

INSPECTION REPORT

Northampton School for Boys

Billing Road, Northampton

LEA area: Northamptonshire

Unique reference number: 122117

Headteacher: Mr M Griffiths

Reporting inspector: Yvonne Barclay
8918

Dates of inspection: 4th – 8th March 2002

Inspection number: 191289

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Foundation
Age range of pupils:	13 - 18
Gender of pupils:	Boys
School address:	Billing Road Northampton Northamptonshire
Postcode:	NN1 5RT
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs Yvonne Edwards
Date of previous inspection:	20/01/97

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities (sixth form)	Aspect responsibilities (sixth form)
8918	Yvonne Barclay	Registered inspector	Business Education Equal Opportunities	What sort of school is it? Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development How well are pupils taught? What should the school do to improve further?
9748	Cliff Hayes	Lay inspector		How well does the school care for its pupils? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
30206	John Spradbery	Team inspector	Mathematics	How well is the school led and managed?
5944	Felicity Golding	Team inspector	Geography	The school's results and pupils' achievements
22005	Melinda Derry	Team inspector	English Literature	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
2643	Kevin Haddock	Team inspector	History	
11526	Mike Hodkinson	Team inspector	Physical Education Economics	
2476	Paul Mitchell	Team inspector	Physics Chemistry	
20966	John Catton	Team inspector	Design & Technology	
15034	Harmer Parr	Team inspector	French Spanish	

15929	David Sheppard	Team inspector	Art & Design Drama Special Educational Needs English as Another Language	
20747	Maureen Hanke	Team inspector	Music	

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REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	7
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	12
PART B: COMMENTARY	
WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL	16
WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED	24
WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	24
PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	25
PART D: THE SIXTH FORM	32
RESULTS AND STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS	32
STUDENTS' ATTITUDES, VALUES AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT	34
TEACHING AND LEARNING	34
CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS	36
THE SCHOOL'S CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS	37
THE EFFECTIVENESS OF LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT IN THE SIXTH FORM	39
PART E: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM	41

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Northampton School for Boys is a 13–18 Foundation Upper School which has had specialist Technology College status since 1994. The school is over-subscribed. The roll is 1280 with 446 in the sixth form, of whom 98 are girls. The percentage of pupils taking free school meals is below the national average. The school is adapted to meet the needs of disabled pupils. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs, including those with statements is below the national average. The percentage of pupils for whom English is a second language is high. Two pupils are at an early stage of learning English. Pupils enter the school in Year 9 with levels of attainment which are slightly above average overall, but those entering the school cover the full ability range and includes boys who are gifted and talented, as well as those with special educational needs. The school is planning to become an 11-18 boys comprehensive in 2004.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Northampton School for Boys is a very good school. The school is managed in a business-like and very effective manner. It has improved significantly since the last inspection. Very good teaching enables pupils to do very well. General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) results are very high, A level results are good. Relationships between pupils, their peers and their teachers are very good. Parental support for the school is excellent. The learning support centre provides pupils with special educational needs with very good support. The school provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- Pupils achieve very well: results at GCSE are outstandingly good.
- Very good teaching enables pupils to learn and progress well.
- Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are excellent and are strengths which contribute strongly to the ethos of the school.
- The Honours Programme meets the needs of gifted and talented pupils well.
- An extensive programme of extra-curricular activities, including additional support for pupils during the lunchtime and after school, is strongly supported by staff.
- Strong, forward-looking leadership ensures that pupils experience a very high quality education within a stimulating environment.

What could be improved

- The plans the school made after the last inspection to meet statutory requirements for religious education throughout the school, as well as a daily act of collective worship, have yet to be implemented.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected 20th – 24th January 1997, and since then good improvement has been made. GCSE results have risen at a faster rate than nationally and are now very high. Sixth form results have improved considerably. Teaching is better than at the last inspection. The school's senior managers and governors have generally responded well to the last report. The school has successfully addressed the main issues identified in the

previous inspection. Subject leaders are now involved in monitoring and evaluating teachers' effectiveness and pupils' achievement; an assessment policy is consistently applied; the school improvement plan is based on the full analysis of data including assessing value for money. However, the school has yet to consistently promote opportunities for spiritual development, comply with statutory requirements for religious education and hold a daily act of collective worship. The school has the capacity to sustain high standards and to improve further.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with				Key well above average A average B above average C average D below average E well below average E
	all schools			similar schools	
	1999	2000	2001	2001	
GCSE examinations	A	A	A	A*	
A levels/AS levels	A	A	A		

Pupils achieve outstanding results at GCSE. Results are improving at a faster rate than nationally. Boys achieve better results than both boys and girls nationally. Performance at GCSE is in the top five per cent when compared with similar schools. At the end of Year 9, measured by average point scores, boys attain very well in mathematics and science; as well as the top five per cent of boys nationally. At the end of Year 9 boys' attainment in English matches similar schools, although is above boys' performance nationally. In both mathematics and science boys' attainment is well above the rising national trend. However, in English boys' results at the end of Year 9 fluctuate from year to year but remain above the national average. The school sets and meets challenging targets. This year its target of 75 per cent gaining five or more A*-C GCSE grades was exceeded by just over three per cent. During the inspection the standard of pupils' work was high, particularly in oral work in English in Years 10 and 11.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils' attitudes to learning are excellent. Pupils are keen to learn. They participate well in extra-curricular activities.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Excellent. Pupils are courteous and considerate to others. Exclusions are rare. There is a good level of racial harmony.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships are very good. Pupils are mature and have high self-esteem. Pupils show a very good capacity to work independently, take initiative and show responsibility.
Attendance	Attendance is excellent in comparison with national averages.

Pupils' excellent attitudes and behaviour make a strong contribution to the high standards achieved. Very good relationships allow pupils to concentrate on learning. Pupils listen attentively to their teachers and, when given the opportunity, take initiative and show independence. Attendance is very high throughout the school. In the sixth form attendance is higher than nationally in sixth forms. Very good attendance has a marked beneficial impact on standards.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Teaching and learning are good and often very good. In Years 9, 10 and 11 mathematics and science are taught well and pupils make good progress. In Year 9 teaching in English is satisfactory overall, but it is good in Years 10 and 11. Teachers are rigorous in their teaching and expect pupils to do their best at all times. Teachers are particularly effective at motivating boys through the range of teaching styles that they use, and as a result, boys achieve well, particularly at GCSE. The skills of numeracy, literacy and using computers are taught well. Northampton School for Boys meets the needs of all pupils very well including those with special educational needs, those from different ethnic backgrounds and pupils with disabilities.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	A good range of subjects is provided, well suited to boys' abilities and needs. The extra-curricular programme is extensive. The excellent Honours Programme meets the needs of the gifted and talented very well.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Very effective: pupils make good progress because the help they are given is very carefully planned and structured, and because learning support centre staff treat them in ways which help them to feel positive about their learning.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Pupils are well supported and care is taken to ensure that they are able to achieve good standards of work.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good, with strengths in moral and social development. Staff and older students are good role models.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school cares well for its pupils and rigorously assesses their progress.

The school provides a good range of subjects for its pupils and they achieve well. Time has been invested successfully into developing the curriculum to meet the learning needs of boys. Curriculum provision is enhanced by the extensive use made of information and communication technology to support pupils in their learning and through offering access to high quality resources, for example, worked past papers and revision guides. The school retains extensive information about pupils' progress and this information is used to identify underachievement. Pupils benefit from the increased opportunities made available to them through extra-curricular provision, and gifted and talented pupils in particular benefit from the substantial enrichment provided by the Honours Programme. Provision for pupils with special educational needs, in particular the adaptation of buildings for wheelchair access, has been both thoughtful and effective.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher provides very good leadership and with senior staff manages the school very well. Leadership has a strong focus upon sustaining the very impressive improvements in standards.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors and senior managers work together well, providing the school with a clear sense of direction and creating a climate where high achievement can thrive.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The Quality Initiative and performance management processes enable the school to evaluate its performance very thoroughly. Results are analysed soundly on a regular basis to set targets for further improvement.
The strategic use of resources	Resources are used very well. The school seeks best value when making spending decisions and evaluates the impact of such decisions.

The headteacher and senior managers are successful in ensuring they sustain a focus on improving standards further for pupils currently at the school; at the same time they are preparing thoroughly for the school to receive eleven year-olds in 2004. Governors and senior staff seek best value in the decisions they take. The school takes a strong stance against racism. There are thorough and effective procedures for dealing with any racist incidents which do occur. The school makes excellent use of extensive information technology systems to support teaching, learning and administration. Computers are used in innovative ways, for example, in enabling all staff to participate in decision-making for the curriculum review and in communication with pupils and parents. The school makes very good use of the additional funds provided by the Northampton Old Grammar School Foundation for building and for enhancing student provision. Accommodation is excellent, including an impressive sports facility and the superb Cripps Hall, which have significant effects on the standards achieved at the school.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school has high expectations of its pupils. • Teaching is good. • Behaviour is good. • The school is well led and managed. • Pupils make good progress. • Pupils are helped to become mature and responsible. • Good extra-curricular provision. • The school works closely with parents. • The school gives the correct amount of homework. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents, in response to their questionnaire and at the meeting with the registered inspector, were outstandingly positive.

Inspectors agree with parents' overall very favourable views of the school. They agree that the school pays significant attention to academic success and found no evidence to support the concerns written by parents on this matter. Parents are right to be pleased with, for example, the progress their child makes, the quality of teaching, the extra-curricular provision, the amount of homework and the high expectations the school has.

ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM NORTHAMPTON SCHOOL FOR BOYS

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

Northampton School for Boys is a 13–18 Foundation Upper School which has had specialist Technology College status since 1994. The sixth form is over-subscribed. The sixth form roll is 446, of whom 98 are girls. Most Year 11 pupils continue into the sixth form. Girls make up to 25 per cent of the total sixth form roll. Numbers have nearly doubled since 1997. The sixth form is bigger than others nationally. The curriculum offers 26 advanced supplementary and A level subjects and intermediate vocational courses. The entry requirements for boys attending the main school enables boys from a wide ability range to continue their studies in the sixth form.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

Students achieve very good examination results, well above national averages. The sixth form is very popular and is over-subscribed. The percentage of students staying on from Year 11 has increased from year to year. Many students gain the qualifications to continue into higher education, including the most prestigious universities. The quality of teaching is very high. The sixth form is very well led and managed by the director and sixth form team. Taking into account the costs and the standards achieved, the sixth form provides good value for money.

Strengths

- High standards of achievement.
- The students meet the aims of the school by displaying a 'passion for learning'. Their attitudes are very positive and they work hard.
- Overall, the quality of teaching is very good. Highly skilled, rigorous teaching leads to the students achieving very good results.
- An impressive range of opportunities for enrichment exist for all students, with enhanced provision for gifted and talented students.
- Provision for expressive arts, physical education and sport is outstanding.
- The sixth form is very well managed.

What could be improved

- The provision for religious education in the sixth form does not meet statutory requirements.

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

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

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

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	Very good. Mathematics is taught very well and high standards are achieved by the students.
Chemistry	Good. Standards were above the national average in 2000 but fell to below average in 2001. However, teaching which is never less than good and often excellent, is leading to standards that are rising.
Physics	Very good. Standards have risen to above or well above the national averages in recent years due to teaching that is good and often very good.
Design & Technology	Very good. Standards at A level are above the national average, and at AS level are well above the national average. Teaching is mostly good or better, some is excellent. Students achieve well.
Business Studies	Satisfactory with some good features. Students currently taking the subject are achieving well, with good value-added from GCSE. Teaching is always satisfactory and sometimes good.
Economics	Very good. High standards of teaching lead to confident, articulate and responsive students. The department uses an effective range of resources and uses good planning and assessment procedures. Examination results are improving.
Physical Education	Excellent. Students achieve very well in their A level examinations. Teaching is very good. The department provides excellent Year 12 and 13 sport and recreation opportunities and an extensive range of extra-curricular activities.
Art & Design	Very good. Students are treated by their teachers as serious art students and encouraged to experiment and explore cultural influences. Students are supported by good teaching and strong individual guidance.
Music	Very good. Examination results are very high and there are excellent extra-curricular opportunities.
Drama	Very good. Students achieve good results due to very good teaching and individual guidance. The excellent theatre facilities encourage students to work in a mature and serious manner, with high levels of commitment.
Geography	Good. Results have risen steadily over the last four years with good value-added from GCSE. Students are achieving well due to good teaching and regular feedback which improves their

	learning.
History	Good. Students are achieving well. Advanced supplementary results in 2001 were good. Learning and teaching are good.
English Literature	Very Good. Recent results are above national averages. Teachers know their subject well and promote in their students confidence and enthusiasm for learning.
French	Very good. Standards have improved since the last inspection and are now well above average. Teaching is very good.
Spanish	Satisfactory. Standards in Spanish are lower than they should be but some good quality work was seen in Year 12.

Standards in psychology and sociology are well above the national average. Standards in photography are above the national average with most students achieving the highest grades. Standards in biology are at the national average. Results in intermediate business are above the national average. The physical education department provides excellent sport and recreation opportunities for all Year 12 and 13 students.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Staff know students well as individuals and relationships are very good. New pastoral and guidance arrangements are working well. Advice on university entrance is a real strength.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	The sixth form is very well led and managed by the sixth form team. Managers use assessment information very well to set targets and to monitor students performance.

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"> • A good range of courses is available. • Teachers are accessible to provide help. • Teaching is good. • Independent study is encouraged. • They enjoy the sixth form and would recommend it to others. • Printed information on courses is helpful. • They are helped to settle well. • Work is thoroughly assessed. • They are well informed on their progress. • They are given good advice on the sixth form. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Careers advice. • Attention to student views. • Support for personal problems.

Students are positive about their sixth form. The concerns they raised in their questionnaire responses are priorities identified by the school for future attention.

COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

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

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Students achieve very well: results at GCSE are outstandingly good.

1. The school is exceptionally successful at GCSE, achieving results that place it within the top five per cent of all similar schools. Results have improved at a faster rate than nationally. The school has exceeded its own challenging target for the proportion of pupils achieving five or more A*-C grades. It has been notably successful in meeting its aims for promoting high attainment amongst boys: boys in the school attain results that are better than those achieved nationally by either boys or girls at GCSE.
2. GCSE results are well above national averages in all subjects. In biology, chemistry, drama, music and physics almost all pupils gained A*-C grades and a good proportion gained A* or A. Notably successful subjects are the sciences.
3. Achievement in lessons in Year 11 is very good. Pupils achieve standards that are high across all subjects. This high achievement is securely underpinned by good attainment in literacy and numeracy, and is strengthened by an enthusiasm for learning. Written work in English and other subjects in Year 11 is of a high quality, often uniting fluency with economy of expression, and pupils are well schooled in the cross-curricular skills of how to find references and to cite textual evidence. In mathematics, science and design and technology pupils are assured in their use of specialist vocabulary, and are confident and accurate in explaining technical terminology. During the inspection pupils competently used number calculations including decimals, percentages and proportion in a number of their lessons. In Year 9 in information communication technology they demonstrated their ability to construct a database and annotate a spreadsheet requiring little help from the teacher. In business studies they used the Internet well for research on an ice-cream business. Standards at GCSE in the separate sciences, which are studied by the top sets, and in double award sciences, are well above national averages and the high standards attained by pupils at age 14 are sustained through to GCSE. In a Year 11 double science lesson pupils in set 2 grasped the idea of ionic bonding quickly and some accurately predicted the behaviour of atoms based on an understanding of electron shell configurations. Almost all boys taking GCSE music gain a grade C or above and more than half achieve the highest grades.
4. Achievement is high at GCSE because the school has established a culture in which pupils of all abilities are challenged to succeed and in which teachers offer time generously to their pupils, providing them with support, guidance and imaginative curriculum enrichment. Achievement is further enhanced because the school has successfully engaged, through its processes of curriculum review, in professional debate about how best to meet the particular needs of boys. The school's innovative thinking has been translated directly into teaching, for example, in GCSE English, which is fast paced, entertaining, and sharply focused, as well as closely matched to the requirements of the syllabus and examinations. The purposes of learning and its relevance are made clear to pupils who are enthusiastic and eager to contribute to lessons as a result. Across the curriculum, subject teachers provide programmes which enrich and support the curriculum being taught, enabling pupils to experience both depth and breadth in their education. The mathematics department, for example, provides 'clinics' every day for pupils, offering support and guidance; in English, reading clubs cultivate pupils' wider interest in literature and in science the school's Intranet provides substantial resources and guidance for pupils.

5. Information communication technology is also used successfully across the curriculum as a potent tool to raise achievement. It is used appropriately to provide insight into how best to learn for example, guidance on how best to present a talk or construct an essay. Additionally computers are used well to enable pupils to become thoroughly conversant with the demands of their examination syllabuses, for example, in science. In lessons across the curriculum teaching is enlivened and made more accessible by the skilful use of interactive whiteboards which engage and sustain pupils' interest. The school is mindful of the need to identify and to pre-empt underachievement and its curriculum provision is underpinned by a sophisticated computerised system of pupil assessment and tracking, highlighting pupils 'at risk' or in need of intervention. Pupils with special educational needs achieve higher standards of work than might otherwise be expected, and make good progress in their learning, because they are given good support to overcome difficulty. Pupils make good progress because the help they are given is very carefully planned and structured and because learning support centre staff treat them in ways which help them to feel positive about their learning. Likewise, because they are well supported, pupils for whom English is an additional language make good progress and achieve standards similar to other pupils.

Very good teaching enables pupils to learn and progress well

6. Teaching, already noted as a strength in the last inspection report, has improved even further, with more teaching than before being deemed as good, very good or excellent. It is good in Year 9, very good in Years 10 and 11. Teaching in the sixth form is very good.
7. In Years 9 to 11 teaching is never less than satisfactory and is excellent in six per cent of lessons, very good in over 20 per cent, and good or better in over 75 per cent of lessons. The quality of pupils' learning mirrors the high quality of teaching that they receive, and the school successfully meets the needs of its pupils, including those with special educational needs, those from different ethnic backgrounds and pupils with disabilities.
8. Teachers' very good use of their subject knowledge and understanding, effective lesson planning and high expectations are key characteristics of good teaching. Teachers manage pupils very well and, as a result, relationships in classrooms are very good. Teachers are rigorous in their teaching and expect pupils to do their best at all times, aiming for the highest grades. Teachers very effectively guide pupils in their learning because of high quality exposition followed by very focused and productive pupil-enquiry work. This results in a very strong work ethos where, in every lesson, teachers expect to teach and pupils to learn, and pupils live up to these high expectations.
9. The teachers use their very good subject knowledge to give clear explanations and to emphasise priorities for learning. In a Year 11 lower set in history, for example, the teacher's skilful simplification of the complex actions associated with the New Deal in the USA, enabled pupils to summarise concisely the positive aspects of New Deal, while demonstrating their understanding of a difficult issue. English teachers are particularly effective at motivating boys through the range of teaching styles that they use and as a result boys achieve well, particularly at GCSE. In a Year 11 design and technology lesson the teacher provided a timely reminder to pupils of the importance of them using technical terms, and of producing design portfolios that were appropriately detailed, in order for them to achieve their expected grade A* at GCSE.

A very secure knowledge of the requirements of examination syllabuses characterises much of the successful teaching seen during the inspection. Teachers prepare their pupils well for the demands of public examinations without compromising pupils' enjoyment of their subjects, or narrowing the range of experience.

10. Lessons are well structured, with activities that are varied and interesting. Teachers, for example, in art lessons, present challenging ideas in their teaching and expect pupils to take responsibility for their own work. In doing so they create a purposeful atmosphere for learning, and they are good both at identifying individual pupils who require assistance, and at providing this support tactfully and effectively. Pupils respond well, are keen to learn and progress quickly. Full use is made of lesson time and homework is set conscientiously, providing valuable opportunities for learning beyond the classroom.
11. The headteacher and subject leaders are aware of the relative weaknesses in teaching. Not all teachers do not pay sufficient attention to providing work which is matched to pupils' learning needs, particularly for those who struggle with the subjects they are studying, those who are more able, as well as those who are gifted and talented. On occasion, too much of the lesson is dominated by the teacher and, as a result, there are too few opportunities for pupils to articulate their own understandings through discussion with each other.
12. Information and communication technology is used well to support teachers in their work. In English, for example, the use of the electronic whiteboard adds a new dimension to the teaching, enabling seamless transitions between learning activities. This enables work on texts to be genuinely integrated with appropriate and memorable video footage, securing pupils' attention and their engagement with the lesson. The resulting teaching is interactive and fast paced, and the standards achieved are higher than previous attainment of the boys in the class might suggest would be possible.
13. Questioning is used well to recap on previous learning at the start and at the end of lessons. At the start of a mathematics lesson, the teacher asked pupils to give an algebraic prediction and ensured that all pupils in the class answered, even those who had not raised their hands. Pupils generally respond well to questions, offering clear extended answers in response to questions and reflection on earlier learning. When asked to focus upon the motivation of characters in 'Macbeth', Year 9 pupils responded at considerable length, developing their personal opinions with very perceptive analysis that drew on evidence from across the whole play. In a Year 9 science lesson skilful questioning by the teacher enabled pupils quickly to understand selective breeding. The teacher clearly valued the answers pupils gave, building upon their responses to develop learning further. The quality of questioning by teachers is usually very good but there are times when questions are too closed. As a result, pupils' responses are short and superficial; or the teacher accepts responses without asking pupils to substantiate answers with appropriate references, and pupils take advantage of the leeway they are offered to answer too casually, or at insufficient length.
14. Teaching in the learning support centre is good. Appropriate support is given to pupils with special educational needs on an individual basis and teachers are skilled at using a range of strategies to support pupils' learning. Teachers and support assistants use humour and encouragement very effectively, asking questions appropriately to lead pupils to a better understanding of what tasks require. Because the work

atmosphere in the room is so warmly encouraging, relationships between adults and pupils are excellent and pupils respond well, stick to the tasks they have set themselves, and maintain a good work rate. Individual education plans are appropriately constructed with clear and achievable targets and teachers and their assistants maintain careful records on individual pupils. Teachers plan well with colleagues from across the school, ensuring that, for example, textbooks are available to support coursework. As a result pupils who come to the learning support centre with coursework to complete, start work promptly and make good progress. When support is provided in lessons not in the learning support centre, it is also often very effective, but teachers do not consistently use the information from individual education plans to best effect.

Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are excellent and are strengths which contribute strongly to the ethos of the school.

15. Pupils are proud to attend Northampton School for Boys. They enjoy both their learning and being in school and work hard as a result. Sixth form students exemplify the school's aims in their genuine 'passion for learning'. Pupils are keen to come to school and their behaviour is excellent. They enjoy very good relationships with their teachers and with their peers. All these factors contribute to the high standards achieved by the school.

16. In Years 9 to 11 pupils' attitudes to learning are excellent. They participate very well in class and in extra-curricular activities. In lessons, pupils of all abilities are confident about asking questions because they know their teachers will be helpful and other pupils will be supportive. In a Year 9 English lesson, most pupils in the class volunteered answers, in response to the teacher's consistent encouragement and clear expectation that they would both work hard and keep to tight deadlines. In a Year 9 information and communication technology lesson, pupils sustained a high level of concentration throughout the lesson. Several boys quickly and enthusiastically helped their peers who were experiencing difficulty with the technicalities of the database that they had to construct. At the same time they made sure that they met the deadline set by the teacher to complete their work. In Year 10 almost all the pupils in an English class contributed to a discussion on the meaning of complex metaphors. In science, Year 11 students worked attentively and confidently throughout a lesson, diligently and correctly answering questions on ionic bonds and using textbooks independently and appropriately to find additional information. In a lower set French lesson, Year 9 pupils were less willing to use their French, until firmly required to do so by the teacher, but were conscientious when working in pairs to test out their spoken French, showing more confidence with a peer than with the whole class.

17. Pupils are mature, poised young adults, have high self-esteem and respond to challenge very well. The extensive provision for extra-curricular activities, lunchtime clubs and residential opportunities have a significant effect upon the very good personal development of pupils, who are keen to take up every opportunity that the school provides. Attendance at the lunchtime sports and musical activities, as well as, for example, the maths lunchtime clubs, is very high. Pupils and sixth form students regularly practise a range of sports skills at lunchtime and display excellent cooperation with each other. At a rehearsal for 'Guys and Dolls' both Year 9 pupils and sixth form students displayed an excellent camaraderie with each other, yet were zealous and committed in their adult approach to the development of the skills they needed to present a professional performance. A Year 13 student showed the very highest standards of personal development in a professional, and technically excellent

accompaniment to a rehearsal of the male voice choir. During the rehearsal, all the pupils and students showed their clear enjoyment of singing everything from 'barber shop' to 'blues' and a determination to contribute to a performance which was of the very highest quality.

18. When given the opportunity, pupils show a very good capacity to work independently, take initiative and show responsibility. In art, Year 11 pupils responded very well to the high standards they had set for themselves. They displayed a high level of independence and initiative but, at the same time, provided valuable assistance to their peers in the evaluation of examination work. Year 9 pupils spoke of how they are keen to volunteer to show visitors around the school or represent their form on the School Council.
19. Behaviour is excellent, both in class, during movement between lessons, at breaks and lunchtime, before and after school. Virtually all pupils are consistently courteous to their teachers, to each other, and to visitors. On the rare occasions that there are less than excellent standards, pupils respond with maturity and good humour to reproof. Pupils spoke of how well supported they feel, by both their peers and teachers, if an isolated incidence of bullying occurs.
20. Relationships are very good. Relationships between pupils and teachers are characterised by mutual respect. The supportive atmosphere and good humour that prevails in many lessons is very effective in establishing and maintaining very good relationships. Pupils with special educational needs feel very positive about their learning because of the excellent relationships they enjoy with their teachers and they receive very effective individual support. Pupils for whom English is an additional language also approach their work with confidence because of these very good relationships. The very good level of racial harmony, reported upon in the previous inspection, has been sustained.

The Honours Programme meets the needs of gifted and talented pupils well

21. The Honours Programme is an excellent feature of the school's provision for gifted and talented pupils. It has recently been appropriately extended to give many more pupils access to the imaginative enrichment of the curriculum it offers, while ensuring that it still caters for the needs of the most academically able. It is informed by a clear philosophy which recognises that pupils are not necessarily gifted across the whole curriculum, that some pupils may be late developers, and that the school has a responsibility to identify latent potential in its pupils. The criteria for entry to the programme are therefore appropriately broad and flexible, allowing for pupils who are exceptionally able in only one aspect of their studies to join, and school monitoring systems are sufficiently sensitive to identify when a pupil might best benefit from inclusion in the programme.
22. Pupils on the programme come into contact with a very good range of guest speakers and activities, covering a breadth of topics designed to enhance and support both academic and social development. Subjects for debate in the current academic year have included metaphysics and morality, and pupils have had the opportunity to visit opera and theatre, and to attend university conferences. During the week of the inspection students were involved in the regional finals for entry to the European Youth Parliament, listening to speeches about the Internet's role in business and taking part in discussions on Marxism and freedom of information. The school is successful in meeting its own target of providing activities for honours pupils every three weeks.

23. The programme is very well managed and led. Its ability to support pupils in their preparation for adult life and deal with the social requirements and expectations of higher education is a key strength of the school. At least a third of the programme is available to the whole school, at the discretion of the programme leader, and the programme sits comfortably inside the school ethos that encourages everyone to make full use of the opportunities presented.
24. Parents, students and pupils are warm in their appreciation of the Honours Programme and the opportunities it offers; those taking part recognise its value to them both socially and academically. The programme promotes both high standards within the curriculum and a breadth of learning beyond the subject curriculum. The school is now engaging in developing its curriculum and its approaches to teaching to ensure that provision for gifted and talented pupils is also securely embedded within all subject lessons.

An extensive programme of extra-curricular activities, including additional support for pupils during the lunchtime and after school, is strongly supported by staff.

25. The school offers an impressive range of extra-curricular activities, with pupils, staff, outside coaches and other experts working together during lunch breaks, after school, and at weekends to offer very high quality provision, valued by pupils and their parents. The programme of activities is extensive, including sport, music, academic pursuits (such as mathematics, chess and computer clubs), and activities of more general interest. Many sessions are taught, although the programme allows for good independent learning and for the development of social and academic skills.
26. This programme offers outstanding opportunities for music, sport and drama. Over 150 pupils have instrumental lessons as part of the programme, with the school subsidising costs in order to ensure equality of access for all pupils, to opportunities to perform in a male voice choir, brass ensemble, concert band, big band, string quartet, a jazz and a clarinet ensemble. During the inspection, a rehearsal with a male voice choir was observed where students from Year 13 were working expertly with their teachers in details of expression, technique and quality of performance. Students frequently attend the theatre to watch plays performed in French and English, and take part very actively in drama themselves, for example, rehearsing to a very high standard a production of 'Guys and Dolls'.
27. Similarly excellent provision is made for pupils to develop sporting interests, skills and expertise. Teachers demonstrate exceptional commitment in providing additional teaching and coaching and arranging sporting fixtures against other schools. The high quality of this provision is rightly acknowledged by pupils, students and parents as a significant strength of the school.
28. A programme of residential experience contributes to the high quality of the extra-curricular provision. The school has been organising residential visits for the last ten years, to places abroad including USA, Canada, France, Denmark, Italy, India, Australia, Spain, Greece and the Czech Republic. In addition, the school organises visits closer to home for large numbers of pupils, who participate in the visits either in the autumn term if they are in Year 9, or in July if they are in Year 12, thereby minimising any loss of curriculum time. A good example of subject-focused visits are the science department visits to West Wales for biology students and to Barcelona for chemistry students. Science visits are also made with Years 9 and 10 pupils to the Science Museum in London, and the Space Centre at Leicester University. Many

other departments organise curriculum visits to enhance the teaching of their subjects.

29. These opportunities provide valuable experiences for the educational, social and cultural development of the pupils, as well as significantly enhancing their learning, their self-confidence and their self-esteem and are an important contribution to the life and ethos of the school.

Strong, forward-looking leadership ensures that pupils experience a very high quality education within a stimulating environment.

30. The headteacher provides very good leadership. The headteacher and his senior colleagues manage the school very well. Subject leaders provide high quality professional leadership, and support other staff well. These have all contributed to improvements in results and to the high standards.
31. The headteacher gives a clear sense of direction. This is translated into the very effective management that is now strongly focused upon sustaining the very impressive improvements in standards that have been made in recent years. Initiatives are carefully evaluated prior to implementation to ensure they match with whole-school priorities. As senior managers rightly recognise, an important priority for the school is to prepare properly for the change of intake age from 14 to 11. They are addressing this issue positively and appropriately, whilst continuing to ensure that pupils currently attending the school receive the best possible education that can be provided.
32. Governors and senior managers work together as a very effective team, providing the school with a sense of direction and creating a climate where high achievement can thrive. This success is also as a result of attention to detail at every level of decision-making and implementation.
33. The school takes a strong stance against racism and incidents of bullying. There are thorough and effective procedures for dealing with any incidents which do occur.
34. The school benefits from, and uses very well, funding from the Northampton Old Grammar School Foundation and from other benefactors, who contribute to the costs of additional staff and promote opportunities for curriculum enrichment, through a wide ranging programme of extra-curricular activities, including many residential educational visits. Income per pupil is very high. The school makes very good use of its funds and achieves best value through careful budget planning and monitoring.
35. The school's buildings and other physical resources are very good. The oldest parts of the building have been maintained well and are adequate for academic teaching. The newest parts of the school are outstanding. They have been built and maintained to a very high standard indeed, and provide exceptional accommodation. There are plans to improve further the facilities for sport and upgrade the dining hall, bringing them up to the superb standard of the sports hall and Cripps building, which accommodates the art and English departments, study rooms and a splendid theatre.
36. Teachers are supported very well by a dedicated team of ancillary staff. The immaculate school grounds and buildings are kept free of litter and graffiti. Teaching resources in practical areas are maintained to a high standard, and the school's information systems and reprographic arrangements enable teachers to focus upon their teaching without having to spend large periods of time on routine administration.

37. Excellent use is made of information communication technology in managing the school. Communications between staff are very good: teachers have easy access to information both about their subjects and to data about their students, and comprehensive records of students' progress are kept.
38. The headteacher and leadership team ensure consistently high quality provision through an ongoing cycle of Quality Initiatives, by which they monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of most aspects of the school. These are carried out in a rigorous manner and have helped the school to improve significantly. Running alongside the Quality Initiatives is a very effective performance management programme, which helps teachers to identify their strengths and areas for professional development and leads to improved teaching and learning. The latter are met through a generous staff development programme. Throughout the inspection a willingness to engage in professional dialogue was apparent from all staff, further endorsing the inspection judgement that this school is a rapidly improving school with the capacity to build on its considerable success.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED?

39. The plans the school made after the last inspection to meet statutory requirements for religious education throughout the school, as well as a daily act of collective worship, have yet to be implemented.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

The school should now:

- (1) fully implement plans to meet statutory requirements for religious education throughout the school, as well as a daily act of collective worship.

Sixth form

- (1) ensure the provision for religious education in the sixth form meets statutory requirements.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 9 – 11	31
	Sixth form	74
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students		45

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
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Years 9 – 11

Number	2	5	17	7	0	0	0
Percentage	6	16	55	23	0	0	0

Sixth form

Number	7	28	23	15	1	0	0
Percentage	9	37	31	20	1	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 [enter Years 9 - 11 and the sixth form as each lesson represents more than one percentage point.

Information about the school's students

Pupils on the school's roll

	Y9 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	834	446
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	55	

Special educational needs

	Y9 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	29	2
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	194	7

English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	98

Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	3
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	14

Attendance**Authorised absence**

	%
School data	5.7
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	284	0	284

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	218	248	247
	Girls	n/a	n/a	na
	Total	218	248	247
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	77 (84)	87 (86)	87 (83)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	36 (46)	70 (69)	60 (50)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	237	245	214
	Girls	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Total	237	245	214
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	83 (87)	86 (89)	75 (70)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	49 (53)	71 (65)	50 (48)
	National	31 (31)	42 (39)	33 (29)

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	2001	292	0	292

GCSE results		5 or more grades A*- C	5 or more grades A*- G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	229	284	286
	Girls	0	0	0
	Total	229	284	286
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	78 (70)	97 (97)	98 (99)
	National	48 (47)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	51.7 (46.5)
	National	39.0 (38.4)

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	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	123	27

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Male	Female	All
School	Number of candidates	123	27	150
	Average point score per candidate	18.9 (19.7)	27.6 (26.1)	20.8 (20.8)
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9 (17.8)	17.9 (18.6)	17.4 (18.2)

		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	123	27	150	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Average point score per candidate	19.1	28.1	20.8	N/A	N/A	N/A
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.5	17.4	N/A	N/A	N/A

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

International Baccalaureate		Number	% success rate
Number entered for the International Baccalaureate Diploma and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all they studied	School	0	
	National		

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	23
Black – African heritage	4
Black – other	5
Indian	57
Pakistani	11
Bangladeshi	12
Chinese	6
White	1132
Any other minority ethnic group	

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	1	
Black – African heritage		
Black – other	1	
Indian		
Pakistani		
Bangladeshi		
Chinese		
White	22	
Other minority ethnic groups		

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y9 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	74.1
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.3

Education support staff: Y9 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	19
Total aggregate hours worked per week	579

Deployment of teachers: Y9 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	73.4%
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Average teaching group size: Y9 – Y13

Key Stage 2	N/a
Key Stage 3	25
Key Stage 4	26.4

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	21
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	23.9

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

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000
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	£
Total income	4831497
Total expenditure	4863612
Expenditure per pupil	4133
Balance brought forward from previous year	52820
Balance carried forward to next year	20705

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out

1290

Number of questionnaires returned

360

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	54	40	4	1	0
My child is making good progress in school.	56	39	4	0	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	44	51	2	0	3
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	34	53	8	1	2
The teaching is good.	53	43	1	0	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	53	38	6	1	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	66	28	3	1	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	84	15	0	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	48	43	7	1	1
The school is well led and managed.	65	31	1	0	4
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	57	36	3	1	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	54	36	2	1	6

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

40. Sixth form results are well above other schools and those of other sixth form providers. In 2001, all students in Year 13 gained at least one A to E grade at A level and over half gained A to C grades in their examinations. The achievement of the boys is well above national average and the girls' achievement is very high. Over the last four years results have risen faster than the national trend.
41. Boys transfer from Year 11 in the school into the sixth form if they achieve five or more A* to C grades at GCSE. Some students enter with relatively modest achievements but they make good or very good progress during Years 12 and 13. Students who enter the sixth form with above average GCSE grades, both from Northampton School for Boys and other schools, continue to sustain these high levels, and achieve very highly by the time they leave. Girls often enter the sixth form with high GCSE grades and continue to make good progress during the two years, leaving with results that are very high, putting the school into the top five per cent in the country. Students with special educational needs or with English as an additional language achieve at least as well as their peers. Students from different ethnic backgrounds also achieve equally well.
42. In 2001, standards of attainment in A level examinations were well above the national average in art and design, music, psychology, sociology and sports and physical education studies. They were above average in economics, English language, English literature and physics. Standards in biology, drama, design and technology, geography and mathematics were similar to those achieved nationally. Results in chemistry, computer studies, French, history, business studies and economics were below average. In Spanish the numbers were too small for a comparison to be made.
43. Students' performance in individual subjects fluctuates year by year. Performance in physics has been better than in other subjects over the last four years. Very high standards have also been achieved in psychology and mathematics where, with the exception of 1999, students performed better than in their other subjects. In music, students have achieved well for the last three years. In economics, English language, French and geography students have achieved well for the last two years. Achievement in history and biology has fluctuated every year. In business studies students' relative performance is lower than in other subjects.
44. Students in Year 12 were entered for the new AS examinations for the first time in 2001 and so there are no national comparisons available. In some subjects, notably sciences and mathematics, students continued into the full A level without taking the AS examination. When students took the AS examination, they performed well with three-quarters or more of the students achieving A to C grades and most students choosing to continue into the full A level.
45. In most sixth form lessons seen, standards are above national expectations for the courses being followed. Boys and girls achieve well. In mathematics, students are skilled at finding solutions to problems and exploring possible alternatives. In science lessons, students show a good understanding of the terminology and use it correctly. For example, in a chemistry lesson, higher attaining students had a good understanding of spectroscopy. Students' achievement in design and technology is

good. Year 12 students demonstrate good knowledge of the design processes and in Year 13 students used this well when using computers to generate their design ideas. Although the standards of work seen in Year 13 in business studies was just below average, the students have made good progress when previous grades are taken into account.

46. Students in Year 12 are achieving well. The few students studying intermediate GNVQ business in Year 12 produce work of a satisfactory standard and work well independently, for example, in research using the Internet. Students studying economics in Years 12 and 13 are achieving good standards. For example, students in Year 12 showed good understanding of types of unemployment in the UK and represented the information well in diagrammatic form. Standards are above average in sport and recreation activities, with many talented sportsmen and women performing to a very high level. In examination work in sports and physical education, students in Year 12 are achieving in line with expectation. In Year 13, students are producing work of the expected standard and showing good analytical and observational skills when reviewing performance.
47. Standards in the expressive arts are high. In art and photography, students are achieving well above national averages. In drama, students in Year 13 are achieving very well with the majority of students working at the highest levels at A level. In music students are very capable in composing, exploring and experimenting in a range of styles, as well as in their instrumental accomplishment. In geography in Year 12, students recognise links with earlier learning and successfully extend their understanding further through very good use of research on the Internet. By Year 13 students are producing work of a very high standard using evidence from geographical case studies capably. In history, students in Year 13 are achieving well following good results in their AS examinations in 2001. In English literature lessons, the standards of spoken English of students in Year 13 are very good, and students formulate complex hypotheses through argument well. In modern foreign languages, standards of achievement are better in French than in Spanish. In Year 13 standards in a French lesson were very high when students conducted a debate showing both spontaneity and an ability to argue persuasively in French.
48. Students following A level courses generally have well developed key skills. They communicate clearly, both orally and in writing. They use their mathematical skills competently in subjects such as science, geography and business studies and use computers with confidence to word-process their work and search for information on the Internet. On the few occasions when pupils' key skills are limited, the school makes good arrangements to bring them up to standard, for instance, students are provided with extra lunch-time lessons in mathematics.
49. The number of students continuing from the school into the sixth form is very high. Nearly all students stay for the full length of their courses. A very high percentage of students, over three quarters of the total in 2001, continue on to university. Fourteen students have been offered places at Oxford or Cambridge for 2002.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

50. Sixth form students meet the aims of the school very well displaying a 'passion for learning'. Their attitudes are very positive and they consistently work hard, being keen

to produce work to the highest standard. Students are excellent ambassadors for the school, frequently representing it at prestigious events such as the School Proms at the Royal Albert Hall, or playing sport in the West Indies.

51. Behaviour is exceptionally good. Students are determined to learn, and pay close attention to their teachers and to their peers, working well together when required. They respond well to questions and readily involve themselves in class discussions. They show self-confidence, for example, in presenting their work to others and in explaining how well they are doing to inspectors. In French, students showed their determination to communicate spontaneously and demonstrate independence in the language through fluent improvisation. In an all boys class in Year 12 in sociology, boys initiated a discussion and spoke with confidence about class and education. However, in some lessons, for example, in psychology, girls are more responsive to teacher questioning and are more willing to initiate a discussion.
52. Students are positive about the sixth form, with a high percentage of them agreeing that they are encouraged to study independently. They show a maturity in explaining their thinking, for example, girls new to the school spoke of how well they were helped to settle. They felt that, on academic matters, their very good relationships with teachers would provide them with the help they needed.
53. Students succeed because they have high personal ambitions, enjoy the subjects they are studying, take careful note of teacher guidance on ways they can improve and work well independently, both in school and at home. The supportive atmosphere and good humour that prevails in many lessons is very effective in establishing and maintaining very good relationships. Relationships between students and teachers are characterised by mutual respect. Students' 'passion for learning' enables them to cover significant aspects of their course in each lesson. They are very competent independent learners who are well prepared for study at university or college and throughout life.
54. Students respond in an adult way to their very good learning environment. They appreciate the high quality accommodation they have for the expressive arts where they are treated as students working in the professional theatre. In art, students use their dedicated individual working spaces well, gradually creating a gallery of their creative work. Students respond well to advice given by teachers on ways to improve their folders of notes, so that by Year 13 these folders are a useful aid to learning.
55. Attendance in the sixth form is higher than in sixth forms in other schools. This very good attendance has a marked impact on the progress students make and the standards they achieve. The school monitors individual attendance closely. Punctuality is very good.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

56. The quality of much of the teaching in the sixth form is very good. Almost all teaching is satisfactory or better, over three-quarters is good or better, almost half very good and one in ten lessons is excellent. Learning in the sixth form follows a similar pattern.
57. Excellent teaching was seen in chemistry, drama, French and design and technology. This led to the highest quality of learning by students. Very good teaching was seen in art, English Literature, geography, mathematics, economics, psychology, sociology, physical education, physics and biology, and in response, students were highly motivated, worked hard and achieved very well. The quality of teaching seen in Spanish, history, music and business was generally satisfactory or better, with some

relatively weaker features of teaching observed in lessons.

58. The greatest strengths in teaching were the teachers' subject knowledge used well in explanations and throughout lessons; good planning which linked lessons to syllabus and examination requirements; good use of technical language; high quality assessment; high expectations of what the students could achieve; the use of a range of teaching methods; innovative and good use of computers both to support and to extend students' learning. The strengths of teaching that were seen in lessons were also apparent in the work the students had completed over previous months.
59. Teachers are highly skilled, rigorous and have high expectations, all of which lead to good performance on the part of students. In mathematics, for example, teaching is characterised by genuine academic rigour and an impressive focus upon accuracy and attention to detail. Teachers are particularly skilful at ensuring that students both understand complex mathematical concepts and employ mathematical techniques with confidence when solving problems. Teachers are very knowledgeable and draw on this expertise, for example, in physics, to provide clear detailed explanations in a careful logical sequence that allow students to understand difficult ideas and relationships. Care is taken to check students' understanding at each stage and to clarify misconceptions. Team-teaching is used very effectively in design and technology, geography and physical education.
60. Teachers make very good use of a wide range of materials to support students' learning and meet their individual needs. Very good use is made of information and communication technology to broaden students' understanding and to widen the search for information. Computers were used well to provide inspirational teaching in French, when students retrieved information to supplement their notes and were then able to sustain an animated debate in French for over twenty minutes. Students in business studies make good use of the wide range of case studies stored by teachers on the school computer, to extend and enhance their learning in class.
61. Few weaknesses in teaching were apparent, but where they exist they restrict sixth-formers' achievements. In Spanish, planning for lessons often focuses too much upon the content to be taught and not enough on the skills students need to display. Lesson time is not always used to best effect. In some lessons, for example, history, teaching focuses upon delivering the content rather than on developing students' learning skills. On occasions, teachers tend to dominate in the classroom and students take less responsibility than they should. In business studies lessons, at times, the teacher talked for too long and gave the students too few opportunities to ask questions about what was being taught.
62. Teachers expect students to work at a high standard both at home and during private study time. Homework is set regularly and appropriately integrated into teachers' lesson planning. Homework, or work to be completed during private study, is almost always demanding and closely related to the work done in lessons. Students are conscientious in doing it and generally complete it very successfully. Assignments are set appropriately, and students are clear both about the standard that is needed to gain high grades and the work they must complete to achieve these. Students already display the qualities which will ensure they are successful as lifelong learners, for example, installing computer software on their home computers so that they can complete assignments at home, using computer-aided design packages for design and technology A level.

HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO

STUDENTS?

63. The school provides a rich curriculum for its students from which they benefit both academically and socially. It is well planned to meet the needs of all its students, while focusing on a predominantly academic curriculum. Students themselves are satisfied that the curriculum meets their needs and aspirations and the sixth form is heavily over-subscribed. Twenty-five subjects are offered at A level, including government and politics, psychology, and photography as well as vocational business at intermediate level. Those students who are seeking a less academic curriculum are given help and guidance in finding appropriate provision at a college. The school enjoys a good relationship with the main provider locally of vocational courses which enables an effective choice for students.
64. A strength of the curriculum is the provision for students who take part in the Honours Programme. This has recently been extended to enable substantially more students to take advantage of the enrichment activities it offers, and is now available to the highest achieving ten per cent of students and pupils in the school. It offers a breadth of activities, including talks from visiting guest speakers, opportunities to attend theatre and opera and invitations to take part in conferences and in debates. During the week of the inspection students were involved in the regional finals for entry to the European Youth Parliament, listened to speeches about the Internet's role in business and took part in discussions on Marxism and on freedom of information. The programme is successful in preparing students academically, socially and culturally for the challenges of higher education and it is held in high regard by the students who take part in it. The Honours Programme meets well the needs of students who are gifted and talented and is a strength of both sixth form and main school provision. On occasion, activities are quite rightly available to other students. Nevertheless, the school is right to constantly review the impact on those students who are not designated for the Honours Programme.
65. All students in the sixth form also benefit from an extensive programme of extra-curricular enhancement, which is also provided in the main school. The school provides over thirty-six enrichment activities with opportunities for sport, music and drama judged by inspectors to be outstanding. In sport students have access to training both in school and to outside coaching; as a result many students represent the school in sport at local, national and international level. Students also have access to a very substantial programme of musical activities where the highest standards are achieved. Students frequently attend the theatre to watch plays performed in French and English and take part very actively in drama themselves, for example rehearsing to a very high standard for a production of 'Guys and Dolls'. This provision is rightly identified by students and by parents as a key strength of the school, promoting both high standards within the curriculum and a breadth of learning beyond it.
66. Provision for residential education is similarly exceptional, making an excellent contribution to students' learning and to their personal development. The programme of visits is highly valued by students who have had the opportunity to study music and sport, for example, in the West Indies and South Africa. For students entering the school in Year 12, residential opportunities are particularly valued as part of their induction process.
67. Those students who do not choose to take part in residential education are offered a choice of work-experience placements in Year 12 which are also available to the few students following post-16 vocational courses. Students' perceptions of this

provision are positive. Nevertheless, the school does not have sufficient links with business and industry although there are initiatives in place, such as the Neighbourhood Engineers' Scheme, on which the school can build.

68. Although key skills are not taught separately, standards of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology are high and students are well prepared to meet the challenges of their chosen subjects. The school has recognised the need to identify those students who may require additional support and is putting in place appropriate mechanisms in order to do this.
69. Provision in the sixth form for the promotion of social, moral and cultural education is very good. Students consider issues of morality in English, for example, when studying the poetry of the first world war and are sensitive to issues of gender, for example when studying O'Keefe's flower paintings in art. In many subjects they are given and respond well to opportunities to work collaboratively, particularly in drama, for example, when discussing audience response to their performance of Lysistrata.
70. The school does not, however, comply fully with the requirement to provide a collective act of worship or religious education in the sixth form.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

Assessment

71. Procedures for the assessment of students' academic progress are very effective. Using GCSE points scores as a baseline, the school develops both minimum and potential target grades, which allow for the 'added value' effect of good teaching and learning. Students' progress is frequently assessed by grades awarded for coursework, trial exams, internal tests and, as applicable, AS level results. This process results in a performance grade known as a 'working at grade', which is then judged against predicted targets. This system is very effective in identifying which students need support, and in which subjects. Parental support is considered to be very important, and parents are informed whenever students are working below their minimum target grade. Comprehensive formal reports are issued each term and include judgements on how well students are achieving and what they need to do to improve further.

Advice, support and guidance

72. As a result of the impressive assessment system, effective means of support and guidance have been initiated. Good day-to-day guidance in lessons is supplemented by extra lessons for those needing to catch up, or needing additional support in aspects of a subject. This year the school has introduced a new system of mentoring by personal tutors as part of the support being offered. In Year 13 individual students meet weekly with a designated mentor (less frequently in Year 12) during which up-to-date assessment records are used as a basis for discussion. A number of these sessions were observed and excellent practice was seen. The one-to-one discussions are expensive in terms of staff time, though the time is also used to supervise private study. Discussions are very valuable but if the impact is to justify the cost, full attendance by all students at scheduled meetings is required.
73. Good advice is given for university and degree choices and UCAS applications. Careers advice from the external agency is improving from a less than satisfactory position. Personal support continues to be the responsibility of form tutors. Students

are given good help to settle in the sixth form through an effective induction programme. The school rightly recognises that the integration of girls into the sixth form can be improved still further.

74. Students' welfare, health and safety are very well secured by the school. Fire protection, first aid facilities and the management of behaviour and attendance are all of the highest order.

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

Parents' views

75. Parents' views of the school are in almost all cases extremely positive. In their answers to the questionnaire and at the pre-inspection meeting, parents were appreciative of the support and guidance offered to students, in particular those who have special educational needs. They recognise the high standards the school achieves and the quality of its teaching, and value the extra-curricular activities provided by the school. Parents agree that the amount of homework set for their children is appropriate, and that their personal development is carefully fostered, with teachers showing respect for the students in their care.
76. Inspection evidence supported the extremely positive views parents have of the school, while noting that students in the sixth form were on occasion unduly constrained by school rules, in particular, those relating to the wearing of coats at the end of the school day. The concerns expressed by a few parents that the Honours Programme was 'elitist' were not confirmed in the inspection because the programme is designed specifically to meet the needs of gifted and talented students. The school offers very good provision for the academically able student, as well as for those with learning difficulties.

Students' views

77. Students also hold positive opinions about the school. Questionnaire returns, from a large majority of students, praise the choice of courses available, the quality of teaching they receive, the opportunities provided for independent study and research, and the detailed information they receive which enables them to settle readily into sixth form life. They value highly the careful assessment of their work and information that they are given about their progress. They said they like the school and would recommend it to others.
78. A significant proportion of students were unhappy about the careers advice they had received, felt that the school did not always either take their views into account or provide help with personal problems. Students new to the school would have welcomed more time to build up relationships with their form tutors and a minority believed the school to be concerned about its reputation for academic excellence to the detriment of some aspects of student welfare, for example, advice and guidance on work and vocational options.
79. Inspection findings confirmed the positive views the students have of the school and welcomed their openness, their good manners and confidence in expressing their views. The school has identified the changes it wishes to implement in order to

develop its careers education programme and a sound start has already been made. It has also correctly identified the need to find new ways to listen to the views of sixth-formers, especially concerns raised by some girls, and is taking appropriate steps to address these. Inspectors also found that, whilst the school does indeed pay great attention to academic excellence, there was no evidence that this has a negative impact on other aspects of school life.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

Leadership and management

80. Leadership of the sixth form by the director and the sixth form team is strong and very effective. The sixth form is a significant part of the school and is managed very well. Standards of achievement at A level are well above average and have improved steadily since the previous inspection. There is an ethos of continuous improvement so that the standard of teaching and learning is reviewed regularly to ensure that it is as high as possible. The governing body has a good awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of the sixth form.
81. Day-to-day management of the sixth form is very good. The school has established an excellent climate for learning and gives students very good personal support and advice through its tutorial systems. There is an inclusive atmosphere that encourages all students to feel part of the sixth form. Particularly good induction arrangements help students from Year 11 and students new to the school, especially girls, feel a sense of belonging. The recently introduced personal tutor system provides very good support for students' independent studies through individual interviews and supervised private study sessions. In addition the school provides high quality advice for application to university and higher education.
82. The strategic management of the sixth form is very good. The priorities in the sixth form's improvement plan are identified through the school's rigorous quality assurance systems. For example, there are effective systems in place to enable personal tutors to carry out their roles in a consistent way and feedback is shared to all on the best practice seen, with recommendations for action. Since the previous inspection the sixth form has nearly doubled in size and this expansion has been managed well. Managers use assessment information very well to evaluate the quality of education the school provides and to set targets for both individual students and for the sixth form as a whole.

Resources

83. The overall standard of resources in the sixth form is very good. There is high quality accommodation for students, with a good range of teaching rooms and facilities for study, including computer suites, a common room area and well-equipped library. Students make good use of computers in lessons and for private study. There has been innovative investment of time to produce materials to support students' private study on the school's Intranet site. The expertise and experience of teachers in the sixth form is impressive and they are deployed effectively to provide a rich and varied curriculum. Technician support in a number of subjects is used very effectively.

84. The school seeks best value when deciding about spending in the sixth form and is careful to evaluate the impact of these decisions. Bearing in mind the amount spent on the provision in the sixth form, the students' high standards, their good progress and personal development, the sixth form provides good value for money.

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

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

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

GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	1	100	78	0	13	2.0	1.6
French	1	100	62	100	15	5.0	1.5

GCE A level and AVCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	39	88	87	43	43	5.7	5.8
Chemistry	25	79	90	21	43	4.6	5.9
Biology	27	85	88	31	34	4.9	5.2
Physics	31	90	88	50	40	6.1	5.7
Design & Technology	24	96	91	28	30	5.5	5.4
Business studies	23	87	92	0	32	5.9	5.5
Economics	13	100	89	31	36	5.9	5.5
Computing/ICT	32	84	86	6	23	3.3	4.6
Physical Education	13	100	92	38	25	6.5	5.1
Art	22	96	96	69	46	7.5	6.6
Music	8	100	93	88	35	8.0	5.7
Drama	9	90	99	30	38	6.2	6.6
Geography	32	100	92	34	38	5.9	5.7
History	24	88	88	21	35	4.7	5.4
Government & Politics	9	100	N/a	22	N/a	6.0	N/a
Sociology	15	87	86	73	35	7.3	5.3
Psychology	30	100	N/a	37	N/a	6.3	N/a
English Language	6	100	91	17	30	5.7	5.3

English Literature	23	95	95	50	37	6.5	5.9
French	9	86	89	14	38	4.6	5.6
Spanish	4	50	89	0	39	1.5	5.7

Intermediate vocational qualifications

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		Average point distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Business Studies	17	82.4	43.7	5.9	38.1	0	17.7

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

85. Mathematics, physics and chemistry were inspected in depth. Biology was sampled. Standards in biology were at the national average in 2001 and well above average in 2000. This represents an improvement on the previous inspection when standards were below average. Teaching in the two biology lessons observed was very good.

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- The quality of sixth form mathematics teaching is good.
- Very high standards are achieved by the students.
- Teachers are rigorous in their teaching.
- Students have confidence in their teachers.
- Teachers are able to explain complex concepts methodically and clearly; they make great efforts to ensure that students understand principles before moving on to more demanding work.
- Teachers provide many opportunities for students to receive additional help with their mathematics.
- Learning is rapid and secure

Areas for improvement

- Teachers do not routinely encourage students to discuss with one another a variety of approaches to solving problems. Students would benefit from more open-ended questioning.
- Mathematical principles are rarely related either to everyday knowledge or to learning in other subjects.

86. In most years recently the standards achieved by sixth-formers in their A level mathematics examinations have been above national averages. For many students their mathematics results are higher than their results in other subjects, with a high proportion of students achieving A and B grades. Few gain less than a D grade.
87. The mathematics department is well managed by the head of department who takes pride in the students' achievements. Resources for the teaching of this subject are good and used well. Departmental guidance to staff is concise, as are the schemes of work. These cover each topic at an appropriate pace. The team of teachers in the department is committed to achieving high standards for its students, and because of their efforts, mathematics has become a popular and successful subject in the school.
88. Teaching is characterised by genuine academic rigour and an impressive focus upon accuracy and attention to detail. Teachers are particularly skilful at ensuring that students understand complex mathematical concepts and employ mathematical techniques with confidence when solving problems. Teachers are also scrupulous in ensuring that topics are fully understood before moving on to more demanding work, which may depend upon prior learning being secure. In some lessons very effective use is made of interactive whiteboards in delivering the taught part of the lesson before students move on to individual work.
89. In spite of the many opportunities to do so, teachers rarely relate the students'

learning to real life situations and students were unable to suggest how any of the topics taught could be applied to solve realistic problems.

90. The mathematics teachers in this school go far beyond the call of duty in providing opportunities for students to obtain additional help if they are finding a topic difficult. Extra lessons and clinic sessions are provided most days of the week; several students said that they had benefited greatly from the ready availability of additional help and all expressed great confidence in their mathematics teachers. This confidence is not misplaced. All the teachers of this subject have sound mathematical knowledge and some of them are exceptionally good mathematicians who are able to inspire a fascination with the subject.
91. As a result of the consistently good, and often very good teaching, the students' learning is almost always secure. When it is not students are shown how to improve and where to find help; they are always offered additional support. Particularly good practice occurs in the support for students who start A level mathematics from a basis of Intermediate GCSE; they are expected to attend additional lessons in algebra for half a term so that they are able to cope with the demands of the AS specifications.
92. Teachers are very good at questioning their pupils, to ascertain whether or not their understanding of the teaching is sound and to help students build new concepts upon those learnt previously. Teachers do not, however, give students sufficient opportunities to discuss with one another different approaches to solving a given problem, or to answer open-ended questions. In some lessons the less confident students receive less attention from their teachers, who focus mainly on those students who responded most rapidly.
93. Students are given demanding targets to achieve in this subject. Every student spoken to during the inspection knew their targets and how close they were to achieving them. In virtually all cases students' aspirations are very high and their commitment to their work, and their attitudes and behaviour in lessons, reflect this. Relationships between teachers and students are very good, and characterised by mutual respect. In spite of the students' confidence in their teachers and their high aspirations, many remained very passive in lessons. They rarely suggested approaches to the solution of a problem that were different from the teacher's and they rarely looked for links between topics. There is no difference in the progress that is made by boys and girls or by students from minority ethnic backgrounds. All students are treated fairly and all are encouraged to succeed.
94. In their teaching, teachers often refer to the examination requirements and show students how to obtain the highest possible marks. The examination board specifications are covered very thoroughly and students are equally competent in all aspects of the subject. The end of module tests that are set quite frequently are marked thoroughly and the students are aware of their overall assessments, and are also helped to rectify any mistakes. By contrast, much of their day-to-day work is not marked by some of the teachers. Other teachers mark books much more regularly and give the students very clear guidance on how to improve the setting out and accuracy of their work, and the appropriateness of the mathematical methods that they employ.
95. Homework is set regularly in this subject. It is almost always very demanding and closely related to the work done in lessons. Students are, almost without exception, conscientious in doing it, and most complete it very successfully.

96. There has been a steady improvement in examination results since the last inspection.

Physics

Overall, the provision in Physics is **very good**

Strengths

- Students' work seen in lessons indicates that the high standards achieved in recent years are being maintained.
- Teaching is never less than good and is often very good; teachers are very knowledgeable and make good use of a wide range of materials, including information and communication technology, to support students' learning.
- Students respond very positively to work in the subject, invariably showing a keen interest.
- A CD-ROM, which has been written by the department and issued to every student, provides a wide range of useful information including support materials, lesson plans and assessment tasks.
- Assessment data provides staff with detailed information on students' progress.
- There is a strong focus by management on ensuring quality teaching and learning through detailed planning and support for students within the subject.
- Performance management and other activities, such as the Quality Initiative, allows the team leader to monitor and evaluate the work of the department and some action has been taken in response.

Areas for improvement

- Many lesson plans are good, but some are too brief and have insufficient detail of the range of teaching and learning activities expected in lessons.

97. Standards achieved in physics examinations have risen from below national averages at the time of the previous inspection to above or well above national averages in recent years. The standard of students' work seen reflects these high standards. Students have a good grasp of basic concepts and usually cope well with the mathematical demands of the subject. They deal with topics such as radioactive decay competently and usually handle related formulae very competently.
98. Teaching is never less than good and is often very good. Teachers are very knowledgeable and draw on this expertise to provide clear, detailed explanations in a careful logical sequence that allow students to understand some difficult ideas and relationships. Care is taken to check students' understanding at each stage and to clarify any misconceptions. While students are working, teachers circulate asking questions that help students to think through problems and providing effective help for individuals and groups, which invariably overcomes the students' difficulties.
99. Teachers make good use of a wide range of materials to support students' learning. Good use is made of information and communication technology to broaden students' understanding. This includes the use of the Internet, data capture and analysis and simulations. For example, in a very good lesson on the Doppler Effect the teacher made very effective use of a real time simulation of a radio telescope. This reinforced the students' understanding and raised their awareness of the practical applications of astronomy.

100. Students cover a good range of work during the course, which is well matched to syllabus requirements. There is an appropriate emphasis on calculations and the consolidation of learning by attempting examination questions. Work is usually marked or teachers go through this in class so that students can ask questions, offer solutions and make appropriate corrections. Students find the latter particularly helpful. Students are also given helpful feedback on their written tasks and tests and this often includes a useful analysis and further explanation by the teacher of common errors or misconceptions.
101. Students come to their physics lessons keen to learn. They respond well to questions and are readily involved in class discussions. Having done their pre-lesson preparation, most demonstrate a good understanding of essential knowledge underpinning their learning and some make insightful comments, or ask questions that indicate a high level of understanding of the topic.
102. In line with science department practice, thorough assessments are conducted during and at the end of units of work. Data from these assessments is recorded systematically and detailed analysis, using information and communication technology, provides staff with detailed information on students' progress. This allows high achievement to be celebrated and underachievement to be identified and appropriate action to be taken.
103. Management of the department is good. Very effective use has been made of performance management and the school's Quality Initiative to monitor and evaluate the work of the science department. There is evidence of a continuing review of practice, for example, the physics department has recognised that the key assessments set by the department may be too challenging.
104. There is a strong focus by management on ensuring quality teaching and learning through detailed planning and support for students within the subject. Most aspects of this planning are very good. However, some lesson plans, whilst having clear statements of what the students will learn, do not provide sufficient detail of the range of teaching and learning activities needed to achieve these outcomes. An excellent CD-ROM, written by the department, is issued to every student. This provides a wide range of useful information including support materials, outline lesson plans and assessment tasks. Students make good use of the support materials, including revising key ideas in a unit already covered in preparation for work in a related unit where they will need this information.

Chemistry

Overall, the provision in Chemistry is **good**

Strengths

- Students' work seen in lessons indicates that standards are rising.
- Teaching is never less than good and is often excellent; teachers are very knowledgeable, highly skilled and have high expectations of students.

- Students enjoy the subject and have very positive attitudes to their work.
- Planning for the AS course is good and this is being extended to the second year of the A level course.
- Assessment data provides staff with detailed information on students' progress.
- There is a strong focus by management on ensuring quality teaching and learning through detailed planning and support for students within the subject.
- Performance management and other activities, such as the Quality Initiative, allows the team leader to monitor and evaluate the work of the department and some action has been taken in response.

Areas for improvement

- More effective action is needed when data and other information indicates under achievement by a small number of students.

105. Standards achieved in chemistry examinations rose in 2000 to above the national average, which was an improvement on the previous inspection when they were below the national average. However, in 2001, standards in A level chemistry were below the national average both in terms of A and B grades and A to E grades. In 2001, students' results were also below those predicted on the basis of their previous performance at GCSE.
106. The 2001 results contrast with the standards seen in lessons, which are at or above national averages with a relatively high proportion of students achieving very high standards. Students have a good grasp of practical techniques and most understand fundamental concepts, such as the mole and atomic structure, which underpin much of the work in chemistry. A very few students in Year 12, often with more modest GCSE results, are less secure with some of these basic concepts.
107. The teaching of chemistry is never less than good and often excellent. Teachers have an excellent knowledge of their subject and have an enthusiastic approach to teaching. Lessons invariably capture and sustain the students' attention and they are involved in the lesson by the skilful use of questions and class discussion. A particularly strong feature is the insistence that students use chemical terminology with precision and pay attention to accuracy in explanations. The quality of teachers' explanations, often of complex ideas, is very high and is well supported by the use of diagrams, drawings and analogies. Practical work is used very effectively both for investigations and to illustrate important ideas. Teachers have an appropriately high regard to safety and students invariably comply with safety requirements. For example, in a lesson involving bromine, students worked with care, making full use of protective equipment and the fume cupboard.
108. Students have a very positive attitude to their study of chemistry. Most carry out the pre-lesson preparation thoroughly and come to the lessons with a good understanding of the topics to be covered. The provision of lesson plans and other support materials to students, by means of a CD-ROM and course guides, helps them in their preparation for the lesson and in the consolidation of the work covered.
109. Chemistry benefits from procedures within the science department, which uses assessment during and at the end of the course to monitor students' progress. The results are compared with the students' target grades in order to ascertain whether sufficient progress is being made. This enables students to be aware of their achievements in relation to target grades. The department has recognised that a few students who complete the course in Chemistry achieve below predictions or grades

N or U. This underachievement is not always recognised or acted upon quickly enough during the course so that remedial action can be taken.

110. Management is good with an increasingly reflective approach to improvement. This reflective approach is illustrated by the department's consideration of the most appropriate course for the students and the subsequent decision to follow the Salter's course, which focuses strongly on the applications of chemistry. There is also a developing use of data to help managers take appropriately focused action to bring about improvement. Across the science department, which includes chemistry, there is a strong management focus on raising standards through effective teaching and learning. This includes detailed schemes of work and support for students' learning through student course guides and use of the Internet and the school's Intranet. The high standards of teaching and higher standards seen in lessons provide clear evidence of management impact.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

Design and Technology

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

Strengths

- Results at A level are above national average, and at AS level they are well above national average.
- Students' presentational and manufacturing skills are well developed.
- Most teaching is at least good; teachers have very good subject knowledge and high expectations of students.
- A good range of appropriate and up-to-date resources are used to support teaching and learning, including computer-aided design.

Areas for improvement

- Development and documentation of policy and practice across the team in particular, the department handbook.

111. The A level results over recent years have been at least in line with national results in the subject. In 2000, students achieved particularly well in design and technology with seventy-five per cent gaining grades A or B. Results at AS level in 2001 were also impressive with sixty per cent gaining grades A or B. There are no significant gender differences in recent examination results.
112. The standards of work seen during the inspection are above average. In Year 13, students are producing work of a high standard and making very good progress. They showed good understanding and ability in their use of computer-aided design and their freehand sketching is generally very good. They present ideas to a very high standard with sensitive use of line and colour to enhance the clarity of their designs. Most are producing work in line with, or above, the standard expected of them based on their GCSE result. They have a good understanding of resistant materials and their properties, and produce designs which exploit specific characteristics of these materials. The standard of their practical constructions is consistently high.
113. Year 12 students also demonstrate good knowledge of the subject. They are enthusiastic about their practical work in which they demonstrate considerable independence. One Year 12 group found difficulty with some of the concepts involved in their systems case study and as a result lacked motivation. Students show a good awareness of health and safety issues and adopt safe working practices.

114. Teaching ranged from unsatisfactory to excellent, with the vast majority being good or better. Teachers are usually well prepared for lessons and make learning objectives clear and explicit. For example, in one Year 13 lesson students were introduced to the work in a clear and concise manner. They were provided with proforma evaluation sheets, a digital camera, and were required to undertake self and peer evaluation of their work in a systematic manner within a specified time. Expectations of the quality of written evaluations were high and this resulted in a real sense of purpose, very good use of time and resources, and excellent progress by all students. Teachers make appropriate and sensitively timed interventions during individual working sessions, effectively reinforcing learning and enhancing achievement. Teachers ask probing questions which draw developed responses from students. Good use is made of team teaching.
115. Students respond well to this teaching and most enjoy their design and technology and make very good progress. They listen carefully to their teachers and respond well to instruction and advice. They enjoy being challenged and work hard, producing work of quality and quantity. For example, in a Year 12 lesson, two students discussed between themselves the advantages of communicating information via spreadsheets, and went on to present their research using tables and pie-charts. This mature response by students is further reflected in their conscientious approach to private study. Many take up the opportunity to install computer-aided design software on their home computers, enabling them to continue design work beyond lessons.
116. Design and technology is well resourced with computer hardware and software and up-to-date tools and equipment, including computer-aided design/computer-aided manufacture which support learning well. Workshops are located separately from the computer and design rooms. Students would benefit significantly if these facilities were located together to facilitate the integration of two-dimensional and three-dimensional work, and to reduce time lost in communication and movement between areas used for designing and those used for making.
117. A departmental improvement plan is in place. Departmental resources are well chosen and well managed. The new head of department is beginning to develop the schemes of work and practice across the team. However, the departmental handbook is at an embryonic stage and has yet to support consistent practice across the team. Policy and practice on important aspects of work, such as health and safety, lesson planning and display, for example, is unclear.

BUSINESS

118. The focus of the inspection for this area was on business and economics at AS and A level, but intermediate vocational business was sampled. Results in intermediate business are above the national average. One lesson was observed where teaching was satisfactory. The teacher provided appropriate individual support to students, who worked on their own, confidently using the Internet to research for information on personal finance. This led to a sound understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of the use of credit cards.

Business Studies

Overall, the quality of provision in business studies is **satisfactory** with some good features.

Strengths

- Students are keen to learn business and increasingly have a sound grasp of business theories and principles which they apply and use.
- Lesson objectives are shared with students, teachers' good subject knowledge is used well to help students build their knowledge and improve their understanding.
- Very good relationships between teachers and their students enables a positive ethos for business learning.
- Students have a good understanding of how well they are doing and the progress they are making.

Areas for improvement

- Develop business debate in lessons among the students.
- Develop links with a range of companies.

119. Students who study business in the sixth form have generally done less well at GCSE than their peers. Many students have not studied business in Years 10 and 11. When account is taken of these students' overall GCSE grades at the start of the business studies course, their grades at A level represent good achievement. The results in 2001 in A level business studies were below average with a very small percentage gaining the top grades. However, in relation to their GCSE results, these students did better than expected. A level examination results have fallen for the past three years, with the percentage of students achieving the top grades declining each year. This occurred during a period when there has been considerable staff turnover within the department.
120. The standards reached by students in Year 13, as seen in lessons and in written work, are just below expectations for the course. Year 13 students produce good quality word-processed coursework showing their understanding of, for example, the Boston Matrix and explain its importance when analysing potential markets in the local leisure industry. They clearly explain marketing strategies with reference to companies and retail stores and prepare an adequate business plan for a computer-games retail store. In Year 12, students show a similarly sound understanding of marketing and explain systematically, for example, how ferry companies adopt a range of pricing strategies to attract customers at different times of the year.
121. Teaching is always satisfactory and sometimes good. Lesson objectives are shared with students at the start of the lessons. Teachers use their good subject expertise successfully to help students build their knowledge and improve their understanding. In a good lesson, because the teacher's explanation was clear, focused and succinct, students understood the concept of management by objectives and were able to relate this to the management of Northampton School for Boys and its mission statement. Lessons are conducted at a sound pace and expectations are high. However, invariably the teacher is dominant for much of the lesson, using a narrow range of teaching styles, with insufficient checks made on students' understanding, particularly at the end of the lesson. Teachers too often answer questions for students or provide them with information rather than requiring the student to provide thorough answers. Questioning, while effective in checking initial understanding, is not used to initiate a debate or discussion between students so that they deepen their understanding using a range of modern commercial examples to support their reasoning.
122. Students enjoy business and are keen to learn and do well. They concentrate throughout lessons, sustaining their interest over considerable extended periods of

time, only occasionally losing concentration or going off-task. Relationships between students and their teachers are very good. Students are attentive, work productively and respond well to the high standards expected of them. Most students recall knowledge well and apply it both in class and in their coursework. Worksheet case studies are used extensively and students have a good understanding of how to access these resources on the computer system from home, so that they can supplement their work in lessons. However, insufficient links have been established with a range of local companies and personnel, to consolidate students' theoretical understanding.

123. Students have a very good understanding of how well they are doing and the progress they are making. Teachers carry out appropriate assessments and marks are discussed between staff and students to improve performance. Students understand the tracking system used by the school to monitor their progress, and use this well to identify the improvements they have to make to gain higher grades. Both students and their parents access up-to-date information on academic progress and reference this to the agreed target grades for each unit of work.
124. The department is well led and managed. Departmental priorities are appropriately focused upon raising standards at A level. The teachers have already acted upon some of the recommendations made in the Quality Initiative review of the department. Up-to-date departmental documentation is on the school's computer system. This includes a large number of resources to assist students in their learning, for example, case studies and model answers. The department is appropriately revising schemes of work to meet the new course requirements. In several aspects progress since the previous inspection appears to be unsatisfactory, however, on inspection evidence, business studies is now an improving department.

Economics

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

Strengths

- High standards of teaching.
- Confident, articulate and responsive students.
- Effective ranges of resources, study guides and case studies.
- Good planning and assessment arrangements.
- Improving examination results.

Areas for improvement

- Focused review during and at the end of the lesson to check student progress.
- Regular and consistent marking to indicate how students can improve their work.
- In-depth questioning to extend the understanding of individual students.
- The quality of student files.

125. Standards overall are good. A level results have for the last four years been in line with national standards, with the exception of 1999 when the results were significantly below national averages. However, since then, standards have risen each year and, in 2001, thirty per cent of the students achieved the A or B grade, with an average points score well above the national picture. Relatively few female students currently study the subject. The first set of results at AS level in 2001 were satisfactory.
126. The standards reached by students in Year 13, as seen in lessons and in written work, match course expectations. In an interesting lesson on balance of payments, international trade and unemployment the students showed a good grasp of the

macro economics involved, and discussed in detail aspects such as exchange controls, export restraints and quotas, and the potential impact on the world economy.

127. In Year 12 students show a good understanding of the central ideas of the subject. In one lesson on market failure and environmental issues, the students were beginning to explore and question concepts such as private costs and benefits and social costs and benefits, which they did in a thoughtful manner, responding intelligently to the teacher's prompting. In another lesson students were investigating unemployment in the UK, and through the use of a past paper learnt about various types of unemployment and how to represent them graphically.
128. Students observed in Year 12 are currently working above the national average with the majority of students confident, articulate and responsive. However, too many student files were disorganised, with notes, assignments and coursework in no particular order, with inconsistent evidence of supportive marking to guide the students on how to improve their performance.
129. Overall, the teaching of AS and A level economics is good with some outstanding features. Teachers are enthusiastic about the subject, confident and highly skilled. Schemes of work are well structured and detailed. Up-to-date and high quality materials ensure a balanced development of students' knowledge, understanding and skills. Lessons are well planned and have clear objectives and learning outcomes. Teachers successfully integrate theory and practice by using detailed and challenging case study materials. In a very good Year 12 cost-benefit lesson students effectively developed their critical thinking and identified what they needed to do to achieve higher marks. In a lesson on unemployment the teacher skilfully questioned and challenged the students to arrive at their own interpretations of the causes and solutions to unemployment, and then tested their knowledge and understanding. A Year 13 group made good progress because of a PowerPoint presentation used well by the teacher to illustrate the key points of international trade and the impact of tariffs. They subsequently went on to work with case study material drawn from the Internet on the potential trade war over the steel dispute with the USA which deepened and secured their economic understanding. All lessons are conducted at a good pace and expectations are high, with a good balance of time on different activities. However, more use could be made of directed questions to individuals, and to reviewing and checking students' understanding and progress, by allowing the students to respond in more depth rather than at a superficial level.
130. Assessment practice is thorough. Teachers monitor students' progress and record achievement against learning goals. Assessment procedures for A/S and A level are detailed and well documented. Assignments are marked promptly and most feedback is thorough. However, some written feedback observed in student files lacked sufficient detail, guidance or direction.
131. The leadership and management of economics is good. There are systematic quality assurance arrangements to monitor students' performance, effective deployment of resources to ensure that standards of achievement are sustained and that all students feel supported.
132. Students are keen to learn and display a very good attitude to work and a desire to succeed. Their experience and knowledge is broadened through an extensive programme of extra-curricular and enrichment activities, including visits and overseas exchanges, which contribute to raising standards and developing in the students a confidence and independence that directly impacts on learning. They have access to

a good range of varied resources for learning. However, more use could be made of exploiting links with business and industry both locally and nationally to support the learning for all students.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

133. During the inspection physical education lessons and sport and recreation lessons were observed.
134. The physical education department provides excellent Year 12 and 13 sport and recreation opportunities for all Year 12 and 13 students. The impressive programme includes tennis, football, the use of external coaches at the school, and the use of off-site facilities, including Virgin Active for fitness training. Students enjoy the opportunity for physical activity as a release from academic study, and display good attainment and take responsibility for aspects of the organisation. In tennis most students make good progress and develop and refine their skills because of excellent teaching.

Physical Education

Overall, the quality of provision in physical education is **excellent**. Students achieve very well in their A level examinations.

Strengths

- Very good examination results.
- Very good teaching.
- Very good use of facilities.
- Excellent extra-curricular activities for all Years 12 and 13 students.

Areas for improvement

- Marking does not consistently indicate how standards can be improved.
- Provide more opportunities for students to review their own progress.
- In-depth questioning to extend the understanding of individual students.

135. Results at A level have been consistently above national standards with the exception of 2000, when the results were slightly below the national average. The A level results in 2001 were very good and significantly above national standards with thirty-eight per cent of students achieving A or B grades with the average points score representing the best value added score in the school.
136. Results for AS in 2001 were satisfactory with fifty per cent of students obtaining A to C grades. However, a significant number of students achieved a grade D, and when questioned were clear about what they need to do to improve their grades in the future.
137. Overall, the students currently in Year 13 who were observed are producing work that is in line with the expectations for A level. A particular strength is the students' ability to link physical performance with theoretical aspects, and to review and evaluate performance through analysis and observation. A good example of this was seen in a lesson where students were asked to comment critically on the skill development of their colleagues in basketball and football, which they did very successfully. The session made a good contribution to the consolidation of subject knowledge and gave them the responsibility to contribute to the improvement in learning of their peers.

138. Portfolios submitted as part of A level evidence across a range of abilities in Year 13, provided examples of detailed and accurate work, including the use of technical vocabulary and in many cases a very good grasp of the knowledge and principles necessary for successful completion of the course. However, too many student files were disorganised, with notes, assignments and coursework in no particular order. Marking in a few instances was incomplete, and more supportive comments need to be given to reinforce what the student needs to do to improve further.
139. Students in Year 12 are achieving well in line with the course expectations. Within the group, there is a range of abilities, partly due to the fact that the students have not taken GCSE physical education. In Year 12 most students were developing a good understanding of the learning skills in physical education and were beginning to grasp the difficult concepts of cognitive theory and operant conditioning. All students make effective use of a wide range of relevant vocabulary and many were confident to respond to the challenging questioning from the teacher. Their writing however, shows in a number of cases a superficial response to questions, rather than more detailed and incisive answers.
140. The teaching is very good. The most effective teaching involves very high expectations, a good pace to lessons which results in good learning. Teachers have very good subject knowledge. Teachers use a very good range of teaching approaches including whole class demonstration, small group coaching as well as requiring individual students to organise and run, for example, the warm up activity for the lesson. All the teachers ensure that students understand the aims of the lessons so they know what they are to learn. Very good use is made of the excellent resources, particularly the sports hall facilities including a weights and fitness room, the tennis court area and the adjacent fields. The work of the advanced skills teacher is a major strength in the department, contributing to both the day-to-day teaching and the professional development of colleagues.
141. The students respond well to both the examination work and the programme of sport and recreation, they are motivated, interested and keen to learn, willing to persevere and practice to improve and were able to work cooperatively and competitively. High participation levels, with excellent standards of behaviour are the norm.
142. Students are very enthusiastic about physical education and their learning benefits directly from good teaching. The skill level of many of the students is good in tennis, football and basketball and their levels of fitness are good. There is a mutual respect between the students and teachers which creates an effective learning environment.
143. The department provides an excellent range of extra-curricular activities many of which contribute very effectively to developing the students' confidence and skills, examples of this include opportunities to achieve the Bronze Medallion, the Community Sports Leader Award and the opportunity for girls to play rugby. Visits abroad provide further experiences to play sport in the West Indies, South Africa and to take part in the visit to La Santa in the Canary Islands. In addition an inter-form competition takes place during either lunch-time or after school which meets the department's objective of mass participation.
144. The department is well led and managed. The head of department has a clear vision that 'sport is for all', whilst striving for excellence and high standards. The department is a very strong team, with each member of staff bringing different strengths to the department and excellent support comes from the other well qualified and experienced staff, including the physical education technician who makes a valuable

contribution to the extra-curricular programme. The tracking and monitoring of students' progress is good, with the recent development of software support to help manage this process.

145. At the time of the last inspection the A level course had just been introduced, and with the exception of 2000 the examination results have been very good. The school has been re-awarded Sportsmark Gold and overall physical education both at examination level and recreational level is a major strength, and makes a positive contribution to the reputation of the school.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

146. The focus of the inspection was on art, drama and music, but one lesson of photography in Year 13 was sampled. Last year all students entered for photography gained A to E grades and three-quarters of them gained the highest grades. In the lesson seen, most students made satisfactory progress with their photography projects, though a few had not organised their work sufficiently, and were hampered because dark-room facilities were not available in that lesson.

Art & Design

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

Strengths

- Teachers have good skills and subject knowledge.
- Assessment of students' work is thorough, and used to guide further development.
- Guidance given to individual students is good.
- A rich range of learning experiences is provided.

Areas for improvement

- A few students develop their work very slowly, and need deliberate strategies to improve the pace of development.

147. A level results last year were good. All students entering the examination gained A to E grades, and the large majority of these gained A to C grades. These results are considerably above the national average, and represent a trend of consistent improvement, especially in terms of the proportion of candidates gaining higher grades. Students performed well in terms of their development from their GCSE results.
148. The work seen during the inspection is consistent with this picture. Students in Year 13 show a well-developed understanding of cultural influences. For instance, they make thoughtful comparisons of the way that different artists approach similar topics, such as the flower paintings of Monet and Georgia O'Keefe. Others have been influenced by recent world events such as the September 11 atrocities and incorporate personal responses into their artwork. In Year 12, students show a good level of ability in interpreting subject matter through different media such as mosaic, or superimposed etching. Students demonstrate a readiness to experiment in their work, and discuss their ideas fluently, with their teachers or other students. In a few cases, students tend to wait for inspiration rather than seek it through experimental activity and because of this develop their work very slowly.

149. Overall, students take a very positive attitude to the subject. In particular, Year 13 students respond very positively to the fact that an art room is dedicated to their use, so that they have been allocated permanent working space. Students feel that the guidance they are given is good, and that assessments of their work in progress are accurate and useful in helping them to prepare to meet examination criteria. They respect their teachers' knowledge and ability, and are impressed by the skills shown by their teachers when demonstrating points for development.
150. Teaching in art is consistently good and sometimes very good. Teachers know their subject well and are ready to use their own skills in the art room. They become co-artists, and students respond to this very positively. When guiding students, they give short and longer term objectives for developing and improving work, and this helps students to form a clear view about how they will need to extend their work over time. Relationships are very good. Teachers build on the good personal relationships they have with students and use humour and praise to encourage students. Because of this, when teachers challenge the students' ideas, students enjoy joining in the artistic debate which follows. Assessments of students' work are careful and accurate and communicated sensitively. Appropriate records of progress are kept. Teachers have a very clear idea of the standards at which individual students are working.
151. Facilities are good and the range of resources allows for a good degree of experimentation. Work is enhanced by gallery visits, and by having an artist in residence, whose close working with students further enhances their perception of the role of art in society. Since the last inspection, A level results have improved significantly. Progress in the lessons observed was at least satisfactory and mostly good. All teaching seen was good, or very good, and assessment and student guidance continue to be a strength. This represents good progress.

Music

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

Strengths

- Very good results at A level.
- High standards of instrumental achievement.
- Outstanding standards of extra-curricular bands and ensembles.
- Excellent music suite.
- Very good relationships with students.

Areas for improvement

- Differentiation to challenge the high ability students.
- Monitoring and recording of departmental information.
- A level music technology.

152. Standards of music in the sixth form are very good. Since the last inspection the department has increased both its record of high attainment at A level and its popularity amongst students. The numbers of students on the AS and A level courses have more than doubled. The standards of instrumental achievement and the standards of the school bands and ensembles are excellent. Since the last inspection the school has gained a series of national awards in the National Band Festival. They have performed in the School Proms at the Royal Albert Hall and have won first prize in the Anglia Region of the National Jazz Festival. The department is housed in a purpose-built expressive arts block, which provides excellent accommodation.

153. Teaching in music is good and the department uses a range of methods to engage and sustain the interest of the students. For example, a Year 12 group learnt about their set work by arranging it for their own instruments and then presenting good quality work to the group. A Year 13 group tackled *Evita* by dividing the work between small groups who each researched a different musical issue through discussion and analysis. With the support of the teacher, the work was presented to the whole group. Throughout small group work, the staff makes good use of open questions to guide the learning. An important characteristic of the department is the close relationship between the course work, instrumental teaching and performance opportunities. A relatively weaker feature of teaching is a tendency to rely too much upon the students' high levels of instrumental skills and insufficiently challenge their musical skills and knowledge.
154. The quality of the compositions is good and a popular part of the course. Students prefer performing and composing to the written part of the examination. In Year 12, students are encouraged to develop and experiment in their own style of composition. They discuss their work knowledgeably and the more able students describe their work with reference to harmony taught in class and the influences of their admired composers. Students are confident and fluent in handling computers, software and keyboards. The school also gives opportunity for good compositions to be performed. In Year 13 the work is significantly more mature than in Year 12. Compositions are more involved and include chromatic harmony and more developed musical structures.
155. The director of music is new to the post this academic year. The department is in a period of change and no department documentation or development plan was available for the inspection. The leadership is satisfactory and clear plans have been identified for monitoring the quality of teaching in the staff, implementing staff development and developing A level music technology.
156. The department has a very committed and dedicated team. Student relationships are very good. Sixth-formers in music work in an adult manner both independently and as part of a group. They accept responsibility well, leading and encouraging younger members of the school in bands, ensembles and pre-school clubs. Members of staff are available for students at any appropriate time to discuss their work and give support. However, the department has no appropriate systems for recording and monitoring both these informal comments and the course work to complement the school target setting and assessment policy.

Drama

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

Strengths

- Teaching is consistently very good and sometimes outstanding.
- Facilities are excellent.
- Guidance given to individual students is good.
- There is a rich provision of activities outside lessons.

157. Very good A level results were gained last year. Eighty-nine per cent of the students taking the examination gained the highest grades which is above the national average, and all students gained A to E grades. The students had made considerable progress from their GCSE results. Over the past three years, results have steadily

improved, and the school has been particularly successful in increasing the proportion of students who gain the higher grades.

158. During the inspection students were producing work matching these high standards. Year 13 students show a good understanding of the use of symbolic representation in drama, and some of their work is particularly innovative. For example, a group preparing a workshop presentation based on Othello created a fairground 'Aunt Sally' board to represent Iago's double identity. Students show an ability to explore text and give careful consideration to problems involved in transferring it to the stage. In Year 12, students show a willingness to consider more abstract ways of representing ideas such as physical theatre or dance drama. They have learned about the theories of eminent drama practitioners and apply them well to their own work. Students talk about their work well, both with their teachers and other students.
159. Students' attitudes to the subject are very positive. They appreciate the high quality accommodation and resources, and the fact that they are treated like students working in theatre. They have good levels of commitment, and are ready to try approaches which may at first seem strange or experimental. Because of their serious approach to their work they learn quickly. Students appreciate the way that they are helped to interpret their practical work so that it closely matches the requirements of the examination syllabus. They enjoy taking part in debate with their teachers, and argue their case in a mature manner.
160. Teachers make very good use of the excellent accommodation to provide stimulating learning experiences. All the teaching seen was very good, and some aspects are outstanding. In particular, teachers use their own skills to work with students in the development of work and create an atmosphere of experiment and exploration. This makes the learning exciting. Building on excellent relationships of mutual respect, teachers achieve a good balance of encouragement and challenging students' ideas. They interpret the examination syllabus carefully and give good advice on meeting its requirements. Teachers make careful assessments of students' work and give students a very clear idea of how their work is progressing.
161. The provision of a purpose-built theatre is a significant factor in the quality of the standards achieved. The drama technician supports lessons well, and also contributes to instruction on technical aspects. This further adds to the feeling of authenticity about the course and giving students real learning situations. There are regular productions which enable students to develop themselves both artistically and personally, and frequent opportunities to extend their learning through visits to the theatre.
162. Since the last inspection, examination results have improved. There is now a greater representation of the higher grades, and from the work seen during the inspection, the majority of work is at the higher levels. Students continue to develop well. Teaching seen during the inspection was very good or outstanding and there is very good leadership. This represents good progress.

HUMANITIES

163. The focus of the inspection was on geography and history at both AS and A level, although psychology and sociology were sampled. Standards of attainment in psychology have improved steadily over the last four years so that in 2001 they were well above the national average. Teaching was good in the two psychology lessons observed. In sociology, results have been well above the national average for the last

three years. In the lesson observed the learning was very good due to the lively and challenging teaching which encouraged students to use a range of source material and evaluate it for themselves.

Geography

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

Strengths

- Achievement has risen steadily over the last four years.
- The quality of teaching is good and often very good due to teachers very good subject knowledge and enthusiasm for geography.
- Teachers help students to improve by giving them helpful feedback.
- Students learn well because they enjoy the subject and are clear about what they are learning.

Areas for improvement

- There are insufficient opportunities for fieldwork.

164. A level results in geography have improved steadily over the last four years. In 2001, the students achieved significantly higher results in geography than they did in their other subjects. Increased numbers of both boys and girls achieved the highest grades. Overall, results achieved at A level matched the national average. In relation to their GCSE results, students did better than expected. Three-quarters of students in Year 12 who took the AS level examination in 2001 gained A-C grades. Geography is a popular choice for students in the sixth form with a good proportion of students continuing the subject into higher education.
165. Students in Year 13 are producing standards of work which are above expectations for the course. They are achieving well in their lessons, and often very well. In one lesson, they recognised the interaction between physical and human features when identifying opportunities for economic development in the Cook Islands in the South Pacific. Students remained fully engaged throughout the double lesson because of the well-structured activities and teamwork evident from the knowledgeable teachers. They responded well to the opportunity to work collaboratively in analysing issues in the case study. All students use geographical terms confidently and manage well a wide range of geographical information in various forms.
166. Students in Year 12 make good progress in most lessons. In one lesson, students made very effective use of their prior knowledge about the process of coastal erosion to begin to consider ways in which coastal landforms are developed. Students were challenged to explore different possibilities by the teacher's searching questions. They became enthused by the idea of researching further in groups using a range of sources including the Internet, in order to present their findings to the rest of the class as 'experts'. In some lessons, students' progress is less rapid, although still satisfactory, because they have fewer opportunities to share their ideas or articulate their understanding.
167. The quality of teaching is good overall, with many strong features; over half the lessons observed were very good. Students learn well as a result. The main strengths of the very good teaching include effective use of subject knowledge so that teachers explain geographical processes clearly and build new learning on what students already know. Students are encouraged to be actively involved in their learning by undertaking geographical enquiries. All teachers show an enthusiasm for geography and ensure that students know what they are to learn. Teachers expect

students to work hard and to use geographical terms correctly. During a lesson on waves and tides, students made a point of keeping a glossary of all new terms as they arose in the teacher's explanation.

168. Teachers have a very good knowledge of the examination requirements at both AS and A level and provide students with very detailed feedback on their progress in meeting these. Marking is up-to-date and relates directly to the aims of the lesson. Students' notes are monitored regularly so that teachers help students to correct any misconceptions, inaccuracies or poor quality presentation.
169. Students learn well because they like geography and the way it is presented and they feel they know what they must do to improve. Many students have very full and thorough folders of notes and show a commitment to hard work.
170. The subject is well lead and the team has produced schemes of work which include useful detail to ensure the examination syllabus is taught in a logical and sensible sequence. The subject team has been innovative in its analysis of assessment results and uses the information very well to set targets for students. There are insufficient opportunities at present for students to take part in residential fieldwork and the department is right to have identified this as a priority for development.

History

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

Strengths

- Students have good knowledge and understanding of the units being studied.
- Attitudes to the subject are very positive and students are prepared to work hard.
- Teachers have very good specialist knowledge and communicate enthusiasm for the subject.

Areas for improvement

- Students' skills in debate and discussion are less good than other aspects of their work.
- Teachers have limited opportunities to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses in students' learning and address inconsistencies in classroom practice.

171. Results in A level examinations over the last four years have been above the national average while at other times they have been below. The department now analyses results in detail and acts accordingly.
172. Students took AS examinations in 2001 for the first time. Results were positive with eighty-four per cent achieving passes at grades A to C. Evaluation of results identified a relative weakness in the students' performance in the use of sources in the unit USA 1917 to 1933. This was fed back to the department and efforts are being made to address this in the work being done currently in Year 12.
173. Evidence from classroom observation, scrutiny of work and discussions with students shows that standards of work in history are good. Students are achieving well and there is evidence that standards are higher than they were at the time of the last inspection despite the rather disappointing A level results in 2001. The introduction of the new examinations and the teachers' positive approach to planning

the new units seems to have provided a new impetus. The performance of the A level students in Year 13 matches course expectations. These students did well in their AS examinations last year and are building on this success. Students in Year 12, many with above average GCSE results in history, are achieving well. They are on course to achieve good results in the summer.

174. Overall, students' achievements are well matched to their capabilities. There are no significant differences in the achievements of males and females. More gifted students' achievements are high and the good level of individual support offered to those of average or below average capabilities ensures that they cope successfully.
175. Teachers have very good specialist knowledge and use this well to explain historical knowledge and concepts. Because of this students' historical knowledge and understanding are good. They demonstrate this both in their answers to teachers' questions and in their written work. Students are enthusiastic about the subject; they take good notes carefully in class and undertake research tasks to extend their knowledge.
176. Students' skills in debate and discussion are less good than other aspects of their work. They discuss historical issues well when given the opportunity, but teachers tend to control discussion too much and restrict students' opportunities to develop their own ideas and opinions. Students are less confident in using historical sources; this is recognised by the department and is being addressed.
177. Study skills are generally well developed. Communication skills, particularly with regard to writing, are good and teachers support the acquisition of these through advice, for example, in the structuring of essays and in the use of appropriate types of sentences.
178. Learning in history is generally good with some particular strengths. Students make very good gains in knowledge and understanding of the units studied. Their research in their own time shows good levels of interest and an ability to organise things for themselves. Year 12 students working on economic growth in the USA in the 1920s were very confident in analysing a wide range of factors involved.
179. The quality of teaching is good overall and underpins good features in the learning. Teachers are enthusiastic and supportive. Teaching is sometimes less effective because it focuses on providing the content of the subject rather than on developing the learning skills of the students. Teachers tend to dominate in the classroom and students take less responsibility than they should. For example, in a Year 13 lesson where students were making presentations about electoral reform in Britain 1832 to 1918 the teacher asked most of the questions when this role could have been assigned to others. In oral work teachers are often too ready to give answers or to provide information.
180. Teachers' planning is generally good. New course units are being developed well and appropriate learning resources are being produced. Teachers have good awareness of examination requirements and give good advice. The chief examiner in history has visited the school and given guidance. Learning objectives are clearly established at the start of lessons and work is assessed carefully. Students receive good advice on how to complete extended pieces of work and individuals receive help when they encounter difficulties. Marking is done regularly and individual feedback is provided. The supportive atmosphere and good humour that prevails in lessons is very

conducive to the very good relationships that exist. The subject is popular and recruitment to the new post-16 courses has been very good.

181. The management of the subject is sound overall with some good features. The team leader's style of leadership is very effective in promoting good working relationships. However, evaluation of the subject's performance has not been carried out rigorously in the past; the analysis of recent examination performances is an important step forward. The demands of the new course for AS and A level has meant that teachers have to work hard to cope with the historical material they now have to cover to teach all six units. This has led to an insufficient focus being placed on developing strategies to improve the quality of students' learning.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

182. English Literature and Language at AS and A level are offered in the sixth form as well as a GCSE English re-sit course. The focus of the inspection was on English Literature with lessons and work in A level English Language being sampled.

English Literature

The quality of provision is **very good**. Progress in lessons is often very swift.

Strengths

- Recent results in A Level English Literature have been above the national average.
- Teaching is very good; teachers know their subject exceptionally well and promote in their students both confidence and enthusiasm for learning.
- Students use spoken and written language with sophistication.
- Students are assured in their understanding and application of the vocabulary of literary criticism.
- Background reading and contextual information is used well by students to deepen their understanding and appreciation of the texts they study.
- Systems for tracking students' attainment are effective in identifying under-achievement.

Areas for improvement

- Students are on occasion overly dependent upon their teachers for direction in debate and guidance when exploring literature or researching context.
- Not all marking is of sufficiently high quality to enable students to make sufficiently rapid progress in their written responses to texts.
- For some students consideration of form and structure is a relative weakness in their literary studies.

183. English Literature is a popular choice for students in the sixth form. In 2000 and 2001 the proportions of students achieving pass grades A to E and the higher grades A and B were well above those achieved nationally. The number of students reaching the highest grade improved markedly in 2001. A large majority of students choose to take the full English A level.

184. The observation of students' work in lessons and the scrutiny of their writing confirms that standards are high in Years 12 and 13. Students are taught techniques of close textual study and literary criticism and they bring these skills, together with their experiences from other A level courses, to bear on their literary analysis which is often deep and searching as a result. Their response to poetry in particular is often characterised by sensitivity and subtlety of interpretation, for example, when reflecting on the duality of feeling, and consequent tension, expressed in a poem by Carol Ann Duffy. They are experienced in using literary language and in exploring literary techniques. When analysing Wilfred Owen's poem 'Exposure' students confidently identified the juxtapositions of opposites which underpin its imagery, and unravelled, with delicacy and tenacity, the threads of metaphorical language. Boys in particular often read aloud with particular expressiveness and fluency.
185. When classroom debate is at its most effective, the students present arguments substantiated by the thoughtful selection of telling examples; they listen attentively to the contributions of others and they seek to find consensus of opinion. In these classroom discussions, the momentum of the argument is sustained by the students without reference to the teacher and helpful insights into the text are refined and developed through vigorous argument.
186. Overall students are more assured and demonstrate higher attainment in response to the analysis of feeling and sentiment than they do when required to comment on language and on structure. To the former they bring an understanding informed by wide background reading and a willingness to compare what they are reading with other books, plays, poems and films that they have encountered. In their studies of literature students on occasion struggle to relate form, style and structure to meaning, for example, when exploring sonnets, although judicious interventions by teachers are enabling students, particularly in Year 12, to develop greater understanding of these aspects of their studies.
187. From early on in their studies the highest attaining students achieve a poised and sophisticated critical style. Their control of a technical vocabulary is assured and they are at ease with the use of quotation and textual reference. These students are particularly skilled in meeting the requirements of the synoptic paper, for example, when writing an essay comparing three poets' views of war, students show sensitivity to quite subtle distinctions in tone and feeling. Students working at lower levels also have a good technical vocabulary and are able to identify and describe heightened poetic language, for example when writing in response to Blake's 'Tyger', but are much less comfortable in explaining the impact of this language on the reader. These students also often experience difficulty with organising and prioritising their notes and their research and require greater support in order to be able to do so.
188. On occasion students, particularly those working at the level of lower pass grades, are overly reliant on their teachers to provide interpretations of texts. In these instances classroom debate is constrained and faltering, becoming a dialogue of individuals with the teacher rather than genuinely exploratory discussion. On occasion discussion of character slips into discussion of personality and this is mirrored in essays that discuss, for example, Gertrude in 'Hamlet' as a person rather than as a dramatic construction of the playwright. In the best lessons teachers are sensitive to this issue and balance the need to intervene in order to maintain the pace of learning with the need to give students sufficient space to talk themselves into more informed understandings of the text.
189. For the most part the assessment and marking of students' work is thorough,

informative and judicious, offering praise and suggesting ways to improve. It is not, however, always consistent between teachers and on occasion students, particularly those struggling with the demands of the subject, receive too little guidance on how to improve their own prose style or how to strengthen their written responses.

190. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Lessons are lively and enjoyable and students are engaged and motivated by their teaching. Teachers know their subject exceptionally well and are able to promote in their students both self confidence and an enthusiasm for studying literature. They prepare students very thoroughly for the demands of the examinations and this also promotes a confident approach to the subject. Students make very rapid progress in their lessons and over the two years of the A level course. A breadth of teaching methodologies are used which help to sustain students' interest, and learning is enriched both by the good use made of the Internet as a resource for research, and by resource material prepared by teachers available to students via the school's own Intranet. The attainment of students is systematically tracked and those at risk of under-achievement are identified swiftly. Students respond well to the high expectations that their teachers have of them, for example, in response to their teacher's prompting, upgrading the language that they are using to discuss from a lacklustre discussion of theme to a penetrating discussion of the rhetoric of argument.
191. The department is well led and the example of good practice in teaching offered by the head of department is a particular strength.

Modern Foreign Languages

192. The focus was on French and Spanish. Three French and two Spanish lessons were observed. Most of the French teaching observed was very good or excellent. Imaginative activities draw a high level of participation from students, and, as a result, their oral skills are well developed. Students are less confident in Spanish, where the very small numbers make interaction more difficult.

French

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

Strengths

- Standards in public examinations have fluctuated and performance in class suggests that recent improvements will be maintained.
- Attainment in Year 12 is well above average, and it is above average in Year 13.
- Students enjoy lessons, and are confident, independent learners.
- Teaching is challenging and expectations are high.
- Information and communication technology, well-conceived support materials and focused use of the foreign language assistant make a significant contribution to learning.
- Relationships are very good, and contribute to a climate where students are not afraid to speak or to make mistakes.
- Assessment of students' work includes, with rare exceptions, strong guidance on how to improve.
- Detailed monitoring leads to successful measures to improve performance.

Areas for improvement

- Some weaker students need greater support with personal organisation.

193. Standards have improved since the last inspection and are now well above average. A level results have fluctuated over the years, but the relatively small numbers make it difficult to establish clear patterns. In the last two years, no student has failed and some have gained A or B grades. In 2001, students of more modest achievement generally did better in French than in their other subjects.
194. Current standards of work confirm an improving picture. At the time of the last inspection standards were in line with national expectations but they are now above these. Year 13 students have well-developed listening and reading skills because of extensive exposure to French in lessons. All students use a sophisticated topic vocabulary and a range of idiomatic expression when writing. This is the result of systematic teaching, good support materials and demanding assignments. The most able students write fluently, and express complex ideas with a wide range of expressions which lend flavour and authenticity to their essays. Only occasional, unnecessary errors prevent this work from being of the very highest quality. Less able students make considerably more errors, but some of these are the result of trying to express more complex thought. On these occasions, expression becomes anglicised. Standards of spoken French are high, as exemplified in a class discussion on the topic of Europe when all students expressed complex ideas with confidence, and a refreshing willingness to take risks.
195. Standards in Year 12 are well above average. Students respond very well to challenging and interesting topics which give them the opportunity to speak at length, to debate, to argue and to improvise. Teachers are strong subject-specialists who conduct lessons entirely in French and provide a range of stimulating activities and resources. These approaches have led to high standards of reading and listening ability. The written work of the most able students shows a wide range of idiom and expression. Average and lower-attaining students also write well, even engagingly, in response to frequent opportunities to write for different purposes. Whilst their work often contains a significant degree of error, there is clear evidence of progress over time in response to well-focused marking and a numbered error guide which links usefully to grammatical reference materials. In some cases, weaker students need more help with the organisation of their work files, to ensure that they can find information easily when they need it.
196. Both Year 12 lessons observed illustrated the strengths of teaching which lead to very high oral standards. In one, students retrieved information from Internet sites in French to supplement notes they had prepared for a debate on immigration. The class was then divided into two groups, one to argue in favour of immigration and the other against. Students sustained an animated debate in French for over twenty minutes. All students contributed well, showing an impressive grasp of the concepts, a wide topic vocabulary and an extensive range of the expressions needed to assert, contradict, agree, disagree and express opinion. The complexity of the material led to some errors from weaker students, but this never inhibited their determination to communicate, to improvise and to paraphrase when necessary. Similar qualities were apparent in the other Year 12 lesson, where the teacher's high demands ensured that students reflected on nuances of meaning and participated fully. As a result, students have developed sophisticated expression, a refreshing spontaneity and a lack of inhibition. This confidence is allied to a high level of self-awareness and independence.
197. Strong subject leadership, good use of resources and an extensive extra-curricular programme are important contributory factors in this strong picture. Schemes of work, policies and procedures are sharply focused, and monitoring of work leads to decisive and successful action to improve standards. For example, the department

identified in 1998 the need to develop students' speaking skills. The action taken as a result of that evaluation has led to the very high standards apparent today. An advanced skills teacher also monitored the use of French in lessons, identifying the occasions when English was used and the reasons for it. This information was used to improve that aspect of teaching. Teachers have also produced very useful guides, summaries and reference materials for students. The foreign language assistant makes a strong contribution to the very high oral standards. Finally, an extensive range of foreign links, visits and exchanges gives students the opportunity to develop their skills and their confidence in a French setting. Two recent examples were the work experience arranged in Le Mans and the participation in a European symposium in Paris.

Spanish

Overall the provision is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- Students have strong reading and listening skills.
- Students speak and write well on everyday topics and themes.
- Attitudes to learning are good.
- Teachers have strong subject expertise.
- The content of lessons is interesting and students respond well to it.

Areas for improvement

- Examination performance in recent years has not been good and numbers have been small.
- The attainment of students is not as high as their prior performance suggests it should be.
- There are gaps in students' subject knowledge, for example in basic vocabulary and verb forms.
- Students struggle to express more complex ideas in Spanish.
- Planning is not always focused enough, and time is not always used to best effect.
- The leadership of the subject is not currently effective and needs greater support.

198. Standards in Spanish are still lower than they should be. In the last few years, very small numbers of students have taken Spanish at A level, making generalisation difficult. However, their performance has tended to be worse in Spanish than in their other subjects, a factor particularly noticeable in 2001 when attainment was well below average. Staffing difficulties have contributed to a lack of continuity which is reflected in these results and in the gaps in students' subject knowledge. Standards seen in class are much the same as those described at the time of the last inspection, although with such small numbers the ability of the students is at least as significant as the quality of provision. Two Year 12 and one Year 11 students study AS level Spanish. No students in Year 13 study A level Spanish.

199. Standards of achievement in class match course expectations and teaching is satisfactory. However, the above-average grades these students achieved at GCSE, one of them a year early, suggest that they should be further advanced by this stage of the course. Nevertheless, improvement is occurring. Teachers' consistent use of

Spanish and choice of challenging, interesting texts have led to good listening and reading skills among the students. Teachers' positive manner and good relationships help students to be well motivated, to work hard and organise themselves well. All three students readily use material from the current topic and a range of idiomatic expressions. However, there are still significant gaps in their basic vocabulary, and application of verb forms and adjective endings remains shaky. As a result, students communicate straightforward ideas in speech and writing, but run into difficulty, sometimes resorting to English, when trying to express more complex or abstract thought. In addition, strengths and weaknesses of students' performance have not been analysed with sufficient clarity to enable gaps in knowledge to be tackled systematically. Communication in this small group goes through the teacher, who therefore controls and restricts the number of opportunities students have to speak at length, to argue and debate. The frequent use of closed questions, which require only a short answer, exacerbates this problem, and means that students do not have enough scope to express more complex thought, to grapple with difficult concepts and to improvise when speaking.

200. Planning of lessons often focuses too much on the content to be taught and not enough on the skills students need to display. Students do not have enough opportunities to take the initiative in speaking, or routinely to use pre-learned phrases when trying to express opinions in extended discussion. As a result, the language they use is less authentic and sophisticated, and they lack the confidence, crucial in more advanced oral work, to begin sentences before they know how they will end. Lesson time is not always used to best effect. For example, students spent time in the observed lessons looking up vocabulary that they could have prepared at home. Teachers should consider how preparation for lessons can provide students with opportunities to take the lead in presenting topics, to engage more regularly in extended speaking and generally to take the initiative. The marking of written work is thorough, but sometimes comments in Spanish do not give students enough information to follow up by cross-referencing to their grammar notes.
201. Subject leadership for Spanish is not as effective as it should be. The monitoring of classroom and examination standards has not resulted in concerted action to target specific weaknesses. The expertise to bring about further improvements in Spanish therefore already resides within the department. Staff should now work to ensure that approaches are consistent and that good practice is shared across the team.