

INSPECTION REPORT

MULBERRY SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

London

LEA area: Tower Hamlets

Unique reference number: 100968

Headteacher: Dame Marlene Robottom, DBE

Reporting inspector: Mrs J Greenfield
7070

Dates of inspection: 18th - 21st March 2002

Inspection number: 192724

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 to 19
Gender of pupils:	Female
School address:	Mulberry School for Girls Richard Street Commercial Road London
Postcode:	E1 2JP
Telephone number:	020 7790 6327
Fax number:	020 7265 9882
Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Dr Walter Ross
Date of previous inspection:	13 th – 17 th January 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities (sixth form)	Aspect responsibilities (sixth form)
7070	Mrs J Greenfield	Registered inspector		The school's results and students' achievements. How well are students taught? How well is the school led and managed?
14756	Mr J Lovell	Lay inspector		Students' attitudes, values and personal development How well does the school care for its students? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
20709	Mr D MacIldowie	Team inspector	English	
3643	Mr D Jones	Team inspector	Mathematics	
7531	Mrs E Cole	Team inspector		How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to students?
17530	Ms M Cureton	Team inspector	History; Drama Special educational needs	
8696	Mr A Maula	Team inspector	Bengali Equal opportunities English as an additional language	
32080	Mr B Dutton	Team inspector	Psychology Media studies	
4684	Mr D Cullimore	Team inspector	Business studies; Information and communication technology	
2396	Mr M Davidson	Team inspector	Biology	
19043	Mr D Lewis	Team inspector	Chemistry; Physics	
4757	Mr D Morris	Team inspector	Art and design	
14633	Mrs J Bannister	Team inspector	Sociology	
10060	Mr D Gutmann	Team inspector	Health and social care	

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London WC2B 6SE

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Mulberry School for Girls caters for girls aged 11-18. With 1379 pupils on roll, 338 of whom are in the sixth form, it is larger than most comprehensive schools. It is a very popular, oversubscribed, school. The school occupies two sites, with Years 7-11 on the main site and Years 12 and 13 on a separate site within a short walking distance from the main school. The majority of pupils are Muslim, with parents strongly in favour of girls-only education. Pupils' attainment on entry is below average. The school serves a very small area that has significant levels of social and economic deprivation. Nearly three-quarters of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is well above the national average. Nearly 97 per cent of the pupils are of Bangladeshi heritage, with small numbers of other heritages, including Black-Caribbean, Black-African, Pakistani, Chinese and White. Over 99 per cent of pupils speak English as an additional language, which is very high, and forty pupils are in the early stages of learning English. The main home languages are Sylheti, Urdu and Arabic. The school receives additional funding to support 354 ethnic minority pupils. In Years 7-11, just over 23 per cent (224 pupils) have special educational needs and two per cent (21 pupils) have a statement. These proportions are similar to the national averages. The range of special needs includes behavioural difficulties, learning difficulties, speech and communication, visual and hearing impairments and physical disabilities. The school is a Beacon School and is in an Excellence in Cities/Excellence Challenge partnership. In 2001, it received a DfES Achievement Award for Excellence.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Mulberry School for Girls is a very good school. Standards by the end of Year 11 are above average and are very high when compared with those in similar schools. Standards in the sixth form are broadly average. Most pupils make good progress because of good teaching and their very positive attitudes to work. The headteacher, with the strong support of senior staff and the governors, leads and manages the school very well, and has established an ethos in which all pupils are valued and given the confidence to succeed. As a result, the school gives very good value for money.

What the school does well

- Pupils are achieving well, as the good quality of the teaching and their very positive attitudes to work enable them to make good progress.
- The headteacher, with the strong support of senior staff and the governing body, leads and manages the school very well and provides a clear sense of focus to school improvement and the achievement of high standards.
- The school promotes an ethos in which all pupils are valued and given the confidence to succeed, and has successfully gained the support of parents and the community in extending and enhancing the pupils' experiences.
- Pupils with special educational needs learn very well because of the very good quality of the support they receive.

What could be improved

- Pupils are not attaining as well in mathematics and science by the end of Year 9 as they are in English.
- The suitability and quality of some of the accommodation to meet the demands of the curriculum are unsatisfactory.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made good progress since the last inspection in January 1997. Standards have improved at a faster rate than the national trend. The quality of teaching has improved, with much more that is good or very good and a reduction in the amount of unsatisfactory teaching. There has been a

good focus on improving practice in relation to literacy and oracy, especially in the use of talk to improve learning. Higher attaining pupils are being adequately challenged. The school's links with parents are very good and firm action has been taken to lessen the impact of extended absences from school. There is a comprehensive database about pupils' attainment on entry. The school does not fully meet the requirements for a daily act of collective worship.

STANDARDS

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

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

Key

very high	A*
well above average	A
above average	B
average	C
below average	D
well below average	E
very low	E*

The school's results in the national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2001 were well below the national average in mathematics and science but were average in English. When compared with results in similar schools, as measured by the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals, the results in all three subjects were well above average. Over the past few years, the school's performance has improved at a faster rate than the national trend. Pupils' current work indicates that standards overall are better than the picture provided by the test results and are broadly average. Standards in mathematics and science remain below average, but are average in English.

The GCSE results over the past five years have improved at a faster rate than the national trend and have been better than the national figures for girls since 1998. In 2001, the results at five or more GCSE grades A*-C and for the average points score were above average and were well above average at five or more grades A*-G and one or more grades A*-G. When compared with similar schools, the results were very high, placing it in the top five per cent of similar schools nationally. When account is taken of their earlier attainment in the Year 9 national tests, pupils did very well in their GCSE examinations. The strongest subjects were Bengali, expressive and performing arts, French, history, physical education, religious education, sociology, information and communication technology (ICT) and Spanish. The weakest subjects were English literature and office applications. The school was very close to meeting its targets in 2001. The work seen in lessons confirms the picture painted by the examinations results. Pupils are making good progress and are achieving well in relation to their earlier attainment. The A-level results have declined slightly over the past three years and in 2001 remain well below average. Fewer students than average gain the highest grades of A and B. However, most students achieved in line with expectations. Standards in the AVCE courses were above average, continuing the pattern of previous years.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils have very good attitudes to the school and to their studies. They work hard and are well motivated.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour is good, both in class and around the school. Most pupils are calm and orderly and behave responsibly.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships in the school are very good. Pupils work well together, and listen and respond positively to each other's views. They have a very good

	understanding of their moral and social responsibilities and a very good appreciation of spiritual and cultural issues.
Attendance	Attendance overall is good and was well above the national average last year. The rate of unauthorised absence is above the national average.

Pupils' attitudes are a particular strength of the school and contribute greatly to the good progress they make and the high standards they achieve. Good relationships, responsible behaviour and pupils' understanding of their responsibilities allow teachers to teach. The high rate of unauthorised absences is mainly the result of extended leave taken by pupils, at the behest of their parents, which is outside the control of the school. In recent years, the school has worked successfully to reduce unauthorised absences.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Years 7 - 9	Years 10 - 11	Years 12 - 13
Quality of teaching	Good	Good	Good

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

Teaching is good overall throughout the school, with many examples of very good and occasionally excellent teaching. The teaching has improved since the last inspection and is making a strong contribution to the improved standards. There are no significant differences between the teaching in Years 7 - 9, Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form.

The teaching of English is satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and good at Key Stage 4; it is satisfactory at both key stages in mathematics and good in science. The teaching of literacy is good in most subjects but the teaching of numeracy, although satisfactory overall, is not as well developed. Teachers use their good subject knowledge to plan appropriately challenging work to meet the needs of pupils well. Pupils are keen to learn and work hard. Most make good progress in their studies. The small amount of unsatisfactory teaching and learning stems from a failure to manage pupils effectively and work that does not adequately meet the varied needs of pupils in the class.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum is broad and balanced and provides a good range of learning opportunities to meet the needs of pupils. A good range of courses in the sixth form effectively meets the needs, capabilities and aspirations of the students. The range and quality of extra-curricular activities are good.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Provision for special educational needs is very good. The achievements of pupils with special educational needs are monitored well and they make consistently good progress against their targets.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Pupils learning English as an additional language receive good support and those in the early stages of learning English are making good progress.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	The school makes very good provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. It gives high priority to pupils' personal development through providing opportunities to take responsibility and exercise initiative.
How well the school cares	Pupils are cared for well and there are good arrangements to support

for its pupils	them. Pupils' progress and achievements are systematically and carefully monitored. Procedures for ensuring the health and safety of pupils, including child protection arrangements other than in the sixth form, are satisfactory.
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The school works hard, and very successfully, to develop an effective partnership with parents. Parents' views of the school are extremely positive. The legal requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship is not fully met: nevertheless, the quality of assemblies is often good. Guidance and counselling services are effective and valued by pupils. The personal and social education programme is well structured and effectively taught.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher, effectively supported by senior staff, leads and manages the school very well, and has a very clear vision of what sort of school it should be. Other key managers fulfil their roles with energy and commitment.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors understand the school's priorities well and give strong support to ensuring improvement. With the exception of ensuring a daily act of collective worship, the governing body fulfils its statutory responsibilities well.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Systems for monitoring and reviewing the work of the school, including its own performance and the quality of teaching and learning, are robust. Planning for the future is clear, realistic and appropriately targeted. Arrangements for performance management are developing well.
The strategic use of resources	The school manages its budget efficiently and effectively, ensuring that funding is allocated to meet its educational priorities. The large budget surplus is appropriately targeted at the new building project.

Most staff are deployed effectively to make best use of their expertise. Resources are satisfactory overall, but there are significant variations in provision. Some accommodation is suitable, but, overall, it is inadequate to meet the needs of the present curriculum and the size of some teaching groups. Some elements of the accommodation, for example narrow corridors, cause problems in the safe management and movement of pupils. Despite the best efforts of staff, many areas of the school are dirty and unhygienic. The school pays close attention to obtaining best value for money.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pupils are expected to work hard and do their best. Their children like school. The good teaching which helps their children to make good progress. The amount of homework that their children receive. Pupils' good standards of behaviour. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Closer working relationships between the school and parents. More information about pupils' progress. Provision of a wider range of activities outside lessons.

Only a small number of parents attended the meeting for parents held before the inspection and just under a fifth responded to a questionnaire about their views of the school. Inspectors' judgements fully support the positive views expressed by parents. Despite the misgivings of a small number of parents, inspectors consider that the school's relationships with parents are very good and that the quality of

information given to parents, especially about their child's progress, is good. The school provides a good range of extra-curricular activities and other opportunities for pupils in the main school and satisfactory opportunities for students in the sixth form.

ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM

MULBERRY SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form has 338 students on roll. The majority of students in the sixth form are those continuing from Year 11, but 69 have come from other schools, an increasing proportion with special educational needs. The proportion of students from minority ethnic heritages broadly mirrors that in the main school. Three-quarters of the students are eligible for free school meals compared with the national figure of six per cent. Fifty students (14.8%) have special educational needs, mainly learning difficulties, of whom six have a statement. The sixth form provides a good range of AS and A-level courses, a small number of vocational courses at Advanced and Intermediate levels, together with a number of GCSE courses, both full and short courses, some of which are provided jointly with other local schools, and certificate of achievement courses. This enables the sixth form to provide students with a wide range of appropriate courses that appeal to them and are mostly suited to their needs. The school has a sympathetic entry policy to cater for the individual needs of students. Students' attainment on entry into the sixth form is below average overall. Entry requirements to advanced level courses at four or more GCSE grades C and above or equivalent qualifications are lower than in most sixth forms. About half of the students embark on a two-year programme leading to A-level, with well over a third following vocational courses, either for one year or for two years. In 2000, 59 per cent of students went into higher education at the end of Year 13 and nine per cent into further education.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The sixth form provides an effective education for the majority of its students and is cost effective. Although pass rates in A-level examinations have been well below average, these generally reflect students' lower GCSE results and are affected by the extended periods of absence of a number of students in Year 12. Students are able to study a wide range of courses, and the provision is sensitive to local circumstances and meets the needs of students well. The teaching is good in most subjects and is very good in physics, drama, business, and government and politics. Most students make good progress, achieving well in relation to their attainment on entry into the sixth form. The main strengths and areas that could be improved in the sixth form are:

Strengths

- Students are achieving well in relation to their attainment on entry and in many subjects are attaining above average standards.
- The good quality of the teaching helps students to learn well.
- Students have very positive attitudes to their learning and work, and are self-motivated to take advantage of the good teaching.
- The provision for supporting students with special educational needs is very good.
- Relationships are very good and students work well together and are mutually encouraging and supportive.
- The curriculum effectively meets students' diverse needs and their aspirations.

What could be improved

- Students do not have enough opportunity to use ICT to support their learning.
- Students' skills in working independently are insufficiently developed.
- Marking and assessment are inconsistent and not sufficiently diagnostic in some subjects.
- The organisation and management of aspects of the sixth form are not sufficiently robust.

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

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

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

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	Good. Standards are above average in Year 13, an improvement on the examination results of the last three years. Teaching and learning are good. Students' achievement is consistent with their GCSE results.
Biology	Good. Teaching is good. Students, especially those who follow the two-year course, make good progress and many reach above average standards. However, a minority of Year 12 students do not achieve as well as they could. They need closer monitoring and support.
Chemistry	Good. Students make very good progress in chemistry lessons as a result of teaching which is at least good and is sometimes outstanding. Although students' work in class and at home is good, their results in recent examinations have been below the national average.
Physics	Satisfactory. Teaching is very good and pupils make very good progress in lessons. In the longer term, however, their progress is less good and their examination results show that their achievement over the two-year course is broadly as expected from their GCSE results.
Business	Good. Students make good progress because of good teaching and a very good range of learning resources, including 'mentors' from the local business community. Standards in the AVCE course are above national averages overall and many students progress to university.
Information and communication technology	Satisfactory. Standards in the A-level classes are above average although they are below average in the sixth form GCSE class. There is good quality computing equipment but better access needs to be provided for all students. More qualified staff are required.
Health and social care	Good. Students make good progress in lessons and on work placements in care settings due to good teaching. Standards are satisfactory, and sometimes above average for advanced level students. ICT is used well for research but not enough in presenting work or analysing statistics.
Art	Good. Standards in the A-level and AS-level courses are high, and are average in the one-year GCSE course. Students progress well as a result of consistently good teaching and their own exemplary attitudes.
Drama	Very good. Very good teaching results in very good learning. The proportion of A and B grades achieved by students is above the national average. The subject makes an outstanding contribution to students' personal development.
Media studies	Good. Standards of students' work are above average. Teaching and learning are good: the students' work is thoroughly assessed.
History	Good. Teaching and learning are good. The good quality curriculum is enhanced with visits to conferences and exhibitions. Texts should be made more readily available to support students' independent learning more effectively.
Sociology	Satisfactory. Standards of work are average. The subject is popular and well managed. Relationships between teacher and students are exemplary.
Psychology	Unsatisfactory. Standards are below average for the first year of results in Year 12. Although assessment of students' work is good, the teaching and learning resources are inadequate.
English	Good. Students are very well motivated and they are given many opportunities to develop a mature and independent viewpoint through group study.
Bengali	Good. Standards are above average overall, the outcome of good quality teaching and learning. Leadership and management are good. There is insufficient use of Bengali in class discussions or ICT in the teaching and

	learning of Bengali.
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In other subjects, work was sampled. The teaching is predominantly good. Some very good teaching occurs in government and politics and textiles. These subjects are generally strong in the school.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Overall support and guidance for students are satisfactory. They receive good support for their personal development through an effective pastoral system. Students are appreciative of this support. Induction arrangements are broadly satisfactory but inconsistent. Systems for monitoring students' academic progress and attainment are satisfactory and are being developed further.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Leadership and management, as they affect the sixth form, are satisfactory. Senior staff have worked effectively to create a wide-ranging curriculum, provide good quality teaching and establish a caring but challenging ethos. However, there are weaknesses in the monitoring of attendance, the organisation of the timetable and issues relating to the large class sizes in some subjects. There is no agreed sixth form improvement plan to guide these developments.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They are taught well and challenged to do their best. • Teachers are readily accessible if they require help or have difficulties with their work. • Opportunities for working independently. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The range of out-of-school activities and enrichment opportunities available to them. • Having more account taken of their views and being treated as responsible young adults. • Advice about the courses they should follow in the sixth form and about their future options. • The information provided about their progress.

From their responses to the questionnaire, students' views were far more negative than the comments they made in discussions with inspectors. Overall, they are positive about the sixth form provision. Inspectors support their positive views, although they believe that students need more opportunities, together with clearer guidance, to help them develop their skills of working independently. The provision for out-of-school and enrichment activities is satisfactory but inspectors note that not all students take advantage of such opportunities. Inspectors found no evidence to support students' views that they are not treated as responsible young adults but found examples where staff were slower than expected to respond to their views. Students are now taking a stronger leadership role in relation to the School Council. The quality of advice and guidance provided for students on entering the sixth form is satisfactory and students receive subject specific induction. However, there is no common programme of induction that might help students make an easier transfer from Year 11 into the additional demands of sixth form work. Careers advice and guidance are good. Inspectors judge that students for the most part receive satisfactory information about their progress, although this is not consistent within departments or across subjects.

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

Pupils are achieving well, as the good quality of the teaching and their very positive attitudes to work enable them to make good progress.

1. Pupils' attainment when they enter the school in Year 7, based on the Key Stage 2 results and their scores in the standardised cognitive abilities tests (CATs), is below average. The attainment of students overall entering the sixth form is also below average. Pupils in the main school and students in the sixth form are achieving well when account is taken of their attainment on entry to the school or when they transfer to the sixth form. One of the main reasons for this is the overall quality of the teaching, which is good. The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection. There is now a higher proportion of teaching that is good or better and a decrease in the proportion of teaching that is unsatisfactory. The effect of this improvement is that in most subjects pupils are provided with more challenging work that is more carefully matched to their needs. This enables them to make good progress and achieve well.

2. Across the school as a whole, 122 lessons were seen during the inspection. The teaching is good or better in just under three-quarters of lessons, and very good and occasionally excellent in slightly under a third. In the main school, some very good teaching occurs in English, mathematics, science, art, textiles, history, ICT, French, Spanish, dance, religious education, drama, personal and social education and in supporting pupils with special educational needs. In lessons where the teaching is most effective, pupils make very good progress. The characteristics of these lessons include: a well planned sequence and variety of activities; clear learning intentions that are shared with the pupils; high expectations; targeted questions to ensure that all pupils contribute to the lesson; and very good use and explanation of key words and specific subject vocabulary.

3. Most teachers have good subject knowledge and expertise, which they use well to plan appropriate activities to meet the needs and interests of pupils. They give clear explanations and in most lessons make good use of questions to check pupils' understanding and to challenge and extend their thinking. Good attention is paid to developing pupils' literacy skills and talk as an aid to learning is given appropriate emphasis. Resources are chosen with care to support the work in class. Teachers manage their pupils well in the main, although on occasions a small number of teachers are not firm enough with their class. In most subjects, they make good use of assessment to inform planning and teaching. Homework is used well to extend and enhance class work. These positive attributes of the teaching are successful in helping pupils make good progress as they move through the school.

4. Another reason why pupils and students achieve well is their very positive attitudes to their studies. Pupils take great pride in being a member of the school community and enjoy coming to school. Their attitudes to school and to their work are very good. This is clearly evident in their responses in lessons, and in the way that they settle down promptly to work, whether on their own, in pairs or in groups. Pupils are able to organise themselves into groups very effectively and are good at collaborating with one another. They work hard and are well motivated. Levels of concentration are good and they persevere when tasks are challenging. Pupils listen carefully to their teachers and respond politely as required, sometimes with considerable enthusiasm. In a Year 9 drama lesson, they displayed significant enthusiasm, and all contributed and participated readily, making significant gains in developing their confidence and in their ability to perform in front of each other. In this lesson, the learning was very effective. In most lessons, there is a good working ethos, which ensures that pupils learn effectively. The presentation of work is usually neat.

5. Pupils with special educational needs want to learn and are conscientious in completing their work, sometimes with the good support of their teachers and learning support assistants. The quality of the support and their positive attitudes enable them to make considerable gains in their learning. This is also true for pupils learning English as an additional language. Pupils who have been identified as gifted or talented have very positive attitudes to their work. They make good progress overall but are not always challenged sufficiently to enable them to make better progress than this.

6. Relationships amongst pupils and between pupils and their teachers are extremely positive, indicating a high degree of mutual respect. They help each other as appropriate. Pupils behave well, although in a small number of lessons, some pupils occasionally fail to engage sufficiently with their work. This is usually a result of undemanding tasks or a failure by the teacher to manage them effectively.

The headteacher, with the strong support of senior staff and the governing body, leads and manages the school very well and provides a clear sense of focus to school improvement and the achievement of high standards.

7. The school is managed very well and this has a strong impact on what the school provides and how successfully it cares for its pupils. The headteacher, who was in post at the time of the last inspection, continues to provide well-informed, visionary and powerful leadership, key attributes that were identified in the last inspection report. She gives unstintingly of her time to the school and provides the driving force for improving the quality of provision. In this task, she is well supported by her senior staff, two of whom are relatively recent appointments to the school, and the governing body. Senior staff have complementary skills and share a commitment to providing a wide range of opportunities for all pupils and to ensuring that they receive an education of high quality. Together, they make a strong contribution to the continued improvement of the school. All the senior managers have clearly delegated areas of responsibility. They work well as a team and convey a corporate sense of purpose and a clear commitment to improving academic standards and to giving pupils and students the best possible preparation for their future lives and careers. They have a good capacity to reflect critically on aspects of the school's work and a keen determination to implement changes to make improvements.

8. The governors have a very clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They are fully committed to the school and are highly supportive of the headteacher. The governing body plays a full part in the school's strategic management and undertakes a key role in shaping its priorities and longer-term direction, in particular in seeking approval for a Private Finance Initiative (PFI) project to remodel and rebuild the school on a single site. They discharge their duties thoroughly for the most part, but have not ensured that all pupils participate in a daily act of collective worship. They undertake their monitoring role well, effectively holding the school to account for its performance, particularly the examination results.

9. Systems for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the work of the school are robust. The school uses the evidence it collects to evaluate its performance and analyse strengths and weaknesses effectively. The evidence is gleaned from the careful analysis of performance data, through regular line management meetings between senior and middle managers, lesson observations, and the scrutiny of pupils' work and homework. Feedback gained from visits by external consultants and inspectors also contributes to the evidence base. Data on individual pupils is analysed according to the band and the class in which they are placed, by their fluency in English and by their placement on the Code of Practice register. This enables the school to monitor pupils' progress effectively and set appropriately challenging targets for their eventual performance. These systems are effective in helping to drive up standards.

The school promotes an ethos in which all pupils are valued and given the confidence to succeed and has successfully gained the support of parents and the community in extending and enhancing the pupils' experiences.

10. The school aims to establish a community in which each individual pupil's contribution is valued and respected equally, to provide the highest possible standard of educational provision within a supportive and challenging environment where pupils are actively encouraged to achieve their potential, and to enable them to become confident, independent and well informed responsible adults. The school meets its aims very well. The school is very successful in helping pupils to grow and mature into responsible young adults. It does this through having high expectations of them, both academically and personally, and providing a challenging but supportive environment in which they can develop. The school's ethos is very positive, helped by the pupils' attitudes to the school and their good standards of behaviour. All pupils are valued and encouraged to make the best contribution they can to its success. The strong emphasis placed on their personal development as well as their academic development ensures that they have the confidence to make the best of their experiences.

11. Many aspects of the school's work contribute to this ethos. The very good provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, and the way the pupils respond to this provision, make a significant contribution. The school respects and places great value on the beliefs the pupils bring from home and builds on this through opportunities to reflect on issues that affect them, their attitudes and their work, within the context of the school and the wider community. Opportunities for quiet contemplation and reflection take place in a calm and peaceful atmosphere, either within the classroom or within year group assemblies. Pupils are very receptive and teachers provide good opportunities for pupils to discuss spiritual and moral matters.

12. Staff are very good role models and have high expectations of moral conduct that are regularly and consistently reinforced throughout the school. Pupils are taught to respect and care for each other, to recognise, understand and combat racism, sexism and negative stereotyping and to value and celebrate individuality. Emphasis is placed on pupils' understanding of why people should behave in morally responsible ways. Pupils respond very well to these expectations. They respect each other's beliefs and values, and are learning how to act with moral insight. The school clearly teaches pupils the difference between right and wrong. Pupils are encouraged to express moral concern through deepening their understanding of issues such as those of global racism. The whole school benefited from the feedback from a small group of students who participated in a United Nations Youth Forum in New York, which debated the issues of global racism and considered the impact of the September 11th tragedy on attitudes. Discussions about this and an awareness of wider moral issues, promoted through the curriculum in subjects such as history, English literature, religious education and the preparation for adult life (PAL) tutorial programme, assist pupils to develop an understanding of how individuals should respond positively to other people and to their needs.

13. Teachers have high expectations and cater well for all pupils in the class. Using a wide range of teaching methods, resources and activities, they confidently establish the context and ground rules to interest and motivate the pupils, and help them to think about and discuss controversial issues with sensitivity and objectivity. Pupils have a developing voice in school matters through the School Council, and the PAL programme makes a significant contribution to pupils' social development and preparation to be 'citizens' within the school and wider community. Pupils are developing an understanding of fundamental human rights and responsibilities and the diversity of identities in Britain and the need for mutual respect and understanding. They learn how to recognise and manage issues such as conflict. The personal and social education programme, which is very good, provides an effective vehicle to consider such issues.

14. Group work plays a very important part in the pupils' and the students' learning and makes an important contribution to the development of skills of enquiry and communication, enabling pupils to analyse information, justify their opinions and consider the experiences of others. An extensive range of visits and activities that enrich the curriculum provides very good opportunities for their social and cultural development. Pupils undertake trips locally and abroad, such as that to be undertaken by a group of Year 11 pupils who will shortly be visiting Spain to study the architecture and history of the Alhambra. In lessons, teachers' expectations of mature behaviour contribute positively to pupils' social development.

15. Cultural diversity is appreciated and highly valued in the school. There are many opportunities for pupils to be involved in activities that support their cultural development. Visits to museums, art galleries and the theatre are organised on a regular basis. There are visits to countries abroad such as Italy where a group of Year 10 pupils recently visited Florence and Venice and looked at the architecture and art, comparing and contrasting the differences between the religious buildings in the locality and those of the renaissance cities of Italy. Throughout the school, the study of different religions and the cultures that support them form part of all pupils' studies. In art, drama and dance, a multi-cultural focus runs throughout their work and cross-cultural themes pervade activities. For example, pupils in Year 9 are building on their visit to the play of the *Lion King* and are developing an appreciation of African drumming, the historical use of masks in theatre and how different cultures present their history through the expressive arts.

16. The school works hard, but very successfully, to maintain the confidence of parents and the community. Staff and governors tread a fine line between extending and enriching pupils' experiences

through participation in a wide variety of opportunities and the cultural and family expectations of the backgrounds from which the majority of the pupils come. Parents express great confidence in the school and are very supportive of the school's ethos and the range of educational and other opportunities provided for their daughters. The school ensures that parents are kept well informed about their daughters' progress and involves them at an early stage in the event of any concerns. Parents receive newsletters and invitations to school events, the majority of which are provided in Bengali as well as in English. Very strong links with community leaders, some of whom are on the governing body, help to maintain positive relationships with parents and carers and reinforce the high status of the school within the local community.

Pupils with special educational needs learn very well because of the very good quality of the support they receive.

17. Arrangements for supporting pupils with special educational needs (SEN) are very good throughout the school, both in class and when they are occasionally withdrawn for more targeted individual work. As a consequence, they make good progress in their learning overall. In some of the withdrawal lessons, they make very good progress because of the very good quality of the teaching. Pupils with SEN make consistently good progress against their targets. There is a highly effective and very well organised cycle of teaching, monitoring and review, which informs the teaching and learning of pupils with SEN.

18. The school has developed a well-organised 'key teacher' system, which is highly effective. Learning support assistants are attached to tutor groups, although they also have subject links. They attend reviews in the primary schools of pupils in Year 6 who are transferring to the school at the beginning of Year 7 and follow them up through the school. This enables them to get to know the pupils well. This level of continuity is effective in helping pupils settle in rapidly, enables the early diagnosis of their needs and promotes a climate of trust.

19. Targets in pupils' individual education plans (IEPs) are known and promoted consistently. All teachers receive a summary sheet outlining the content of the IEPs for all pupils, which enables them to provide work at an appropriate level. Activities are interesting and engage pupils' attention and resources are well chosen. Skilful questions by teachers and learning support staff are used well to elicit a response and to check pupils' understanding. Teachers and learning support staff work well together. Some particularly effective teamwork occurred in a Year 10 English lesson where a pupil with a statement of special educational needs received individual help from both the teacher and the learning support assistant. In another, Year 11 English lesson, four pupils with SEN worked on their own with a support teacher to undertake some more focused work on the text of a poem. At the end of the lesson, their ready responses showed that they had made very good progress in their understanding and appreciation of the poem.

20. Leadership and management are very good. The two special needs co-ordinators share the work effectively and have produced good systems for the day-to-day running and development of provision for SEN. They monitor standards of teaching and learning carefully, and manage and co-ordinate their team of teachers and learning support assistants to create an optimum level of support for students. They have an excellent understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the provision. The school fulfils all statutory requirements of the code of practice for students with SEN. Governors give appropriate support and fulfil all their statutory duties.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Pupils are not attaining as well in mathematics and science by the end of Year 9 as they are in English.

21. In the national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 in 2001, the results in mathematics and science were well below average, whereas the English results were in line with the national average. From lessons and the scrutiny of work, it is evident that standards in both subjects have improved since last summer but remain below average. Pupils do not have a strong background in mathematics or science and consequently find these subjects more challenging. In both subjects, most pupils are making at

least satisfactory, with many making good, progress and are achieving well when account is taken of their attainment on entry to the school.

22. The teaching in mathematics is satisfactory overall. However, the wide range of attainment in some of the classes, especially in Year 9, means that the work is not always appropriately matched to their needs and is insufficiently demanding, especially for the higher attainers. In lessons, pupils often work at their own pace and exercise books contain a high degree of correct work, indicating that pupils are not being challenged sufficiently. Some of the work that the higher attainers are undertaking is too basic.

23. In science, the quality of teaching is good at Key Stage 3, which is having a positive impact on pupils' learning. There are signs of improving standards in Year 7 and Year 8, which are now closer to the average, but the good teaching and learning have not yet had time to influence standards in Year 9, which remain below average. As in mathematics, insufficient attention is paid to providing appropriate work to meet the needs of all pupils, in particular the higher attainers. A few teachers are not challenging pupils' thinking sufficiently through focused questioning and homework is not used sufficiently to reinforce and extend learning.

24. The school has experienced difficulty in recruiting staff in both subjects and a number of temporary appointments have been made. A new head of department for mathematics has been appointed and will take up post at the beginning of the summer term. In science, the head of department has been in post for two years and some of the improvements that have been introduced are helping to raise standards.

The suitability and quality of some of the accommodation to meet the demands of the curriculum are unsatisfactory.

25. As at the time of the last inspection, the suitability and quality of some of the accommodation to meet the demands of the curriculum are unsatisfactory. The provision for art and design, design and technology and physical education continues to be inadequate and is affecting pupils' learning. In art and design, there are insufficient working spaces, especially for sixth form students to work at times outside timetabled lessons, the size of rooms is very small for the numbers in some groups and results in cramped working conditions, and storage areas are limited. In design and technology, workshops are also very small, there is no clean area for electronics or textiles and there are insufficient numbers of sinks in food technology. Accommodation for physical education, when account is taken of the numbers of pupils in the school, is insufficient and changing facilities are inadequate and in poor condition.

26. Elsewhere in the school, some classrooms are too small and limit the use of a wider range of teaching approaches. This is particularly so in the sixth form, where the large group sizes in some subjects makes the use of small group work difficult. Many corridors in the main school are too narrow and present difficulties in the management and movement of pupils, although this is eased somewhat by the good behaviour and attitudes of the pupils. Movement between lessons is difficult as so many pupils emerge from classrooms into congested areas. The buildings themselves are in poor condition and despite the best efforts of staff to provide interesting displays of pupils' work, many areas of the school are dirty and unhygienic. Toilets, although some have been repainted recently, are in an unsatisfactory condition. Some are locked and in the remainder, some of the cubicles have no locks on the doors. The provision overall is unsatisfactory.

27. The school has recently received approval for a major Private Funding Initiative (PFI) project to provide new buildings and to remodel extensively the main school site to improve the accommodation and to bring the sixth form onto the main school site. These developments should address the current inadequacies in the longer term.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

28. The school should:

- (1) raise standards in mathematics and science to at least the level attained in English, by:
 - ensuring the work is more closely matched to meet the needs of all pupils, especially the higher attainers;
 - making more effective use of direct teaching methods, including sharper questioning and answer approaches;
 - reviewing the grouping arrangements to ensure that classes contain a narrow range of attainment; and
 - having higher expectations of what pupils can achieve.

(Paragraphs: 21; 22; 23; 24)

- (2) improve the quality and suitability of the accommodation to meet the learning needs of pupils more effectively.

(Paragraphs: 25; 26; 27; 75; 131)

Sixth form

- (1) improve the opportunities available to students to use and develop their ICT skills more effectively, by:
 - ensuring greater access to the computers available in the sixth form and in the main school; and
 - ensuring that all subjects use ICT more frequently to support teaching and learning.

(Paragraphs: 33; 44; 48; 51; 76; 107; 114; 120; 123; 130; 143; 157; 161; 172)

- (2) implement strategies for helping students to develop the skills of independent learning, by:
 - developing a more consistent approach to the induction of students into the sixth form;
 - implementing teaching approaches lower down the school that progressively develop their research and other learning skills; and
 - reducing the amount of teacher led/directed learning in the sixth form especially in A-level and AS level courses.

(Paragraphs: 33; 44; 51; 123; 154)

- (3) improve the quality of assessment of students' work, by:
 - improving the quality of marking and relating it more closely to course requirements in some subjects;
 - monitoring course files and assignments more effectively; and
 - making the marking more diagnostic to help students improve.

(Paragraphs: 44; 56; 82; 84; 90; 91; 95; 100; 166; 172)

- (4) improve the organisation and management of aspects of the sixth form, by:
 - improving the attendance levels and monitoring attendance and absences more rigorously;
 - reorganising the timetabling arrangements so that students do not have three or four consecutive lessons in the subject;
 - reducing the large class sizes in some subjects; and
 - monitoring more rigorously and systematically aspects of the work of the sixth form.

(Paragraphs: 40; 49; 62; 70; 73; 167)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 - 11	62
	Sixth form	60*
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		38

**the teaching was not graded in one lesson*

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
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Years 7 - 11

Number	1	18	22	18	3	0	0
Percentage	2	29	35	29	5	0	0

Sixth form

Number	3	14	29	11	2	0	0
Percentage	5	24	49	19	3	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 - Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1041	338
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	777	222

Special educational needs	Y7 - Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	21	7
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	244	32

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	1367

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	28
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	65

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	5.1
National comparative data	8.1

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	1.7
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	n/a	210	210

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Girls	143	99	92
	Total	143	99	92
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	68 (59)	47 (43)	44 (28)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	26 (15)	24 (14)	16 (9)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Girls	144	132	85
	Total	144	132	85
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	69 (55)	62 (56)	40 (33)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	22 (29)	11 (16)	11 (7)
	National	31 (31)	42 (39)	33 (29)

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	n/a	209	209

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A* to G	1 or more grades A* to G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Girls	113	201	208
	Total	113	201	208
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	54 (53)	96 (98)	100 (100)
	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	44.1
	National	39.0

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	n/a	339	339

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Male	Female	All
School	Number of candidates	n/a	98	98
	Average point score per candidate	n/a	10.8	10.8
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	18	17.5

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS examinations			For candidates entered for Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	Number of candidates	n/a	68	68	n/a	37	37
	Average point score per candidate	n/a	9.8	9.8	n/a	10.5	10.5

National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.9	17.4	9.8	11.4	10.6
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Figures in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	1
Black – African heritage	8
Black – other	5
Indian	3
Pakistani	14
Bangladeshi	132
Chinese	3
White	11
Any other minority ethnic group	2

Exclusions in the last school year

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

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 - Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	81.8
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.9

Education support staff: Y7 - Y13

Total number of education support staff	20.4
Total aggregate hours worked per week	564

Deployment of teachers: Y7 - Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	71.8
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Average teaching group size: Y7 - Y11

Key Stage 3	19.2
Key Stage 4	17.8

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000/01
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	£
Total income	5,400,629
Total expenditure	5,112,644
Expenditure per pupil	3,684
Balance brought forward from previous year	1,117,553
Balance carried forward to next year	1,405,538

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	27
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	26

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	4
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	1
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	3

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1,379
Number of questionnaires returned	275

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	58	36	3	0	2
My child is making good progress in school.	59	36	2	1	2
Behaviour in the school is good.	63	27	5	1	4
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	61	33	4	1	1
The teaching is good.	56	39	2	1	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	47	40	8	2	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	50	39	4	3	4
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	79	19	0	0	2
The school works closely with parents.	41	37	13	4	5
The school is well led and managed.	56	30	6	2	5
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	57	32	54	2	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	51	30	9	3	7

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

29. The school's performance overall in the A-level examinations in 2001 was well below the national average and below the figure for girls nationally. There has been a decline in the school's results over the past three years and the average points score for students entered for two or more A-levels was lower than at the time of the last inspection. Students' attainment on entry into the sixth form is below average. In line with the school's philosophy of catering for students' individual needs, entry to advanced level courses, at four or more GCSE grades C or above, is lower than that usually found. An analysis of the results indicates that most students make satisfactory progress when account is taken of their earlier performance in GCSE examinations, but, other than in a small number of subjects, gain far fewer of the highest grades of A or B than the national average. There were considerable variations in performance between subjects.

30. In 2001, the A-level results were above the national average in biology, sociology and drama and were at the national average in media studies and ICT. In chemistry, law, government and politics, mathematics and art and design, the results were below average. They were well below average in English, physics and religious education. The small number of students entered for history makes comparison with the national figures inappropriate but all students gained pass grades, although few attained the highest grades of A or B. In Bengali, slightly over half the students gained the highest grades of A or B. In media studies, the proportion of students gaining the highest grades of A or B was similar to the national averages and in the case of biology, law and sociology was above the national averages for these subjects. In 2001, the AS examination results were very variable. All students gained grades A-E in Bengali, drama, English literature, history, media studies and sociology, and a high proportion did so in government and politics, art and design, chemistry and physics. The results were weakest in psychology and environmental science.

31. In the Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) awards (formerly the General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQ) Advanced awards), the results in business and in health and social care were above average: a higher proportion than average gained merit or distinction awards. These above average standards have been maintained over the past three years. The GNVQ Intermediate results in both subjects were well below average in 2001, particularly in health and social care, where just over a quarter gained at least a pass award. In both subjects, there was a considerable drop in performance between 2000 and 2001.

32. From the work seen during the inspection, there are indications that standards are rising and are better than the examination results in 2001 would indicate. Students are attaining average standards overall and are attaining above average standards in the advanced courses in many subjects, including mathematics, biology, chemistry, physics, drama, Bengali, art and design, media studies and business. This improvement is partly accounted for by the changing nature of the cohort, particularly where there are comparatively few students studying the subject; improvements in the use of value-added analyses in order to set targets for students; and improvements in the quality of teaching and learning. The majority of students are achieving well in relation to their earlier attainment based on their GCSE examination performance and in relation to the targets that have been set for them. In drama, they do very well. In psychology, they are doing less well than expected, mainly because the teaching approaches do not challenge them sufficiently or give them enough opportunities to contribute to discussions. The higher attaining students, including the gifted and talented, are making satisfactory progress overall and good progress in history, Bengali and art and design. In drama, they make very rapid progress. Nearly all students have English as an additional language and those who are less fluent in English are making satisfactory progress in most subjects and good progress in history, drama, art and design and health and social care. Students with special educational needs, most of whom have learning difficulties, are also making satisfactory progress in the range of courses that they are studying.

33. Students' communication skills are broadly average, enabling the majority to cope satisfactorily with the demands of their courses. Many students are reticent in contributing to discussions or asking

questions of their teachers, especially where group sizes are large. In addition, some of the teaching approaches rely too heavily on exposition and explanation by the teacher and do not encourage and challenge all students sufficiently to pose questions and contribute their own ideas. This has an adverse effect on students' capacity to use specialist vocabulary confidently and with understanding, to undertake independent research and to develop their skills of critical analysis and problem solving – weaknesses that are identified in several subject reports. The majority of students have a good capacity to take and make notes and to organise their work effectively. Standards in the use of mathematics to support learning in their respective subjects are broadly average. Students' skills in the use of ICT to support their learning are below average overall, although in the advanced courses in business and ICT, standards are at least average and often better than this as the students concerned have regular access to ICT equipment. The majority of sixth form students do not have enough opportunity to use the range of computer hardware and software currently available in the school. Consequently, this adversely affects the standard of their work.

34. Retention rates across subjects are very variable but overall are broadly satisfactory as are completion rates. To a greater degree than in most schools, the students' ability to remain in the sixth form and to complete their courses are influenced by cultural and family expectations. Over two-thirds of students have continued their education after Year 13, the great majority going on into higher education.

35. All students who took the externally validated access course in communication and application of number at Level 1 passed the coursework component of the examination in 2001. They did not do so well in the examination. In the GCSE examinations in art, textiles and catering, almost all who were entered achieved grades E to G. One student with a hearing impairment gained a distinction in health and social care and art.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

36. Students' attitudes towards school and their learning are a significant strength. They are proud of their school. Students are motivated, interested and responsive, showing very positive attitudes to their work. They collaborate very well, on occasions confidently engaging in discussion that stimulates their thinking and extends their understanding. For example, in a combined Year 12 and Year 13 lesson in government and politics, students worked very well in small groups, contributing ideas and developing a good understanding of relationships between the Civil Service and Government Ministers, and made very good gains in their learning. Students sustain their interest and concentration even when lessons, due to timetabling arrangements, extend over an entire morning. Students respond well to appropriately challenging work. When given the opportunity, students are developing their skills of working independently, although this is not consistent across the sixth form. Some students, especially in the vocational courses, show good initiative in planning their learning and developing study skills to enable them to organise their own work without continual support of staff and specific direction.

37. Students with special educational needs want to learn, and are conscientious and compliant. They enjoy lessons, and work readily and productively with others. Their study of basic literacy, numeracy and life skills provides the basis for future independent learning.

38. Students' views of the school and of the sixth form are positive overall, although a small but significant minority express reservations about some aspects of the sixth form. Some are concerned about the advice they receive about the courses they should follow in the sixth form and about their future career or education options, the information they receive about their progress and the range of extra-curricular activities available to them. Others have concerns about the way in which the school listens and responds to their views but recognise that the School Council, which is seen as a positive initiative, is providing a forum that is improving their access to senior management. Inspectors judge careers provision to be good and find that the school is generally responsive to the views of the sixth form and recognises their concerns. They also judge that induction procedures into the sixth form could be more consistent and developed further.

39. Behaviour in the sixth form is very good. Students are courteous and trustworthy, and show respect for property. Relationships between students and between students and staff are very good. Students relate positively to their tutors and teachers and feel that they can readily turn to them for assistance. Students have respect for each other's feelings, values and beliefs and display sensitivity

when encouraging, supporting and constructively criticising each other's work or performance. Students' response to opportunities to take responsibility through the School Council and to setting an example to younger pupils is very good.

40. Overall attendance in the sixth form is well below that of the main school, although there are no national figures against which the attendance rate can be compared. There are significant variations in attendance levels between classes in both Year 12 and Year 13. The explanations of these variances are not entirely clear because of errors in coding absences during the last two years. In addition, a number of students take extended holidays at some stage in Year 12. An analysis of attendance figures, based on the school's own data, shows that in the period between 3 September 2001 and 18 March 2002 overall attendance in the sixth form was 82.7 per cent with 2.0 per cent authorised absence and 15.3 per cent unauthorised absence. The school does not monitor attendance with sufficient rigour. The unsatisfactory attendance of some students affects their learning.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

41. The quality of teaching in the sixth form is good overall and is making a positive contribution to students' learning and to the good progress that they make. As yet, the impact of this good teaching has not been realised in improving standards in external examinations in all subjects. Sixty lessons were inspected in the sixth form. In all but two of these lessons, the quality of teaching was at least satisfactory and more often better than this. In nearly four out of five lessons, the teaching was at least good and in just under a third, it was very good and occasionally excellent. The teaching overall in Year 13 is slightly better than in Year 12, but the difference is not significant. It is not possible to determine whether the quality of teaching in the sixth form has improved since the last inspection, as no specific data from the last inspection are available. However, if the sixth form mirrors the improvements found across the school as a whole, then it is more than likely that teaching has improved since the last inspection, both in the reduction of unsatisfactory teaching and in the increased proportion of good or better teaching.

42. In the majority of subjects, the teaching is good overall and is very good in physics, drama and business. In sociology, psychology, media studies and ICT, the teaching is satisfactory. There are many examples of very good and occasionally excellent teaching in a number of subjects. For example, some excellent teaching occurs in chemistry, business and Bengali. There is also some very good teaching in English, mathematics, art, drama, politics and textiles as well as in chemistry and business. The strengths of these lessons include strong encouragement of independent learning; a high level of involvement of students in discussions; clear, confident presentation of the work as a result of the teacher's considerable expertise; very effective use of group work to improve students' understanding and confidence; and challenging questioning to probe and deepen their understanding. In these lessons, students make rapid gains in their learning.

43. Teachers use their good subject knowledge to plan appropriate work for the students and generally prepare lessons well. They provide a suitable range of activities to help students learn effectively. This is particularly necessary in the case of some classes, which are timetabled for extended periods of time because of the school's involvement in a consortium arrangement with local schools. For example, a Year 12 English group is timetabled for two-thirds of their week's teaching on one morning, as is a Year 12 art group.

44. In a number of lessons across many subjects, which are otherwise effectively taught, there are some weaker features. Too much direct teaching and a lack of challenging open-ended questioning means that many students are less inclined to contribute orally to the lesson. In such lessons, students come to rely too much on their teachers for guidance, find it difficult to solve problems, especially in science, unless the methods are provided, and so do not develop their skills and confidence in working and learning independently. This is one of the reasons why students do less well in written examinations than they do in their class and course work. Some students are less confident in their understanding and use of subject specific vocabulary and terminology and require additional support from their teachers. This is particularly so in the case of students with English as an additional language, who frequently experience difficulty in understanding the higher level vocabulary for a subject, which has an adverse impact on standards. Occasionally, as in a Year 13 biology lesson on sexual reproduction in flowering plants, the work is not matched closely enough to the range of attainment in the class and consequently the higher attaining pupils are not sufficiently challenged. The marking of

work and the use of assessment to inform learning is inconsistent in some subjects. This makes it difficult for students to know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. In many subjects, ICT is not used enough to support learning. The weaknesses in the small amount of unsatisfactory teaching stem mainly from inadequate subject expertise, slow pace to the lesson and insufficient intervention by the teacher in one lesson and inadequate lesson planning and unclear objectives in the other.

45. In the vast majority of lessons, students work productively and respond well to skilful teaching. The students' extremely positive attitudes to their studies and the respect in which they hold the teaching staff, as well as the strengths in the teaching, mean that they make good progress overall. Students believe that they are taught well and challenged to do their best.

46. Students with special educational needs learn well overall and make satisfactory progress in the basic skills of literacy and numeracy. Teachers know the strengths and weaknesses of the students, and help and encourage them to overcome difficulties. Marking is conscientious. The curriculum is clearly influenced by assessment. In one numeracy lesson, examination techniques were specifically addressed. In a GCSE English lesson in Year 12, one student with learning difficulties was well taught. The teacher made frequent checks on learning, and showed good management of a carefully diagnosed learning style. The IEP was used well to inform teaching and learning. The pupil made a significant contribution to class discussion during this lesson. Role-play is used effectively in life skills lessons, which are well planned and effective. In one lesson, students made insufficient progress, as the planning did not take enough account of their individual education plans, the teaching methods lacked variety and urgency, with students expected to do no more than complete the task in hand.

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

47. The curriculum is broad and provides a satisfactory balance of academic and vocational courses that are also open to students from other schools. The curriculum is very responsive to local circumstances and offers a good range of courses for students with varied levels of attainment. The sixth form has grown because it offers courses that appeal to students and are mostly well suited to their needs. Not all students choose to enter the sixth form from Year 11, a small proportion preferring alternative provision elsewhere. Students are able to select from 18 subjects at AS/A-level and AVCE and GNVQ Intermediate courses in business, and health and social care. The take-up rate for vocational courses is good. The entry-level requirements for the AS/A-level courses are sometimes too low, for example in mathematics, to enable students to achieve the higher grades in national examinations. The school offers a good range of GCSE courses, including English, mathematics, art and design, Bengali, catering, textiles, ICT, and religious education, as well as courses at Level 1 in key skills in communication and numeracy, City and Guilds communication skills, Business English, life skills, and free-standing mathematics qualifications in handling data and finance. The curriculum meets the needs of its students well, and offers them the opportunity, through the consortium arrangements, to take additional subjects at other local schools. Very few students have taken advantage of this opportunity this year. The number of students entering higher education continues to rise with nearly three-fifths taking up university places.

48. The planning of the curriculum is mostly good. The school is successful in planning schemes of work to provide coherence and advancement of learning. Provision for key skills, which is taught mainly through subject teaching, is broadly satisfactory, and is more effective in communication and application of number than in ICT. Provision for careers advice is of good quality and students have the opportunity to undertake work experience, as well as physical recreation. The school meets the statutory requirements for religious education but not the requirement for a daily act of collective worship.

49. There are weaknesses in the organisation of the curriculum, particularly with regard to class sizes and the timetabling arrangements, which affect the quality of students' learning. Class sizes in a number of subjects, including art, drama, English, Bengali, government and politics, law, media, psychology, ICT, sociology, business, health and social care, communication skills and handling data in Year 12, and biology and English in Year 13, are too large for all students to be able to contribute effectively to the lesson and tends to lead to too much work being led and directed by the teacher. The sizes of these groups are all above 20 and in the case of sociology there are 31 students. The school

comments that reducing the size of some groups is constrained by the limitations of the accommodation and that in Year 12, it does not always know how many students are going to be returning to the school, which makes the appointment of specialist staff very difficult. The timetable constraints of working within a consortium arrangement mean that, in some subjects, students are taught for four consecutive lessons at a time. Although teachers provide a variety of activities to maintain students' interest and concentration, this arrangement is not conducive to effective learning. In addition, students who are absent on the day miss two-thirds of their subject teaching time for the week.

50. Curricular opportunities for students with a statement of special educational need are very good and the provision fully meets the curricular requirements specified in their statements. These students receive effective support in a range of A-level and GCSE courses. Others on the special needs register are provided with a worthwhile curriculum in which they follow an externally validated access course in communication and application of number. They study successfully for a certificate of achievement in life skills, and, additionally, choose at least one GCSE course in art, textiles or catering. Students undertake challenges in physical education that they find culturally acceptable, such as canoeing and rock climbing.

51. The school provides a good range of suitable activities, which meets the interest, aptitude and particular needs of individual students, including those with learning needs. Because of family circumstances and their cultural backgrounds, not all students are able to take advantage of the range of extra-curricular opportunities that the school provides. There is a satisfactory range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities, mostly related to the courses they follow. Access to other provision is more problematical. Students have insufficient access to computers, as the main school facilities are not freely available to them. This limits their ability to develop their independent learning skills and to demonstrate initiative and responsibility. This aspect of learning and the use of private study time for students who lack the skills of independent learning have not yet succeeded in raising standards. Students gain from national and local initiatives and they speak highly of the support they receive, for example, the learning mentors and the links with the Business Partnership.

52. The tutorial programme provides a very good developmental approach to students' personal and social education, and includes a focus on careers, health education, records of achievement and students' needs, rights and responsibilities. Students are given assertiveness training, training in job search skills, help with their CVs and fully supported interviews as they enter the job market. They make presentations, which are filmed, so that they know how to improve the impression they make on would-be employers. The school aims to promote confidence and self-esteem and in this they are successful. Students show maturity and responsibility, and are positive about life in the sixth form. Although competitive in their desire to succeed academically, they are caring and supportive of other students and make a major contribution to the ethos of the school.

53. The school values the wide and varied community it serves and its work reflects the richness of its local history, culture and experience. Many of these links are long standing whilst others are continually developing and changing according to the needs and priorities of the school. The careers and work-related programme in Year 12 offers students a very wide range of experiences and encourages them to take the first step in becoming less reliant upon their teachers. This transition develops their self-confidence to express independent ideas. The school prepares students with statements of educational need very well for their careers and life after school. The access course promotes familiarisation with money and teaches such skills as basic monetary calculation, telling the time, telephoning and organising travel. Life skills lessons fully support the three weeks' work-experience undertaken by students. The school's liaison with work experience providers and the local careers agency is of a high order, and a major reason for its success. The partnership with the community is far reaching, and includes links with the Police, Health Authority, banking, many universities and colleges, and numerous primary and secondary schools in the area.

54. All these enrichment activities and the satisfactory range of extra-curricular opportunities contribute to students' personal development and provide them with very good opportunities to reflect on a range of spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues relevant to them. The very good provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development seen in the main school continues in the sixth form and prepares students well to join and value the diversity of the multi-cultural society in which they live. The school places great value and respect on the beliefs the students bring from home and builds on this

through opportunities to reflect on issues that affect themselves, their attitudes and their work within the context of the school and the wider community. Students have a developing voice in school matters through the School Council. The school has continued to offer, and increase, the very good aspects of provision that were highlighted in the last inspection report.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

Assessment

55. Overall, the procedures for assessing students' attainment and progress are satisfactory. There is a clear whole school policy, which is routinely monitored. Departments follow the assessment requirements of the range of external examinations taken by the school. Assessment is well moderated and accurate. The school has a range of information about individual students' earlier achievements that are used to set targets for the end of the sixth form. The school is shortly to implement a new system for target setting and monitoring the progress made by individual students.

56. The marking and assessment of students' work are satisfactory overall but lack consistency, both within departments and across subjects. Some students feel that they do not get sufficient information about their progress. Assessment is particularly strong in drama and business. In drama, all work receives oral feedback of very good quality and essays receive lengthy and helpful written comments. In business, assessment is used well to guide students' learning. In some other subjects, detailed marking and assessment provide students with a clear sense of their progress and knowledge of how to improve. Although satisfactory overall, the marking of work in English and mathematics is not sufficiently diagnostic and does not always give specific advice on how to improve. There is a very good standard of assessment in statements of special educational need, where the continuous cycle of teaching, monitoring and review ensures that all students make progress.

57. Diagnosis and provision for students' individual learning needs are satisfactory. There is very good provision for students with a statement of special educational needs and with English as an additional language, which ensures that they receive appropriate support to meet their learning needs. The use of assessment to guide curricular planning is satisfactory. For example, teaching approaches have been modified in the light of poor examination results in English, although there is no pooling of assessments to inform curriculum planning on a regular basis. Activities in drama lessons are particularly responsive to the very good assessment procedures used by the department. In mathematics, the use of assessment to guide curriculum planning is underdeveloped.

58. Reports on students' attainments and progress are satisfactory and give a clear account of their performance. The targets, which cover students' learning and personal development, often lack specific detail but students have regular reviews at which specific focused targets are agreed and monitored.

Advice, support and guidance

59. Overall support and guidance for sixth form students are satisfactory. A number of students join the sixth form from other local schools and, during the course of the inspection, many of these students explained that they had been closely involved in the decision to attend the sixth form at Mulberry Girls' School, and had taken account of its reputation within the local community and its results. Arrangements to prepare students for study in the sixth form are broadly satisfactory and are covered within individual departments and through tutorial sessions. These arrangements are not consistent across all subjects and students would benefit from a more coherent approach. Because of the new AS syllabuses, a minority of students feel that they would have liked greater support in settling into the sixth form. Some would also like more advice about the courses they should follow and about their future options. However, most students feel that teachers are readily accessible for help and guidance and give them good support and help to study independently. Students receive satisfactory advice and guidance with regard to their future careers. The school's very good links with the business community and the work experience programme help to widen students' horizons and their knowledge of the different opportunities available to them.

60. The school guides students with a statement of educational need very well in their choice of sixth form courses. There are formal interviews to which parents are invited to attend. Students' individual education plans, which particularly address their communication skills, are distributed to all teachers, and generally used very well to inform teaching. A constant cycle of teaching, monitoring and review informs all progress, be it emotional progress, improving self-confidence or students' academic progress. Arrangements for review are well organised and thorough.

61. An effective pastoral system provides good support for students' personal development. This involves tutors and other staff, together with a counsellor to whom girls feel very able to turn if they have any problems. Students are expected to take responsibility for their own actions and to provide good role models for other students and pupils. They respond very positively to these expectations. Staff provide very good role models for students and are very successful in promoting high standards of behaviour within the sixth form.

62. Arrangements for health and safety are satisfactory, although there are some areas relating to safety that need to be tightened up. The overall arrangements for child protection in the sixth form are unsatisfactory, as no member of staff permanently based in the sixth form building, which is a few minutes walk from the main school, has undertaken a recognised course in child protection. The designated child protection officer and her deputy, both of whom have undertaken the necessary training, are based in the main school. The procedures for monitoring and promoting good attendance in the sixth form are unsatisfactory. Attendance records are not analysed systematically enough and insufficient action is taken to monitor and follow up absences. Attendance levels in different classes vary significantly and the recorded levels of unauthorised absence overall are extremely high.

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

63. The school's partnership with parents and carers is very good and the school has successfully engaged them and the community in encouraging and supporting students in their studies. The partnership is reinforced by the provision of good information about students' progress, and the involvement of parents or carers in the event of any concerns, supported by translators, bilingual staff or governors, as necessary.

64. Only a comparatively small number of parents responded to the questionnaire sent out before the inspection or attended the Parents' Meeting. Parents of students in the sixth form have very positive views of the school and the quality of education that it provides. They are particularly positive about the high expectations and quality of teaching, which, they consider, enable students to make good progress and develop as mature and responsible members of the community. A small number of parents and carers expressed some reservations about the closeness of the relationship between the school and parents. Inspectors support the positive views expressed by parents and carers, confirming that the school's links with them are very effective.

65. Discussions with sixth form students and an analysis of the questionnaires that they completed before the inspection indicate that they are positive about the quality of teaching and the accessibility of staff to provide support, both in their study and personal development. Most students are very positive about the community within the school and the high quality of relationships that are developed. The majority would recommend the sixth form. Many students, however, express reservations about other aspects of the school, such as the range of extra-curricular activities and the way in which it responds to their views.

66. Information provided to parents and carers is good overall and although most families, for whom English is not their first language, have at least one bilingual member, the majority of communications are provided both in English and in Bengali. Bilingual staff and governors ensure that the school communicates effectively with all parents on a day-to-day basis and at meetings where they assist with translations. Annual reports provide parents with good information and include targets related to students' learning and their personal development. They often lack specific detail but students have regular reviews at which specific focused targets are agreed and monitored. Parents/carers are contacted about specific issues relating to their daughters. Tutors, heads of year and the general office are very effective in involving parents/carers for the benefit of students.

67. The school tries hard to involve parents/carers in its work. It issues newsletters and invitations to events and the very strong community links help to reinforce the status of the school within the local community. The majority of parents/carers provide satisfactory support for students' learning at school. At home they are generally very supportive of the school's ethos and the opportunities which it provides for students to learn and to experience activities in the wider community. Such opportunities benefit the

development of students' knowledge and understanding about issues such as racism in a global context. Students and staff appreciate the support of parents/carers.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

Leadership and management

68. The aims and values of the sixth form mirror those of the whole school and the headteacher, with the strong support of her senior managers and the governing body, leads by example in developing a sixth form that aims to promote equality of opportunity for all students by catering for their individual needs. The school is successful in providing a curriculum that is very responsive to local circumstances. This means that although the entry requirements for particular courses, especially the advanced courses, are lower than usually found in other schools, students have the opportunity to follow a wide range of courses at different levels to attain the highest levels of which they are capable. The sixth form welcomes students from other institutions, regardless of their previous experience.

69. The governing body fulfils its responsibilities well. Governors are fully aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the sixth form and recognise that raising standards in the sixth form is a key priority. The governing body monitors performance and expenditure carefully. As with the main school, it does not meet the statutory requirements for a daily act of collective worship.

70. The management of the sixth form is broadly satisfactory, with areas of strength and areas for further improvement. One of the deputy headteachers carries overall responsibility for the sixth form site, which is separate from the main school. Responsibility for maintaining oversight of the academic and pastoral curriculum and students' progress and achievements resides with the head of sixth form. The monitoring and evaluation of students' progress and achievements, as well as the quality of teaching, are satisfactory. Examination results are carefully analysed and the outcomes reviewed by senior managers and with the heads of department according to an agreed schedule. Performance data are used well to support the monitoring and evaluation programme and the school is developing its valued-added procedures to enable it to monitor students' progress more effectively. However, in other areas, for example the monitoring of attendance, the current systems are unsatisfactory. The school is part of a consortium arrangement with other schools in the area but very few students are involved. As the arrangements include an element of common timetabling through the blocking of a whole morning, this restricts unduly the flexibility that the school has in organising the sixth form timetable, resulting in some students having three or four consecutive lessons in the space of a morning. In addition, some class sizes are too large and need further review and prompt action as the size is having a detrimental effect on students' learning and, consequently, the standards they achieve. Managing the large numbers of students in the sixth form and the wide range of provision, as well as monitoring systematically aspects of the work of the sixth form, requires more management time than is currently provided.

71. Leadership and management of special educational needs are very good. The two special needs co-ordinators, who work on a part-time basis, share the work effectively. They have produced good systems for the day-to-day administration and the development of provision for students with special educational needs in the sixth form and monitor standards of teaching and learning carefully. There is an excellent understanding of strengths and weaknesses in the provision. The school fulfils all statutory requirements of the Code of Practice for students with a statement of special educational need. Governors give appropriate support and fulfil all their statutory duties.

72. There is no agreed, shared, development plan for the sixth form, although reference is made in the school development plan to sixth form issues, for example monitoring recruitment and retention, and the curriculum for 14-19 year olds. In the light of some of the issues identified in this report, a more specific sixth form development plan would identify priorities more clearly and set the timescales for improvement.

73. Expenditure on the sixth form is considerably less than the income it receives for its sixth form students, with pupils at Key Stage 3 gaining most from this situation. This is to the disadvantage of sixth form students as many are taught in large groups. The average class size is 23, with group sizes in Year 12 considerably larger than those in Year 13. Only three classes in Year 12 have fewer than 10 students. Because of the school's local circumstances, students drop out of courses or take extended leave, which makes effective planning more difficult, particularly in ensuring sufficient specialist staff. Limitations of the present sixth form accommodation also reduce the flexibility that the school has to

arrange smaller groups. However, the current situation is unsatisfactory. The school needs to undertake a rigorous review of the organisation and the management of some aspects of the sixth form. Nevertheless, the sixth form, in terms of the range of opportunities and the quality of education it provides for its students, is cost effective.

Resources

74. The match of teachers and support staff to the demands of the curriculum is satisfactory. Teachers are appropriately qualified and nearly all teach their areas of expertise. Performance management has been implemented effectively. Arrangements for teachers' professional development are satisfactory so that teachers are kept up-to-date with regard to the demands of their subjects and the requirements of external examinations. The school effectively supports the career development of individual teachers, which accounts, in part, for the high staff morale and informs much of the good teaching seen. Support staff are sufficient to meet the demands of the curriculum. A team leader for learning support assistants and a deputy team leader have been appointed, giving this aspect of teaching a career structure and increasing the motivation of the staff concerned.

75. Overall, accommodation for the sixth form is unsatisfactory for teaching the curriculum. Sixth form teaching is carried out on two sites, which are some distance apart. This creates difficulties for staff and students who have to travel between sites for lessons and registration and to use facilities such as science laboratories and a library containing literature and fictional texts. Some classrooms are too small for the large groups in some subjects. They restrict teaching and learning styles, and make small group work difficult. Overall, the social and study accommodation for students is adequate and there are some features, such as the roof garden, which are particularly enjoyed by students. Toilet accommodation in the sixth form is unsatisfactory. During the inspection, one of the three toilets was locked and of the remaining two, half of the cubicles had no locks. Dining and kitchen facilities are unsatisfactory although students may choose to take their meals at the main school. Plans are well in hand to undertake a major rebuilding and remodelling of the main school site to provide better accommodation for the main school, community and sixth form facilities.

76. Resources for learning are adequate, but there are significant variations in provision. Facilities for ICT are good, but they are more accessible to those students who are following certain courses, for example business or ICT, than they are to those who study subjects such as English or history. The main school library is a good facility that is available for sixth form students when they are on the site. The library on the sixth form campus is a good source of reference but access is limited and books cannot be taken home. In history, there is a shortage of texts to support independent learning. In textiles, the sewing machines are inadequate for modern fabrics and there are no ironing facilities. The quality of equipment in food and design and technology is unsatisfactory.

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	25	64	62	16	15	1.4	1.5
Biology	41	71	84	22	34	1.6	2.6
Chemistry	32	84	87	22	40	2.3	2.8
Physics	16	81	86	25	39	2.4	2.8
Environmental science	23	35	n/a	0.0	n/a	0.7	n/a
ICT	18	72	81	0	22	1.4	2.2
Art & Design	15	80	86	13	43	1.7	2.9
Drama	13	100	95	46	40	3.4	3.0
Media studies	19	100	93	32	38	3.1	2.9
History	19	100	94	58	41	3.6	3.0
Government & politics	22	91	85	23	32	3.6	2.5
Sociology	22	100	86	77	34	4.1	2.7
Psychology	12	50	85	0	32	1.0	2.5
English	41	100	95	24	39	2.7	3.0
Bengali	20	100	n/a	45	n/a	3.4	n/a

GCE A level and AVCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	7	71	87	29	42	4.5	5.7
Biology	13	92	88	39	34	5.7	5.3
Chemistry	14	71	90	29	43	4.7	5.9
Physics	5	80	88	0	41	3.6	5.7
AVCE Business	20	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	10.9	10.5
ICT	7	100	86	14	23	4.6	4.6
AVCE Health and social care	12	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	10.0	10.8
Art & Design	11	100	97	0	46	5.1	6.5
Media studies	11	91	95	27	31	4.7	5.7
History	3	100	89	0	36	5.3	5.5
Religious studies	6	83	93	0	38	3.3	5.9
Government & politics	6	83	88	17	35	3.7	5.4
Law	8	75	88	37	35	5.3	5.4
Sociology	15	93	87	40	36	5.1	5.4
English	24	74	96	0	37	5.3	5.9
Bengali	9	78	n/a	56	n/a	5.2	n/a

Intermediate vocational qualifications

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit or distinction		Average points score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
GNVQ Business (Int)	19	58	89	5	65	11.8	n/a
GNVQ Health and social care (Int)	21	28	n/a	14	n/a	6.3	n/a

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

Mathematics

77. The focus was on AS and A-level courses in pure mathematics and statistics. In addition, freestanding qualifications in calculating finances and handling and interpreting data were also inspected.

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

Strengths

- Standards in Year 13 are above average.
- The teaching is good overall and consequently students have very good attitudes to their work.
- The curriculum offers a broad range of mathematics courses in response to local circumstances.

Areas for improvement

- Provide more opportunities for students to make oral contributions in lessons.
- Ensure greater consistency in the use of assessment to inform planning and learning.
- The allocation of teaching time for some groups of students.

78. The A-level examination results in 2001 were below the national average, both for the proportion of students gaining grades A-E and for those achieving the highest grades of A or B. The results in 2001, however, were a significant improvement on the results of the preceding two years. The AS examination results were also below the national average. Just under two-thirds achieved pass grades, and a small proportion gained the higher grade B.

79. Standards of work of A-level students in Year 13 are above course expectations. Students are achieving as expected given their above average results in their GCSE examinations in Year 11. Their understanding of calculus is good, and was the reason for the very good learning seen in a lesson on the more difficult work in module three in pure mathematics. Their understanding of the concepts involved in hypothesis testing in statistics is developing satisfactorily through good use of routine exercises.

80. In Year 12, standards of work are below expectations. A significant minority started their studies with GCSE results that were well below that normally seen for students embarking on an AS course. As a result, they find the work difficult. Concepts in calculus are not yet clear to them and their algebraic skills are not well developed. Moreover, because of timetabling difficulties, which the school has tried to resolve through arranging additional teaching time after school, they have one period a week less than other students on the same course. As these students have not taken advantage of this additional time, this affects their progress and consequently they do less well than expected. The other students in Year 12 have made a good start to their course and are achieving as expected. Basic work in calculus is secure. Problems in arithmetical progressions are solved accurately. Standards in the sixth form have improved since the last inspection.

81. Standards in the freestanding qualification courses - finances and handling data - are below average as attendance is below average and the teacher contact time is affected adversely by internal school arrangements. Moreover, the attainment of a few students at the end of Year 11 was below that recommended for the course and they find the work difficult. Coursework shows good use of computer skills and is of an appropriate standard for the course.

82. The quality of teaching is good overall, ranging from satisfactory to very good. Students learn well on the AS and A-level courses because the teaching is mostly good, and occasionally very good. The teachers' good subject expertise and effective planning of lessons are responsible for the gains in students' knowledge and understanding. The outcome is purposeful study, as students know what to do and how to go about it, engaging in discussions with each other and with their teacher to correct any misunderstandings. Students' attitudes to their work are good and they work very well in pairs and small groups. Students would benefit from more opportunities to make oral contributions in lessons,

which would increase their rate of learning and reduce the amount of individual tutorial work. Although broadly satisfactory, the use of assessment to inform learning, or students of their progress, is inconsistent with the result that some students are not clear about how well they are doing. Teaching has improved since the last inspection.

83. The quality of teaching in the freestanding qualification courses is also good. Students' learning is satisfactory, not as good as the teaching since some started the course from a lower than recommended GCSE level. Support for their course work is good. Assessment is inconsistent, with the result that students do not know how well they are doing and misunderstandings go uncorrected.

84. The mathematics department is managed satisfactorily. The breadth of the curriculum is a strength of the department, offering a range of courses to fit all standards of Year 11 applicants. The aims of the department promote the school's aims well. Good in-service training has taken place in preparation for the introduction of a new AS level course in decision mathematics. A new head of faculty begins work next term, which should ease current staffing difficulties. The monitoring of the department's work is satisfactory, although there is insufficient emphasis placed on ensuring that assessment is used consistently across the department. There has been a good improvement since the last inspection.

SCIENCES

85. The focus was on AS and A-level courses in biology, chemistry and physics.

Biology

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

Strengths

- Students in Year 13 are attaining above average standards.
- The good quality of the teaching enables students to achieve well over the two-year course.
- The increased popularity of the subject.

Areas for improvement

- The achievement of students in Year 12.
- Monitor more closely students' routine work and files, especially in Year 12.

86. The A-level examination results in 2001 were above the national average. Overall, the results were better than those predicted from students' earlier GCSE performance, showing that these students had achieved well in their two years of study at A-level. In 2001, and also in 2000 and 1999, Year 13 students did significantly better in biology than in their other subjects. Results in the Year 12 AS examination in 2001 were not as good as the A-level results. The average points score was well below the national average and a large number of students, 12 out of the 41 who sat the examination, failed to obtain a pass grade. The results fell below those predicted by these students' GCSE performance, showing that some students underachieved in relation to their earlier attainment.

87. Standards attained by students currently in Years 13 and 12 mirror those shown by the examination performance in 2001. Year 13 students, who are preparing for their A-level examination, are on course to achieve above average results. Almost half the students in this large class obtained A or B grades in their AS examination, and the majority of the remainder achieved a grade C. Building on this very secure foundation, they have continued to progress well. In a lesson on plant structure, for example, students closely examined the material, drew careful diagrams and produced good quality sections for microscopic examination. Their substantial folders of notes and other work indicate very positive attitudes to their studies, a methodical way of working, above average attainment and good achievement.

88. The overall picture in Year 12 is not as positive as that in Year 13. Based on their target grades, some students are not progressing as well as they should. These students are more often than not those students who obtained a grade C at GCSE in science and those for whom biology is the only

A-level science subject they are studying. In the recent AS examination taken by these Year 12 students, almost a quarter of the two classes failed to achieve a pass grade, although a fifth achieved a grade A or B. Some students admit that they did not work hard enough. Most of the Year 12 work folders are not well organised and, consequently, are not so helpful for revision purposes. Students in Year 12 are interested in their studies. In lessons, they are attentive and do all they are asked to do. Some, especially the more capable and confident students, readily share their ideas and questions and are able quickly to extract key information from their textbook and other printed resources on contagious diseases, the topic currently being studied. Other students, however, are not skilled in note taking, as opposed to copying, and miss opportunities to use scientific language, even in discussion with their peers. This slows their progress.

89. The quality of teaching, as judged by the impact it has on students' learning, is good overall. All students are taught by biology specialists. Teachers make good use of the course requirements to explain to students what they need to learn. This helps also to ensure that teachers' expectations are well referenced to the syllabus so that lessons cover the ground well. Lessons get off to a prompt start and time is used well. Where resources for practical work are needed, the contribution by the laboratory technicians is very effective. Resources for students' use are well organised and readily accessible. Lessons are taught in a friendly and purposeful manner, with a clear focus on learning. The teaching of new topics is clear, with attention paid to specialist terms, although they might be emphasised a little more strongly to ensure that students quickly learn to use them confidently. Activities are suitable for the topic being taught, as well as making a good contribution to students' literacy and communication skills, for example in the lesson on contagious diseases. Here, students worked together well as they researched for information in preparation for presentations to the class. The Year 13 lesson on plant structure gave students first-hand experience of some key aspects of flower structure, thereby laying a good foundation for the next stage in their learning. In this and other lessons, learning builds up stage by stage, so that most students are confident and understand what they need to do to make progress. Biology makes a good contribution to students' social development through the regular group working activities.

90. There are, however, several aspects of teaching which are less well developed. The teachers' questioning of students during lessons does not explore the extent of their knowledge and understanding thoroughly enough to ensure that the demands of the lesson challenge all students sufficiently. This is sometimes also the case with the learning activities. Students, irrespective of their stage of progress in biology, are given much the same work to do. Consequently, those working at the highest grade levels are not always sufficiently challenged, whereas the rate of work for those whose achievements are more modest is sometimes too fast. While past examination papers, used for assessment purposes, and coursework assignments are thoroughly marked by teachers, not enough attention is given to keeping a check on students' routine work, namely the quality of their notes and the organisation of their work files. Despite these weaknesses, teaching is good, taking account of the achievement of students over the two-year course. The underachievement of some students, most of whom do not continue with biology in Year 13, requires further attention. The school has already recognised this in the light of the AS results in 2001, but some of the present Year 12 students are doing less well than expected. The great majority of students work hard enough, but some are coasting and need closer monitoring and challenge.

91. The head of faculty, appointed since the last inspection, is developing a sound understanding of how to improve biology further. Priorities for change are appropriate, including more thorough and regular checks of students' working files. However, the faculty action plan gives little attention to the sixth form and the head of faculty does not have the support of a formally appointed senior biology teacher who would bring subject specialist knowledge to bear on the development issues. In view of students' better performance in biology over the past three years compared to their other subjects, improvement since the last inspection has been good.

Chemistry

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

Strengths

- The quality of teaching, some of which is outstanding.
- Students' involvement in lessons, especially in practical lessons.
- The quality of students' written work, including their presentation skills.

Areas for improvement

- Levels of attainment in AS and A-level examinations.
- The support given to students, to give them the confidence they need to tackle both routine and unfamiliar problems.
- The quality of marking of students' written assignments.

92. The A-level results in 2001 were below the national average. When they come into the sixth form, students' attainment, based on their GCSE performance, is generally below average. They make progress as expected during the two-year course but few of them gain the highest grades of A or B. Consequently, the A-level results remain below average. In the AS examinations in 2001, around four-fifths of students gained pass grades, with about a fifth gaining the highest grades of A or B. There has been little variation in the results gained by A-level students over the last three years.

93. The standard of work seen in lessons and in students' work is higher than is indicated by the 2001 examination results. In the main, students show a good understanding of the ideas that underpin the subject and are able to make good links between experimental observations and the molecular explanations of them. For example, in a Year 13 lesson on properties of strong and weak acids, they were able to explain the relationship between pH and concentration for acids having different values of K_a , and in a Year 12 lesson on properties of aromatic compounds, they were keen to explain the reactions of bromine with cyclohexene and with methylbenzene under various conditions. Much of their written work is also of a high standard and is always well presented, although many students show that they have difficulty when asked to solve problems set for homework. They also perform less well than expected in end of unit tests.

94. Teaching is good overall, and in some lessons it is very good and occasionally excellent. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and plan their lessons carefully. Support for students in lessons is good, whether in a lesson in which they had to research the properties and uses of modern polymers using the Internet, or in practical lessons. Teachers are at pains to challenge students of all levels of attainment to think about their work carefully. The individual attention that students get means that the needs of all are catered for well. In one excellent lesson on properties of hydrocarbons, the teacher led an extremely effective discussion at the beginning of the lesson and students undertook a variety of experiments designed to reinforce the very good theoretical basis of the topic. The very high level of commitment of students, the excellent support of the teacher, and very carefully prepared investigations meant that the needs of all students were met and excellent learning took place.

95. Homework is set regularly, and end of topic tests are an important part of the departmental monitoring system. The marking of work by teachers is not sufficiently systematic. Students feel that they do not have a good enough understanding of their own progress, and that teachers do not always help them enough when they find it difficult to understand a topic. They are concerned that as some of their homework is marked in class, teachers may not always understand the problems they encountered in attempting it. These concerns are reflected in the written work in their folders, where the very good work produced in class is intermingled with problem-solving exercises which students have clearly found difficult. New monitoring systems have been introduced to give both students and teachers a better understanding of students' strengths and weaknesses, and enable them to build on the good progress which they already make in lessons.

96. Leadership and management of the department are good. The head of department has been at the school for nearly two years. He provides a very clear sense of direction for the department, and has chosen an excellent course of study in the sixth form. Monitoring of teaching takes place regularly.

Schemes of work develop skills in chemistry well, and support the development of literacy and numeracy skills effectively. Good use is made of ICT. Staff are well qualified and resources are usually adequate and of good quality, although there is a shortage of data-logging equipment for sixth form use. Technical support is good. The head of department has implemented a good scheme for assessing pupils' work and monitoring their progress, although the effects of this have not yet been felt in the examination results gained by students. Overall, the department is making satisfactory progress, which is set to continue.

Physics

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

Strengths

- Teachers' subject knowledge and the quality of teaching.
- Relationships between students, and between students and their teachers.
- The quality and presentation of work in students' folders.

Areas for improvement

- Levels of attainment in AS and A-level examinations.
- The use of assessment for monitoring progress and as a tool for raising attainment.

97. The results of the A-level examination in 2001 were well below the national average, although the small numbers entered for the examination make comparisons with the national figures not very meaningful. Students' attainment on entry to the sixth form over the last few years, based on their GCSE examination performance, has been below average. During the two-year course, they progress broadly as expected so that their A-level performance remains below average overall. During the last three years, no student has gained the highest grade A, and only a small proportion achieved grade B, so that in terms of average points score their attainment is well below average. In the AS examination, which was taken for the first time in 2001, a quarter of the candidates gained the highest grades of A and B, although the average points score was again well below the national average, but by a smaller margin than in the A-level examinations.

98. In lessons, and in their written work, students produce work that is better than is indicated by the examination results. Lesson notes are impeccably kept, and there is much good work arising from experimental work in lessons. However, students find it difficult to solve problems when these are set outside the immediate context of the lesson, and teachers give students insufficient practice in responding to this type of question to raise standards further. On the evidence of work in lessons, and written work undertaken outside the laboratory, students are achieving as expected in physics.

99. Lesson observations, and evidence from the scrutiny of work, indicate that teaching has improved since the last inspection and is now very good. Students relate to the teacher and to one another very well. Teachers' planning and approaches to teaching are very good, and the activities that students undertake lead to very good learning in lessons. This very good learning is achieved by very clear explanations, very good support for students to make sure that all of them understand the underlying ideas in the subject, and a range of tasks that test and reinforce their understanding. For example, in a lesson on electromagnetic induction, the teacher introduced the topic using an excellent series of simple demonstrations, followed by practical activities undertaken by the students. Throughout the lesson, he emphasised the fundamental idea of flux linkage, continually reinforcing its meaning and importance. The lesson ended with a further series of demonstrations in which the students had to explain some surprising observations. Every student was actively involved in the discussion part of the lesson and in the practical tasks. The teacher's questioning was skilfully adjusted to make sure that pupils of all levels of attainment were challenged to the limit of their ability. The lesson was well planned to develop the key skills of numeracy and literacy, and the teacher made a brief but useful mention of the historical development of the topic.

100. Homework is set regularly and is designed to ensure that students can attempt questions similar to those they will meet in their examinations. It is regularly and constructively marked. But, away from the security of the classroom, students still find it difficult to solve problems in which the

method of solution is not given and, apart from their very good class notes, the standard of their written work is in line with their examination results. Teachers keep good records of test and homework marks, but they are not yet used sufficiently rigorously to identify areas where students need further support if they are to gain the highest grades.

101. Leadership and management of the department are satisfactory overall. Day-to-day administration of the subject is very good, and teachers receive good support from the laboratory technicians. Teachers are well qualified and resources are well maintained. However, many students do not achieve the results that they should because the innovations that are being implemented by the head of science have not been part of the physics department for long enough to have a real effect in public examinations. Nevertheless, the good work seen in lessons and the new assessment and monitoring procedures suggest that the subject is well placed to improve further in the near future.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

102. The work in textiles and food technology was sampled. In both subjects, students are following a course leading to a GCSE examination. Two lessons were observed, one in each area. In textiles, students, some with limited experience of the subject, make very good progress through the very good quality of the teaching. In food technology, the good teaching provides students, who work very hard, with challenging activities that enable them to make good progress.

BUSINESS

103. The focus was on AVCE (previously GNVQ Advanced) business and GNVQ Intermediate business.

Business

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

Strengths

- Standards in the GNVQ Advanced course which have been above average for the last three years.
- Very good leadership, which has brought together well-qualified staff and high quality learning resources, including ICT, and accommodation.
- Very good teaching that uses assessment well to guide students' learning.
- Good links with the business community.

Areas for improvement

- Introduce a Foundation level course to meet the needs of some students more effectively.
- Enable students following the Intermediate award to experience the same ICT, accommodation and mentors as the AVCE students.

104. Students' attainment at the end of Year 13 in the AVCE course in 2001 was above the national average, maintaining the pattern of the last three years. Over the same period, the GNVQ Intermediate results have been below average. Standards of work of the current cohorts in both courses are at a slightly higher level than the results in 2001 would indicate, although some of the lower attaining students following the Intermediate course are not achieving as well and would find the Foundation level qualification more appropriate to their needs.

105. Most students are making good progress and are achieving well. Those following the AVCE course are able to discuss the benefits of the European Union and Marketing strategies. They have gained a good understanding of enterprise from the local business context and each student has a mentor from the business community who works with them periodically over the two-year course. These students are confident with their subject and enthusiastic to share their knowledge. Students following the GNVQ Intermediate course are able to talk about how businesses develop and have a satisfactory understanding of the subject although they have access to fewer resources than those available to AVCE students. However, all students are able to use ICT effectively to support their learning and they

all have a first hand knowledge of the business world. Business education was not reported on in the last inspection report.

106. Teaching varies between good and excellent and overall it is very good. All students are well supported by subject staff and they value the work their teachers do. There is good guidance and monitoring of progress and work is set and marked regularly. Students have targets that are reviewed on a regular basis so that they know what they need to do to improve and how they are going to do this. Teachers have good subject knowledge. Lessons are well planned and usually employ a rich mixture of learning experiences. Particular emphasis is given to giving students first-hand experience of business, through visits, work experience and mentor support, and to providing them with ICT. Classroom displays ensure a stimulating environment for students to learn. Teachers have good relationships with students and are skilled at developing learning through sharply focused questioning and the use of effective assessment strategies.

107. The department is very well led and managed. The head of department has brought together a team of teachers of high quality and well developed physical resources, and maintained high standards over a sustained period. There are improvements that could be made in terms of a more appropriate Foundation course for some of the less capable students. Students studying the GNVQ Intermediate course would also benefit from access to the same quality of accommodation, resources, including ICT, as the AVCE students. However, these are relatively minor adjustments to the predominantly good provision.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

108. The focus was on GCSE, AS and A-level courses in ICT.

Information and communication technology (ICT)

Overall, the quality of provision in ICT is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- All students gained pass grades at A-level in each of past three years.
- The ratio of computers to students in the sixth form is good and students studying ICT at advanced level have very good access to computers.
- There is a detailed ICT policy and departmental development plan.

Areas for improvement

- Schemes of work for the use of ICT need to be developed for all subjects.
- More qualified staff are required and staff development needs to be more effective.
- Standards in the GCSE are low and the curriculum for this level need to be reviewed.

109. Standards in ICT are in line with the national averages. The A-level examination results in 2001 were in line with the national averages, similar to those in 1999 but below the results in 2000 when they were well above average. Over the past three years, all students have attained a pass grade but only a few gained the highest grades of A or B. Standards in the GCSE short course were below the national averages with very low pass rates at grades A*-C in two of the three previous years. This year many students can only expect to gain a relatively low grade in the GCSE examinations.

110. Students, including the most capable ones, make good progress in A-level classes and they perform in line with expectations and in the case of some, above expectations. Students know how to design and test databases for a variety of purposes; they also know when and how to use different ICT tools. GCSE students have a good basic knowledge of the subject but these students produced little evidence of analysis or application of skills. The pace of learning in the GCSE course is too slow partly because of weaknesses in the teaching. The outcomes are therefore depressed.

111. The current situation is almost the reverse of that found during the last inspection when the GCSE results in Year 12 were judged as generally good and the A-level results judged as poor. All students, irrespective of the level at which they are studying or whether they are from an identifiable

grouping within the classes, have a compliant attitude to their studies and most are positive about their learning. They work hard and provide help to each other, which supports their progress. Many of the A-level students want to go to university and most succeed in this ambition.

112. Teaching is satisfactory overall, although difficulties in recruitment have led to inexperienced teachers being used which affects the learning in some GCSE classes. In the most effective teaching, the teachers' confidence in the subject enables them to set challenging but attainable tasks for students, develop good relationships with the students and ensure the regular marking of work. Academic performance and progress are monitored and supported effectively in the A-level classes, although there is little documentary evidence of this.

113. The classrooms used for the teaching of ICT are well resourced and all have access to the Internet. In the GCSE course, there is considerable input of computers, teacher time and student time but the results are well below average. An alternative curriculum may be more appropriate for these students and provide better value for money.

114. Although students studying ICT and Business Studies have access to high quality ICT this is not the case for other students in the sixth form. This sizeable majority have quite poor access. There are very few computers for them in the sixth form and these are often not available at convenient times. The students are not allowed to use the rooms in the main school unless they are supervised. The result is that many students are unable to make proper use of the excellent facilities in the school.

115. The department is well led in many respects. It has a clear policy and an effective departmental development plan and the head of department has ensured the procurement of good quality networked computers and accommodation for students. However more qualified staff are required and there is a need for more effective training of the current staff to develop their expertise. The development of schemes of work would also support all staff in organising their teaching more effectively.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

116. No courses are offered in this vocational area.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

117. The focus was on AVCE health and social care in Year 12 and Year 13 and GNVQ Intermediate health and social care in Year 12. Courses are very popular and class sizes have increased since the double-award AVCE was introduced.

Health and social care

Overall, the quality of provision in health and social care is **good**.

Strengths

- Results show good achievement by students over time: GNVQ Intermediate standards are improving.
- Students have a good grasp of basic theory and make effective use of work placements and visits to care settings to develop their personal skills.
- Teaching is good overall: teachers have good subject knowledge and very good relationships with students.
- The AVCE course effectively meets the needs of students who wish to enter the health care professions.

Areas for improvement

- Students do not use ICT sufficiently to present work, draw graphs and analyse statistics.
- There are insufficient opportunities for independent learning in some lessons, and too many unread handouts.
- Marking is regular, but teachers do not always give detailed targets for improvement.

118. Overall standards are average. Results in the AVCE course in 2001 for the 12 students entered were above average. Two students, one with special educational needs, obtained distinction awards, and nine gained merit awards. These results maintained the high trend from previous years. Results for the first year of the new AVCE course in Year 12 were below average. Students found the external tests difficult. Students' overall achievement was, however, as expected when account is taken of their earlier attainment. Teachers have made considerable changes to the schemes of work for the current Year 12 students, whose progress is good. Very few students drop out of courses. It is not possible to gauge improvement since the last inspection, as the subject was not inspected.

119. The attainment of GNVQ Intermediate students was well below average in 2001, with three-quarters of students failing to complete the course successfully. This continued the trend from previous years and was largely due to the low GCSE grades most students had when starting GNVQ. Many students found the more rigorous external tests in the new course too difficult. However, standards are improving, as students' GCSE entry levels in 2001-2 are higher.

120. Students at both levels make good progress in lessons and in the work seen. Year 12 AVCE students present work to a high standard and relate their experience in local care settings very well to theory learnt at school. On work placements, students develop good communication skills through interacting with their selected clients, infants and elderly people. In one good lesson, they showed a very good understanding of how to collect and present data related to the diets of their family and friends, and were able to link dietary information from different sources well when comparing their results with published data. There is, however, little evidence in coursework notes to show the development of key ICT and numeracy skills in recording and analysing health care statistics or fitness levels.

121. In their coursework assignments, GNVQ Intermediate students show a clear understanding of how people can develop self-concepts through socialisation, and they can describe the effect of social and economic factors on peoples' lifestyles well. The higher attaining students succinctly explain the emotional effects of bereavement. Nearly all students have passed both external tests to date. Students' clear oral presentations of their recent work placements in early years' settings meet assessment criteria very well, and incorporate good organisation charts. Their presentations are weakened because they do not use ICT either to word process their points or produce graphs.

122. Year 13 AVCE students use word processing well to present their projects, for example, good descriptions of *champiassage* (Hindi for head massage) and sound research, mainly from the Internet, on the history of aromatherapy. These included good analyses of examples from students' own culture. There are good analyses of how children's self-confidence can be nurtured, and the role of adults in a child's early moral development. In lessons and work seen, students show a good awareness of strategies for alleviating mental health problems, discussing ethical, cultural and political issues in a very mature way, sometimes using local people as examples in a sensitive and ethical way. A student with special educational needs clearly explained the effect of Alzheimer's on the nervous system. Students use the web well to research health care information, but there is less evidence of the use of ICT applications such as spreadsheets (for graphs), desktop publishing (merging text and images) and databases to analyse statistics or model problems. This is mainly because computers are not easily available for students' use outside lessons. Most students use action-planning techniques well to prepare for research. Students' progress since their rather disappointing AS level grades has been good, and they are likely to attain results at least in line with national expectations in 2002.

123. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers make their expectations very clear, and create a positive climate for learning. Relationships between teachers and students are good, and students clearly enjoy the subject. Students bring ideas from friends and family outside school into the classroom, and readily discuss ideas and views with each other and their teachers. In the best lessons, students worked quietly in small groups to discuss viewpoints which they presented, and were encouraged to evaluate each others' strengths and weaknesses, a feature not seen when students analysed their work placements. All Year 12 students use their work placements well to reflect on critical issues, and teachers help students gain a good understanding of ethical issues through well-focused class discussion. Teachers' handouts are clear and topical, but sometimes they are not all read by students, who depend on teachers too much for guidance in some lessons. Regular homework is constructively marked, but more written targets would help students. More use of ICT needs to be encouraged, to develop graphical and statistical skills.

124. Leadership and management are good. Assessment procedures are very well organised and meet examining board requirements very well. Teachers regularly meet to check the quality of students' assignments. Their expertise is developed by appropriate training, including short placements in local care homes. They work very well as a team, and use a good, up-to-date range of textbooks, videos and other materials from local care settings. They have built up very good links with local schools, hospitals and a day centre, which students visit frequently. Students' progress is well monitored by comparing their current standards to predicted grades, although analysis of past results was not seen. The new AVCE course is popular, and further development of work placements for Year 13 students will improve standards further.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

125. The focus was on art, drama and media studies, which are offered at AS level and A-level. In addition, a one-year GCSE art option in Year 12 was also sampled. In this course, students, who have not done art since the end of Year 9, are achieving well.

Art

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

Strengths

- The quality of teaching is good, helping students to acquire knowledge and develop their understanding well.
- Students' attitudes are excellent, promoting good learning.

Areas for improvement

- The two small art rooms are in constant use and become very crowded, thus making it difficult for sixth form art students to find a space in which to work outside timetabled lessons.
- Developing a greater understanding of ways in which ICT can be used creatively.

126. The A-level results in 2001 were below average, although students achieved as expected in line with their target grades. All students gained pass grades but none achieved the highest grades of A or B. In the AS examinations, almost all students gained a pass grade, with a small proportion attaining the highest grades of A or B. In relation to students' prior attainment, their achievement was as expected.

127. Standards of work of A-level students in Year 13 are above average and almost all the group, which consists of five students, are on course to obtain high grades. They are achieving well in relation to their earlier attainment. Contextual studies research is very good, for example in work after John Biggen showing very good pencil studies of African plants. A substantial range of artists' work has been studied and linked to students' own work, notably Georgia O'Keefe who has inspired some excellent abstracts in pastels and paint. All the work shows very good control of media and highly developed powers of observation.

128. The work of students in Year 12 following the AS course is also above average. They are making good progress and doing better than expected, especially the students whose prior experience at GCSE is textiles or expressive and performing arts in which the art component is very much less than it is for art and design. Work in folders and sketch books is of above average standard, and work on the theme of 'magnification', for example, has inspired meticulously executed and incredibly detailed work. Artists' work is carefully researched and students have completed some very fine work in pastels.

129. The quality of teaching is good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and art skills, seen, for example, in the range of artists' work they introduce to the students and the quality of their observations about them. They plan their lessons with great thoroughness and go to considerable pains to ensure that students understand the subject in hand and the language being used. Students have a good command of English but some of the specialist words in the art vocabulary, such as *formal elements*, sometimes baffle them. All students have a good understanding of texture, line and so on, but were unable, when asked, to explain what constitutes the formal elements. Teachers are alert to difficulties of this kind and explain very carefully the language used in examination papers, for example. All classes contain a number of students with special educational needs and teachers are well aware of them and sensitive to their difficulties. These students make good progress. A few students in the AS group in Year 12 are identified as gifted and talented. These students do very well and examples of their work show above average attainment.

130. Students' attitudes and personal development are excellent, and it is the combination of these factors, together with good teaching, that leads to the good quality of their learning. In lessons, students work with good concentration and diligence. Much is achieved in the time and all make good

progress in undertaking their tasks and in developing their art skills. Although all the students are familiar with word processing, the creative use of ICT is not well developed.

131. Leadership and management of the subject are very good, ensuring clear direction for developing the work of the department. Monitoring and evaluation arrangements are good. Accommodation for sixth form art is unsatisfactory. The tightness of the accommodation poses problems for art students looking for somewhere to work on their own, outside of timetabled lessons. Good use is made of visits to London galleries to support their learning. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory.

Drama

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

Strengths

- The co-ordination of the subject is excellent.
- The very good teaching results in very good learning.
- The proportion of students gaining the highest grades of A and B in the AS examinations in 2001 was above the national average.
- The subject makes an excellent contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The quality of extra-curricular activities, particularly the regular theatre going, consolidates and extends students' knowledge and improves their attainment significantly.

Areas for improvement

- Students do not read enough to support their learning.
- Opportunities to work with professional actors and directors could be developed further.

132. No students were entered for A-level examinations in drama in 2001. The results in 2000 were well below average. All students gained a pass grade in the AS examination in 2001, with just under a half gaining the highest grades of A or B. As AS course students are not required to have any previous background in the subject when they are accepted on to the course, they achieved well. Standards of work of the current students are above average. In Year 13, students are achieving well in relation to their AS results. In the dress rehearsal of their original production, which is the culmination of their study, very good ensemble work was key to the good standard of dramatic realisation seen. Students worked together very well to plan and write the witty, feminist script. Their very good knowledge of genre and the work of other playwrights fully informed their sophisticated concept of a play within a play.

133. Students collaborate in a highly effective way to plan, develop and rehearse their production. They carefully planned the audience response, which was ensured by the good and confident acting. Lighting, sound, costume, stage management and staging were completely and effectively organised. Students take direction well. A good standard of well-informed and perceptive personal and whole group evaluation is a particularly strong feature of students' learning. Examination of structured records of the developing drama show good skills of analysis of the ways in which the stimulus material has been developed. Students' work is thoughtful and often original in its account of emerging roles and the dramatic techniques best used to communicate them. These notes are key to the continuing improvement and success of the performance. Their attainment was well supported by written evidence of research into women in prison, which was translated effectively into the script. Critical essays on current London productions are a very strong feature of students' learning. Students make clear statements of their opinions and are able to present good reasons as to why they think as they do. Using their classroom notes, they comment and give examples of background, interpretation, acting and staging. Their frequent visits to worthwhile London productions provide an extensive knowledge of genre, which fully informs both their practical and written work.

134. Students in Year 12 have already reached the standard above that expected at AS level. In their practical drama, ensemble work is well developed. Students plan and rehearse in highly effective ways. They explore character by improvisation and come to practical conclusions as to dress, utterances and

body language to produce rounded and believable personalities. They make effective comparisons between the development of their characters and those in *The House of Bernada Alba*.

135. Students make clear and thoughtful exploratory notes to support their practical drama. Essays show sound understanding of theatrical concepts. In their study of *Our Country's Good*, students are generally capable of making valuable connections between the themes of the play and contemporary issues. Not all students make sufficient reference to practical drama, however, and sometimes there is too little development and illustration of the points made. Students effectively redraft their work, and present it neatly.

136. The teaching is very good and students learn very well as a result. A very strong feature of teaching is the very high expectations evident in all lessons. This inspires confidence and enables students to do their best. Teachers know their subject and the requirements of the external examination very well and have taken enormous trouble to know their students. This knowledge has led to the creation of a secure environment in which students can safely experiment. Although they often make mistakes, some also make outstanding contributions to lessons such as in the development of characters in *The House of Bernada Alba*. Students are enthusiastic and co-operate in their own learning to such an extent that class management appears to be effortless. Key vocabulary, both spoken and written, is routinely and successfully addressed. Students have good knowledge of their learning. The high quality of peer and self-evaluation was a major element in some of the very good learning seen during the inspection.

137. Students' independent work includes visits to the theatre to support the course. Students use the Internet in the course of their independent study. They habitually read the theatrical critics in newspapers and magazines, but they do not read sufficiently widely to fully support their learning.

138. The very good teaching and learning result from work in the subject being excellently led and managed. Targets set for the subject are met. Teaching is well monitored. The co-ordinator has fought hard to establish the subject within the sixth form curriculum and in so doing has gained the co-operation and approval of parents. The curriculum is very good, supported as it is by 'relentless theatre-going'. It provides good opportunities for public performance in school and in the community. There are some valuable opportunities for students to work with theatrical professionals such as those in the Théâtre de Complicité, and these could profitably be developed further. The subject makes an outstanding contribution to students' spiritual development in extending their self-knowledge, improving their confidence and engendering positive feelings of self-worth. Students' moral development is excellently promoted in the discussion of moral issues deriving from character and situation. Students find the subject empowering socially because of the systematic development of spoken language and the excellent opportunities for performance. Their cultural development is fully supported by the study of original plays, critical texts and reviews, as well as by frequent visits to the theatre. Drama has been introduced as a sixth form subject since the last inspection.

Media studies

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

Strengths

- The pass rate in the AS examinations in 2001 was above the national average.
- Students achieve a good standard of independent research and have a good understanding of film grammar.
- The teaching is based on a strong subject expertise.
- The students' work is thoroughly assessed.

Areas for improvement

- The students' written work contains insufficient use of some key concepts.
- A significant minority of students fail to participate in lessons and there is inadequate questioning of their understanding in class.
- The students have poor access to ICT.

139. The A-level results have been in line with the national average over the past two years. In the AS examination in 2001, all students gained a pass grade and almost a third gained the higher grades of A and B. From the work seen during the inspection, standards are above average. Students' production work in video is of an above average standard, showing a strong grasp of visual narrative and the ability to select appropriate shots. One group of students effectively used a split screen mirror image to represent aspects of the supernatural in their video work. However, the standard of print production is below average, usually containing quite basic design and lacking in creativity. Students' evaluation of their production working tends to be superficial, lacking a critical analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the product.

140. Students' work in the AS course shows a good understanding of how cinematography and editing in film and television are used to create meaning. The ability of students in Year 13 to research independently a selected aspect of the media is very good, helped by a visit to the British Film Institute library. For example, in researching the relationships between children and television, some students have gathered an impressive range of evidence, including academic research, features from newspapers and magazines, and results from their own audience survey. Much of the written work by the students contains insufficient use of many key media studies concepts; for example, it fails to refer to ideology and preferred meaning when discussing media representations and audience responses.

141. The teaching is satisfactory overall and is based on strong subject expertise. Courses are well planned. Within lessons, there is effective use of up-to-date examples of media developments. In one class, the theme of technological convergence was examined initially through a case study of the new X-box games console, and then by studying how the latest generation of mobile phones has become a new medium of information and communication. Resources are well chosen to enable students to develop their understanding of media issues. A feature from the media pages of the Guardian on the rising popularity of the Daily Star was used in one lesson to explore the shifts in the tabloid newspaper market.

142. Whilst many of the students are enthusiastic about the course, especially the practical work, a significant minority fail to participate in class discussions. In assessing the learning that has taken place in the classroom, there is a failure to check the extent of students' understanding adequately. A few students are allowed to dominate when responding to questions, which are often not sufficiently probing. Students appreciate the support and guidance offered to them both inside and outside the classroom. Their work is assessed thoroughly and they are provided with a clear sense of their progress and how to improve.

143. Media studies is well managed by a very experienced course leader. The resources, whilst modest, are used efficiently within the spacious media base room. However, access to ICT is restricted by the small number of computers available inside the media room and elsewhere. The desktop publishing software is basic, restricting what the students can achieve in print media production work. Although cinema is well represented, the library contains a narrow range of media textbooks.

HUMANITIES

144. The focus was on AS and A-level courses in history, sociology and psychology. The school provides AS courses in religious studies as well as at GCSE in Year 12. No lessons in religious studies were observed.

History

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

Strengths

- Teaching and learning are good.
- The good quality curriculum is enriched with visits to conferences and exhibitions.

Areas for improvement

- Students' attainment at A-level.
- Texts should be made more readily available to support students' independent learning.

145. Only three students sat the A-level examinations in 2001 and therefore comparison with the national average is inappropriate. All students gained a pass grade but none achieved the highest grades of A or B. During the last three years, the A-level results have been below, and in 2000 well below, the national average. The proportion of students gaining a grade B declined during this time and no student achieved a grade A. During the last three years, the number of students following an A-level course has also declined.

146. Standards of work of current A-level students are in line with course expectations. Students are achieving well in relation to predictions based on their AS results. In their study of Nazi Germany, they evaluate, and use effectively, a wide range of sources in their study of the manipulation of Hitler's image. They use these to see how the Führer was glorified and stage-managed, and fully understand the Führer himself as a master of mass emotion. Students have an increasing level of knowledge of the complexities of the relationship between the Nazi party and the German state during this era. They realise some of the reasons why the party failed to govern the state in the 1930s and how the power of Bormann and Goebbels originated and developed. Teachers' good subject knowledge and focused teaching of writing techniques help students to achieve well-organised essays derived from careful and effective notes. Although key vocabulary is addressed well in lessons, less capable students are still unsure in their use of terminology, and some students find it difficult to sustain a historical argument and illustrate it with examples. Although all students make a conscientious effort in lessons, not all are prepared to contribute orally to proceedings in a way that would allow them to develop historical argument further and to marshal and present their facts in a coherent way.

147. Students in Years 12 and 13 following the AS level course achieve well and are reaching standards that are broadly average. In their study of Kristallnacht, they have examined a range of sources, and realise that some questions are left unanswered in some of these materials. Students gain a firm grasp of the organisation of the state in Nazi Germany and increasingly realise how this was influenced by ideology. They have fully understood the term *anti-Semitism* and know to what it leads. Students' writing shows undue use of colloquial English, and there is a need to use a greater range of vocabulary to communicate precisely. They plan their essays well, using well-annotated texts and the effective notes they make to support their writing. Higher attainers evaluate new resources adequately, but this is a weakness for some. Students derive key information from the Internet, but they do not read to support their learning as much as they should.

148. Teaching is good and students learn well as a result. Teachers work together as a complementary team. They have strong, confident, subject knowledge seen in explanations such as the 'blood and soul ideology'. There is a varied approach to learning, with an emphasis on group work, which allows students to learn effectively and make them more independent as learners. Lessons, which sometimes produce active learning, are consistently well planned, with clear learning objectives, which the students know and co-operate in achieving. Resources for learning, usually well-chosen textbooks and video clips, are good, but the lack of a variety of texts in classrooms is a weakness in provision. Questioning does not always elicit the lively vocal response intended, but students are conscientious, show interest and are determined to be successful.

149. The independent work students undertake is carefully prepared by them and complements the lessons. They are confident users of ICT, but although the department readily lends resources, students have insufficient access to a range of texts that could support their learning more effectively. Independent work is consistently supervised and assessed by the department and help is given as required.

150. The subject is well led and managed. The curriculum provides units of work that build securely on students' existing knowledge. Schemes of work are accessible, flexible and rigorous. The evaluation of course materials occurs on a regular basis and is effective. Programmes of study are theoretically devised so that students can make connections between the courses and so provide a wider dimension to their study of 20th century dictatorships, but some students find this confusing. There is evidence that the short course in history taken in Year 10 and 11 does not prepare students adequately to evaluate the range of historical sources required at A-level.

151. Since the last inspection there has been at least a satisfactory level of improvement as declining standards are now beginning to improve. Schemes of work have been revised since the last inspection and resources developed further to include revision booklets of high quality to support examination attainment.

Sociology

Overall, the quality of provision in sociology is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- In the A-level examinations in 2001, a higher proportion of students than average attained the highest grades of A or B, and the AS results were well above average.
- Students' good attitudes to study, which are characterised by a willingness to learn.
- Good resources, staff experience and subject knowledge.
- Good leadership and management of the subject.

Areas for improvement

- Some students underachieve owing to weak recognition of their learning needs and lack of clear targets.
- More access to ICT and the library for presentation, reading and research.
- The size of the group in Year 12, which has a wide range of ages and prior learning experiences, is too large and presents particular challenges.

152. The A-level examination results in 2001 were in line with the national average, although a higher proportion than average gained the highest grades of A or B. The results in 2001 were lower than those in 1999 and 2000 and the average point scores have declined over the last three years. The AS examination results were well above average in 2001, reflecting thorough teaching and preparation for the requirements of the new examination. A high proportion of students gained the highest grades of A and B in the AS examinations in 2001.

153. Standards observed during the inspection in Year 13 are in line with course expectations. They have benefited from sound learning in Year 12. The current AS level group, mainly Year 12, contains a wide variety of ages, including some Year 13 students and some who have left school and returned after experience of employment. This, allied to the very large size of the group, inhibits the use of discussion and written responses, given the task of marking the work of such a large group. However, their achievement is broadly as expected. Preparation for the external examination has been satisfactory. Their attainment is weaker than that of last year's AS group overall and there is no systematic formative assessment procedure in use.

154. Students in Year 13 have a satisfactory understanding of the theory and methodology of the subject. They organise their work well, especially notes, worksheets and exercises, including statistical data. Strengths include the use of clear layout, colours, arrows, diagrams, references to sociological theory and research in personal notes. Higher attaining students in Year 13 write skilfully constructed essays based on argument, analysis and evidence. They argue from a wide variety of perspectives, and articulate major methodologies, using research terms with knowledge and understanding and analysing quantitative and qualitative data well. Less capable students in Year 13 understand and can recall major concepts and ideas in their course topics, including power and deviance, the family, education and religion. They describe theories and explain examples from American and British society, using their own experience to enhance their work from the female or ethnic minority perspective. Some of the less capable students reflect what they have recalled rather than tackling questions with arguments and examples. The ability to comment on written and numeric evidence is taught and developed over the two years of the course. All Year 13 students reach A-level standards, but some do not attain their full potential. Some have inadequate preparation for managing their time and receive insufficient guidance on developing their study skills to help them revise. Others lack encouragement in working to improve the quality of their responses, or the capacity to tackle different types of questions on familiar topics.

155. Students following the AS course are making satisfactory progress. They are well prepared to work on sources, using questionnaires for investigation of their situation as individuals and members of family and society. They recognise and compare the shared experiences of their group with examples from the textbook and source material. They manipulate statistical data on social trends, for example on leisure and church attendance patterns, constructing graphs for themselves from raw data. Students develop the capacity to analyse, compare and interpret trends over time; for example, three generations were tracked for differences in attitudes to children, responsibility for them, and childhood/social

problems. Higher attaining students write good extended answers, based on sound interpretation of source material. Their knowledge and understanding of a wide range of concepts and research enable them to make good comparisons and judgements, and they have excellent sets of brief revision notes they have created for themselves. Lower attaining students find written responses more challenging, and need further support in developing skills for revision, time management and planning answers to specific questions. Less capable students rely excessively on recall and reproduction of material they know and understand.

156. Teaching overall is satisfactory. In one lesson, students made satisfactory gains in understanding a new topic on deviance, increasing their knowledge and understanding of the medical and functional explanations for deviancy in European and American society since the nineteenth century. The teacher took pains to draw out opinion, shaping the theory with the students, using the whiteboard with well-prepared and up to the minute stimulus material, incorporating recent newspaper photographs and articles to good effect. The limited cultural experiences of the group, especially when discussing aspects of football crowd behaviour, led the teacher to use, with sensitivity, adolescent delinquency within the local ethnic community. Neither group work nor pair work was used. The stimulus material was used during the double lesson to separate two sustained periods of teacher-led presentation supported by direct questions. Active participation by students was limited and only one student expressed an opinion which challenged the ideas being presented. Nevertheless, students sustained their concentration and produced a good set of notes.

157. The subject is well led. Good subject knowledge and teaching skills, appropriate to learning at A-level, are linked to sympathetic understanding of the local community around the school. A good induction programme is now used for AS level. The challenges offered in Year 13 enhance the confidence of the majority of students of sociology to aim for university education in a variety of subjects, including law, religious studies and history, for which their sociology studies have helped prepare them. Resources to sustain the learning include good textbooks, worksheets, illustrative material from newspapers, video clips and Internet articles downloaded by the teacher. The lack of direct access to ICT in the department and library, and the unavailability of the library in the lunch hour, are frustrating to many students eager to extend their opportunities to learn for themselves.

Psychology

Overall, the quality of provision in psychology is **unsatisfactory**.

Strengths

- Students have a good knowledge and understanding of key research.
- A good selection of exercises is used in class to test students' understanding.

Areas for improvement

- Standards in the AS examination were well below average.
- The scheme of work is inadequate to support teaching and learning.
- Excessive use is made of photocopied extracts from textbooks.
- Insufficient use is made of ICT to support teaching and learning.

158. This is a new course examined for the first time in 2001 at AS level. The AS examination results were well below average. Only half of the students gained a pass grade in the subject and no student attained the highest grades of A or B. Consequently, only a small number of students progressed to the second year of the course in Year 13.

159. Standards of work seen during the inspection are broadly average. Students have a good knowledge and understanding of psychological approaches and issues arising from research. In discussing ethics, students are able to discuss the problems arising from undertaking psychological research without being truthful to subjects about the real intentions of the research. However, students are not skilled at critically assessing the strengths and weaknesses of different psychological approaches.

160. The teaching of psychology is broadly satisfactory but there are a number of weaknesses. It is not well planned and relies on an excessively narrow range of teaching approaches. There is no scheme of work that clearly identifies how the course will be taught in the classroom. Whilst the aims of lessons are clear, there are few details about the range of teaching and learning methods to be used. There is an over-reliance on providing lengthy photocopied extracts from textbooks, which are often not actively used by students. Some group work and discussion occurs but is not always well managed. For example, in one lesson, the organisation of the class into large groups of 8-10 students did not enable some of the students to participate fully in the discussions.

161. A good range of tests are employed to check students' understanding. In one class, the students were given a demanding work sheet on assessing which statistical techniques are most appropriate when analysing psychological data. When undertaking trial examination tests, students are provided with examination board mark schemes, which help them assess the standards of their responses and how their answers might be improved. Little use is made of ICT within psychology, either as a research tool or through subject-based software.

162. The management of psychology has some weaknesses. The course leader for psychology lacks specialist qualifications, but has developed greater expertise through recent employment as an A-level psychology examiner. Students are very dependent upon the teacher for resources as the library contains a limited range of textbooks and no current journals such as Psychology Review. The main teaching room suffers from poor acoustics, making class discussion difficult, especially for larger teaching groups. Some class sizes are too large. The AS examination results in 2001 have not been properly analysed and so no clear course of action has been agreed to improve the results.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

163. The focus was on AS and A-level courses in English and Bengali. The school also provides a GCSE course in Bengali but no lessons were observed.

English

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

Strengths

- Effective teaching, including the use of group study.
- The teachers' very good knowledge of students as individuals.
- Strong encouragement of wider reading and research.
- Substantial contribution to students' moral, social and cultural development.
- The students' attitudes and their respect for other peoples' ideas are very good.

Areas for improvement

- Marking does not always give specific advice on how to improve.
- Closer references to the text are needed in students' written work.
- The timetabling of one Year 12 group is unsatisfactory.

164. In 2001, the standards attained in the A-level English examination were well below average, with no students gaining the highest grades of A or B. Progress for this group of students was unsatisfactory. Over time, standards have declined from average. In the GCSE English examination taken at the end of Year 12, students repeating the course have attained average standards in recent years. Although in 2001 the results were below average, the GCSE students did as well as could be expected on the basis of their earlier attainment.

165. In the work seen during the inspection, the overall standards are average in both AS level and in A-level (Years 12 and 13) and in GCSE (Year 12). There are three reasons for this improvement. These are the change to modular assessment, the adaptation of teaching styles to extend the students' thinking and background knowledge, and the higher attainment of the students at the start of the course. The improvement is borne out by their performance in recent AS-level examinations, in which the results were close to the average. The higher attaining students write well-structured essays, for example

analysing Iago's motives in *Othello*, making perceptive observations and developing clear arguments. In general, however, their essays lack the detailed references to the text that are required to gain the highest grades. A Year 12 student studying *Snow Falling on Cedars* very skilfully showed how the author made use of the changing weather and different settings to create atmosphere. In group discussions of their reading, the students were heard to extend their ideas and deepen their understanding, and they reported back to the class with confidence and clarity. Overall, students are making satisfactory progress.

166. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. Although recent results at A-level have been below the standard attained in 1996, the recent changes to more effective approaches in teaching and learning are giving the students good preparation for the new examinations. They take good advantage of the opportunities to explore and discuss the set texts in a structured way, and their growing ability to refer to wider reading gives their commentaries more depth and interest. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers know individual students very well and provide help and encouragement to those with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language, so that they make satisfactory progress. Students from different ethnic backgrounds and those who arrive at the school at 16 are well integrated and play a full part in research and discussion. They are encouraged to share their learning with the whole class through copying essays and commentaries to each other. Lessons are well planned so that students are able to build on their previous knowledge and understanding. They are challenged to extend their vocabulary, and many show increasing confidence in using the language of literary criticism and linguistic analysis. Teachers' marking is regular and detailed, but it does not always give specific advice on how to improve. In a minority of lessons, too much talking by the teacher can lead to a loss of concentration, but there is usually a good variety of activities that maintains the students' interest and involvement throughout the double lesson. One Year 12 class has an unsatisfactory timetable, in which two-thirds of their week's English teaching takes place on one morning. Apart from the challenge to the teacher of using this extended period effectively, the effect of a single day's absence is disproportionate for the students concerned.

167. The students' response to their English teaching is very good. They arrive for lessons very well prepared and settle quickly to work. Listening carefully to the teacher and to each other, they treat other people's ideas with respect. They conduct mature and reflective discussions on the moral and social issues that arise from their reading. The teachers' enthusiasm is infectious and most students show a high level of interest and intellectual curiosity. Notes and supporting material are well organised, although some students do not make active use of the many articles and study guides they obtain from the Internet. Others annotate and highlight key points and make references to their wider reading in A-level essays, showing that they are becoming independent thinkers and learners. There are some students on the GCSE English course, however, whose attendance is too erratic for them to benefit from the good teaching on offer.

168. The team of English teachers in the sixth form is well led and managed. The new approach to the teaching of literature and language, which actively involves the students in their learning, is effectively used by most teachers. The less experienced teachers would benefit from the extension of the programme of lesson observation. There is a shared commitment to the success of all students, and the rich diet of literature studied in English makes a major contribution to the students' social, moral and cultural development. Accommodation and resources for learning are adequate, although the lack of specialist rooms limits the opportunities for display.

Bengali

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

Strengths

- Standards are improving: all students gained pass grades in the AS level examination with nearly a half gaining the higher grades of A and B.
- Teachers' good subject knowledge, experience and management enhance students' motivation; students' very positive attitudes and good standards of behaviour enable them to consolidate their learning and make good progress.
- Learning resources are good in range and quality.

- Leadership and management of the subject are good.

Areas for improvement

- Greater use of Bengali in classroom discussion and learning of standard Bengali.
- More use of ICT to support the teaching and learning of Bengali.
- More systematic use of assessment to inform planning and teaching.

169. The A-level results have been below average for the past two years, although in 2001, over half the students gained the higher grades of A or B, which was a considerable improvement over the previous year. The results in 2001 were partly affected by comparatively small numbers of students taking the examination and partly by the fact that two of the students who were unsuccessful in the examination did not receive the benefit of a full two-year course. All students gained grades A-E in the AS level examination in 2001, with a significant minority attaining the highest grades, indicating that standards are rising. The improving trend in standards reflects some improvement in students' attainment on entry, effective teaching and learning and the use of quality resources. The results in the GCSE examination taken in the sixth form were above average.

170. The majority of students in Year 12 and Year 13 are attaining above average standards in many aspects of Bengali. They have well developed listening skills, although they do not readily use Bengali in their classroom interaction. Students generally lack confidence in speaking standard Bengali. They have difficulty with standard Bengali pronunciation, particularly aspirated and unaspirated sounds. They read authentic Bengali texts, and many, particularly the higher attainers, do so with accuracy, fluency and understanding. A minority of students have limited fluency, expression and understanding. Many students write for different purposes including formal and informal letters, paragraphs and short descriptions, although under the guidance of their teachers. Year 13 students use compound sentences and persuasive writing while Year 12 students use relative and conditional clauses. There is some evidence of spelling mistakes and uncertainty in the use of 'shadhu' and 'chalit' forms of Bengali. A minority of students has not yet grasped certain aspects of grammar such as the use of appropriate verb endings for different pronouns. Students' handwriting is of a good standard and their work is well presented.

171. Much of the achievement in the subject results from students' very positive attitudes to learning and the way they conduct themselves. The majority are co-operative and relate well to each other and to their teachers. Their learning is characterised by very high levels of motivation, interest and concentration, which is a clear indication of the good progress many students make, both in lessons and over time. All of this reflects the impact of the teaching, which is often good, and occasionally excellent, with strong features rooted in good subject knowledge, appropriate questioning, careful preparation and well developed resources. In the best teaching, students gain greatly from the rigour and pace of the lesson, and there is good consolidation of learning. Most teachers are well experienced and resourceful. The approach to promoting the use of Bengali is not always consistent. Relationships are well established and students benefit from good management by their teachers.

172. The subject is well managed. The programme of activities is consistent with the requirements of the syllabus, and often provides access to all aspects of the Bengali way of life. The subject benefits greatly from an impressive range of resources. This is the main improvement since the last inspection. The school has taken a lead role nationally in developing learning resources to support the teaching and learning of Bengali. Assessment procedures are in place, but there is insufficient use of assessment to inform subsequent planning or teaching in a systematic way. The department is aware of this and of the need to develop a consistent approach to promoting the use of Bengali, the learning of its standard form and the use of ICT in the teaching and learning of Bengali.