focus in most lessons.

170. Teachers show good understanding to match work to the ability of pupils while ensuring that it challenges them. In a Year 8 lesson for lower attainers on the weather, the teacher had pupils working at breathtaking pace in a wide range of energetic oral tasks, enabling them to reach standards well above expectations. Pupils' attitudes to learning another language are generally good, with few exceptions. Behaviour in class is always very good or excellent. To some extent this derives from the fact that pupils are so engaged in their work that problems of classroom management simply do not arise. This has a very positive impact on learning. Teachers have the confidence to vary their methods and set up a variety of organisations within lessons. Pupils in a higher attaining group in Year 9 left their seats to work with different partners in discussing what they did last weekend. In Year 10, a higher attaining group did a survey on television programmes; an average attaining group did some Internet research on the same topic; and a lower attaining group adopted a horseshoe formation to ask and answer questions with each classmate. There is very good collaboration in these activities, which contributes well to pupils' personal development.
171. Teachers make very good use of the time allocated. They use a range of resources and make imaginative use of overhead projectors to stimulate learning. The use of videos and computers varies routines and improves the interest of boys. However, there are no opportunities for individual reading from a choice of texts and few pupils have opportunities to communicate with native speakers as there are no foreign language assistants and no links with schools in French-speaking countries. Pupils themselves make good use of a range of resources in Year 9, when they collaborate in groups to produce a newspaper. Marking is good, overall. There is a little inconsistency in the use of National Curriculum levels and the requirement for corrections. However, teachers usually supplement brief comments in French with helpful guidance on how to improve. Homework is set consistently. It extends work done in class. In the best examples, challenging written tasks allow pupils to write creatively and exceed minimum requirements.
172. There is good leadership and management for French. The head of department observes lessons and samples written work. Timetabling unfortunately prevents teachers from observing each other and sharing the very good practice within the department. However, minutes of meetings show how cohesively the department works and their capacity to ensure further progress. As a result, teachers make good use of the analysis of assessment data to ensure that weaknesses are addressed. The development plan and schemes of work show that the department has identified weaknesses and is working to deal with them. Nonetheless, assessment data is not as accessible as it should be. There is a good range of visits, exchanges and stays in foreign homes, which improve the attitudes of pupils who participate and add

substantially to pupils' cultural awareness. Displays in classrooms are good, but are not well used to promote learning. Since the previous inspection, attainment and progress are better and are improving further; the quality of teaching is much better; good leadership ensures that planning and policies provide effectively for raising attainment; and speaking and writing skills are now much better developed. Overall, this represents very good improvement.

Spanish and German

The overall quality of provision for both German and Spanish is very good.

Strengths

- Attainment at the end of Year 9 is above average.
- GCSE examination results in 2001 were well above average in Spanish and high in German.
- The quality of teaching and learning is very good.
- Leadership and management are good for both languages.
- The analysis of assessment data improves provision and progress.

Areas for improvement

- Boys' achievement as they perform less well than girls by more than the difference nationally.
- Provision for individual reading.
- Opportunities to communicate with native speakers.

173. There are no reported teachers' assessments for German and Spanish at the end of Year 9. Teachers' records show attainment to be above average. Girls do better than boys in Spanish, though there is little difference in German. At the end of Year 9, GCSE results at grades A* to C for the single group entered for German were high in 2001. Results have fluctuated over the last three years. Girls did better than boys by more than the difference nationally, but both exceeded the national averages for boys and girls by a considerable margin. Numbers gaining the highest grades, A* and A, were above the national average. A much larger entry for Spanish achieved results at grades A* to C well above the national average. Again, girls did better than boys by more than the national difference, but both exceeded their national averages by a large margin. Both boys and girls achieved the highest A* and A grades in line with boys and girls nationally. Results over three years have fluctuated, but have been consistently well above average. Over the last three years, all pupils have gained a grade at GCSE in both languages, as should be the case, since all lower attaining pupils follow a course in French. Pupils did better in 2001 in German and Spanish than in almost all their other subjects.

174. Pupils choose from German or Spanish as a second language from Year 8. There are three sets in each language. Evidence from work seen in lessons and from the analysis of pupils' written work shows that standards are above average by the end of Year 9, with pupils making very good progress over the two years of study. There is considerable emphasis on oral work in lessons, but also careful consideration of language rules, especially in German where structure is more complicated. Pupils acquire knowledge of vocabulary steadily and reading and listening skills are well developed. They write fairly accurately, usually to produce descriptions within familiar topics. In Year 9 they include past tenses in both languages and are learning conditional phrases in German. On the whole, pupils write more accurately in Spanish as rules for word order cause problems for some learning German. Inspection evidence confirms that pupils continue to make very good progress in Years 10 and 11,

to reach standards which are well above average. In German, there is a better balance of boys and girls, so that boys do better in German than in the other two languages. Pupils learn and recall vocabulary very well, enabling them to deduce meaning from context and understand most of what they hear and read. Coursework develops written work well. Pupils speak fairly fluently, cope easily with role-playing situations and converse with good pronunciation and intonation.

175. The quality of teaching and learning is very good overall. The same eight teachers ensure that they apply their knowledge and skills as effectively in German and Spanish as in French. There was no unsatisfactory teaching during the inspection. The strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning are similar to those reported for French. The key strengths are high expectations and the provision of varied and stimulating activities, which accelerate progress and enable pupils to enjoy learning. For example, in a Year 11 Spanish lesson, routine role-play on going to the dry cleaner's was enlivened by the teacher's choice of resources. She had gathered a range of colourful jumble from a second hand clothes shop and these added fun and purpose to the oral exchanges. A Year 9 German lesson included grammatical work, oral routines stimulated by clever use of overhead transparencies, choral work and reading comprehension. These activities ensured that newly acquired vocabulary and structures were absorbed and applied.
176. There are separate heads of department for German and Spanish within the modern languages faculty. They provide good leadership and management for their subject areas. They have produced schemes of work which replicate the good practice seen in French and which ensure rapid progress throughout Years 8 to 11. They monitor the work of their departments well and make a good contribution to the cohesiveness of the work of the faculty. For the same reasons as in French, there has been very good improvement since the previous inspection.

MUSIC

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

Strengths

- Standards achieved by Year 11 pupils in GCSE examination are well above average.
- Teaching is always good and often very good.
- A variety and quality of extra curricular activities promotes high musical standards.
- Very good leadership and management of the department encourages commitment and support from other staff.

Areas for improvement

- Access to appropriate, reliable and sufficient information and communication technology to support learning in music.
- Adequate and sufficient storage for pupils' instruments

177. Standards achieved by pupils at the end of Year 11 are well above average. In the last two years all pupils achieved A* to C grades with 85 per cent of the cohort achieving the highest grades. Boys and girls achieve equally well. Examples of very good performing standards from pupils who choose to study music for examination were seen during the inspection. A trio of Year 10 pupils was given a short musical theme to develop into a rondo. The group included high attaining pupils who transposed the piece at sight and added appropriate harmonies, thus ensuring that they found the work challenging. The teacher assessments of pupils work at the end of Year 9 indicate that attainment is well above the national average with girls achieving better than boys. However, from work seen in lessons, from pupil notebooks and taped recordings, the difference between boys' and girls' attainment is less marked than these figures suggest. The frequency of lessons for pupils in Year 7 combined with the good instrumental skills of some pupils means that very good progress is made. Pupils are critical in their written evaluations and have an awareness of timbre and texture when composing group compositions. This was clear in a lesson where pupils were adding music to the story of the *Hare and Tortoise*. Instruments were chosen carefully so that other pupils could follow the story when listening to the music. Pupils continue to make good progress during Years 8 and 9, but because they only have one lesson per week progress is not so rapid. On occasions, a lack of self-motivation and discipline means that pupils with special educational needs do not make sufficient progress in lessons; however, these occasions are rare and overall progress is good.

178. Teaching is a major strength of the department and is good overall with many examples of very good teaching. The musical knowledge and high quality demonstrations by staff ensure that pupils want to learn, take pride in their work and are well motivated to reach high standards. Activities are integrated so that time is not wasted and learning time is maximised. Skills are practised and evaluated regularly. Lessons are well planned and pupils are given the opportunities to demonstrate practically their understanding of a musical concept. This was demonstrated clearly when Year 11 pupils gained an understanding of atonal scales and serialism. The teacher skilfully guided the class through a mixture of theoretical and practical activities that ensured pupils had a clear understanding of how to use serialism in their compositions. Teachers take every opportunity to promote musical dialogue where pupils can exchange ideas and develop their evaluation skills. Pupils in Year 8 could demonstrate good understanding of the characteristics of Caribbean music. Use of technical language is good, but because the teaching focus has concentrated more on rhythm and instrumental work pupils lack the same depth of understanding when writing melodies and singing. Pupils' work is marked carefully and gives detailed

analysis for examination candidates so that they are clear how to improve their work. This level of detail is not so well shared with pupils in Years 7 to 9 so that they are equally informed as to how to improve their work and reach higher grades.

179. Another major strength of the department is the attitudes pupils have to their lessons and the opportunities for music making at other times. The department is a hive of activity at lunchtimes, when pupils can practise instruments and also participate in a wide range and variety of extra-curricular groups. The repertoire played reflects a variety of styles and is carefully chosen to ensure all pupils can contribute to the performance. The commitment pupils have to these ensembles is high and it provides many opportunities to support pupils' social development. This was evident when one pupil managed to play a difficult quaver passage without stopping and was rewarded by spontaneous applause from other members of the orchestra. Pupils who no longer study music enjoy making music. Co-operation between pupils and between staff and pupils is good and there are very good relationships.
180. The leadership and management of the department are very good. The staff work as a team and there is clear vision and organisation. Good practice is shared and there are strong links with the instrumental teachers. Accommodation is just satisfactory. This is because some lessons have to be taught in a non-specialist room away from the department. As a result, equipment has to be moved and pupils do not have immediate rehearsal spaces for group work. There is a lack of appropriate storage space for instruments resulting in them being left on the floor at busy times. Resources are good overall; however, the department does not have sufficient and appropriate ICT facilities to support pupils' learning. This means that pupils are unable to store and develop their compositions easily. Since the previous inspection the department has built on and consistently improved the musical opportunities it offers pupils in order for many of them to become talented musicians. Very good improvements have been made since the last inspection.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Overall, the quality of provision in physical education is good.

Strengths

- The quality teaching and learning is good.
- There is a wide range of extra curricular activities.
- GCSE examination results are good and are well above the national average.

Areas for improvement

- Consider introducing Junior Sports Leaders Award for Years 10 and 11 pupils.

181. In 2001, 40 pupils took the GCSE examination in the subject and the number of pupils gaining the higher A* to C grade passes was well above the national average. An impressive number of pupils are currently involved in the examination, and inspection evidence suggests that the good results that have been obtained in the past will be continued.
182. Pupils arrive at the school with varying levels of physical education skills, with some below that expected in some activities. They settle into the school quickly, respond to the good quality teaching and make good progress so that by the time they reach the end of Year 9 most pupils are attaining levels of performance that are in line with national expectations with a significant number, especially in swimming, doing even better. This judgement is in line with the most recent teacher assessments. Pupils

perform well in a wide range of physical education activities. In games activities, pupils have an emerging knowledge of rules and conventions of a number of games and are developing the skills to enable them to compete successfully. Pupils are aware of simple defence and attack strategies, although some pupils find it difficult to apply these skills when the element of competition is introduced. The overall standard of swimming is very good. There are very few non-swimmers in the school and most pupils are able to demonstrate a high level of competency in a variety of strokes as well as life saving and personal survival techniques. In gymnastics, pupils are able to demonstrate a range of movements both on the floor and on apparatus, with many pupils demonstrating a growing ability to link these movements into complex sequences. However, some pupils' movement vocabulary is limited and their movements lack quality and control.

183. Pupils continue to make good progress during Years 10 and 11 and by the end of Year 11 most pupils are attaining levels better than that expected. In health related fitness lessons, pupils are attaining an understanding of fitness issues and practices, with many able to devise their own personal fitness programmes. Pupils are able to confidently lead their classes in warm up routines at the beginning of lessons. Pupils are developing good skills in performance and evaluation in a range of fitness and sporting activities and they are able to apply the skills they have practised to full game situations. They have a good knowledge of rules and tactics and are able to undertake a range of roles including performing, officiating and coaching. Pupils use the fitness room of the adjacent sports centre sensibly to develop their personal fitness. Pupils in the examinations groups are developing understanding and expertise in both the theoretical and practical aspects of the subject. They are becoming confident in their use of technical language and most are providing course work folders that are well presented and detailed. Pupils are able to work independently and organise coaching sessions within lessons. Pupils are able to make informed contributions to discussions using appropriate technical language.
184. Pupils with special educational needs are well integrated and given much support by both teaching staff and fellow pupils and reach levels of attainment that are commendable for them.
185. School teams play many inter-school matches and gain much success. School teams in netball, soccer and rounders are the current district champions. Some pupils have represented Hertfordshire in a variety of sports and a few have gone on to gain national honours.
186. Although there has been a big change of staff, the good standard of teaching noted at the time of the last inspection has been maintained. All the lessons observed were judged to be at least satisfactory, with most being judged to be good or very good. All lessons begin in an orderly manner with objectives being clearly stated and understood by pupils. Activities are chosen that sustain pupils' interests and involvement. There is an expectation that all pupils will work hard and behave well and generally these are met. Teachers show a care and concern for their pupils while encouraging the best in fair play, co-operation and competitive experiences. Pupils respond very positively to this good quality teaching. They are enthusiastic, behave well and are prepared to work hard. Their enjoyment of the subject is very evident.
187. The curriculum, which meets statutory requirements, allows pupils to take part in a wide variety of activities, although the limited on-site indoor accommodation inhibits the range of activities that can be offered. The department should consider offering pupils in Years 10 and 11 the opportunity to take the Junior Sports Leaders' Award. The on-site indoor facilities are supplemented by the use of the fitness suite and the excellent

swimming pool at the adjacent East Hertfordshire sports centre. This facility contributes much to the high standard of swimming the pupils attain. The department is in the process of revising and changing its assessment procedures. They are gathering a wealth of information on the pupils' attitudes towards the subject and their attainment in it. Staff now need to use this information to inform future planning and to set individual physical education targets for all pupils.

188. Many staff, including non-specialists, provide a wide range of extra-curricular activities, that are very well supported by large and enthusiastic groups of pupils. Pupils also have the opportunity to join skiing holidays to Switzerland, a netball tour to Cyprus and a sailing camp in Norfolk.
189. The two heads of department were appointed in September 2001 and have already had a significantly positive effect on the work and organisation of the subject. High quality documentation covers all aspects of the department's work and helps in the delivery of the subject. Appropriate initiatives to improve all aspects of teaching and learning are being introduced. An example of these initiatives is the increase in mixed gender classes, but there has not yet been time for them to have a significant impact on pupils' attainment. Good displays of the department's activities around the school effectively stimulate pupils' interest in the subject. Hard working, talented teachers work effectively together, support each other and show a strong commitment to their pupils and to the improvement of the department.

Religious Education

The overall provision for religious education is excellent.

Strengths:

- Results at GCSE are well above national averages.
- The quality of teaching is very good and sometimes excellent.
- Relationships between teachers and pupils are excellent.
- Management of the department is excellent.
- There is a very strong programme of visits to enhance the curriculum.
- The department makes an excellent contribution to the personal development of pupils.

Areas for improvement:

- More textbook resources to support the learning needs of lower attaining pupils.
- The use of ICT needs further development.
- Marking of pupils' work across the department is not sufficiently monitored.
- Accommodation is insufficient for the department's needs.

190. In recent years, GCSE examination results have been well above national averages and in the most recent examination half the pupils entered achieved the highest grades. This is a notable achievement and this success is being replicated by the current cohorts of pupils studying the subject. During their first year at the school, pupils make very good progress in their knowledge and understanding of Christianity and other world religions as outlined in the locally Agreed Syllabus. As a result of these early advances in subject skills, pupils also become confident in expressing their opinions and their oral progress is very good. This was demonstrated to the full in an excellent Year 7 lesson in which pupils examined the concept of the Holy Spirit in considerable depth and with remarkable maturity. The emphasis placed on the development of literacy skills also allows pupils to replicate their oral progress in writing and, in this context, some very good extended writing was seen from Year 9 pupils on

moral issues such as the causes of suffering. As a result, by the time they reach the end of Year 9, standards for most pupils are above and sometimes well above the level of expectation linked to the locally Agreed Syllabus. This has addressed successfully an issue raised in the previous inspection report about careless written work and slow progress at this stage. In Years 10 and 11, these high standards are being maintained by all pupils. At this stage, there is a variety of courses, including full GCSE, short course and core religious studies. In all lessons, pupils are developing their ideas on spiritual and moral issues in considerable detail, for example in extended writing on the Holocaust. By the end of Year 11 most pupils are achieving very high standards and it is heartening to note the large number of pupils who continue to study the subject in the sixth form.

191. The very high standards achieved in the subject are directly linked to the quality of teaching that is very good overall and sometimes excellent. Teachers are very enthusiastic and have very high expectations of all pupils. As a result, there is an air of purpose and rigour in lessons and all pupils are encouraged to become active participants in the learning process. This was seen to very good effect in a Year 11 lesson on marriage ceremonies in Judaism, during which pupils worked very diligently in pairs to discuss and interpret the legal, religious and historical significance of such customs. The specialist teachers have excellent subject knowledge and use it very well to motivate and stimulate pupils. A wide variety of techniques are used, such as video extracts, artefacts, discussion, paired and group work, short written tasks, and, on one occasion, meditation. This encourages all pupils to do their best and, as a result, they make very good progress. Aims and objectives are shared with pupils at the start of lessons and ample opportunities are provided to reflect on progress at the end of each session. The previous report noted that there was a lack of purpose and relevance in some lessons. This is no longer the case. Lessons are conducted with pace, variety and, above all, a sense of enjoyment; for example, an excellent Year 11 lesson was seen using a rich variety of teaching methods to stimulate an extremely lively debate on mixed race marriages.
192. Relationships between teachers and pupils are a particular strength. Pupils show very positive attitudes towards the subject and clearly enjoy their lessons. They behave very well and show considerable respect for their teachers, for each other and for different beliefs. This was demonstrated very well in a Year 9 lesson on the importance of naming ceremonies in Sikhism, which made very good use of a recent visit to a Sikh temple and of one pupil's own personal experience to reinforce multicultural understanding within the whole group. All pupils respond very well to the high expectations of their teachers and willingly take part in debate and discussion. Higher attaining pupils are given ample scope to develop their talents in depth through extension work. Lower attaining pupils and those with special educational needs are supported well in classrooms, but need a wider variety of textbook materials to support their literacy development.
193. The previous report noted a lack of subject management and planning. The reverse is now true. The management of religious education is excellent. There is an enthusiastic and dedicated teaching team to support learning. Assessment procedures are used well to monitor pupils' progress and there is an increasing use of self-assessment to ensure that pupils themselves are part of the process. Marking is, for the most part, very thorough, but not sufficiently monitored across the department to ensure consistency. The subject makes an excellent contribution to the personal development of all pupils, particularly in the area of multi-faith issues. There is a commendable programme of visits to different places of worship to enrich what is taught in class and the department is also to be commended on the production of a

newsletter outlining developments in the subject and including contributions from pupils. The use of ICT is beginning to have an impact on the work of the department, but this area is insufficiently developed and lacks consistency throughout teaching groups. Accommodation is very dispersed and is insufficient for the needs of the department. However, the one dedicated room is a visual delight with excellent examples of pupils' work on display.

194. Overall, the department has made excellent progress since the previous inspection, particularly in the areas of teaching, management and the progress made by pupils at all levels. Religious education is now a considerable strength in the school and the highly skilled teaching team has the ability and determination to build on its notable success.

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

In the inspection, 13 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 2001⁵.

GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
English	21	95.2		23.8		2.5	
Mathematics	37	75.7		35.1		2.2	
Biology	8	100		50		3.6	
Human biology	10	100		10		2.8	
Physics	28	96.4		53.6		3.4	
Chemistry	15	100		60		3.5	
Textiles	10	100		20		2.9	
Business studies	50	100		44		3.4	
Art	21	76.2		42.9		2.8	
Music	2	100		50		3.5	
Drama and theatre studies	14	100		21.4		2.5	
History	28	100		75		4	
Religious studies	11	100		27.3		2.7	
French	20	85		20		2.2	
German	2	100		50		3.5	
Spanish	14	92.9		7.1		1.9	
Economics	23	87		39.1		2.7	
Geography	37	100		37.8		3	
Physical Education	12	100		66.7		3.5	
Psychology	22	90.9		27.3		2.8	
Sociology	21	95.2		14.3		2.4	
General studies	26	92.3		23.1		2.5	

⁵ At the time of publishing this report the national comparative figures were not available

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
English	25	100		48		6.7	
Mathematics	30	93.3		50		6.5	
Biology	7	85.7		28.6		5.1	
Human biology	8	87.5		0		3.2	
Physics	15	100		33.3		5.6	
Chemistry	12	91.7		41.7		5.8	
Business studies	23	100		43.5		6.3	
Art	13	100		46.2		7.2	
Music	3	100		100		8.7	
Drama and theatre studies	10	90		30		6	
History	15	86.7		53.3		5.9	
Religious studies	9	100		66.7		7.3	
French	6	100		50		6.7	
German	2	100		0		6	
Spanish	3	66.7		0		2.7	
Economics	14	92.9		35.7		6	
Geography	28	100		71.4		8.1	
Physical Education	16	100		6.3		4.3	
Psychology	9	100		55.6		6.9	
Sociology	19	100		36.8		6.2	
Business and finance GNVQ	8	62.5		12.5		4.2	
Further mathematics	6	100		83.3		9	

Intermediate vocational qualifications

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		Average point distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Leisure and tourism	4	100	n/a	50	n/a		n/a

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

The inspection focus was on mathematics, biology and physics. Chemistry and human biology were also sampled.

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- Standards on the advanced courses are well above national averages
- Teaching is good on all courses and students achieve well
- Teachers of the A-level Subsidiary and A2 courses have very good subject knowledge
- Students on all courses are well motivated and work hard

Areas for improvement

- Teachers do not always explore fully, through questions in lessons, the students' understanding of their explanations and give them the opportunity to suggest what the next step in a solution might be
- Computers are not used enough to support teaching and learning

195. Results in A-level examinations over the last three years have been well above national averages. The proportion of students gaining the highest A or B grades, over 50 per cent, is particularly good. Mathematics is a popular subject and attracts a high number of students. Current sixth form students say they enjoy mathematics and find it interesting. Girls do as well as boys and the number of girls taking the advanced courses this year is equivalent to that of boys, which is contrary to the national trend. In summer 2001, results in the new A-level Subsidiary (AS) examination were just above the national average. The less successful results represent mainly students who had not gained the very highest GCSE examination grades and did not plan to continue with mathematics as a fourth course in Year 13. Very high attaining students have the opportunity to undertake the demanding Further Mathematics A-level course. The small numbers achieve very creditable results.

196. Standards for students currently taking the A2 course in Year 13 are well above average and for students on the AS course in Year 12 above average. Year 13 students show a very good understanding of the work they are currently doing. They apply previous work well to new situations, such as the chain rule for differentiation when finding the gradient of the tangent to a circle. In mechanics, students understand the principles behind the construction of mathematical models of real situations. Year 12 students can explain clearly why they know whether they are going up or down in an enclosed lift and also the forces acting upon them. The students use graphical calculators competently, but the use of computers to support work in mathematics is limited. Girls, boys and the small number of students from ethnic minority groups do equally well. Students are very motivated, listen well in lessons and work hard at the tasks set. They work well together, although more opportunities could be provided for them to do so. It is difficult for the students to find a quiet working space outside lessons to share approaches to the homework set.

197. Teaching on the advanced courses is good. A significant strength is the depth and wide range of subject knowledge of a substantial number of teachers in the mathematics faculty. This ensures expert teaching for each element of the course,

whether statistics, analysis or mechanics. The teachers also enjoy their subject and create a good climate for learning. Students' queries and difficulties are competently dealt with and ensure good progress in learning. Teachers put a good emphasis on students understanding the concept of a mathematical model, particularly in mechanics. They make clear connections between the mathematical model and how objects move in everyday life - for example, in work on centres of mass the teacher asked students to reflect on why lorries in the recent gales were more likely to topple over than other vehicles. This helped them to understand more clearly the forces acting and why knowledge of the centre of mass of an object is important. Relationships are good, although weaker students are not always confident enough to share their difficulties and teachers need to check their understanding more carefully in lessons. The students on the AS course commented on how well they are prepared for this new examination, where few past papers currently exist.

198. The best teaching puts a very good emphasis on the students suggesting methods of approach to a problem. Through good questioning, teachers help them to draw on knowledge from previous work and to focus clearly on what they know already and what they need to find out. Where teaching is less successful, the teacher works through examples, emphasising mostly the technique and does not ask enough questions to check that the students understand the purpose of each step. This occurs mostly when the work requires considerable use of algebraic techniques to arrive at the required result, such as in solving equations and using differentiation to prove a result.
199. Students on the GCSE re-sit course achieve well, given their abilities. The course is for those students on other A-level courses who have not yet gained at least a GCSE grade C in mathematics. Most students obtain better results than they did in Year 11, but the proportion of A* to C grades gained is still quite low, as was the case at the time of the last inspection. In spite of good teaching and hard work, students find the work difficult and algebra and numeracy skills are not yet secure at the level required for a GCSE grade C. However, fewer students now need to take this course than at the time of the last inspection because of improved GCSE results in Year 11. Students taking advanced and intermediate vocational courses in business studies and leisure and tourism do a key skills course which includes a numeracy component. The activities are well planned to reflect their course content and the teaching observed was good. Results are appropriate for the students' abilities.
200. Numeracy skills for students in the sixth form are very good overall. In subjects such as business studies, geography, sociology and science the students undertake accurately complex calculations and display and interpret effectively numerical information. For example, in sociology the interpretation of data on women's participation in sport; in business studies the application of formulae to work out total sales and costs; and in geography the use of data to analyse the connection between the spread of infection and environmental factors.
201. Although the head of faculty has overall responsibility for sixth form courses, the teachers work together well to make the courses run smoothly. Expertise is shared and training is used to support an individual teacher's further development. Teachers monitor students' progress regularly through homework tasks and tests and the modular examination system for both the advanced and GCSE courses provides on-going feedback on how well students are doing. However, computers are still not used as well as they could be to support teaching and learning: for example, to speed up work involving the use of trial and error methods or to simulate the movement of an object when different forces act upon it. The mathematics faculty would use computers more, but currently the teaching area has no computers and access to the computer rooms is not readily available because of the demands of other subjects. Since the last

inspection the faculty has continued to produce very good A-level results and improved its provision for other mathematics courses. Overall, improvement has been good.

SCIENCES

The focus of the inspection was on biology and physics. Chemistry and human biology were also sampled. The overall quality of provision in chemistry is good. In advanced level chemistry, results were average last summer. The AS results were good and almost all students did as well as or better than expected from their GCSE scores. One lesson was observed and the effective teaching ensured students had a good understanding of the properties of insecticides. The overall provision for human biology is good. A-level examination results were well below average last summer, but the school has put in place good developments to take account of the wide attainment range of students taking the course. As a result, the AS results show students are now making the expected or better progress as predicted from their GCSE results.

Biology

Overall, the quality of provision in biology is good.

Strengths

- The staff are well-qualified and enthusiastic.
- The teaching is good.
- The students have very good attitudes to their work.
- There are very good relationships between teachers and students.

Areas for improvement

- Lesson planning does not ensure the work is suitable for the wide range of attainment of all the students.
- The progress of students is insufficiently monitored to ensure they receive suitable support.
- The use of information and communication technology is not included in lesson planning.

202. In 2001, the results for A-level biology were just below the national figure. However, the data held by the department indicate that the majority of students obtained their predicted grade. The results for AS level biology were above the national figure in 2001 and again most students obtained at least their predicted grade. There are no significant differences between the results of male and female students.

203. The standard of work seen in the present Year 13 is above national expectations, with all the students being predicted grades at or above a level C. All the students are working at or above the grade expected based on their GCSE results. The students take great care when performing practical work, as seen in one session observed on the chromatography of chlorophyll. These students, in another lesson, were able to predict changes in habitats from given data in a very convincing and detailed manner using their scientific knowledge well.

204. There are more AS level students in Year 12 than in the A-level group in Year 13. The students, sometimes from a different school, found the transition from GCSE, easy to cope with and commented favourably about the support given to them by the school. The students demonstrate a high standard in their written notes and exercises. They have the confidence to discuss and ask questions in biology. This was seen during a lesson on the process of respiration where the students were able to describe the

processes involved in great detail. The students were also able to demonstrate their scientific knowledge by being able to predict the effect of temperature on biological systems. These students performed practical work in a very mature and careful manner, showing good co-operation within each group.

205. The department is willing to take all students with a grade C or above at GCSE, resulting in a group of students with a wide range of abilities. This causes a challenge to the teachers in that the students' needs are different depending on their potential attainment. Currently, lesson planning does not sufficiently ensure that the work planned is suitable for the wide range of ability within the group.
206. Teaching, overall, is good and the students learn well as a result. The teachers are well qualified, show good subject knowledge and have an obvious enthusiasm for the subject. The lessons are well planned and delivered to ensure full syllabus coverage. The teaching is supported by the very good relationships seen between teachers and students. Much of the learning is over-directed by the teacher, but there are sufficient opportunities for students to perform relevant and challenging practical investigations to reinforce their learning. Insufficient use is made of information and communication technology within biology to enable students to experience a wider range of learning styles.
207. Students make good progress in Years 12 and 13 and are aware of their potential and actual attainment from their regular modular tests and other assessments. Students appreciate the care taken by teachers with their assessments and are fully aware of their progress. The students also appreciate the fact that they can talk to the teachers if they do not fully understand a topic. The department does not adequately use the data they have to identify those students who are finding certain topics difficult and offer them suitable support, as not all the students seek help when they should.
208. The attitude of students in both Years 12 and 13 is very good. They are attentive, polite and act in a very mature manner. The presentation of their notes is of a high standard and they obviously take a great pride in their work. Homework and other tasks are performed to a good standard. The department, however, is not sufficiently demanding with a small minority of students who, at times, do not always produce the highest standard of which they are capable.
209. The management of the department is effective and staff have worked hard to review the teaching and learning strategies within the subject. In particular, the review of the examination performance of last years' students has provided a focus for further improvement. When this initiative is linked with the standard of teaching observed, the department is rightly confident of the students gaining higher attainment at both A- and AS level in 2002.

Physics

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

Strengths

- The trend in examination results has been above the national average.
- Student achievement is very good, some showing extremely high levels of motivation.
- Teachers' high expectations for students' accomplishments.
- Strong management has resulted in a team highly committed to raising standards further.

Areas for improvement

- Structured time for personal guidance for students who are finding elements of the course difficult.
- The use of information and communication technology.

210. Standards in lessons are above average and reflect the trend for the last three years. Examination results dipped in 2001 to be close to the national average because a number of individual students did less well than might have been expected. However, all students were successful in gaining an A to E pass grade. More than half the group made expected or better progress based on their GCSE examination scores, representing good achievement overall. Numbers taking the examination are usually below 20, making statistical comparisons difficult. However, the proportion achieving the highest grades A or B has been consistently above the national average for the last three years, with outstanding results in 1999 when two thirds attained the highest A or B grades and everyone had at least a grade C, representing very good achievement for the cohort. Results in the first year of the AS course are very encouraging, with over half the students gaining the highest A or B grades, adding very good value to GCSE grades overall. The new course has been successful in recruiting more girls and in recruiting students who have a humanities bias and follow one year of AS to broaden their academic base. Most students continue into the second year of the A-level course. Students are successful beyond the sixth form, good numbers continuing to higher education in physics and engineering.
211. Students formulate good concepts because teachers are very good at presenting ideas in physics through modelling. Students in Year 13 developed a good understanding of the motion of a charged particle through good discussion of circular motion of a solid mass. Students have a good awareness of applying mathematical principles to new ideas. Written work shows they are successful in applying their learning to a wide range of calculations. The current Year 12 students are well above the national average, demonstrating very good mathematical abilities when, for example, they find the point of resonance of sound waves in a closed tube. They compare experimental findings to validate the consistency of their results.
212. Achievement is very good because teachers have high expectations for analysis and evaluation. Critical thinking is apparent in students' writing, very well illustrated by a report on the 'Physics of Stealth Technology' and a full investigation raising questions about the validity of the Inverse Square Law. High ability students show rapid progress from GCSE because they are highly motivated and keen to argue about ideas. Similarly, a number of lower attaining students rise to the challenge of the group and flourish to gain commendable results because teachers work closely with them. The number of girls participating in the course is small, but individuals achieve commendable results, even though they are more tentative in contributing to discussion. Students show strong commitment to the course because teachers

emphasise the relevance of the subject to alternative vocational routes beyond the sixth form. The small numbers of students with ethnic minority backgrounds are fluent English speakers and writers. They perform well and are very well integrated. There are no students with special educational needs on courses this year, but last year a student with language difficulties made very good progress.

213. Teaching and learning are very good. Students discuss topics very confidently because teachers build on background knowledge, asking probing questions to challenge and motivate them with new ideas. Key words are used very well to ensure that students use technical vocabulary when speaking. They are given the opportunity to consolidate their own learning by briefly teaching the group. However, they did not extend this further to engage students in more extended presentation of their argument. High ability students use mathematical solutions very readily to explain their ideas, such as lines of force in gravitational fields. They show a high level of independence in conducting research for coursework. Teachers are very good role models. Lessons begin promptly and give students a tight structure for learning. Students are expected to work at a fast pace, but are given time to reflect on their own work to reinforce concepts and practise calculations independently of the teacher. Teachers use time well to monitor the progress of individuals and support them further. Resources are used well to enrich student experiences, as seen in Year 12 lessons, when good computer software captured the features of standing waveforms and measured the acceleration of a falling object. The personal development of students is very good because relationships are positive and teachers foster a lively atmosphere where students support each other very well.
214. The physics teachers are very ably led. Capable analysis of course availability has resulted in finding a course that suits students well. Investment in staffing is making a significant impact on student achievement. A newly formed team of teachers demonstrates commendable consistency in working with students to increase their personal skills alongside their capability in physics. Monitoring of progress is good. Students have clear targets for improvement each year and teachers find time to provide personal tutoring where it is requested. The team now needs to use annual targets to develop individual student guidance further, discussing with senior staff the needs of individuals for more structured support. The team needs to build on good experience with information and communication technology to ensure students have very regular access to computers now that resources are beginning to improve.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

No subjects were inspected in depth in this curriculum area. The textiles course was, however, sampled. The overall provision in textiles is very good. Examination results at AS level are above average, with the majority of students gaining A to C grades and all gaining A to E grades. The quality of research and practical work is often outstanding. Teaching and learning are very good. Students are very enthusiastic about their work and apply their knowledge and skills very effectively. The quality of leadership is very good and results in students achieving very well.

BUSINESS

The main focus of the inspection was on business studies. Economics was also sampled. The provision in economics is good. The AS level examination results are in line with national averages. The school has put detailed monitoring procedures in place to ensure the better tracking of pupils' progress. Teaching and learning are good and the improvements in management are having a positive impact on standards.

Business studies

Overall, the provision for business studies is good.

Strengths

- Students have good attitudes to learning, they make good progress and attain well.
- Management of the subject is effective.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and an enthusiasm for the subject.
- Procedures for assessing and monitoring student progress are good.
- ICT is well used to support learning.

Areas for improvement

- There are insufficient links with business in the area to enhance the curriculum.
- The quality and consistency of reports to parents are variable.
- There are too few lessons in specialist rooms.

215. Standards overall are above average in the AS and A-level courses. Examination results over the past three years have shown a consistently good performance. Although the numbers gaining the higher grades dipped slightly in 2001, the overall results remain good. There was no significant difference in standards between boys and girls. However, in 2001 the small number of girls did achieve high grades. A greater proportion of students gain higher grades than in schools nationally. The students taking the subject are not from minority ethnic backgrounds and do not have special educational needs. While some students entering the sixth form may have taken GCSE business studies, others have not. However, all students make good progress, quickly developing good business knowledge. Students in Year 13 were able to draw on a good foundation of knowledge when considering sources of finance. Year 12 students showed a good level of knowledge and understanding when considering possible approaches to modular tests.

216. The students benefit from good quality teaching. They are provided with many opportunities to apply their knowledge when tackling business problems and past examination questions. In one example, groups of Year 13 students were required to consider ways of financing growth. In doing this, each group related their response to a particular form of ownership. It was evident in the presentations that they were able to apply their knowledge of internal and external sources effectively. Year 12 students demonstrated considerable maturity when applying the examination group mark scheme to trial examination questions completed by their peers. This enabled them to improve their understanding of the subject matter and improve overall examination technique. Other higher attaining students in Year 12 responded to questions well, reaching good evaluative conclusions. This, through good teaching techniques, further improved the understanding of the group who were considering recruitment theory. Specialist teachers have a very good business knowledge and considerable enthusiasm for the subject. Sometimes the enthusiasm that teachers have for the subject translates into over-direction allowing students insufficient opportunity to develop their understanding independently. By their own admission, students could improve their understanding further by increasing the amount of background reading they do. However, they do benefit from good quality notes to which they add their own thoughts. While on occasions objectives lacked sharpness and questioning was more closed than is appropriate, the overall quality of teaching was good. Students are made aware of their progress and areas for improvement as a result of the good systems of monitoring and assessment in place. Reports to parents, however, are of variable quality.

217. Business studies, as part of the social science faculty, is well-organised and led effectively. All department staff are involved in monitoring the performance of colleagues. Staff in the faculty work closely, sharing ideas and evaluating materials used on the course. Access to information and communication technology is good and used well by students and staff. Other resources for the subject are good. The popularity and success of the subject has meant that much teaching takes place in rooms away from the department. This means time is lost through movement of staff and students and prevents staff having subject resources readily available or displayed to further enhance lessons.
218. In the previous report, most aspects referred to were satisfactory with effective use of ICT. Overall, the department has since made good progress in standards, teaching and the use of ICT.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

No subjects were inspected in this curriculum area.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

Physical education was inspected in depth.

The overall quality of provision for physical education is very good.

Strengths

- The quality of leadership and management is good.
- Very good teaching promotes considerable progress amongst the students.
- Teachers use their good subject knowledge to support students very well.
- Good relationships exist between students and teachers.

Areas for improvement

- Students do not take sufficient responsibility for their own learning.

219. In July 2001, 16 students took the A2 examination and all gained A to E grades, which is better than the national average, but the number gaining the higher grade passes, A* or A, was lower than that gained nationally. All students taking the AS examination gained pass grades and the number gaining the higher grades was in line with the national average. Although there were more girls than boys taking the examination, there was no significant difference in the levels of attainment.
220. The standards of attainment of the current Year 13 students (all of whom were successful in the school's AS examination) are good. Files are meticulously organised and show that the demands of the A2 syllabus are being met. Students' practical performances show a good range of skills in different activities and levels of fitness. They can analyse practical performances confidently, applying a range of theoretical principles. They are able to refine them with a satisfactory level of precision. Students write at length on a variety of topics such as drug abuse in sport, the effect of sponsorship and women in sport. Students are able to ask quite perceptive questions of their teachers using appropriate technical language. They are articulate and can discuss in depth a variety of course topics. Speaking and listening skills are good. Most display a range of good discussion skills as they discuss, argue and defend their viewpoints. They evaluate each other's response and make perceptive comments partly to get a reaction as well as to debate their views. Students were highly articulate

in discussions on the role of women in sport. Clear views were vigorously expressed, challenged and defended, although they were very tolerant of each other's view and opinions. Some students have used the Internet to broaden their knowledge and to research individual topics.

221. All students in Year 12 have made good progress since they started the course in September 2001 and are achieving well. In lessons, students work conscientiously, are attentive and concentrate well. They show real rapport with their teachers and relationships when working in groups are very good. However, students rely heavily on their teachers, who work hard for them, and in some lessons students do not take sufficient responsibility for their own learning. The higher attaining students have developed very well their analysis and evaluation determinants of skilled performance. In discussions, all students make effective use of a wide range of relevant vocabulary.
222. Students learn well as the result of the very good or excellent teaching. Enthusiasm for the subject and wide subject knowledge enable staff to interest and motivate their students. Teachers are aware of the different ways in which their students learn and they work hard to use methods, and to provide them with resources, to meet their needs. A particularly impressive feature is the importance that teachers place on a continuity of approach from Year 11 to Year 13. They know that the change to the sixth form study can be difficult for some students and they, therefore, attempt to ease them into research and further reading. The expectation of what students can do is high and students respond with high levels of industry and a mature approach to their studies. Teachers pass on their considerable expertise and challenge students to think intellectually. Lessons proceed at a good pace and teachers mark students work consistently so that they know how to improve their attainment. In addition to having impressive knowledge, teachers have very good relations with their students and treat them as responsible adults.
223. Good knowledge and management are reflected in the obvious enjoyment and enthusiasm of both staff and students of both years. Student numbers are set to rise and examination results match expectations well. The department is investigating the possibility of giving some students the opportunity to take the Community Sports Leaders' Award.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

No subjects were inspected in this curriculum area.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The focus was on art and design and music. Theatre studies was also sampled. The overall provision in theatre studies is very good. Students are very enthusiastic and despite limited facilities they achieve very good examination results.

Art and design

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

Strengths

- The quality of teaching and learning are very good.
- Teachers and students enjoy very good relationships and students benefit from high levels of personal tuition and guidance.
- Assessment is thorough and the support given matches students' needs.

Areas for improvement

- The accommodation is inadequate and limits the range of large-scale work.
- Group sizes are too large in some classes.

224. Overall, the most recent examination results are above average: half of the students entered for A2 gained grades A or B, with five students gaining A grades. In the AS examination, almost a third of students gained A grades, with 100 per cent pass rate in textiles. The AS level examination results provide a good foundation for A2 study, with the retention rate of students into the second year being good.

225. The work of current students is above average, with Year 12 showing an upward trend of improving standards. The quality of the work in students' sketchbooks and portfolios confirms these standards. Students speak eloquently and with confidence about their work and demonstrate very good knowledge and understanding. Their independence and maturity enable them to manage their own studies in completing coursework and working towards examinations. Art and design sketchbooks show that most students have carried out thoughtful investigation and creative exploration of ideas. This work shows very good annotation and an understanding of compositional principles and techniques needed for development of coursework projects. Students show a very good understanding of design principles in their preliminary sketches. The initial designs are developed into good quality finished products. Students show good progress in comparison with their previous attainment at GCSE. Initially in Year 12, students sustain most of their interest and skill from their GCSE work. This was evident in a lesson based on the consideration for planning compositions, where excellent art history connections were successfully understood by the students. Judgements on spatial layout were very good and students were eager to discuss their coursework and success in the GCSE examination. Some students showed good ability and understanding of ICT in their assignment work. These high standards are maintained and built on in the Year 13 A2 course and there is ample evidence from students' work that independent research skills are being developed well. In a Year 13 lesson, students were looking at critical study. Personal and coherent responses were being discussed and students were able to articulate well the connections made with the work of various artists. Progress was ensured by the challenging demands of the work and guidance offered by the teachers.

226. The quality of teaching is always at least very good, sometimes excellent, and has improved since the previous inspection. The four art and design teachers have very good subject knowledge and technical skill. Many students speak well of the support provided by teachers. Teachers' expectations are high and lessons have very good pace and productivity. Students are informed of how work can be improved and theory and practical work is integrated most effectively. Project briefs are well designed and give a clear focus to the students' work. Very good quality visual resources are used in teaching the critical aspects of new topics. This was evident in a Year 13 textiles lesson where students were using individual studies of artists in considering links to the

development of their own work. Teachers give appropriate attention to presentation skills and monitor students' work thoroughly. Assessment criteria are well defined and deadlines for completion of work are made very clear. Assessment procedures involve a variety of methods that build progressively on students' knowledge and give them the confidence to undertake more demanding tasks. Students are very clear how well they are doing and what they have to do to improve further. Visits to galleries locally and in London have extended students' knowledge of art and design, including aspects of contemporary practice.

227. The sixth form courses run effectively. The department is led and managed very well. Teachers compare their experiences of the AS and A2 units and share best practice. The use of ICT is insufficiently well developed. Current planning does not include improving the provision for more ICT resources. The present use of the services of conscientious part-time technicians is extremely beneficial to the running of the department. Accommodation is inadequate and does not allow for art work on a large scale and this inhibits further potential expansion. The facilities and provision for work using clay are insufficient to meet the demands of a large department.
228. Overall, this is a successful area of sixth form provision and it is becoming increasingly popular. It is taught very well and, as a result, standards are high and students make very good progress.

Music

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

Strengths

- Students' achievement is very good.
- Teaching is very good; teachers are knowledgeable and enthusiastic.
- Students are highly motivated, committed to their course and the range of other music opportunities.
- The department is well led and managed.

Areas for improvement

- Presently, there is not enough access to and use of ICT equipment
- The department lacks up-to-date computer and keyboard resources to allow students to record and refine their compositions.

229. Standards achieved by students in their AS and A2 examinations are above expectations and an increased number of students choose to study music. Students continue their study from AS to A2 levels and they maintain the highest grades. Strengths are found in the very high standards of musicianship displayed by students through their practical skills. The school has maintained its level of success noted at the time of the previous inspection and it helps students to build effectively on their above average GCSE examination results.

230. Teaching is very good and leads to very good learning by students. They are inspired to produce sophisticated compositions in a variety of musical styles and to gain insights into pieces of music other than those they study. Strengths in the teaching include the way students are encouraged to research a topic before a lesson. This means they are familiar with the composer's music before analysing it in depth. Lessons are reviewed by use of summary sheets, building into a useful reference section. Paired work enables musical dialogue and discussion to flourish and students readily use their voice to hum or sing illustrations during discussions. This ensures they are familiar with the music they study. Written work is well-organised and marked constructively, providing students with a clear understanding of how to improve.

231. Students are attentive and show a willingness to learn, seeking clarification of their understanding by asking thoughtful questions. Year 12 students were taken carefully through the scoring used by Mendelssohn compared to that used by Haydn. Questions of both the teacher and the students ensured that the instrumentation was completely understood before listening to the music. Students are aware of the effect of music on the listener; this was seen when they experienced for the first time the final bars of an overture played by string instruments. The whole class was visibly moved by the ethereal beauty and power of the music. All students are well motivated and enthusiastic about the music they play and study. They help with ensembles and make a valuable contribution to the school orchestra and wind band. They benefit from very good teaching from peripatetic staff, who work closely with the department helping to prepare students for the performing element of their examination.

232. The department is well led and managed. There is good communication between the two teachers and both have strong technical skills. Much has improved since the previous inspection. However, the department lacks up-to-date computer and keyboard resources. This means that students often struggle to record and refine their compositions. The current quality of recording equipment does not do justice to the high quality of students' instrumental performances. The department has maintained the very high standards observed during the last inspection.

HUMANITIES

233. The main focus of the inspection was on history, geography, sociology and psychology. Religious studies was also sampled. The provision in AS and A-level religious studies is excellent. Standards are very high and in the most recent A-level examinations, two thirds of those entered gained the highest A and B grades. The subject is becoming increasingly popular. The quality of teaching ranges from very good to excellent. A key feature of the teaching is excellent subject knowledge and very high expectations of the teaching team. As a result, students are thoroughly motivated and make very good progress. Standards remain very high, both in terms of students' oral contributions and in their written work. Relationships are excellent in the classroom, creating a very positive learning environment. Management of the subject is excellent and students are given a very clear idea of how to improve their work. This is a very strong area of sixth form provision.

History

Overall, the quality of provision in history is good.

Strengths

- The standards of attainment and achievement of students are very good.
- The overall quality of teaching is very good.
- The leadership of the head of department is very good.
- Students' attitudes, personal development and views of the subject are very positive.
- Students' personal and learning skills are developed well.
- There are clear procedures for assessing performance and supporting students' learning.

Areas for improvement

- The further development of independent learning.
- The use of ICT.
- The purchase of additional book resources to meet the demands of the new syllabus at A-level.

234. Students' performance in A-level examinations is above the national average. Results were particularly good in 2000, when 78 per cent achieved grades A to C, but dipped in 2001 to 67 per cent. However, the relatively small numbers of students taking the examination makes statistical comparisons difficult. An indication of the current rising standards is that all AS candidates in 2001 achieved grades A to C, on a significantly larger cohort of students. Evidence from the inspection, including the quality of work seen in lessons, confirms these results. The history department grants open access to A-level courses to all students, irrespective of their prior attainment. Because of this, teaching groups are of genuine mixed ability and even include pupils who did not follow a history course in Years 10 and 11. The overall standard of teaching and learning in the sixth form is very good. Achievement is good and pupils make good progress as they move through Years 12 and 13. They display very mature attitudes and good social development in this subject. There is no significant difference in the performance of boys and girls.

235. Students in Years 12 and 13 benefit from good teaching. This enables them to make good gains in knowledge, understanding and the development of skills. Students identify a wide range of factors that led to the fall of the Weimar Republic. Through skilful questioning they begin to categorise these as political, social or economic. The varied range of students' understanding is apparent in some lessons. For example,

one student struggled to recall Germany's pre-war history and its impact upon the 1920s. Another recognised that opposition to the government in the 1920s was partly fed by the peoples' unfamiliarity with democracy before the war and a lack of trust in its institutions. Students gain valuable insights into motive, considering the assumptions made by the 'ruling class' in their relationship with Hitler. By contrast, students also study a unit of work on Tudor England. Benefiting from the class teacher's good subject knowledge, students use documentary material effectively to assess the success of Henry VII's policies. On occasion, however, learning is less effective, where group activities do not fully capitalise upon promoting thinking and discussion between students.

236. In Year 13, there is some excellent teaching, which ensures all students make very rapid gains, for example, in their understanding of Nazi rule during the 1930s. A variety of resources, including video clips, brought the means by which Hitler gained the loyalty of differing groups vividly to life. A very effective task drew all students into a discussion on this topic. They responded by offering a range of insights that characterised the feelings of ordinary German citizens. The students identified such words as 'fascination', 'desperation' and 'a man of honour' to describe feelings about Hitler. This lesson challenged students' thinking and ensured they delved into evidence to support their assertions. Again, students returned to the Tudor unit of study and, because of the teacher's considerable expertise of this period, were swiftly directed to key documents concerning Mary Tudor. Students display good judgement in weighing evidence and assessing its reliability. This enables them to reach conclusions, for example on Mary's character, which helps to explain her successes and failures. Students noted she was 'determined' but 'naïve'. Very good use is made of difficult texts - for example, *The Book of Martyrs*, to make the valid points about ideas. However, at times, learning is less effective because questions are not always directed to individuals. This leads to significantly more contributions from some students than others.
237. When interviewed, students are very positive about studying history. They identify a range of skills it helps them develop. They are clear on what is expected of them and what they need to do to improve; this has an important impact upon developing their study skills. They see value in studying history for itself and as a means of gaining access to higher education. One student recognised it would help his understanding of the law. Students believe they are well taught and are supportive of the work of the department. There are a number of reasons for this positive outlook. The quality of teaching is very good. The head of department provides very good leadership. There are clear procedures for assessing and monitoring students' work; marking is of a high standard. This greatly assists students in knowing how to improve the standard of their work. Relationships between staff and students are very good. The curriculum is effectively enhanced through educational visits and by opportunities for students to attend historical conferences. However, there is insufficient use of ICT as a means of promoting independent learning. Staff are enthusiastic and work extremely hard to give all students good access to the curriculum. There is effective mentoring of the newly qualified member of staff, who brings particular expertise to the department. While resources are adequate, the current change of Examination Board means there are some shortages in textbooks for the new syllabus. Overall, provision is good and there has been good progress since the last inspection in improving the sixth form curriculum and increasing student numbers.

Geography

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

Strengths

- Standards of work are well above average.
- Students achieve very well, particularly in their course work in Year 13.
- Teaching and learning are very good; teachers have very good subject knowledge and plan their lessons very well.
- Excellent relationships exist between teachers and students; teachers have very high expectations of their students and support them well.

Area for improvement

- A comprehensive scheme of work has not been completed.

238. Standards of work in the sixth form are well above the national average. In 2001, all the students entered for the A-level examination at the end of Year 13 obtained a pass grade. The proportion of students, particularly boys, gaining the highest grades of A and B was significantly above the national average. Students did much better in geography than in their other subjects. In the previous year, a very small group of students, all girls, achieved equally well. These results represent a marked improvement since the last inspection. In the 2001 AS examination at the end of Year 12, the pass rate was above the national average, while achievement at the highest grades was in line with it. Most students from this group have continued their studies into Year 13. Geography is a popular choice for girls and boys in the sixth form and students' prior attainment is high. Achievement and progress are very good throughout the course.

239. The standard of work seen in the current Year 12 is above average. Students show competence in the application of geographical skills and many are eager to engage in discussions about their work. For example, in a very good lesson on urban regeneration schemes, the teacher's very good resources and challenging questions enabled all students to achieve very well as they made complex choices and decisions about different areas for re-development. Working in small groups, they shared their understanding and learning very successfully. Constant help from teachers enables students to achieve high standards in recording notes and in planning and writing essays.

240. In Year 13, standards are well above average. The quality of students' work suggests that results in the forthcoming examination will be at least as high as those achieved last year. Individual studies and course work make a very valuable contribution to students' independent learning. For example, course work essays on aspects of world health show particular skills in research from a wide variety of sources and very good achievement, using ICT skills, in the organisation and evaluation of data. Students enjoy applying ideas and knowledge to topics that they study. For example, they were able to use their own experience of global marketing and finance to conduct a sophisticated debate on the impact of world trade from a wide variety of different viewpoints.

241. Overall, teaching is very good. One of the four lessons observed was good and three were very good. The best features of the teaching include the excellent relationships that teachers develop with their students and the very high quality of lesson planning.

Students enjoy the varied approaches and specialities that different teachers bring to the subject. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and develop many up-to-date resources and methods of learning that stimulate students' interest. Lessons proceed with pace, challenge and very high expectations so that learning takes place rapidly. Students who are new to the school in Year 12 feel well supported by their teachers and are given individual help with aspects of the subject that are less familiar to them.

242. Work is marked regularly and target grades give students a very clear idea of how well they are doing in relation to national standards and to their own progress. Very good supervision and support during the production of extended pieces of work enable students to refine and improve their work. Regular opportunities for students to record then discuss their own views of their work are not available to help them to develop greater responsibility for their own learning.
243. The department is well led and managed. The internal analysis of performance is very good and is used to present a very clear vision for future directions. Resources of all kinds are plentiful and students are encouraged to use the wide range of textbooks available for their own research. Teachers work well together as a team and share their ideas and experience in teaching the units of study. New syllabus requirements have been carefully analysed and work planned in logical sequences that build gradually on students' capabilities and experience. However, a comprehensive scheme of work has not yet been produced. The department is maintaining the very good improvement in students' attainment that has occurred since the last inspection.

Sociology

The overall quality of provision for sociology is very good.

Strengths:

- The number of students in both years is very high.
- Teaching is very good.
- The specialist teacher uses excellent subject knowledge to enthuse and motivate students.
- There are excellent relationships in the classroom and students thoroughly enjoy their lessons.
- The management of the subject is very good.
- Very thorough marking gives students a clear idea of how to achieve the highest grades.

Areas for improvement:

- The use of ICT is not fully developed.
- There are limited resources for students to use in the library.
- There are few opportunities to listen to visiting speakers.

244. There are 27 students studying the subject in Year 12 and 18 students on the A-level course in Year 13. In recent years, the number of students entered for A-level sociology has fluctuated, but results have been consistently high. All students in the last three years have achieved a pass grade and the proportion of students attaining the highest grades has been at or above the national average. In the most recent AS level examination in Year 12, all but one student gained a pass and more than half gained grades A to C. The standards reached by students as seen in the current inspection are above average both in terms of oral attainment in lessons and in their written work. In Year 12, a large number of students are following the AS level course and they are developing a very good understanding of different sociological theories

and of subject methodology. For example, this occurred in an excellent lesson on the division of labour in which students examined various theories in order to produce a detailed essay structure for future reference. Evidence from their written work suggests that they are also able to analyse these theories in considerable depth, for example, in some very detailed essays on sociological theories of family life and households. Students' files are very well organised and, as a result, most make very good progress during their first year of study. In Year 13, these high standards are maintained and refined during the A-level course where students are able to analyse and evaluate, for example, how far Britain is becoming a secular society. At this stage, students are honing their ability to think critically and research skills are being developed very well through the coursework assignment. Planning for this has been very thorough and most students have submitted very detailed proposals on a variety of topics, such as the decline in religious beliefs and women's participation in sport.

245. The quality of teaching in the subject is very good. The specialist teacher has excellent subject knowledge and uses it very well to provide valuable information for students and to ensure very good progress. Lessons have a clear structure and are planned very well with clear aims and objectives that are shared with the students. Expectations for both year groups are very high and, as a result, students develop the confidence to ask questions and to participate fully in lessons. This was seen to very good effect in a Year 12 lesson on the sociology of feminism, during which students examined the concept of gender stereotyping in early years development and worked in pairs to design a 'gender-free' toy; a task that was both enjoyable and stimulating in terms of the subsequent discussion. Very good use is made of question and answer techniques to reinforce learning gains and to ensure that all students make a contribution in lessons. Praise and encouragement are used to very good effect and all students show considerable enthusiasm for their learning. Relationships are excellent and students respond very well to the enthusiasm and expectations of their teacher. They are also keen to develop their own ideas and listen attentively to the views of others. Above all, there is a sense of enjoyment and purpose to lessons and this was demonstrated very well in a Year 13 lesson on labelling theories. Students conducted a role-play, exhibiting different personal characteristics and, from this amusing start, a very stimulating discussion ensued which was orchestrated with considerable skill by the teacher.
246. The department is managed very well with commendable enthusiasm and efficiency. Schemes of work are comprehensive and there is a very good induction pack which gives students a valuable insight into preparation for A-level study. There is a very wide range of home-produced materials to support learning, but, as yet, the use of ICT and the Internet as resources for learning are not fully developed. There are limited resources for students to use in the library. Monitoring of students' progress is very thorough and detailed marking gives students a clear idea of how to achieve higher grades. Students attend conferences on relevant topics but their experience would be enriched by further opportunities to listen to visiting speakers. The sociology room is used very well to support learning with an impressive array of students' work and newspaper articles on display.
247. Overall, this is a very successful area of sixth form provision and it is becoming increasingly popular. The very high quality of teaching and the very positive response of all students are the main hallmarks of the department's success.

Psychology

The overall quality of provision in psychology is good.

Strengths

- Good teaching results in examination results that are above, and often well above, average.
- Use of perceptive open-ended questioning examines the quality of understanding and extends students' learning in a supportive and good-humoured environment.
- Students are highly motivated because the teaching encourages them to take responsibility for the quality of their own learning.
- Teaching provides a good model of academic analysis and discourse to which pupils respond with increasing confidence, fluency and rigour.

Areas for improvement

- Lines of responsibility and accountability are not clearly established, especially in regard to quality assurance and developmental planning within the subject.
- There is insufficient sharing of information about effective teaching and learning to improve and extend the range of teaching styles that are used.
- There are insufficient course texts and additional resources, including ICT access to research to support learning, especially for students studying on the A2 course.
- Many students receive insufficient guidance on how to improve their work.

248. In 2001, A-level results were very good, with all the students achieving A to E grades. The proportion achieving the higher A and B grades was well above the national average. The new AS course was only introduced in 2000 and there were no national performance figures available at the time of the inspection. Ninety-two per cent of students passed at grades A to E, with 27 per cent obtaining the higher grades of A and B. These results were lower than predicted, but school performance indicators show that students are performing well in comparison with their GCSE examination results. Psychology is a new subject for Year 12 students but they make rapid progress, studying 20 core units. Suitable course textbooks have still to be published. The result is that written work understandably focuses rather heavily on factual content. Contributions to lessons provide a picture of enthusiastic and committed students whose knowledge of technical vocabulary is good. This is used to inform high quality discussion. An example of this was when a Year 12 student asked the deceptively simple question 'Is a 'schema' an 'operation'?'. The ensuing energetic discussion revealed in-depth understanding of a fundamental conceptual issue in developmental psychology. Work from Year 13 students indicates that good progress continues to be made. While their work is still factually dominated, students are showing growing skills of academic analysis and debate. This is especially true of their ability, both orally and in writing, to identify strengths and weaknesses of published research. They are less likely to argue by example and higher attaining students are able to identify theoretical positions, relating them to earlier studies and identifying the implications of those positions in both social and academic contexts.

249. The school uses performance data well. Grades are predicted on the overall performance at GCSE and these are often exceeded in psychology. The subject's results are one of the strengths of the sixth form. Students are very enthusiastic about the subject, which they find challenging but stimulating. They work well in small groups

as well as independently. In class discussion, they listen carefully to the teacher and each other and contribute willingly.

250. Relationships between the teachers and students are excellent. The increased popularity of the subject has resulted in relatively large teaching groups in Year 12. This is currently limiting the extent to which gifted and talented students are being further challenged. Boys and girls make equally good progress that could be further improved if students were clearer about how to improve their performance. Careful planning and excellent liaison with the learning support assistant resulted in a student with a statement of special educational needs, making very good progress, contributing well in the lesson and achieving in line with the target 'C' grade.
251. Short-term problems have been created by the late publication of a key textbook. In consequence, files reveal a high degree of directive teaching. In the lessons seen, teachers demonstrated good skills in developing and extending understanding. All the teaching seen was good or very good. First-rate subject knowledge meant that teachers were very effective at encouraging students to explain and extend their ideas. Lessons have clear and appropriate objectives and are well structured. A variety of teaching approaches make lessons interesting. An introduction to a critique of Piaget's work involved demonstration, a carefully selected short video sequence, searching questions and a well designed piece of homework. In combination, these provided an excellent foundation, resulting in students developing a clear understanding of conservation within which they displayed detailed knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of Piagetian research. Students learn how to apply ethical principles to simple research projects. Lessons proceed at a brisk pace and so sustain students' interest very well. One Year 12 group was observed wrestling with statistical tests of significance. Although they found the work difficult, the well-structured teaching and good use of example material took them through the process.
252. Overall, the quality of teaching is good. Teaching, particularly in Year 13, is notable for its clarity of explanation and the use of probing questions in class discussions. These drew out ideas, tested and consolidated understanding and challenged students' thinking and explanations. Case studies raised important issues and were used to help students apply skills of analysis and explanation. Year 13 work on proxemics (the study of the way people have a sense of territory) demonstrated that students were quick to recall research evidence on territorial behaviour. They confidently and humorously analysed the presence of the inspector and described theoretical behavioural options open to them in response to this 'intruder'. In a subsequent lesson, these students were able to analyse in-depth features that identified aspects of privacy and dimensions of social space. They were quick to identify the ethical violations in more notorious pieces of research and understood the problems of conducting effective research.
253. The rapport between students and teachers is based on mutual respect and results in highly positive attitudes. Students engage in demanding work for the whole of each session. Students respect and admire their teachers and have a well-placed confidence in their energy and knowledge. Excellent handout material has been developed, but there is need for higher attaining students to have access to a wider a range of material.
254. Psychology is taught within a much wider faculty structure. The head of faculty and both the specialist teachers have been appointed within the last 18 months. The quality of subject knowledge and tuition is high, but there is insufficient clarity about the structure of subject leadership. In order to provide adequate course coverage, lessons have been rather more content dominated than the teachers would have liked. It is

testimony to their subject expertise that teachers have been able to overcome the problems they inherited. This has been especially true of Year 13. Closer monitoring of marking would have revealed that many students do not get sufficient detailed guidance and advice. There is no use made of ICT based research opportunities. The head of faculty is fully aware of the situation and supports the proposed improvements.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus of the inspection was on English and French. German, Spanish and general studies were also sampled. The provision in general studies is satisfactory. The AS level examinations results are in line with national expectations. Students are taught well and the management of the subject is satisfactory.

English

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

Strengths

- Leadership and management are very good, especially in encouraging a wider range of teaching and learning styles.
- There are good standards of attainment, especially at A2 level.
- There is very good teaching, resulting in good or very good learning by most students.
- Students have very positive attitudes towards the subject.

Areas for improvement

- The range of teaching and learning strategies are limited.

255. The proportion of students attaining an A to C grade in the 2001 A-level examination was above the national average. All students passed the examination and the average points score was above the national average, making English one of the strongest subjects in the school. The inspection confirmed that standards in English in the sixth form are good, both for students in Year 12 on the AS course and for those studying on the A2 course in Year 13. Although there are many more girls than boys studying English, there are no significant differences in attainment between them. Most of the students join the sixth form with standards above the national average and they make very good progress in developing their knowledge and understanding of a range of texts and their skills of textual analysis.

256. Students, including those who join the sixth form from other schools, make a good transition to study in Year 12 and welcome the opportunity to debate a range of texts in more depth. They are able to analyse selected texts such as Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Hamlet* in considerable depth, both from the point of view of analysing the effectiveness of authors' use of language and form to create effect, but also in terms of making a personal, individual response. The majority of students are less secure in their understanding of the context of particular works, notably Dickens' *Hard Times*, and experience difficulty in appreciating some of the irony, although the highest attainers are able to discuss the impact of the work in some depth. In Year 13, students consolidate their understanding well and are able to make a very effective personal response to other texts such as *Bird Song*, and make a meaningful comparison between Mrs Gaskell's *North and South* and Dickens' works as social as well as literary documents. The weakest aspect of students' understanding is their ability to relate other critical interpretations to their own studies.

257. The quality of teaching in the sixth form is very good and leads to very good learning by students who are very positive in their attitudes towards sixth form English. The strongest characteristic of the teaching is the continual encouragement which some teachers give to developing students' independent learning skills. This was very evident, for example, in Year 12 lessons on *Hamlet*, in which teachers succeeded in deepening students' understanding of Hamlet's motivation through a combination of close textual analysis, working in groups, class readings and dramatic performances. These activities are supplemented by effective use of a range of resources such as audio recordings and use of contemporary illustrations. The teaching is enthusiastic and knowledgeable and this knowledge is conveyed to students through a combination of focused, briskly paced questioning and explanation, but in such a way that the activity is made to seem like a voyage of discovery for students. Very good relationships motivate students to work hard and give them the confidence to debate, as seen, for example, in a detailed discussion of a crucial scene in *North and South*. Teachers also give good feedback to students on how they can improve their work, a feature of a Year 13 lesson on *Menelaus and Helen*, which saw students developing a deeper understanding of the language and imagery in the poem.
258. Although there are no significant weaknesses in the teaching, the degree of independent learning within lessons does vary and the head of faculty has as a priority the development of a still wider range of teaching and learning styles.
259. Overall, leadership and management of English in the sixth form are very good. The relatively new head of faculty has made it a priority to continue to develop the range of independent learning styles, although currently sixth formers have limited access to computers. Professional development of teachers is good and is having a positive effect upon standards. English is rightly a popular subject within the sixth form.
260. A-level results at the time of the previous inspection were well above the expectations of similarly aged students nationally and this is still the case. However, given the increased emphasis on developing more innovative teaching styles in the sixth form and the high quality of teaching, there has been good progress in English since the previous inspection.

Modern foreign languages

261. The focus of the inspection was on French, but work in German and Spanish was also sampled. The overall quality of provision in German is good. Results at A-level in 2001 were average and this represents satisfactory progress by students. German attracts only small numbers of students. In a lesson observed, the quality of teaching and learning was good and students were obviously determined to succeed and enjoying the work. Management of the department is good. The quality of provision in Spanish is good. Results in 2001 were below average, representing unsatisfactory progress from grades gained at GCSE. However, results for a small number of students in two previous years were above average. In the lesson seen, teaching was very good and students were making good progress. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. Spanish is now attracting an increased number of students, who are making good progress in both Year 12 and Year 13. Management of the department is good.

French

Overall, the quality of provision is very good.

Strengths

- Results at A-level in 2001 were above the national average.
- The quality of teaching and learning is very good overall.
- Numbers taking French are increasing and students have positive views about most aspects of provision.
- Leadership and management are good.
- Students benefit from cultural and residential visits, at home and abroad.

Areas for improvement

- Students do not receive regular individual information on how well they are doing, and what they need to do to address weaknesses.

262. Over the last three years, results at A-level have improved from being below average to above average. In 2001, three of the six students gained A or B grades and all achieved a grade across the full range, A to E. Results at AS-level for students now in Year 13 confirmed the trend of improvement, with an increasing rate of progress compared to their prior attainment at GCSE.

263. Attainment is well above average overall, with very few students failing to build acceptably on grades gained at GCSE. Progress for students in Years 12 and 13 is good overall. Students joining from other schools tend to do less well, as their knowledge of how language works is less well developed. At least half of the 12 students in Year 13 are producing work worthy of high grades. Students acquire a knowledge of vocabulary and language structure at a steady rate through dedicated language lessons and literary study. Reading and comprehension skills develop well. Students apply themselves well to researching new words and phrases, and deduce meaning from context as well as understanding the gist of long and complex passages of written and spoken French. In lessons, they collaborate well in a variety of oral situations and evaluate each other's performance, using a good level of language. They are less confident in discussing points arising from literary study, with much of the work being shared between the most able in the group. At this level, most students need a good deal of support, through paraphrase and explanation. Pronunciation, in reading aloud and in routine classwork, is good and students use French spontaneously in routine interchanges in class. Written work is generally of good quality. Progression from AS-level is evident. Students study challenging topics, such as environmental issues, national stereotypes and the situation of Jews in France during the Second World War. In related written tasks, students write interestingly, with good content often matched by accurate and complex language. The few average attaining students within the group write less confidently and are prone to basic errors of gender and number. There are more female than male students, but no significant difference in performance.

264. Attainment in Year 12 is above average, with all students making good progress as they build on excellent grades at GCSE. They work together very well as a whole group, and in smaller groups, and show great confidence in each other and their teachers. Early progress is made in extending knowledge of vocabulary and the range and complexity of language structures. This is achieved by instant immersion in prescribed topics, such as youth employment issues and the impact of immigrants and refugees on French society. Students discuss such topics with increasing maturity and develop comprehension and productive skills equally well. They begin to build

arguments and can challenge and defend points of view. Pronunciation is usually very good, though some students are lazy in their pronunciation of cognates. Written work shows considerable progression from the standards required for GCSE coursework. Students demonstrate their increased maturity in both content and accuracy, though they are still prone to careless mistakes.

265. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Teaching is shared by several teachers. There was no unsatisfactory teaching during the inspection. Teachers conduct lessons entirely in French and expect students to do so as well, so that they hear and use French on a regular basis in the five hours of lessons they have each week. Through sheer immersion, this improves oral and listening skills steadily. Teachers plan lessons very well and support learning with very good resources. In a Year 12 lesson on refugees, the teacher had photocopied an article from the previous week's Figaro and prepared a series of reading exercises on it. She stimulated discussion on key words and salient points and used a large atlas to identify where the refugees came from. Students are encouraged to use the Internet to find further information on topics, supplementing the authentic resources they use in class. In a very good language lesson with Year 13, the teacher showed great skill in getting students to consider their answers critically and to think about ways to include more sophisticated language, such as subjunctive constructions. He enjoyed very good relationships with this group, contributing to his success in involving all students, irrespective of ability, gender or ethnicity. Students appreciate the efforts of teachers on their behalf and their own attitudes and exemplary behaviour contribute to an enjoyable and academic atmosphere in lessons. They organise their work particularly well in ample files. Marking is thorough and helps students to recognize their mistakes and improve their work. It enables students to compare their performance to the criteria included in the very useful student guides produced for them by teachers. However, they feel that there is a lack of one-to-one discussion on their progress and that they rely on marking to deduce this.
266. Work is well led and managed by the head of faculty. The department has quickly put together very detailed schemes of work for both AS and A-levels, which are under constant review and which are supplemented by student guides. Students value the contribution to their cultural development of the authentic materials used routinely in lessons and through the help they receive in accessing appropriate websites for information. This provision is further enhanced by opportunities to participate in visits to Paris and to cinemas and conferences in London. Unusually, students in Year 13 this year have the rare opportunity to discuss their literary text with the actual author. They have a good awareness of contemporary French culture and society.