

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **BIRCHWOOD HIGH SCHOOL**

Bishop's Stortford

LEA area: Hertfordshire

Unique reference number: 117549

Headteacher: Mr Richard Till

Reporting inspector: Vivien Johnston  
8402

Dates of inspection: 10<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> December 2001

Inspection number: 192859

Full inspection carried out under Section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

© Crown copyright 2002

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that all extracts quoted are reproduced verbatim without adaptation and on condition that the source and date thereof are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the School Inspections Act 1996, the school must provide a copy of this report and/or its summary free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of students:	11-18
Gender of students:	Mixed
School address:	Parsonage Lane Bishop's Stortford Hertfordshire
Postcode:	CM23 5BD
Telephone number:	01279 655936
Fax number:	01279 757459
Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr Bob Illingworth
Date of previous inspection:	November 1996

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
8402	Vivien Johnston	Registered inspector	English as an additional language	The school's results and students' achievements How well are students taught? What should the school do to improve further?
19798	Jane O'Keefe	Lay inspector		Students' attitudes, values and personal development How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
28199	Peter Lawley	Team inspector	English	
27719	Paul Metcalf	Team inspector	Mathematics	
29742	Patricia Fyans	Team inspector	Science	
2501	Raye Allison-Smith	Team inspector	Art Equal opportunities	How well is the school led and managed?
22491	Lorraine Small	Team inspector	Design and Technology	How well does the school care for its students?
10817	George Rayner	Team inspector	Geography History	
17874	Dan Moynihan	Team inspector	Information and Communication Technology	
15075	Bryan Stephens	Team inspector	Modern Foreign Languages	
11746	Robin Coulthard	Team inspector	Music	
22042	John Challands	Team inspector	Physical Education	
10761	Patrick Willan	Team inspector	Religious Education Special Educational Needs	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to students?
3726	Maureen Bean	Team inspector		

The inspection contractor was:

e-Qualitas Ltd, Langshaw, Pastens Road, Limpsfield Chart, Oxted, Surrey RH8 0RE.

Any concerns or complaints about the inspection or the report should be raised with the inspection contractor. Complaints that are not satisfactorily resolved by the contractor should be raised with OFSTED by writing to:

The Complaints Manager, Inspection Quality Division, The Office for Standards in Education, Alexandra House, 33 Kingsway, London WC2B 6SE.

## REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
<b>PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT</b>	<b>7</b>
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Students' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
<b>ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM</b>	
<b>PART B: COMMENTARY</b>	
<b>HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?</b>	<b>12</b>
The school's results and students' achievements	
Students' attitudes, values and personal development	
<b>HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO STUDENTS?</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>PART E: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM</b>	<b>55</b>

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

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Birchwood High School is a community comprehensive school that serves Bishop's Stortford. It has 840 boys and girls on roll, including 93 in the sixth form. Several year groups have more boys than girls. Although the proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is lower than in most schools, other evidence shows that the background students come from is neither advantaged nor disadvantaged. Almost all students are white. The few from other ethnic backgrounds are mostly of Indian origin. An average proportion of students has special educational needs, including both learning and behavioural difficulties. The proportion of students with a statement of special need is above the national average. Twenty-four students speak English as an additional language, two of whom are at an early stage of learning the language. Overall, students' attainment on entry in Year 7 is now average, having risen gradually in recent years. The school has recently been awarded Technology College status.

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

The overall effectiveness of the school is satisfactory. Standards at the end of Years 9 and 11 are broadly average. Standards are generally below average at the end of sixth form courses, reflecting the below-average levels of attainment at the start of the sixth form courses. Students' achievement is satisfactory in the main school (Years 7 to 11) and the sixth form. The overall quality of teaching is satisfactory in the main school and good in the sixth form. Leadership and management are satisfactory, as is the value for money provided by the school as a whole. However, the sixth form is not cost-effective.

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

- Students do very well in geography, and their achievement is good in art and design and technology.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge, and manage learning activities well.
- Students with special educational needs make good progress because of the effectiveness of the support given by the learning support centre staff.
- Students' attendance and punctuality are now good in the main school (Years 7 to 11), because the school has worked hard to improve them.

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

- The provision for information and communication technology (ICT), as standards are lower than they should be.
- Students' skills in writing and in studying independently.
- The challenge provided to higher-attaining students.
- The attitudes and behaviour of the minority of students who are inattentive in lessons.
- The management of the sixth form, to ensure that students are more successful in their examinations.

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

### **HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION**

The school was last inspected in November 1996. Its improvement since then is satisfactory. Most of the key issues identified by the last inspection have been dealt with successfully. These include improving attendance and punctuality, boys' achievement, and teaching and learning in art, strengthening the arrangements for students' welfare including the personal, social and health education course, and meeting requirements for performance management (formerly appraisal). More still needs to be done in several areas of the school's work. These include providing clear direction and rigour in some aspects of management, ensuring that all students have positive attitudes to learning and behave well, particularly in lessons, and improving the sixth form. GCSE results fell after the last inspection, although in 2001 they rose markedly and returned to their 1996 level. This rise reflects the improved teaching now found throughout the school. In addition, the school has gained Investors in People status and has become a Technology College, increasing its popularity in the local community.

## STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by students at the end of Year 11 and 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	C	C	C	E
A-levels/AS-levels	E	D	n/a	

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

Overall, the school's results in the tests in English, mathematics and science at the end of Year 9 are average compared to schools nationally, with a trend of improvement similar to that nationally. English and mathematics results have generally been above average, whereas science results have varied considerably. The school's results for 2001 were well below the average for similar schools (those with a similar proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals). However, they were average when compared with those of schools in which the students had similar attainment on entry in Year 7 (as measured by their scores in the national tests at the end of Year 6), indicating that overall the students had achieved satisfactorily in Years 7 to 9.

In 2001, the school's GCSE results rose sharply, returning to the level attained at the time of the last inspection. The percentage gaining five or more grades A\* to G was above the national level. However, the overall results were well below average compared to those for schools in which the students had gained similar results in their Year 9 tests two years earlier, and the trend in results since the last inspection is below the national trend of improvement. Students did well in design and technology, drama, geography, mathematics and religious education. Results were below average in science, art and Spanish, and low in French, German, history and music.

The school met two of its targets for GCSE results: the percentage gaining five or more grades A\* to G, and the average points score (which measures the average grade attained by students). It did not meet its target for the percentage gaining five or more grades A\* to C as higher-attaining students did less well than expected. Next year's targets are higher than those for 2001, and are suitably challenging.

Standards at the end of Years 9 and 11 are broadly average, and students' achievement is satisfactory in the main school. In most subjects, students show greater knowledge and understanding in their oral work than in their writing. The standard of presentation of boys' work is often lower than that of girls. However, students' achievement in ICT is unsatisfactory because they do not cover all that is required by the National Curriculum.

A-level and A/S-level results have been well below average in most years, though they were better than this in 2000. National data for 2001 is not available, but the school's results were similar to those for 1999. In 2000, the girls' results were average compared to schools nationally, whereas the boys' results were well below average. The small numbers taking most subjects make comparisons invalid, although English results were better than those for most other subjects in 2001. Standards in the sixth form are below average overall. Many students enter Year 12 with comparatively low GCSE results. In relation to this starting point, their achievement is broadly satisfactory. Nevertheless, too many students do not gain an A/S or A-level pass (grade E or better), generally because their attainment on entry is below what it needs to be for success in these courses.

## STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Satisfactory. Most students enjoy school and join in lessons willingly. A minority are less motivated, and are easily distracted when they find learning difficult.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Satisfactory overall, though with considerable variability. Many students behave well in lessons and around the school. The minority who are sometimes inattentive in lessons work sensibly when they are managed firmly. The rate of exclusions is average.
Personal development and relationships	Satisfactory personal development, and good relationships. Students treat each other with kindness and respect, and feel that the school is a friendly place.

Attendance	Good. Attendance figures are above average, and punctuality is now good.
------------	--

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of students:	Years 7 – 9	Years 10 – 11	Years 12 – 13
Quality of teaching	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	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.*

Teachers' subject expertise is good, as is their firm management of classroom activities and students' behaviour in most lessons. In the main school (Years 7 to 11), teaching is satisfactory in history, ICT, mathematics, religious education and science. It is good in design and technology, English, geography, modern foreign languages, music and physical education, and very good in art. In the sixth form, teaching is good. Overall, the teaching was very good, or occasionally excellent, in about a fifth of the lessons observed during the inspection. Here, the pace of the work was fast, a variety of activities motivated the students and the work was challenging for all in the class. The students learned well because they enjoyed the work and so tried hard. However, teachers are generally more successful in meeting the needs of average- and lower-attaining students, including those with special educational needs. Higher-attaining students are sometimes not sufficiently challenged by the work set, often because teachers have not identified clearly and precisely enough what they expect students to learn during the lesson. Marking is satisfactory overall, with some good, informative feedback but also some that gives too little guidance on how to improve in future. In a few lessons in the main school, unsatisfactory learning resulted from teaching in which students' behaviour was not managed effectively and the lesson activities were not well enough matched to the students' needs.

The teaching of numeracy skills across the curriculum is satisfactory, but the teaching of literacy skills is unsatisfactory overall, despite being effective in several subjects. In general, teachers do not provide enough guidance on how to write well, and accept a low standard of presentation of written work. This contributes to some students not doing as well as they should in tests and examinations.

Students' learning is satisfactory overall in the main school and sixth form. Their learning during lessons is often good as they try hard and work well, particularly in the sixth form, although inattentiveness slows some students' learning in Years 7 to 11. Students do not do enough to follow up the work of their lessons, for example by learning key information and reading widely. Many lack confidence and are too dependent on teachers for guidance, which also slows the overall rate of these students' learning.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Satisfactory overall, although the National Curriculum for ICT is not fully covered in Years 7 to 9. The sixth form curriculum is unsatisfactory as the range of courses offered does not meet the needs of the lower-attaining students, and the requirements for religious education are not met.
Provision for students with special educational needs	Good overall. The learning resources centre staff provide good support to these students, and they are taught well in the learning resources centre. Subject teachers give suitable help during lessons, but do too little to adapt the learning activities and resources to meet the students' needs.
Provision for students with English as an additional language	Satisfactory. Staff do their best to meet the students' language needs, but teachers lack specialist knowledge of how to do this effectively. Nevertheless, the students make satisfactory progress because they are well motivated.
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Satisfactory overall. The provision for students' moral, social and cultural development is good overall, but that for their spiritual development is unsatisfactory.
How well the school cares for its students	Satisfactorily, with strengths in several areas. The procedures for improving attendance are good, as are the strategies for promoting good behaviour. A very good system for monitoring students' academic standards has been devised, but



	is not systematically linked to setting short-term targets for their work in subjects.
How well the school works in partnership with parents	Satisfactorily. The school provides parents with some useful information. The quality of information in reports is too variable, with some subjects giving a clear idea of students' learning and progress but others providing too little information.

## HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Satisfactory. The headteacher has worked purposefully to improve the school. The senior management team have a good understanding of its strengths and weaknesses and where improvements are still needed. Most subject areas are now led and managed well. However, some areas have not been tackled successfully, particularly the sixth form.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Satisfactorily overall. The governors have a good idea of the school's strengths and weaknesses, and are very supportive. They have asked probing questions about how well students do academically. They fulfil their statutory responsibilities satisfactorily in most respects, except in ensuring that the requirements for ICT are covered and that students take part in a daily act of collective worship.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Satisfactory overall. Those with management responsibilities check the quality of teaching through classroom observations, and analyse test and examination results to see how well students have done. These arrangements have helped several subject areas to improve the quality of education they provide, but overall the considerable information gained from evaluations is not used rigorously enough to bring about improvements.
The strategic use of resources	Unsatisfactory. The budget is not closely linked to development planning. The school has sufficient staff, accommodation and resources for learning in most subjects. However, the library is inadequate and students have too little access to computers except in ICT lessons. The school applies the principles of best value satisfactorily for the main school but not for the sixth form, and so it has not ensured that it gains value for money from the high expenditure on the sixth form.

## PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Their children make good progress.</li> <li>• The teaching is good.</li> <li>• The school expects their children to work hard and achieve their best.</li> <li>• The school is approachable.</li> <li>• Their children are helped to become mature and responsible.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The amount of homework that is set.</li> </ul>

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

Birchwood High School's sixth form has 93 students, of whom 56 are in Year 12. It is smaller than other sixth forms nationally. It has more girls than boys in Year 12, but similar numbers in Year 13. The backgrounds and ethnicity of the students are similar to those of students in the main school, as almost all the sixth formers have stayed on from Year 11. The school is in a consortium arrangement with another local school, but is expecting this arrangement to cease at the end of this academic year.

The courses offered are almost all A-levels, in a wide range of subjects including business education, which is also available as a GNVQ course. Some class sizes are very low. The school expects the numbers in the sixth form to increase. It expects those who enter Year 11 to have five or more GCSE grades C or higher. Some of those who stay on have attained high GCSE grades, but many have only the minimum grades and so overall the attainment of the students at the start of Year 12 is lower than in most sixth forms.

## HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is satisfactory. Although standards are below average, so is the attainment of students on entry to Year 12. The teaching is good. Although students work hard and learn well in lessons, overall their learning and achievement are satisfactory because afterwards they do not consolidate and extend the work they have done during lessons. The library and ICT resources are inadequate, affecting students' learning. The curriculum does not meet the needs of the students well enough, and results are comparatively low. The leadership and management are unsatisfactory as these problems have been allowed to continue since the last inspection. A high proportion of the school's budget is spent on the sixth form, to run courses with very small numbers. This is not cost-effective.

### Strengths

- English is a popular subject in which students do well because of good teaching.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge, which contributes to the generally good teaching and learning.
- Students are well motivated in lessons, and relationships in the sixth form are good.

### What could be improved

- Results at AS- and A-level, ensuring that students gain or exceed the grades predicted on the basis of their GCSE results.
- Students' skills in writing, and their opportunities for independent learning including with ICT and library resources.
- The range of courses offered in the sixth form, so that students follow courses in which they are likely to gain a qualification.
- The strategic management of the sixth form.

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

## THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

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

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	<b>Satisfactory.</b> Results have been below average, but students' achievement is now satisfactory as a result of satisfactory teaching and learning.
Chemistry	<b>Satisfactory.</b> Students are achieving satisfactorily, although standards are below average.
Design and technology	<b>Good.</b> Standards in students' current work are above average, and their

	achievement is good because of effective teaching.
<b>Curriculum area</b>	<b>Overall judgement about provision, with comment</b>
French	<b>Satisfactory.</b> Standards are below average, but students are achieving satisfactorily.
English	<b>Good.</b> Results are broadly average, and students achieve well because of good teaching.

Other work was seen in several subjects, including physics, art, history, geography, law, psychology and general studies. In most, standards were below average although the students worked well in the lessons because of good teaching, and were achieving appropriately in relation to their attainment on entry to the courses. In business studies, their achievement is unsatisfactory.

### OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Satisfactorily overall. The school makes considerable effort to care for individual students' welfare. The guidance as to what to study in the sixth form is unsatisfactory. Assessment procedures are satisfactory, but students are given too little specific guidance on how to attain their predicted results.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Unsatisfactory. The school is firmly committed to providing post-sixteen courses, but the strategic planning is weak. Although the school is aware of what needs to be improved, effective action has not been taken to deal with the weaknesses in the quality of education provided and the standards attained. The sixth form does not provide all its students with suitable opportunities for academic success.

### STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Their teachers are supportive and helpful.</li> <li>• The regular feedback from tutorial meetings.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The advice given about what to study in the sixth form and in their subsequent careers.</li> <li>• The challenge provided by the teaching.</li> <li>• The information on their progress.</li> <li>• Teachers' accessibility if they have difficulties with the work.</li> <li>• The range of courses and enrichment activities.</li> <li>• How far they are treated as responsible young adults.</li> <li>• How well the school responds to their views.</li> </ul>

The views summarised above are mostly drawn from responses to the questionnaire completed before the inspection by the majority of students. Students interviewed by inspectors presented a much more positive picture, with which the inspection team agrees. Careers advice is satisfactory, and the teaching is good. Students are generally given helpful information on their progress, and teachers are ready to help when students have difficulties. The school expects students to be responsible, and its responsiveness to their views is satisfactory. The team agrees that the range of courses is not well matched to students' needs.

### COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

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

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

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

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

1. At the start of Year 7, students' attainment is broadly average overall. It was higher in 2001 than in most of the previous five years. At the end of Year 9, the overall results in the national tests in English, mathematics and science have also been average in most years, including in 2001. The trend in the school's results is broadly in line with the national trend. Compared to similar schools, on the basis of free school meals, the overall results were well below average in 2001. However, compared to schools in which the students had similar Year 6 test results, the results were average. This indicates that the students' achievement, judged in relation to their attainment on entry to the school, was satisfactory.
2. English results in the Year 9 tests have been above average in most years, and were well above average in 2000. The gap between boys' and girls' performance has been narrower than nationally because the boys have done comparatively well. However, in 2001 the English results fell to below average, having been even lower until a re-mark raised the results of about a third of the students.
3. Mathematics results have also generally been above average, except in 2000 when they were average. Boys have tended to do better than girls, except in 2001 when their performance was similar.
4. Science results have varied considerably from year to year. In 1998 and 2000, they were below average, whereas in 1999 they were above average. In 2001, they were average. The school's view is that this wide fluctuation was due to variation in the quality of teaching.
5. In 2001, the overall results were similar to those gained in 1996, shortly before the last inspection. The English results were lower than those of 1996, whereas the mathematics and science results were higher. Nevertheless, the trend over the last four years is broadly in line with the national trend of improvement.
6. GCSE results in 2001 were average overall, as measured by the average total points score. This is calculated by giving a set number of points for each GCSE grade, adding up the total scores for each student, and dividing by the number of students. The overall trend in results since the last inspection is below the national trend of improvement. The average total point score for 2001 was the same as that at the time of the last inspection, whereas nationally results are higher. The boys' results dropped markedly after the last inspection. However, the school took action to improve the boys' performance, and in 2001 their results rose sharply, to above the national average for boys. Girls' results were close to the national average for girls. Consequently, the gap between boys' and girls' performance was narrower than nationally in 2001.
7. The school did well in enabling many average-attaining and lower-attaining students to gain five or more grades G or better. Its results on this measure were above the national average, and above average compared to schools with similar results in the Year 9 tests two years previously. The school met its target for five or more passes at grades A\* to G. In almost all subjects, all the students who took GCSE gained at least grade G. The exceptions were mathematics, French, music and design and technology.
8. The results for students gaining five or more grades A\* to C were below the school's target in 2001, although they were average compared to national figures. The school's results were well below average compared to similar schools (both schools with a similar proportion of students entitled to free school meals, and those with similar Year 9 test results). This was because higher-attaining students did less well than predicted, and so the overall results (based on the average total points score) were also well below average compared to similar schools, on both measures. The school's A\* to C results were above average in design and technology, drama, geography, mathematics and religious education. They were below national results in art and Spanish, and low in French, German, history and music. In the other subjects, they were average.
9. The results for students gaining one or more grade G or better were average compared to national figures and to schools with a similar proportion of students eligible for free school meals – though well below the average for schools with similar Year 9 test results. The school was not successful with a small minority of students with weak attitudes to learning and perseverance in their work.

10. The evidence of the lessons observed and students' coursework, showed that standards are now broadly average in Years 9 and 11. Standards in most subjects are similar to the 2001 test and examination results. However, due to better teaching, standards in art have risen and are now average. In design and technology and history, teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 were well above national figures, but the evidence of students' work showed that the assessments had been over-estimated and that standards are above average. In ICT, modern languages and physical education, standards are also lower than the teacher assessments. Nevertheless, students' achievement is satisfactory or better in all subjects except ICT, where it is unsatisfactory because of lack of coverage of the National Curriculum requirements. In most subjects, students show greater knowledge and understanding in oral work such as class discussion than in their writing. Their work is often badly presented, although the quality of their handwriting, spelling and organisation varies widely according to subject teachers' expectations. Boys' writing is often weaker than that of the girls.

11. Students with special educational needs make good progress in relation to their starting points, as is shown by the school's detailed data on these students' attainment and progress over time. Their achievement in withdrawal groups is sometimes very good because of the quality of teaching. The few students who speak English as an additional language achieve satisfactorily.

### **Sixth form**

12. Overall, the attainment of students entering the sixth form is well below what is usual for sixth forms nationally as many students have comparatively low GCSE grades. A-level and AS-level results have been well below average in most years, though in 2000 they rose to below average. National figures for 2001 were not available at the time of the inspection, but the school's results for 2001 were similar to those for 1999, when they were well below average. In 2000, the girls did better than the boys.

13. Small numbers took most AS- and A-level subjects and so comparisons between subjects are not valid. English is one of the more popular subjects, and its students did comparatively well in 2001. The students also tended to do better in general studies than in their other subjects.

14. Students' results were below the predicted or target grades in a wide range of subjects. These include biology, physics, chemistry, business studies at AS-level, and English, biology, mathematics, theatre studies, business studies and religious studies at A-level. Some of the predictions are unrealistic. The evidence of students' current work, together with their GCSE grades on entry to the sixth form, suggests that some students are attempting courses in which they have relatively little chance of gaining other than a low pass (grade E) at best. This is part of the reason for the low results compared to national figures, and for the below-average standards observed in students' work in most AS- and A-level courses. However, the students' achievement is broadly satisfactory overall, given their comparatively low levels of attainment on entry to the sixth form.

15. Five subjects were focused on during the inspection: English, mathematics, physics, French and design and technology. Standards are average in English, mathematics and French, above average in design and technology and below average in physics. Students' achievement is good in English and design and technology, in relation to their attainment on entry to the AS- and A-level courses, and satisfactory in the other subjects. The evidence suggested that standards in the subjects not focused on during the inspection are mostly below average, although the students' achievement is satisfactory – though this was not the case in business studies, where the evidence indicated that their achievement is unsatisfactory.

16. As in the main school, students' oral work is often better than their writing, as literacy difficulties and a lack of confidence in working independently continue to impede their learning. In discussion, students generally showed sound understanding of the topics, and were successful in written tasks when guided and supported by teachers. However, comparatively few are able to produce work of a similar standard on their own, for example for homework. This explains why their results in examinations are lower than the standard of their work in lessons.

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

17. Students' attitudes to school and their behaviour are satisfactory overall. In their questionnaire responses, a high proportion of parents expressed their satisfaction at the attitudes the school fosters in their children. Relationships are good, and a strength of the school. Most students treat each other with kindness and respect. When given the opportunity to show initiative or take responsibility, most students respond appropriately. In lessons, most students want to learn, and they listen and concentrate well although they tend to depend on the teacher for guidance and support instead of being confident, independent learners. In art and English lessons in particular, students are enthusiastic and work hard. Students collaborate well in practical activities, such as in music.

18. Behaviour in the majority of lessons is satisfactory. However, students' attitudes and behaviour were unsatisfactory in over a tenth of the lessons observed. A significant minority of students, often boys, did not concentrate, were noisy and their behaviour disrupted lessons. Their response affected their own and other students' learning. For example, in some lessons a few students' unsatisfactory behaviour limited the opportunities for collaborative work. Very often, it was only the skilled management by the teacher that prevented the whole class from losing concentration. In other lessons, students sometimes tended to be restless even though they were interested in the activities.

19. Outside lessons and at breaktimes, students are often noisy and boisterous. However, on the whole this behaviour does not appear to be aggressive, and the students themselves consider that the school is generally a friendly place. Bullying is not a particular problem, and students are confident that it will be dealt with effectively should an incident occur.

20. Students with special educational needs respond well to the individual attention they receive. They gain confidence through in-lesson support, and through the supportive environment of the learning support centre. The personal development programme for Year 10 students who have become disaffected with school and may be at risk of exclusion is successful. The students observed were confident, gaining in independence and social skills. For example, they have painted the boys' toilets in one of the main teaching blocks. Students seen in the learning support area at lunchtime were using the computer facilities to support their classroom learning, for example by word processing an assignment, and using a computer spelling programme.

21. Those who are learning English as an additional language are also appreciative of the support they receive, and well motivated.

22. The previous inspection reported that attendance levels were below national averages and therefore unsatisfactory. Since then, the school has worked hard on this area. The attendance figures are now above average. Punctuality, which was a concern at the time of the last inspection, is also much improved and is no longer a problem. Registers are taken promptly at the beginning of each session, and lessons start on time.

## **Sixth form**

23. Sixth form students are loyal to the school, and feel positive about the care and support they are given. Relationships with each other and with staff are good. Most students have mature attitudes to their work during lessons. They want to do well, often persevering even when finding the work difficult. For example, students were willing learners who concentrated well and responded confidently to questions in the science lessons observed. Students in English were interested in the texts studied. In design and technology lessons, students worked well independently. However, most students lack the confidence to work independently. For example, students in a mathematics lesson were reliant on teachers as they were unsure how to work the problems out on their own. Some students have much less determined attitudes towards homework than towards lessons, and their relative lack of persistence in independent, follow-up work of all kinds limits their achievement overall even when their learning in lessons is good.

24. Students feel that staff are supportive and approachable. They value the regular feedback from their form tutors, and feel that they are well informed of their progress. The students taking on-line psychology at AS-level were observed working sensibly and well in a live, television-tutoring session, but the drop-out rate from this course has been high partly because students have felt unsupported – because of the nature of the distance learning involved.

25. Day-to-day, sixth form students contribute a great deal to the school. For example, some work with younger students in lessons and during form time.

26. In their questionnaire responses, many students said they were not entirely happy with one or more aspect of the school's provision for them. However, in discussions with inspectors, most students expressed much more positive views. For example, they generally felt that they had been given suitable careers advice, although some felt that the advice on what to study in the sixth form is less helpful than they would like. Many students say they have stayed on for sixth form work because of the good, friendly relationships and their teachers' readiness to support their learning.

27. Attendance levels are good in the sixth form, and slightly higher than those in the main school. However, during the inspection student numbers were low in some lessons, including GCSE re-sit in mathematics and GNVQ courses. Most students arrive on time in the mornings, but students arrived late for several lessons observed during the inspection, which slowed their learning and that of others in the class.

## **HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?**

28. The quality of teaching is satisfactory in the main school, with strengths particularly in teachers' subject expertise and their management of classroom activities and students' behaviour in most lessons. The teaching was good in three-fifths of the lessons seen in the main school. It was very good, or occasionally excellent, in one fifth.

29. Very good teaching was observed in art, English, geography, mathematics, French, Spanish, music, physical education, science and religious education. The key strengths of these lessons were that the pace of learning was fast, with a good variety of activities that interested and motivated the students. The work was challenging for all in the class, for example because of questioning that probed students' understanding by asking them to explain their reasons and to support their views by evidence. The needs of the higher-attaining students were provided for, such as by extension work, and the students with special educational needs were given additional support or adapted materials when necessary. The students learned well in these lessons because they enjoyed the work and so tried hard.

30. Several revision sessions with Year 11 students were very good because of the teachers' clarity of explanations as to what is required to do well in GCSE examinations. For example, in English a teacher-led discussion of 'Silas Marner' enabled students to gain very good insights into the author's use of language to create atmosphere. The activity consolidated and extended their existing understanding of the novel, and showed them how to ensure that they gained as many marks as possible in their answers.

31. Excellent teaching was occasionally observed in art and music. For example, Year 7 students' learning was excellent in a music lesson because the lesson was very well organised, with timed activities that involved students in listening, composing and performing. At the end of the lesson, the teacher made excellent use of evaluative discussion to promote students' understanding of how to improve each performance. Similarly in art, the key feature of the excellent teaching was that the students were taught how to develop their skills, in well-planned activities that made the learning fun. In both subjects, the work was planned to challenge all the students in the class, including both those with special educational needs and the high attainers.

32. However, as the school is aware from its own evaluations, teachers are generally more successful in meeting the needs of average- and lower-attaining students, including those with special educational needs. Higher-attaining students are sometimes not sufficiently challenged by the work set, often because teachers have not identified clearly and precisely enough what they expect students to learn during the lesson. Some students' learning over time is also held back by their reluctance to complete homework properly, for

example in mathematics. As these students do insufficient work on their own to consolidate what is covered in lessons, such as through learning new vocabulary for modern foreign languages, their progress over time is affected despite the generally good teaching and learning within lessons.

33. The learning of the students with special educational needs is good overall. An experienced team of teachers and learning support assistants support in-lesson learning. They provide effective assistance to ensure students achieve good outcomes from the lesson activities, given their starting points. The learning support manager and her team pass on detailed information to all teaching staff, including targets for those students with an individual education programme. Some departments, for example English, make good use of this information in their planning. In some lessons, however, class teachers did not follow the good example of the support team, and had not adapted the learning materials for the special needs students in their classes. This sometimes meant that these students found the work too difficult.

34. Staff in the learning support centre accept students who, for various reasons, find it difficult to work with their peers in the classroom. The staff show great skill in handling these students. Whenever possible, they provide them with work similar to what they would have had in their mainstream classes. For example, students withdrawn from lessons were seen working on projects for design and technology (designing logos for products), and revising for the ICT mock examination, using on-line BBC Bitesize revision.

35. Usually, class teachers' firm control and consistent use of the school's system for managing behaviour means that students' restlessness is kept in check and does not hinder their learning. However, unsatisfactory teaching was observed in ICT and science. In these lessons, students' attitudes and difficult behaviour were not managed effectively. Relationships with students were positive, but misbehaviour was not dealt with firmly enough. The teachers provided individual help, but not whole-class teaching of the essential concepts and skills. As a result, the teachers had to explain the key points individually, which meant that some well-motivated students had to wait for their turn, which slowed the pace of their learning. The lower-attaining students and those with special educational needs struggled with the work, including with what they had to read in the science lesson, and with analysing numerical data in the ICT lesson. This contributed to their inattentiveness and lack of confidence.

36. Marking is satisfactory overall, but too variable across the school. Some teachers provide good, informative feedback that helps students see what they have done well and how to improve in future. However, other marking gives general comments that do not give individualised advice. The opportunity to use marking as a means of setting individualised targets is missed. As a result, many students have too little idea of how well they have done and what specifically they should do to improve in future work, although they are generally clear about the level or grade they are predicted to get at the end of the course.

37. The teaching of numeracy skills across the curriculum is satisfactory, but the teaching of literacy skills is unsatisfactory overall, despite being effective in several subjects. In general, teachers do not make sufficient use of independent reading and research activities, and provide enough guidance on how to write effectively. The quality of students' presentation of their written work varies widely, partly because of some teachers' low expectations of handwriting and how to lay work out. In several subjects, including design and technology, good presentation is the norm. Too often elsewhere, as in mathematics, untidy work is accepted without comment. This contributes to some students not doing as well as they should in tests and examinations.

38. Students' learning is satisfactory overall. During lessons, their learning usually closely reflects the quality of teaching. With good or very good teaching, students usually try hard and work well, for example in English and modern foreign languages. They enjoy these lessons. In other lessons, including many that were judged satisfactory overall, the learning of some or all in the class was slowed by a persistent under-current of inattentiveness arising from some or many students' lack of concentration and interest. In a few lessons, unmotivated students behaved immaturely and inconsiderately, and disrupted the learning of others in the class. Many students lack confidence in learning independently, and so rely too heavily on teachers for guidance. For example, they prefer to wait for individual help from the teacher rather than sorting out their difficulties on their own. This slows the overall rate of these students' learning in lessons. Another factor affecting the rate at which students progress is that many do not do enough to follow up the work of their lessons, for example by learning key information and reading widely.



## **Sixth form**

39. In the sixth form, teaching is good overall. It was satisfactory in almost all the lessons observed and good in about four-fifths. It was very good, or occasionally excellent, in nearly one-fifth. As for the main school, strengths are that teachers have good subject expertise and manage learning activities well. Lessons generally get off to a prompt start, with clear explanations of what is to be done. In many lessons, teachers had planned well, and made effective use of a variety of resources. For example, in AS-level chemistry, good teaching of ICT skills was seen when students were asked to access data about pollution from the Internet, and to use computers to analyse and make sense of the data. Where teaching and learning were good, the teachers had high expectations of the students' effort and attainment, the pace was brisk and the students were attentive. Their skills were being developed progressively, including in Year 12 lessons in which one or more of the students had not taken the subject at GCSE, for example in art. Relationships were good, and teachers' use of humour increased students' interest and motivation.

40. In design and technology, very good teaching occurred in a graphics lesson in which students worked on individual coursework projects. The students were given very good one-to-one support. The teacher posed challenging questions that had a very positive impact on student's knowledge, research skills and problem-solving in their projects. The students felt well guided and that their ideas were valued.

41. Students' learning during lessons is often good as they try hard and work well, in response to their teachers' encouragement. However, over time students' learning is satisfactory. This is because students do not do enough to follow up the work of their lessons, for example by learning key information and reading widely. Many lack confidence and are too dependent on teachers for guidance, which also slows the overall rate of these students' learning. Literacy difficulties also slow some students' learning, and the lack of reference books in the library and access to ICT limit the breadth of their study.

42. Some weaknesses were observed in teaching and learning, including in some lessons in which teaching was judged satisfactory overall. In several lessons, students were insufficiently punctual, and this held up their learning. In a business studies lesson, students were told what to do but the knowledge and skills they were expected to learn from the activities were unclear. As a result, the activities kept the students busy for most of the lesson, but did not challenge them enough. In several lessons, the teacher had not considered how to meet the range of ability within the class, affecting the pace of learning of some students. Occasionally, the lesson activities ended early, with too little use of a final discussion to review what had been learned and to set the agenda for subsequent work.

43. The teaching of a key skills lesson in mathematics was satisfactory, and included a good explanation of different graphs. However, some students arrived late and so less was covered than had been planned. Students' learning over time has also been hampered by low attendance, due to timetable clashes. The lack of an overall scheme of work for key skills, and of regular assessment of how well students are doing, also contribute to teaching and learning in key skills being unsatisfactory overall. Not enough is done to develop students' competence in writing well. This leads to some students not performing as well in written work as in their oral work. In science and mathematics, teachers have paid too little attention to developing students' skills organising their studies and presenting their work, which has contributed to failure rates that are higher than for other subjects.

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

44. The curriculum for Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory overall. All National Curriculum subjects are taught, together with a personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme which is taught during form tutor periods. However, this provision and the PSHE lessons for students in Years 10 and 11 are not linked well enough. The issue of lack of time for art and music identified by the last inspection has been resolved. In Years 8 and 9 the curriculum for expressive arts has been enriched by the addition of an extra lesson a week, shared on a carousel basis between art, music, drama and dance. Also, enrichment is provided

through the X-club for those students identified as higher attaining. This is a programme of activities taught after school by the curriculum areas.

45. The school has gone some way to improving the provision of ICT in Years 7 to 9. All Year 7 classes now have a timetabled period of ICT, after which it is intended that ICT be taught through other subjects. This does not happen sufficiently to cover National Curriculum requirements, because of a lack of cross-curricular planning and co-ordination, and because teachers of other subjects have insufficient access to computers.

46. In Years 10 and 11, the curriculum achieves suitable balance through a core provision of English, mathematics, science, modern languages, technology, religious education and games. A carousel arrangement provides careers education, PSHE and a short course in ICT for all students. A range of GCSE options complements the core provision. The higher-attaining students can take triple science, and GCSE statistics through after-school classes. Students can also take the opportunity of twilight study if they wish to extend their core GCSE short course in ICT, and sit for the full examination.

47. The carousel system for the short course in ICT in Years 10 and 11 has several weaknesses, contributing to students not making enough progress. The carousel system sometimes gives classes unequal numbers of lessons. Sometimes, the teachers change with the rotation, leading to a lack of continuity for the classes affected. The computer rooms do not have identical facilities and software, and so students who are taught in different rooms at different stages of the carousel have to learn to use different software from that which they started on. Other weaknesses in the curriculum are that the core provision for physical education of one lesson a week is insufficient to cover all the National Curriculum requirements, and that the double period given to science classes is too long for some to sustain concentration.

48. The strategies for teaching numeracy skills are satisfactory. Those for promoting literacy, particularly writing, are unsatisfactory. These are discussed elsewhere in the report, in the relevant subject sections and in the previous section.

49. The provision for students with special educational needs is good. The learning support team work mainly in lessons with students where classes have been organised in sets on the basis of their attainment, including in English, science and mathematics. A range of courses provides alternative accreditation for students for whom the GCSE examination is inappropriate. Students mainly work within the mainstream, timetabled classes. Some classes take place in the learning support centre, for example French, humanities and additional literacy.

50. To further its inclusion policy, the school has begun a personal development programme for a small group of students identified in Year 10 as having become disaffected with school life and to be likely to drop out. Taught by a deputy headteacher, the group meets once a week, and works on strategies for these students to overcome their disaffection. This provides a helpful support, and is reported to have been successful in keeping some in school.

51. The extra provision for students who have been identified as higher-attaining is good. In addition to the additional GCSE opportunities outlined above, some of these students are chosen to take part in the Hertfordshire Project for enrichment, a programme in which they meet their peers from other schools and exchange ideas. Where it has been deemed appropriate, the school has designed opportunities for some students to follow an amended curriculum to meet their needs. However, within subject teaching the higher-attaining students' needs are insufficiently well provided for in curriculum planning, and so some teaching is undemanding for these students.

52. The range of extra-curricular activities is wide. They include after-school revision sessions for those nearing their GCSE examinations, theatre trips and visits abroad. There are competitive games and expressive and performing arts options every day. Good provision at lunchtimes caters for those unable to take up after-school activities due to their travel arrangements. The learning support centre is busy each lunchtime.

### ***Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development***

53. The school promotes students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development satisfactorily overall. However, the provision for student's spiritual development is unsatisfactory. The legal requirements for a daily act of collective worship are not met. The school does its best to enable all students to attend assemblies regularly, but they contain little spiritual content. No acts of worship such as prayers were observed during the inspection. The school still does not formally plan for students' spiritual development, as was reported by the last inspection. In art lessons, however, students reflect on and discuss the work of various artists. Respect for other faiths is fostered well during religious studies.

54. Students' moral development is fostered well in a range of ways. The themes used in assemblies have a strong moral message and students are encouraged to reflect on these. In religious education lessons, many opportunities are used to encourage students thinking on moral issues. In Year 10, groups of students in history have prepared effective presentations for a local primary school on women in medieval society. The staff ensure that students are clear about right and wrong, through the behaviour policy and school rules, and apply them consistently.

55. Students are given good opportunities to develop socially. In mathematics lessons, for instance, students enjoy good relationships with each other and positive social skills are both encouraged and demonstrated by teachers. The wide range of extra-curricular activities, including residential trips, gives students opportunities to develop relationships and social skills. The design and technology department has given students many opportunities to work alongside primary school children. The school has established a 'buddy' system in which students in Year 10 support younger students when they experience difficulty with work such as homework and reading. Students have too few opportunities to take on other roles of responsibility that would contribute to their personal development.

56. Cultural development is well provided for with many opportunities planned for across the school curriculum. Many educational visits are organised to museums, art galleries and theatres as well as places of historical or geographical interest. These outings are highly valued by students. For instance the African project included in the art curriculum in Year 7 promotes students' understanding and appreciation of other cultures. In a Year 10 design and technology lesson students were using Chinese and Indian art as inspiration for a menu design.

### **Sixth form**

57. The sixth form curriculum offers students a broadly academic choice of AS- and A-level courses, with intermediate GNVQ business studies in Year 12. Religious education and general studies are taught to all students. However, the recommended minimum time for religious education required by the local Agreed Syllabus is not met. There is currently a post-16 curriculum link with a local school, giving opportunities for students from each to benefit from the other's curriculum offer. The school expects the requirement for key skills to be met through the general studies programme and other taught subjects, including English and mathematics. However, this is not co-ordinated well enough, for example through curriculum planning that shows how and when literacy, numeracy and ICT skills are to be taught, and then developed within the examination courses.

58. For several years, the school has worked to increase student numbers in the sixth form, and to offer a wide range of courses. However, the changes to the curriculum have not been firmly rooted in a vision for post-sixteen education that takes as its starting point the students in the school, their prior attainment and predicted achievements at age eighteen. Consequently, some of the courses that are offered are not suitable, and many have run with unviably small numbers of students. As the school is aware, the sixth form curriculum is not as successful as it should be. Some students pursue academic AS- and A-level courses in which they are unlikely to succeed, even though the prediction is that they will gain a grade E. The sixth form has been developed in response to students' wishes to stay in further education in an environment which is both sympathetic to their needs and supportive of their ambitions. In this respect it has been successful, but the unacceptably large failure rate at AS-level in 2001 in some significant subject areas suggests this needs to be reviewed. Having recently-acquired technology college status, the school acknowledges that it now needs to evaluate its curricular provision across the school, including the sixth form, to ensure that the new status is reflected in its curriculum. In its forward planning, the school makes

clear the need to focus further development on those areas which are most appropriate to its students' preparations for the adult world, as well as AS- and A-level for the higher attainers.

59. Students in Years 12 and 13 are encouraged to take advantage of the wide range of extra-curricular activities they have enjoyed in previous years. Significant among these in 2001 has been the participation of a large number of Year 12 students in the Birchwood Young Enterprise Company, named Indulgence. They won the Hertfordshire regional round in summer 2001, going on to compete in the East of England category. The enterprise scheme also allows students to make a contribution to their development of key skills.

#### *Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development*

60. The inspection found little evidence of spiritual development being planned for in the sixth form. As in the main school, sixth form students do not attend a daily act of collective worship. The provision for moral development is satisfactory as it is promoted in some lessons, for example when A-level students considered abortion and a child's right to life in a religious studies lesson.

61. The sixth form offers better opportunities for students to develop social awareness. For example, in an A-level history lesson the role of the church at the time of the civil rights movement in America was sensitively discussed. English lessons often explore moral and social issues. For example, in Year 12 English, students explore changing expectations of the role of women in marriage in Jane Austen's time, through their study of 'Pride and Prejudice'.

62. Students' social skills are effectively fostered through the good range of visits organised as part of their study. These also contribute to their cultural development. Students have visited theatres, television studios, and places of historical and geographical interest. The school encourages students to organise charity fundraising events. Many successful events have been organised, initiated by sixth formers, for instance to assist a local school for epileptic children. Students also enjoy taking part in fundraising events such as the popular all-night disco. Each Year 7 tutor group is allocated two sixth formers to support teachers during tutor periods, for example by checking the students' planners and collecting credits.

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

63. The care of students is satisfactory overall. Procedures for child protection have improved since the last inspection and are now satisfactory. Policies are up-to-date and well linked to local procedures. Staff are aware of the person who has overall responsibility for child protection and familiar with the school's procedures. However, training on matters of child protection is not included as part of the induction and in-service training of new or newly-qualified staff.

64. Health and safety procedures are now good. Staff are aware of their responsibilities, and safety checks are carried out as necessary. Procedures for dealing with accidents are good. Parents are contacted when their children become unwell, but the school has inadequate facilities for students to wait or rest when they are in need of medical attention. A number of staff including the main receptionist have first-aid training. However, there are concerns over the safety of students using the driveway as it is very congested. There are particular dangers while commercial deliveries are made, and when parents drop and collect their children at the start and end of the day, for both the main school and the on-site nursery.

65. The procedures for supporting students' personal development include guidance and counselling, and are satisfactory. The school uses the support of the student welfare officer and a link youth worker well. A personal development programme has been introduced, for Year 10 students who have become disaffected with school and whose behaviour and attitudes mean that they are at risk of exclusion. The programme combines rewards for commitment to good behaviour in school with making a contribution to the school environment. The personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme is satisfactory, and better than reported by the last inspection. PSHE issues include work on health, drugs and sex education, and are covered in tutor time and assemblies. The provision for careers education and work experience is satisfactory.

66. Particular success has been achieved in raising the level of attendance since the last inspection. Records of students' attendance are good, and absence notes are monitored and checked. Concerns are identified early and parents are contacted on matters of concern.

67. The arrangements for the care of students with special educational needs are good. Comprehensive records are kept of students. The learning support centre operates successfully, promoting students' education and personal development well. Information on students with special educational needs is made available to class teachers, together with information on the targets in their individual education plans. Subject teachers are expected to build on these, and some do so well. For example, the English department has collaborated with the learning support staff in drawing up individual targets, and shares lesson planning with the learning support teachers and assistants. This good practice is not consistent across the school, however.

68. The arrangements for guidance are based on staff knowing the students well, and are satisfactory. As part of the pastoral programme, students have regular meetings with their form tutors to discuss how well they are doing. Any difficulties with behaviour are also monitored. Assessment data is displayed for students and form tutors, and parents are contacted when performance levels drop. Heads of year are also informed, and if necessary the senior management team are consulted. The time allocated to tutor periods is used satisfactorily, following a planned programme. A review of students' performance across the curriculum has been completed recently, and the information shared with tutors and heads of year. However, the information has not yet been used with students.

69. Target setting is not systematic, although some good practice was observed during the inspection. Some targets for improvement are set by subject teachers and recorded on reports. However, few subjects set short-term, specific targets, and there is insufficient monitoring of whether suitable targets have been set and whether they are being met. Target setting as a result has had too little impact on raising standards.

70. Since the last inspection, the school has done much to promote better attitudes and behaviour, with some success. It now has good procedures for promoting good behaviour and eliminating oppressive behaviour. These procedures are followed consistently by teachers, and have helped most be effective in managing class activities. The code of conduct is clear, and known by all. A good system of rewards encourages positive behaviour. Staff supervise students well at breaks and lunch time. Inappropriate behaviour is dealt with quickly and followed up effectively. The rate of exclusions is broadly average. The school promotes an ethos of inclusion, to give educational opportunities for all. Procedures for monitoring and eliminating oppressive behaviour in the school are good. Those who have not behaved appropriately go on report. This system works reasonably well in promoting a more positive response in lessons. Exclusion is used as an ultimate sanction, to reinforce the standards of behaviour and effort expected of students. Issues of bullying and racism are dealt with in PSHE, assemblies and tutorials. The school's reward system offers merits and prizes for good achievement. Students' views are taken into consideration through school council meetings.

71. The learning support centre provides a high standard of care for students with special educational needs. Staff assess the individual needs of students carefully, and target their support effectively. They monitor the students' academic and personal development, which helps students, teachers and parents to recognise what is being achieved.

### ***Assessment***

72. Procedures for assessing students' attainment and progress are satisfactory overall. A very good central database includes detailed assessment data on all students across all years in all subjects. This, together with the school system of regular progress checks, informs predictions of individual students' examination results. Assessment procedures within subjects are more variable. They are very good in art, and are supported by displays of National Curriculum levels as well as portfolios of work which are used well to ensure that teachers' assessments are valid. In languages and science, students' progress is tracked carefully and targets are set. In religious education, teachers make good use of the levels of attainment identified in local Agreed Syllabus to assess the standard of students' work, although there is some

confusion over the different systems adopted by the core and GCSE courses. Marking in physical education is inconsistent, and too much work is not assessed in ICT. Teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 were too high in several subjects, including design and technology, history and physical education. The teacher assessments are much too high in ICT because the data collected from across the curriculum is unreliable.

73. The school monitors and supports students' academic progress well. Very good analysis of assessment data enables senior staff to identify underachievers. They also monitor how well subjects do in examinations, and students' performance in terms of gender, special educational needs and ethnicity. Curriculum area leaders and form tutors also identify underachieving students, and provide mentor support as well as involving parents. High-quality data is used in art to track progress across years, and good practice was also evident in design and technology, humanities, science, English and modern foreign languages. However, this information is not followed through to setting students short-term targets that support them in achieving their target results in examinations.

74. Several subjects make appropriate use of assessment information to guide curricular planning. For example, teachers in design and technology recently reviewed examination results and coursework to identify the causes of some students underachieving. This enabled staff to identify what needed to be done to improve teaching and learning. The science syllabus was changed, because staff felt that the students would be better suited by a modular course in which their work is assessed at intervals rather than by a final examination.

## **Sixth form**

### ***Assessment***

75. Procedures for assessing sixth form students' attainment and progress are satisfactory. The school has a clear picture of how well students perform. Senior staff compare results between subjects and track how well groups of students are doing, to assess the extent to which the school has 'added value'. This information provides clear identification of emerging issues, highlighting where further work is needed and where more rigorous monitoring is required.

76. Regular progress checks provide predicted grades for each student. In modern languages, very precise procedures enable teachers to assess and track students carefully. Good procedures in English include diagnostic and formative feedback, and examination board criteria are used well to assess coursework in design and technology. However, teachers' assessments of the standard of students' work in other subject areas, such as science and mathematics, have been too high, and so students' results are below those predicted for them. Curriculum area leaders work closely with underachieving students. Good practice is evident in technology, mathematics, languages and science. Here, teachers are particularly supportive of weaker students. However, target setting is insufficiently developed, and so students have too little guidance as to how to achieve their target grades.

77. The detailed assessment data in the central database is used well to prompt subject departments to look at group and individual performance, but has not been followed up rigorously enough by action to raise standards and ensure that students are successful in their courses. Nevertheless, some teachers make good diagnoses of individual needs, including in English, design and technology and languages.

78. Assessment information is used appropriately to help staff decide on which A-level syllabus to follow. In design and technology, a recent review of results led to a change from a graphics to a products course. In history, the department changed the syllabus to one that was better matched to students' interests and staff expertise. In mathematics, a change to a modular syllabus is intended to help students do better than in the previous course, which was based on a final examination.

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

79. The school makes considerable effort to care for the welfare of individual students in the sixth form. Teachers show a genuine concern and do their best to support students when they need it. Relationships

between staff and students are good. Procedures for child protection comply with the local guidelines and are well linked to the main school provision. PSHE is included within the general studies programme, and students generally take responsibility for their own personal safety.

80. The school provides a safe environment for those in the sixth form. Procedures for promoting regular attendance are good.

81. The school has a good system to provide opportunities for students' personal development. There are regular tutorial meetings between tutors and students to discuss how well they are doing, and students are expected to take responsibility and be a good example to the younger students. Careers information is satisfactory for the sixth form, although some students would value more opportunities for careers interviews. The support and guidance for students about the suitability of the courses they choose to study in the sixth form is unsatisfactory as some are enrolled onto courses on which they are unlikely to gain a pass grade. However, students receive a good level of support with their applications to further education and employment.

82. Targets and expectations based on students' prior attainment are shared with them, their teachers and parents or carers. Regular checks alert tutors to any areas where additional help might be needed. Students feel they receive good support from their teachers, and value the time spent helping them with work that they are finding particularly difficult.

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

83. Parents are happy with the education and care their children receive. They are supportive of the school and its work. Consultation meetings on students' progress are always well attended. If a student's attendance or punctuality is causing concern, staff find that parents are helpful and support the school's actions well. The school benefits from supportive parent governors and a dedicated small group who run the Parents' Society. This group organise regular fund raising and social events, most of which are well attended by parents.

84. The school has worked hard to build sound links with its parents. Parents receive useful information from the school in the form of newsletters, letters, the school brochure and governor's annual report. Consultation meetings are held annually with additional 'surgeries' held on different subject areas as the need arises. Written reports on how well their children are doing are issued to parents in the summer term, with interim progress reports each term. The annual reports were considered to be unsatisfactory by the last inspection, and have been improved. They now contain a lot of information in an easy-to-follow format, including targets for improvement. However the quality of the comments by individual teachers remains inconsistent. Some teachers provide good, detailed information on how well students have done whereas other subject reports are very general and contain little or no information on students' attainment.

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

85. Leadership and management by the headteacher and the senior team are satisfactory, with some considerable strengths but also some weaknesses. The headteacher has a clear view of the future of the school. Securing specialist school status has formed part of this vision. The bid for technology college status identified design and technology, ICT, mathematics and science as priorities for improvement, reflecting the weaknesses in these areas at that time. Other priorities were to improve boys' achievement, increase student numbers in the sixth form, and provide more suitable courses for sixth-formers. Progress has been made in most of these areas, and has been good in design and technology. The senior managers and staff share a commitment to the direction in which the school is heading, but the action taken to achieve the targets for improvement has not been entirely successful.

86. The headteacher took purposeful action to tackle areas of weakness highlighted by the previous inspection report. Some have been improved, and no longer give cause for concern. In other areas, further work needs to be done – for example the provision for ICT. The senior management team has worked closely with subject leaders to press for improvements in curriculum plans and schemes of work, and to

improve standards. Where serious under-performance has been identified, the headteacher has taken steps to put right what was not working. As a result, standards have risen, as is illustrated by the improved GCSE results in 2001. Nevertheless, there remains much that can be done to continue the improvements.

87. Following the last inspection, the school introduced an appropriate structure for reviewing the performance of staff. The first cycle of reviews and observations are nearing completion. This aspect of the school's work was unsatisfactory at the time of the last inspection. There are now clearer lines of accountability. Newly-qualified teachers are seen teaching on a regular basis by their subject mentor. They feel they receive adequate support in this aspect of their work.

88. As at the time of the last inspection, the implementation of action plans is not followed through rigorously enough. Too few checks are carried out to monitor the progress being made. As a result, staff with delegated responsibilities are sometimes distracted by new initiatives and so lose sight of the objectives and longer-term goals of their development plans. Many initiatives are being introduced in the school, and the points at which they meet and overlap are sometimes not exploited to obtain maximum benefit from the effort staff put into them. Whole-school and cross-curricular initiatives are generally less consistently implemented and less carefully monitored than those within subject departments. For instance, the promotion of literacy skills, ICT and key skills in the sixth form are not effectively managed, and the PSHE course for Years 7 to 9 is not clearly enough linked to that for Years 10 and 11.

89. The management of the provision for special educational needs is good overall. The learning support centre is very well organised, and its work has a very good impact on students' achievement when support staff are involved. However, when no extra support is available, subject areas are inconsistent in implementing the learning support centre's good practice.

90. The management of subjects and curriculum areas has improved. It is now at least satisfactory in all subjects except ICT, and is good in several. It is very good in art because of a strong focus on raising standards. Subject leaders are provided with a very detailed review of students' attainment, together with predictions and targets for future assessments. Some subject leaders have recognised the benefits of this information and used it well, for example to monitor the impact of teaching and help explain why certain groups of students achieve better than others. Other subject leaders have not made full use of this data. Subject areas have one-year development plans that reflect the whole-school development priorities, but the lack of a strategic, longer-term view of development and the steps to be taken is a weakness in most subject areas and the school as a whole.

91. The governing body is highly committed to the school and has a good understanding of many of the challenges that the school faces. In particular, governors understand local issues and the opportunities for work and training in the area. This experience has been used well in their planning for improvements. Some governors come into the school on a regular basis and this helps them informally monitor the day-to-day work of the school, the school administration systems, accommodation and students' behaviour. Governors have made accurate assessments, and so know what is working well and what needs to be improved. They are very aware of the vulnerability of the sixth form, and this is one of the issues that gives them the greatest concern. They know that the cost of keeping the sixth form takes much-needed resources from elsewhere in the school, but they also feel strongly that without the sixth form the school has a limited future. Governors have accumulated much information about the school, including through asking questions and receiving reports, but they and the school have had limited success in bringing about the desired improvements. Governors have been unable to exercise their corporate role in ways that achieve the level of success that they would like.

92. The governing body fulfils its responsibilities satisfactorily except in ensuring that the school meets statutory requirements with regard to providing the full statutory curriculum in ICT and collective worship in the main school and in the sixth form.

93. The school has evaluated the effectiveness of teaching and learning in several ways. These include the detailed analysis of students' achievements in relation to their starting points, and a review of teaching and learning as part of the performance management system. The school's approach to improving the quality of teaching is satisfactory in the main, but lacks rigour. The informality of observations of teaching and learning lessens their importance in the eyes of staff. This reduces the impact of this monitoring in



terms of identifying improvements and weaknesses. Curriculum area managers have adequate time allocated to carry out a set number of observations each year. However, the focus for the observations is not clear, and opportunities to consolidate and give emphasis to key priorities have been missed. For example, the work currently taking place to improve standards of literacy across the curriculum has not been monitored systematically. The impact of whole-school training days on teachers' practice has not been evaluated, to see whether the training provided good value for money. Too few opportunities are created for teachers to learn from one another, and for those with particular skills to be observed by others.

94. The school has identified appropriate aims in its current development plan, but the long-term financial effects of these plans have not been adequately explored. This has led to an unsatisfactory drift of funds over time from the main school, to maintain high staffing levels in the sixth form. As a result, several areas of the main school lack adequate resources – especially the library and provision of ICT facilities. Day-to-day monitoring of expenditure is carried out satisfactorily. All the points raised in the last audit report have been acted upon, and specific grants are used appropriately.

95. The school and the governing body have applied the principles of competition to the services that they buy, and have consulted widely over matters such as the bid for technology college status. However costs, such as for staffing, have been compared only to local figures. When compared to national figures, the school is funded at a much higher level than most schools. The school has not asked itself whether the standards it achieves for the costs of provision compares well to other schools nationally. In the main school, the standards achieved are satisfactory, despite the lack of resources caused by the continued subsidy to support the sixth form. Overall, the school has applied the principles of best value satisfactorily for the main school, but not for the sixth form.

96. The school has made sound provision to ensure equality of opportunity. Strengths include the good support for students with learning difficulties and the detailed analysis of the progress made by individuals and groups of students as they move through the school. This information is an important part of the whole-school monitoring system. Weaknesses in the provision of equal opportunities lie in the behaviour of the minority of students whose behaviour interrupts the learning of others in the class. Although students with particular talents and gifts have been identified, there is insufficient focus on their learning needs in lessons.

97. Resources are unsatisfactory overall, although some subject areas are well resourced. These include English, modern foreign languages, music and religious education. Design and technology has a new, very good Scantek room, which contains the most up-to-date technology. However, the school library is unsatisfactory. Its stock of books is well below what is needed for a school of this size, and includes too few reference materials relevant to the curriculum. Some modern computers with Internet access are available in the library. They are popular with students. The library is not used sufficiently by classes to support their learning, although it is the base for a homework club. Unsatisfactory resourcing also has a particularly significant impact in ICT, where the lack of access to computers is depressing standards of attainment.

98. Staffing is good overall. There is an adequate number of well-qualified staff for the needs of the curriculum, and they are deployed appropriately. Not all the staff in design and technology are specialist. No staff have specialist skills in meeting the needs of students with English as an additional language, which is unsatisfactory, although some training has been planned.

99. The school has adequate accommodation overall to meet most current curricular requirements. The quality of accommodation varies from very good to unsatisfactory. The art, modern languages, music and religious education departments have suites of good-quality specialist rooms, and the design and technology department is housed in a very well-designed, largely open-plan area. Some classrooms are small for the size of classes. The school has too few ICT rooms to match the demand. The indoor facilities for physical education are insufficient and suffer from lack of maintenance. Additionally, recent flooding has damaged the gymnasium floor. Some classrooms in the mathematics department are too cold to work in comfortably. The school has worked hard to ensure that the accommodation is accessible to students with physical disabilities, and has largely succeeded in this.

100. Internally, the condition of the buildings is satisfactory. Many areas are well presented and have good displays of students' work and other items of information, as in mathematics and design and technology.

The school has made an effort to produce an attractive learning environment, but many buildings have a neglected appearance. The exterior of the main block has not been redecorated for over thirty years. The lie of the land and the poor drainage lead to flooding in very wet weather. The many grassy areas adjacent to the buildings cause much mud to be brought into the corridors and classrooms during wet periods.

## **Sixth form**

### ***Leadership and management***

101. The school's mission statement clearly expresses how the sixth form contributes to the whole school, promotes education beyond the age of sixteen, encourages responsible citizenship and provides younger students with role models. Students, staff, governors and parents share a strong commitment to the sixth form. The headteacher and governors are wholly committed to ensuring that sufficient resources are made available to enable the school to retain and expand its sixth form. However, management of the sixth form lacks a clear educational direction. The headteacher and senior management team are aware of this weakness, and are reviewing how to improve the situation.

102. The school has not ensured that it provides a curriculum that meets the needs of the students it accepts into the sixth form, and that it uses its resources to best effect. It has chosen to provide a wide range of AS- and A-level courses, even when numbers taking some of the courses are very low. This means that the expenditure on the sixth form is very high in relation to the income per sixth form student. The school has been aware that this is not sustainable, and has sought to improve the situation through recruiting more students and establishing a consortium arrangement with another local school. Numbers in the sixth form have risen, and are predicted to increase further in September 2002, but many courses still have too few students to be viable. The effectiveness of the expenditure has not been evaluated rigorously, in terms of whether it provides value for money for the sixth form and whether it has a negative impact on the quality of education provided in the main school. Although students' achievement is satisfactory overall in relation to their attainment on entry to Year 12, the sixth form produces results which are low compared to national figures, and the high expenditure is not cost-effective. A partnership arrangement with a local school was set up to resolve this problem, but is expected to end shortly and so the school is having to re-consider how to run its sixth form.

103. The governors are very keen to ensure the sixth form is maintained. They have been active in pursuing ways that give a better steer to future developments, for example by meeting local politicians and councillors to secure their support. Governors are very keen to find ways of improving the sixth form accommodation. In the highly-competitive local environment, they believe that the poor condition of the sixth form social area is a significant influence on recruitment. Compared to other local centres, the accommodation is considered by students to be unattractive.

104. Governors are very aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the sixth form and have been probing in their questioning of those with management responsibilities. In most respects, the governors carry out their statutory responsibility for the curriculum satisfactorily, but have not ensured that statutory requirements are met with regard to collective worship and that the school fully complies with the local Agreed Syllabus for religious education.

105. As for the main school, monitoring is satisfactory overall, although the information gained has not always been followed through systematically enough into action to deal with the weaknesses that have been identified. Nevertheless, the senior managers have successfully tackled some of the issues identified from evaluations of examination results. For example, they have worked with teachers to help them adjust their teaching styles to the needs of older students. This has led to improvements in teaching, explaining why teaching was judged good by the inspection. Monitoring has not focused enough on the impact of teaching on students' learning and achievement, which remain weaker than the quality of teaching in many subjects. This is partly because of the students' lack of confidence in independent work, but also because of the lack of resources for studying outside lessons.

## **Resources**

106. Resources for sixth-form work are unsatisfactory. The library does not contain sufficient books to support the range of post-16 courses on offer, and so students are unable to read and research widely enough. Sixth form students make good use of the library for working in during private study time, including Internet access. Unsatisfactory resourcing has a significant impact in ICT, where the lack of access to computers is depressing standards of attainment.

107. Staffing is satisfactory. The teachers have generally good expertise for the needs of the sixth form courses offered, but less experience of vocational courses.

108. The school has adequate accommodation overall for the curriculum currently offered. However, the quality of the accommodation varies from very good to unsatisfactory, as for the main school. The sixth form centre is a converted BT fibre optics centre which was originally designed to have a ten-year life expectancy. It is quite spacious but in a poor state of repair. Parts of the roof split recently, resulting in damage to the ceiling and wiring, soon to be repaired.

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

109. To raise standards further and improve the quality of education offered, the governors, headteacher and staff should:

- (1) improve the provision for ICT and thereby students' achievement, by:
  - developing clearer whole-school plans for the implementation of the National Curriculum in Years 8 and 9 [paragraphs 45, 176] ;
  - improving ICT resources so that subject teachers have better access to ICT facilities and can implement these plans [paragraphs 97, 140, 147, 151, 163, 173, 176, 198] ;
  - assessing students' work in ICT more accurately in Years 8 and 9 [paragraph 176];
  - making better arrangements for the short GCSE course in Years 10 and 11 by improving the timetabling of the course [paragraphs 47, 177].
  
- (2) improve students' skills in writing and in studying independently, by:
  - ensuring that subject areas implement the whole-school policy for literacy, and follow the good practice that has already been established in several areas [paragraphs 117, 119-120, 130];
  - raising teachers' expectations of the quality and presentation of students' written work [paragraphs 37, 120, 136] ;
  - providing more guidance on how well students are doing and what to work to improve next, including thorough marking that gives more analytical feedback, so that students have greater confidence in working independently [paragraphs 17, 36, 38, 172];
  - increasing library resources, so that independent reading and research tasks can be set [paragraphs 37, 136, 173, 209];
  - improving students' response to homework and follow-up tasks, so that the good learning that takes place in lessons is consolidated [paragraphs 38, 144, 186, 188] .
  
- (3) improve the challenge offered to higher-attaining students, by:
  - identifying more clearly what students of all levels of attainment are expected to learn in each lesson, and ensuring that the planned work will extend the higher-attaining students [paragraphs 32, 51, 127, 154, 174, 198].
  
- (4) improve the attitudes and behaviour of the minority of students who are inattentive in lessons [paragraphs 18, 35, 128, 139, 180], by:
  - using teaching strategies that interest and motivate these students [paragraph 35];
  - class teachers adopting the strategies used by learning support staff, to adapt their teaching and resources to the needs of the students with special educational needs [paragraph 35].

- (5) improve the management of the sixth form [*paragraphs 101-105*]. This issue is discussed below.

### **Sixth form**

- (1) improve the quality of students' learning over time and the challenge offered to students of all levels of prior attainment, so that results at AS- and A-level improve and students gain the grades predicted on the basis of their GCSE results [*paragraphs 14, 42, 58, 236, 247*];
  - (2) provide a more suitable range courses, so that students follow courses in which they are likely to be successful [*paragraphs 14, 58, 81*];
  - (3) improve students' skills in writing, including through better-planned key skills provision, and students' opportunities for and confidence in independent learning [*paragraphs 16, 23, 41, 43, 57, 226, 252, 254*];
  - (4) improve the facilities for ICT and the library resources to support the courses taught and to enable students to work independently and to follow up their learning in lessons [*paragraphs 97, 106, 252, 259*];
  - (5) improve the strategic management of the sixth form, so that it is cost-effective and enables its students to do well academically [*paragraphs 101-2*].
110. In addition to the issues identified above, the governors may wish to include the following, more minor points in their action plan.
- Provide more opportunities for students' spiritual development, in the main school and sixth form [*paragraphs 53, 60*].
  - Improve the rigour with which some aspects of the school's work are managed, particularly whole-school initiatives, cross-curricular provision, and the implementation of action plans [*paragraphs 44, 45, 88, 90, 93, 94, 95, 105, 219*].
  - Provide more time for physical education in Years 10 and 11, so that the National Curriculum requirements can be covered in sufficient depth [*paragraphs 47,202*].
  - Within subject areas, make more systematic use of the assessment information provided by senior managers, to set targets that guide students in how to improve the quality of their work [*paragraphs 69, 72, 73, 76, 77, 216*].
  - Improve the areas in which health and safety issues were noted by the inspection [*paragraphs 63, 64, 202*].
  - Improve the accommodation, including the indoor facilities for physical education, the classrooms for mathematics, and the state of repair of the sixth form centre [*paragraphs 99, 100, 108, 202*].
  - Ensure that all students have the opportunity for a daily act of collective worship [*paragraphs 92, 104*].
  - Provide sixth form students with more time for religious education, so that the requirements of the local Agreed Syllabus are covered properly [*paragraph 104*].
  - Improve sixth form students' punctuality to lessons [*paragraphs 27, 42*].

## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

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

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	110
	Sixth form	33
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students		55

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
<b>Years 7 – 11</b>							
Number	3	22	43	38	3	1	0
Percentage	3	20	39	34	3	1	0
<b>Sixth form</b>							
Number	1	5	20	6	1	0	0
Percentage	3	15	60	18	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 students

<b>Students on the school's roll</b>	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of students on the school's roll	747	93
Number of full-time students known to be eligible for free school meals	61	0

<b>Special educational needs</b>	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of students with statements of special educational needs	29	0
Number of students on the school's special educational needs register	168	1

<b>English as an additional language</b>	No of students
Number of students with English as an additional language	24

<b>Student mobility in the last school year</b>	No of students
Students who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	8
Students who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	2

### Attendance

#### Authorised absence

	%
School data	7.9
National comparative data	8.1

#### Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.3
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	96	72	168

<b>National Curriculum Test/Task Results</b>		<b>English</b>	<b>Mathematics</b>	<b>Science</b>
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	40	68	63
	Girls	56	54	49
	Total	96	122	112
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	57 (74)	74 (68)	66 (56)
	National	64 (63)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	22 (21)	52 (39)	33 (24)
	National	31 (31)	42 (39)	33 (29)

<b>Teachers' Assessments</b>		<b>English</b>	<b>Mathematics</b>	<b>Science</b>
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	49	68	54
	Girls	53	56	44
	Total	102	124	98
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	61 (50)	74 (68)	58 (56)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	30 (21)	52 (39)	33 (24)
	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 students in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	66	67	133

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of students achieving the standard specified	Boys	30	64	65
	Girls	36	65	65
	Total	66	129	130
Percentage of students achieving the standard specified	School	50 (45)	97 (92)	98 (95)
	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 student	School	39.3 (35.4)
	National	39.0 (38.4)

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

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

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	9	19	28

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	3.2	4.5	4.1 (4.9)	0	0	0 (2.9)
National	n/a	n/a	n/a (17.6)	n/a	n/a	n/a (2.7)

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

Vocational qualifications	Number	% success rate
Number in their final year of studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those students who achieved all those they studied	School	87
	National	73

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

	No of students
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	1
Black – other	2
Indian	14
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	1
White	814
Any other minority ethnic group	3

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

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	1	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	20	4
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

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

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

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	51.1
Number of students per qualified teacher	17

#### **Education support staff: Y7 – Y11**

Total number of education support staff	5
Total aggregate hours worked per week	132

#### **Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11**

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	72.4
---	------

#### **Average teaching group size: Y7– Y11**

Key Stage 3	23
Key Stage 4	23

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

### ***Financial information***

Financial year	2000-2001
----------------	-----------

	£
Total income	2,674,826
Total expenditure	2,591,468
Expenditure per student	3,138
Balance brought forward from previous year	54,819
Balance carried forward to next year	138,177

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

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	17.7
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	25.6

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

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*



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

### Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	174
Number of questionnaires returned	840

### Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	41	44	9	5	1
My child is making good progress in school.	43	50	4	2	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	13	59	14	3	11
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	19	59	16	5	1
The teaching is good.	29	62	3	1	5
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	31	54	12	2	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	58	37	3	2	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	60	32	5	1	2
The school works closely with parents.	28	55	10	2	5
The school is well led and managed.	29	56	6	1	8
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	36	54	8	1	1
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	22	56	12	2	8

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

### **ENGLISH**

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

#### Strengths

- Teaching is good overall, particularly in the way varied activities hold students' interest.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is good, and used well to help students according to their different strengths and needs.
- Good quality of students' speaking as they answer questions and take part in discussions in class.
- The department is well led, and so teachers share effective materials and methods with a beneficial effect on students' learning.

#### Areas for improvement

- Most students' writing, so that the quality of their written work reflects their level of understanding and spoken expression.
- Opportunities for students to think and work independently, without direct teacher support.
- The challenge provided to the higher-attaining students in Years 10 and 11.

111. Results in the national tests at the end of Year 9 were below the national average in 2001, and well below average compared to similar schools (based on the number known to be eligible for free school meals). The school requested a re-mark of the English test papers, which led to some students' levels being raised although the overall results remained below average. Students did less well in English than in mathematics and science. The 2001 results were much lower than those of the previous three years, when they were above average. The boys' results fell more than girls'. Teacher assessments were higher than the test results in 2001. The evidence of students' written work and the lessons observed showed that standards in Year 9 are average overall, and closer to the teacher assessments than the test results.

112. The overall standard attained by students joining the school in Year 7 is currently average, although the evidence suggests that in previous years their attainment was not quite at this level. In their first three years in school, students' achievement is good. They study a range of texts with enjoyment, and use what they have read to tackle writing tasks with thought and imagination. For example, Year 7 students reflected the suspense and sense of the unknown in Wilfred Wilson Gibson's ballad 'Flannan Isle' in their own mystery stories on a similar theme. Many students make regular use of the library to read fiction for pleasure, although the stock of books is too limited to meet their needs fully. Students write in a satisfactory variety of styles. These range from newspaper articles with appropriate headlines and opening paragraphs, to reflections on personal experience, for instance when describing a personal experience of Christmas with the family. By Year 8, many students write in well-organised paragraphs and present their work carefully. However, approximately half the students lack the extended vocabulary needed to express their thoughts in detail, and in written work their sentence structure is limited and repetitive. When studying fiction, most write capably about the narrative events such as in George Orwell's 'Animal Farm', but by Year 9 few have moved on to analyse the underlying messages and ideas. Girls' written work is better than boys', reflecting the test results. Computers are sometimes used to present work well, with good layout and accurate spelling. Students who are members of minority ethnic groups achieve satisfactorily. Those with special educational needs make good progress, in response to well-thought-out methods to help them and to the guidance of support staff, who work productively with the class teachers to assist individual students.

113. GCSE results in English and in English literature were similar to the national average in 2001, as they have been for several years. The results rose a little in 2001, but overall were similar to the level achieved at the time of the last inspection. As nationally, girls did better than boys. The results were average compared to similar schools, both on the basis of free school meals and compared to schools in which the students had gained similar results in the Year 9 tests two years earlier. However, the school's analysis identifies that the highest-attaining students' results were below expectations. In drama, results rose in 2001 to above the national average.

114. In Years 10 and 11, students' achievement is satisfactory and the standard attained in Year 11 is broadly average. However, the average- and lower-attaining students do better than those capable of gaining higher grades (A\* to C) because of some lack of challenge to the higher-attainers. Students with special educational needs make good progress because of the extra support they are given, although their achievement is held back by their lack of basic literacy skills and their dependence on adult help. Students study a good range of fiction and non-fiction texts with interest. They discuss ideas thoughtfully and listen attentively to others' contributions. For example, a high-attaining Year 11 class analysed the language and layout of a travel brochure. Led by very good questioning from the teacher, their oral work was confident and insightful, but they were less successful when asked to record their ideas independently in writing. This difference in the quality of students' oral and written work was frequently observed. Students generally write most confidently about the literature they have studied in class, rather than on language topics. Many use technical terms such as 'octave' and 'sestet' accurately, and appreciate well the emotional relevance and meaning of poetry.

115. Students' response in lessons is generally good. They join in most lessons enthusiastically, and sustain attention even with work they find difficult. Teachers have a good knowledge of their strengths and weaknesses, and promote positive attitudes sensitively. Students answer questions and explain their ideas willingly in lessons. They take part sensibly in discussions, respecting others' contributions and suggestions. They enjoy the opportunities to use ICT to present their written work.

116. The quality of teaching and learning in lessons is good, and has improved since the last inspection. Lessons are well planned, with a good variety of activities that hold students' attention and interest. Teachers use their good subject knowledge to question and prompt students, ensuring that their existing knowledge is confirmed and that their minds are kept focused on what they have to do in order to improve. This approach is successful as students learn well from the oral work, although the teachers tend to model much of the thinking for the students instead of encouraging them to take more responsibility for independent thought. Teachers prepare students well for tests and examinations. Students' written work is marked sensitively and conscientiously, with helpful comments on what they have done well and what needs to be improved.

117. Although their enthusiasm and response to teaching are good in lessons, the learning of students in Years 10 and 11 is slowed by weaknesses in their confidence and language skills. For example, many have still not acquired an extended vocabulary and learned to use complex sentence structures to express their ideas in writing. As a result, students' achievement over time is satisfactory, even though their learning in lessons is good.

118. The subject is well led. The head of department evaluates the work of teachers and their students effectively, and helps them to improve standards. The English staff check students' progress and analyse their needs well. They share practical teaching ideas and materials so that classroom work is adapted appropriately for students' needs, although insufficient attention has been focused on the challenge provided to higher-attaining students. The improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory. Although standards and results are broadly the same as then, the quality of teaching and learning are more consistent, and the department has a better insight into what needs to be done to improve the quality of students' written work and how well the high-attaining students perform.

#### *Literacy across the curriculum*

119. Most students enter the school with below-average skills in writing. Few students write at length in extended sentences. Most students' vocabulary is limited, which affects the quality of their spoken and their written work, in English and across the curriculum. The quality of their written expression falls considerably below their ability to express ideas clearly in class discussions. The school has taken appropriate initial steps to tackle this, by setting up a group of teachers to co-ordinate the implementation of its policy on literacy across the subjects. The school has also participated in a national initiative to improve literacy. However, these approaches are not having sufficient impact because the policy and advice is not followed consistently.

120. In design and technology, history, geography and English, the quality of students' writing is higher than elsewhere as a result of carefully-focused teaching methods. For example, in geography and history teachers explain to students how to write at length, organising complex ideas coherently, and encourage them to spell correctly. In these subjects, students present their work well. In art, new technical words are displayed and referred to so that students gain confidence in discussing their ideas, responses and feelings and explaining their ideas to others. This good practice is not applied consistently in other subjects. For example, in mathematics, students' work is badly organised, poorly presented, with too little attention paid to spelling. When students write, or use computers to compose their thoughts, opportunities are often missed to help them with their spelling and grammar. In religious education, exercises are sometimes marked effectively to help students tackle weaknesses in their written skills, although this is inconsistent. Some teachers' low expectations of the effort students put into writing and the quality of their work contribute to students not doing as well as they should in tests and examinations.

## MATHEMATICS

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

### Strengths

- Teachers' subject knowledge.
- The generally positive relationships between teachers and students.
- Teachers' management of some students' challenging behaviour.

### Areas for improvement

- Catering for the full ability range in teaching, particularly challenging the higher-attaining students.
- The provision for using and applying mathematics.
- The presentation of students' written work.
- The attitudes and behaviour of the minority of students who are inattentive in class.

121. In the 2001 national tests in mathematics at the end of Year 9, overall results were above the national average but below that for similar schools. The proportion of students reaching level 5 was above the national average but below that for similar schools, while the proportion of students reaching level 6 was above national averages and in line with that for similar schools. The teacher assessments were broadly similar to the test results. The performance of girls was similar to that of boys in 2001. Students did better overall in mathematics than in English and science. Over the last four years, mathematics results have risen in line with the improving national averages.

122. When students enter the school in Year 7, standards in mathematics are broadly average. The evidence of students' work and the lessons observed showed that standards in Year 9 are also average and that students' achievement in Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory. The work covers all the areas of the subject. For example, students know how to create tally charts, and produce bar charts and simple pie charts. By Year 9, they can identify patterns in linear sequences and recognise the symmetries of different shapes. Higher-attaining students identify patterns in quadratic sequences correctly, successfully use trial and improvement methods to solve cubic equations, and know how to calculate missing lengths in right angled triangles. Insufficient emphasis is given to using and applying mathematics and so students' mathematical thinking skills are not so well developed. There is too little difference in the standard attained by the higher-attaining and average students because of a lack of challenge and extension work. The department's successful concentration on review exercises, test practice and revision clubs in Year 9, in preparation for the national tests, means that the test results are higher than the overall standards in mathematics.

123. In the 2001 GCSE examinations, the proportion of A\* to C grades in mathematics was above the national average and in line with that for similar schools. Results at A\* to C have remained steady for several years, whereas the average point score, which takes account of all the students' results, has risen. This shows that the department has been more successful in raising standards among the average- and lower-attaining students than those who are potentially high attaining. Compared to these students' Year 9 test results two years earlier, the overall results in mathematics were in line with expectations. However,

the results were below expectations in terms of the proportion gaining grades A\* to C, showing that the higher-attaining students did not gain the results predicted from their test scores. Overall, the results of boys and girls are broadly similar.

124. The students' work and the lessons observed showed that standards are average by Year 11. As in Year 9, results are higher than standards because of the departments' success in providing examination practice, revision clubs and out-of-lesson support for Year 11 students. The area of using and applying mathematics remains under-developed. Numeracy skills are taught well, especially for the lower-attaining students and those with special educational needs, and high-level algebraic skills are covered by the most able. Most students have a good knowledge of percentages and reverse percentages, as well as transformations including enlargements. Higher-attaining students work confidently with rational and irrational numbers, and use the sine and cosine rules to calculate the lengths and angles of any triangle. Overall, students' achievement is satisfactory.

125. GCSE statistics is offered for high-attaining students in Years 10 and 11, after school. The lessons provide an opportunity for students to achieve an extra GCSE, and support and extend their mathematical progress. The work includes measures of central tendency, measures of dispersion and some challenging work on comparative pie charts. The course has no scheme of work and there is no formal assessment, and so students have too little idea of how well they are doing. On the basis of the work seen, standards in statistics at the end of Year 11 are above the national average, and students' achievement is satisfactory.

126. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Lessons start promptly, with a starter activity which quickly focuses students' attention. For example, in a Year 7 lesson, the teacher used 'follow me' cards which had been tailored to the topic area of algebra and served as a useful warm-up activity as well as a consolidation of previous work. Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge, and lessons have a good balance of teacher exposition and student practice. Relationships between students and staff are positive and productive. Teachers manage students well, employing a good variety of strategies to cope with the unsatisfactory behaviour of a minority of students. Teachers have a good awareness of the students' individual strengths and weaknesses. Good information on individual students is kept centrally and in teachers' record books. Homework is set according to the homework timetable.

127. Many students are not independent enough and so rely heavily on the teacher to help them when they face difficulties with the work. Sometimes, they waste much time waiting for the teacher's attention. Often, teachers pay too little attention to meeting the needs of all in the class. In particular, insufficient consideration is given to providing work that challenges the higher-attaining students. This contributes to these students making less progress than they are capable of. Marking is regular although its quality is inconsistent across the department – some is detailed and thorough, but other marking is too brief. Students have a good awareness of their target grades but less idea of how to attain them, for example when marking gives generic comments such as "work harder" or "revise more" instead of subject-specific advice.

128. Overall, students' attitudes and behaviour are satisfactory. Most are keen to do well, and so concentrate well on their work. Their relationships with teachers and each other are positive. However, in many classes a significant number of boys demonstrate poor concentration, challenging behaviour and unsatisfactory attitudes to their work. They are usually managed firmly and effectively, but at times they disrupt the learning of others in the class.

129. The provision for students with special educational needs is satisfactory. The students are well supported by their teachers, and by learning support assistants when available. Individual education plans are very full but too rarely comment on developing numeracy skills. Support for students with English as an additional language is satisfactory, with examples of good practice. For instance, a German student was particularly well supported by the German-speaking teacher in a Year 9 lesson. The provision for gifted and talented students is unsatisfactory as they are not identified by the department nor sufficiently challenged by the work.

130. The curriculum meets statutory requirements but the provision for literacy within mathematics teaching is inconsistent and unsatisfactory. Specialist vocabulary is not sufficiently stressed in lessons, and students' spellings are often incorrect. Written work is very untidy as students' skills in organising and

presenting are weak. The provision for ICT is satisfactory overall, although inconsistent across the department. Students make good use of graphical calculators in some lessons and in Year 9 they are introduced to LOGO, spreadsheets and databases.

131. The provision for numeracy across the curriculum is satisfactory overall. The staff handbook has a well-considered whole-school numeracy policy, but its implementation has not been monitored. Number work is developed well in several subjects. These include counting in modern languages, chronology work in history and calculating results in science, although students were observed having some difficulty working out average speeds. Measurement skills are used in technology for weighing ingredients and taking temperatures using temperature probes. Students make good use of shape and space in art discussing descriptions of circles and ellipses and contrasting size and proportion. Students have good opportunities for developing their graphical and data handling skills. For example, Year 8 students were introduced to graphs to show river depth in a geography lesson, while Year 11 students used a variety of statistics from questionnaires, tally charts and graphs when comparing tourism in Costa Rica and the United Kingdom.

132. The leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory, as is the department's improvement since the last inspection. Results and standards at the end of Years 9 and 11 are similar to those reported by the last inspection. The highest-attaining students are still insufficiently challenged. The department has responded very well to the revisions of the National Curriculum, the introduction of the National Numeracy Strategy and recent changes in GCSE requirements. Mental approaches to the development of number skills are improving in the lower school, whereas problem solving and investigative approaches remain under-developed. The department is well resourced with equipment and textbooks, but the school library provides inadequately for mathematics. Some of the temporary classrooms provide poor accommodation, especially in very cold or very hot weather. Departmental documentation is out-of-date, but revised schemes of work are being rewritten to take account of recent curriculum changes. Examination results are analysed carefully, but too little other monitoring of the work of the department takes place. The recently-appointed curriculum area leader has a good awareness of these strengths and weaknesses, and the department is now well placed to improve further and to raise standards as there is a shared commitment to improvement and a capacity to succeed.

## SCIENCE

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

### Strengths

- Standards are rising as a result of more effective teaching than in the past.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge.
- Teachers make good use of assessment information to track how well students are doing.
- Teachers use the resources they have, including support staff, well.

### Areas for improvement

- Some students' concentration and motivation to learn, and the behaviour of a few students as it slows the learning of all in the class.
- Teachers' effectiveness in managing students' behaviour.
- Teachers' planning for what students of different levels of attainment are to learn each lesson, so that individual needs are met better and the high-attaining students are stimulated and challenged more.
- The use of ICT within the science curriculum.
- Writing and presentation skills, especially of the boys.

133. The results in the national tests at the end of Year 9 were close to the national average in 2001 but very low when compared to similar schools. Boys did less well than girls, compared to boys' and girls' results nationally. The science results were similar to those in mathematics and above those in English. The trend in the school's results is overall in line with the national trend of improvement, although with wide variation from year to year.

134. In the current Year 9, the overall attainment of the students is average. Higher-attaining students were challenged by the idea of a diffusion gradient in a lesson on diffusion. They asked and answered questions well, showing that they remembered the ideas presented in earlier lessons. In a revision lesson involving average-attaining students, the teacher worked hard to motivate the class, who showed that they knew the differences between human and plant reproduction. The lower-attaining students find it difficult to concentrate. Their attitude makes practical work difficult and leads to an over-reliance on completing worksheets. The students' weak skills in reading and writing make some of these resources difficult for them to use, slowing their learning. For example, in a lesson on atoms and molecules, students who had difficulty reading words such as 'reactive' and 'properties' needed much help to answer the questions on the worksheet. Their understanding of atoms and molecules was at a basic level.

135. Students enter the school in Year 7 with knowledge, skills and understanding that are just below average overall. Students are achieving satisfactorily in relation to their attainment at the start of the course. Year 7 students in mixed-ability classes are responding well to the new course that is being developed. In a lesson on separating salt from water, they showed that they know how to set up an experiment safely, write it up and draw diagrams effectively. The new individualised learning units recently available to Year 8 in the Scantek room were popular with the majority of the higher-attaining set. It gave a variety of learning opportunities relating to biomedical and alternative energy topics, but was quite difficult for the teacher to manage without support. The literacy level and personal organisation skill needed by the learners was quite high, but the class observed managed well.

136. The students' results in the 2001 GCSE examinations were close to the national average. The school's analysis of these results shows that lower-attaining students generally did as well as or better than was predicted from their test results in Year 9. However, higher-attaining students tended to do less well than predicted. The overall standard attained by the students now in Year 11 is below average. In particular, the students' written work is generally poorly presented – especially that of the boys. Teachers have rewarded mediocre work with over-enthusiastic comments. The lessons observed were revision lessons as the students were about to do school examinations. In an average-attaining set, students used a computer to test their scientific knowledge and understanding. Some went off task rather easily and scored badly on the tests. A high-attaining set enjoyed their 'Who wants to be a millionaire' quizzes, and had prepared a suitable set of questions to test knowledge. A lower set worked at matching exercises and was able to respond to a game testing their linking of concepts to words.

137. Overall, students in Years 10 and 11 are now achieving satisfactorily. Year 10 students are responding well to a new, modular course which is being taught well, and the standard of their work is in line with course expectations. Their written work is of a considerably higher standard than that of Year 11 students. Year 10 students of all levels of attainment had a good record of the work done. Their books are well kept, showing pride and effort. Teachers' marking is helpful, with comments on the quality of the work. In lessons, students were carrying out investigations. A lower-attaining set collected data on how the slope of a hill affected the speed of trolleys. The students could explain what they were doing and how to do it, and they understood about fair tests. Although they worked well, the two-hour (double) period was too long for them to sustain concentration and so the pace of their learning slowed towards the end of the lesson. In a high-attaining set, good teaching kept a lively group on task and learning well about osmosis and food preservation.

138. Overall, teaching and learning are satisfactory, although they ranged from very good to unsatisfactory in the lessons observed. Where teaching was satisfactory or better, teachers used their good subject knowledge to produce well-sequenced lessons, building on students' previous learning. Teachers are good at using question-and-answer to probe students' understanding and enable them to build on what they already know. For example, a high-attaining class in Year 10 were challenged by the scientific questions posed as to why uncooked potato chips go floppy in salty water and salad dressing makes lettuce limp. The teacher's use of scientific language provided a good role model of how to express scientific findings accurately.

139. Occasionally, despite good teaching the class made less progress than they should have, because of the inattentiveness and difficult behaviour of some students. For example, in a lower-attaining group in Year 8 with a large number of students with special educational needs, the teacher's lively approach and firm

management of the activities meant that the students' learning about elements and how to use the periodic table was satisfactory. Praise and encouragement kept most concentrating, although at times the teacher had to work very hard to keep control. If the students had behaved better, they could have made good progress. Some weaknesses in teaching were seen in several lessons. These included expectations of the students being too low, what students were to learn not being clarified, suitable resources not being readily available, and difficult behaviour not being managed effectively. The learning was slowed because the students become noisy and inattentive, or engaged in tasks which were far too simple. For example, a Year 8 class of average-attaining students arrived very noisily. Many students did not understand the task they were given, which involved drawing graphs of results, and made too little effort to cope with the work. Some, mainly boys, were very noisy and disrupted the learning of other members of the class despite the teacher's efforts to quieten them.

140. The leadership and management of the department are satisfactory. Most of the science staff have changed since the last inspection, and four teachers joined the school at the start of the term of the inspection. The head of department has made sound decisions to change the courses taught in Years 7 and 10, with the aim of raising standards. The team makes good use of its resources, including the school database of assessment information, which it uses to track student progress and to inform curriculum planning. The technical staff support the work of the department well. The additional hours recently allocated have made their work just manageable. The laboratory accommodation is satisfactory, but storage space is limited and the technicians have very little space to work in. The use of laboratories as form bases presents problems. Students should not be allowed in them unsupervised as this presents both a health and safety risk and leads to loss of equipment stored in them. Whilst resources are just adequate for teaching, technicians find it difficult to access funding for training. Although the department is making some use of ICT to support learning, it is insufficient to cover the requirements for the use of computers within science.

141. The department has made satisfactory improvement since the last inspection, particularly recently. It has the will and the potential to improve further, and recognises that much remains to be done. These include clarifying what students are expected to learn in lessons, managing students' behaviour more effectively, and improving their skills in writing. However, to achieve the desired improvements, the department is having to cope with many initiatives. The department's organisation to manage these initiatives is insufficiently clear. Nevertheless, the recently-introduced courses in Years 7 and 10 are proving beneficial in improving students' learning. Although results have varied widely and are still lower than they should be, particularly for the higher-attaining students, indications are that a further rise is likely as the new initiatives work their way through.

## ART AND DESIGN

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

### Strengths

- Very good teaching and learning, leading to students achieving well in Years 7 to 9 and very well in Years 10 and 11.
- Students' very positive attitudes towards art, and good behaviour in lessons.
- Teachers' knowledge and understanding of the subject, very effective lesson plans and classroom organisation.
- Leadership and management have led to very good improvement since the last inspection.

### Areas for improvement

- Resources for art, including access to ICT in all years.
- The opportunities for higher-attaining students to achieve their potential.

142. When students enter the school in Year 7, the majority have limited skills in the subject and have experienced a fairly narrow range of art and design experiences in their primary schools. The 2001 teacher assessments of students' attainment at the end of Year 9 showed attainment to be broadly as expected for their age. This shows good achievement.



143. The work of students currently in Year 9 shows attainment to be in line with the standards expected for their age. All students achieve well, including those with special educational needs. They confidently express views and opinions about their own and artists' work, guided by teachers' very good questioning. For example, Year 9 students who were shown paintings by Duchamps and Picasso responded to the teachers' questions with more questions of their own. They realised that the artists created a sense of movement by using multiple viewpoints, as though the figures were travelling through the paintings. This observation provided an excellent introduction to the students' own work – a series of over-lapping figure drawings. In another class, in preparation for a series of prints, Year 8 students made drawings from observed plants and flowers. As they worked, they looked for patterns in the shapes of leaves and petals and carefully made decisions about proportion and scale. In both classes, students' analytical skills were improved through the teachers' skilful questioning that enabled them to reflect on what they had achieved and to refine and improve their drawings. Students worked very hard, were curious and showed interest and enthusiasm for the subject. Art lessons were fun.

144. Sketchbooks show examples of good work, especially where students build on what they have learned in lessons. However, remembering to bring homework into school on the right day is something that some younger age students find very difficult. The sketchbooks are a good indicator of the progress achieved. They contain well-presented artwork, annotated drawings and some longer pieces of written work. However, students are asked to buy their own sketchbooks. As they are a National Curriculum requirement, this is inappropriate.

145. Results in GCSE examinations have been just below average for several years, and fell to well below average in 2001. Written critical assessments and evaluations received more attention in the moderated assessments than in previous years, and some students with low standards of literacy lost marks. In 2000, for which a breakdown of the results was available, more girls than boys chose to study art and they gained significantly better results in art than in their other subjects. All students did well relative to their starting points on entry to the course in Year 10.

146. The work of students currently in Year 11 is a higher standard than the 2001 results, and is close to the national average. A few students have work of high quality, with the level of skill required for the higher grades (A\* to C). There are no significant differences in how well boys and girls are doing. All students, including those with learning difficulties, are now achieving very well. Their portfolios have examples of a good range of two-dimensional work, including some photographs taken during a visit to Cambridge. Students have been quick to familiarise themselves with the photographic processes of developing and printing. Their prints and supporting written notes are of good quality. Most written statements of students' ideas and their personal opinions about artwork are carefully presented, and generally word-processed. In these and all aspects of their work, students benefit greatly from well-structured lessons, projects and tasks. For example, writing guidelines or 'frames' have been provided to help students organise what they want to say. They work methodically, completing ambitious practical work that is often on a large scale. The quality of their drawing is very good. However, students are less assured and productive in examinations and when they are required to work independently. Significant numbers have weak independent learning skills.

147. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers' knowledge and understanding of the subject are excellent, and used to good effect to set activities that generate students' interest and curiosity. The good rapport between teachers and students leads to positive working relationships. Students are keen to learn and they work hard. Teachers manage students' behaviour very effectively by setting a challenging pace and short, timed tasks, with a mix of whole-class question-and-answer activities and individual practical work. What students are expected to learn is stated clearly, materials are ready and to hand, and lessons begin and end promptly. Teachers make very effective use of portfolios of past students' work, examples of artists and designers' work, books and reproductions to help raise expectations and bring the subject to life. Visits to places of interest and national galleries give students a wider understanding of the breadth of the subject. These visits, and other opportunities within the curriculum to consider art from western and non-western cultures, make a significant contribution to students' spiritual and cultural understanding. Art rooms have high-quality displays, including examples of students' work. Computers have been used mainly for research and written work rather than to manipulate images. Although ICT is appropriately planned into the curriculum, the access to computers is too limited and so students have too few opportunities for

computer-based artwork. Homework is set regularly, and good use is made of books and other published materials.

148. Very effective leadership and management have led to very good improvement since the last inspection. Information about students' progress and achievements has been used well to confirm strengths and help diagnose weaknesses. The data has sharpened teachers' awareness of learning strategies that work well, and helped them improve many aspects of their work. Teachers have been particularly successful in adapting and refining their teaching styles to meet the needs of lower-attaining students in mixed-ability classes, but have yet to pay the same attention to challenging higher-attaining students. Departmental documentation and schemes of work are greatly improved. They are very thorough and provide continuity in teaching from year to year. Recently, difficulty in appointing experienced art teachers put considerable pressure on staff, but the department is now fully staffed with specialist teachers. However, it does not have a technical assistant.

## DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

### Strengths

- GCSE results in design and technology are improving.
- Management of the department is very good.
- The curriculum is better planned, which is having a very good impact on students' achievement.
- There are good relationships between teachers and students.
- Teachers provide good individual support for students in lessons.

### Areas for improvement

- Students' skills in analysing existing products and using the ideas to influence their own design.
- The challenge offered to students of all levels of attainment.

149. In 2000, the proportion of students achieving GCSE grades A\* to C was below the national average. Results in 2001 increased considerably, and were above average. The girls outperformed the boys. Students achieved better results in design and technology in 2001 than in most other subjects. Within the design and technology subjects, students did best in food and textiles. Teacher assessments for students at the end of Year 9 in 2001 indicate that standards were well above the national average, with girls outperforming the boys. However, the work seen during the inspection showed that standards are above the national expectation, and that the teacher assessments were too high.

150. In Years 7 to 9, students' achievement is good, when compared to the average levels of attainment at the start of Year 7. By Year 9, students have developed sound skills in designing and making products in food, graphics, resistant materials, textiles and electronics. They have a good range of knowledge to underpin and increase their understanding of the products they design. Students' design portfolios show evidence of an improving standard of planning. They use the full design process in some projects, particularly in food technology. In other areas, however, they do not analyse a sufficiently wide range of commercially-produced products to help them with their own designs. Students have learned to use two- and three-dimensional drawings, and do so well in their work in all specialist areas within technology. When designing and making products for particular commercial purposes, students take consumer preferences into consideration and apply the results of their research well when developing their products. They use a good range of hand and machine tools safely in all material areas.

151. All students learn to use computer-aided design and computer-aided manufacture, including in work on producing packaging, by use of the computer-aided sewing machine and in their work on electronic circuits. In all specialist areas, students use numerical data well to plan and produce products and models which are often designed to scale. They present the results of surveys in the form of charts and graphs. However, ICT is used too little in Years 7 to 9 to process data when developing products and to present work.

152. In the work seen during the inspection, attainment of students in Years 10 and 11 is above the level expected of students at this stage nationally. This is reflected in the rise in GCSE results in 2001, which was brought about by the department's recent work to raise standards through better teaching. The work in food technology is of a particularly high standard. It is well annotated, with explanations and details of specific features and processes. Teachers provide examples of work to ensure that students cover all aspects of the GCSE assessment criteria. Students use a wide range of investigation and research skills, but are weaker in analysing what they have learned from the research and using the information to influence their own designing. Nevertheless, students produce work of good quality. Students have well-developed drawing skills, and work methodically through each stage of the design process. They explain each stage of product development clearly, using drawings and annotation. Their work is detailed and well presented, using ICT well to process data and to present the supporting information.

153. The work of students in Years 10 and 11 shows that their achievement is good. Students increase their skills in using the specialised design process. They learn to use a good range of presentation techniques, including the use of rendering to apply colour and texture to both 2-D and 3-D drawings. However, their skills in analysing a variety of commercial products are weaker. As a result, students show less evidence of how existing designs have influenced their own designing, or how they have improved on aspects of similar products on the market. Higher-attaining students work accurately. They produce well-developed plans. They use ICT effectively to enhance the quality and presentation of written work. Folders include testing and modelling of the products at the various stages of development. Lower-attaining students design products, responding to good guidance by their teachers to consider the main features of the examination coursework requirements.

154. Teaching and learning are good overall. Some very good lessons and one excellent lesson were seen during the inspection. Lessons generally had clear objectives for students' learning. Lower-attaining students and those with special educational needs were well supported on a one-to-one basis and so they achieved well. However, the planning does not always meet the needs of all in the class when there is a wide range of ability, which results in some lack of challenge to those who could cope with demanding work. Teachers have a positive approach, and as a result students are involved well in the learning activities. Structured worksheets and guidance notes, which include opportunities for self-assessment, help them to learn to work independently. They are encouraged to consider how to improve the overall quality of their work. Students generally behave well because they know what is, and what is not, acceptable. They form good relationships with their teachers, and work hard for them.

155. Teaching ensures that students gain good craft skills as well as ensuring that they have opportunities to include their own design ideas. This was seen in a Year 9 resistant materials lesson where students were making sets of bookends. All students included the feature of making a finger joint, with good guidance from the teacher to achieve this successfully. Teachers use a good range of resources, for instance when Year 9 students evaluated celebration cakes in a food technology class, and Year 10 students looked at clocks in a resistant materials lesson. Students were helped to evaluate their work by the teacher's prompts and questions about strengths in the work and ways of improving it. However, this approach is not consistent in all lessons.

156. Teachers use a range of strategies to enable students to develop the technical vocabulary associated with the subject. Guidance materials help students to structure their writing, and they are expected to write in a good variety of styles including making notes, compiling instructions and writing up a record of their work. This attention to literacy is helping students to improve their writing skills. Good numeracy skills are encouraged in practical and written tasks, such as in measuring and marking out the dimensions they require during the making process. Students have good opportunities to use ICT. For example, students use ICT to assess nutritional value in food technology. In resistant materials and textiles, teachers encourage the use of ICT as part of designing, computer control, and computer-aided manufacturing.

157. Good improvement has been made since the previous inspection. The leadership and management of the department are now very good. The school has had some difficulty in recruiting specialist staff, but good planning has minimised the impact on students' learning. The recent focus on raising standards has been successful. The department has also worked on developing the ethos of a technology college, in its strong links with industry and local schools in the area. Schemes of work are well developed and up to date. A

good system for monitoring and recording students' attainment has been established, and targets are set to help them improve.

## GEOGRAPHY

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

### Strengths

- GCSE results are high, and standards are above average.
- Students achieve well in all years.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and high expectations of students' success.
- Geography makes a good contribution to students' skills in literacy and numeracy.

### Areas for improvement

- The opportunities to use ICT.
- The take-up of geography for GCSE.
- The allocation of management responsibilities for geography, within the humanities faculty.

158. Students join the school with knowledge, skills and understanding which are average overall. In 2001, the results of teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 were well above average compared to schools nationally. The standard that was seen in the work of Year 9 students during the inspection was above average. Students achieve well during Years 7 to 9, and there are no significant differences in how well boys and girls do. A continuation of the current rate of achievement during the rest of the school year will place Year 9 students in a strong position to reach levels similar to those of 2001. Students' skills in research and writing improve well during Years 7 to 9. While a few, lower-attaining Year 9 students have limited capacity to carry out research and write at length about what they know, most do these tasks well. This was shown by work in which information about the production of chocolate bars had been used well to describe sources of raw materials, and to explain the contributions to the finished product of various groups of workers in primary, secondary and tertiary industries in different parts of the world.

159. GCSE results were also well above average in 2001. The proportion of grades A\* to C was particularly high in comparison with the national average. The great majority of students did significantly better in geography than in their other subjects. The performance of boys was slightly better than that of girls. Geography results have improved significantly since the last inspection, when they were just below the national average. A lower proportion of students take this subject at GCSE than in most schools.

160. The overall standard of work seen during the inspection was above average. While the overall level is not yet quite as high as that reached in the 2001 examination, students are on target to match this by the end of the academic year. This represents good achievement. Most students have learned to interpret weather maps, identifying the conditions in the places that they depict and forecasting those for the following period. They correctly identify climate differences between the UK and places such as Japan, as well as climatic differences between places in each country. They have a good understanding of the physical and human interrelationships that lead to such processes as global warming, and explain these in well-structured writing. The work of the highest attainers includes particularly good explanations, taking account of alternative views and solutions. The written work of most of the lower attainers is of a reasonable standard and often shows good perseverance, leading to improvement.

161. The attitudes and behaviour of students in geography lessons are generally good. They are usually well behaved, listen carefully to teachers and concentrate well on their tasks. Most respond well when questioned in class, and often show interest by asking questions of their own. However, in many lessons, the concentration and interest of a small minority are lower, and in a few cases these students distract others.

162. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. In the lessons observed in Years 7 to 9, teaching and learning were satisfactory. However, a scrutiny of students' work showed that in the longer term teaching and learning are good. The quality and range of the work covered enable students to improve

their knowledge, understanding and skills systematically. Teaching and learning were good in lessons and work samples in Years 10 and 11. Teachers plan well for students to develop skills such as mapping, knowledge of the places that they are learning about, and an understanding of geographical themes such as weather and climate, in a well-integrated way. They ensure that students are clear about what they need to achieve and how to do this. Teachers give detailed, clear explanations and ask challenging questions that require students to justify their ideas and opinions. Students are prepared well for their examinations. For example, Year 11 students were given good quality guidance about how to use what they know to do well when answering examination questions. Occasionally, teachers do not make full use of students' contributions. For example, they sometimes miss opportunities to involve the class in thinking of answers to questions students ask. While marking often gives good targets for improvement, it does not always do so.

163. The subject provides good opportunities for students to practise and use their literacy skills. The department attaches high importance to improving students' writing. This makes an important contribution to the high standards that are reached. Students have frequent opportunities to learn and use key geographical terms. Writing guidelines or 'frames' are often provided to help students to improve the structure and content of their writing. Geography also makes good contribution to students' skills in numeracy as a high proportion of lessons include some numerical work. Students often interpret graphical information as a way of finding out about places, or translate information in text and tables into different types of charts and graphs. This not only helps them to improve their numeracy skills, but also significantly enhances the depth of their geographical learning. For example, the analysis of data about the development of tourism in Costa Rica gave a Year 11 class a useful context for identifying issues faced there and for making comparisons with other places. The department is committed to providing opportunities for students to use computers, and plans ICT-based activities in most units of work. However, it often finds it impossible to implement its plans due to difficulties in gaining access to computers, and so the contribution the subject makes to developing students' skills in ICT is unsatisfactory. The school's library makes an unsatisfactory contribution to the learning of geography, due to the inadequate provision of relevant books.

164. The learning of students with special educational needs is good. Teachers have a good awareness of the targets in the students' individual education plans. When learning assistants are present, they ensure that work is fully accessible to the students with whom they work. The integrated humanities course provides students with special needs with the opportunity to gain accreditation for their study. At the time of the last inspection, the provision for the higher-attaining students was unsatisfactory. There has been satisfactory improvement, and so these students now achieve as well as the others.

165. The leadership and management of geography are good, and the subject continues to be successful within the humanities faculty. Its improvement since the last inspection is good. Results are much higher, as are standards, and students' knowledge of distant places is no longer significantly weaker than that of the home locality. The inadequate provision of textbooks in Years 7 to 9 has been dealt with. Following a recent change in management of the subject, there is now a need to review the balance of responsibilities between the teacher in charge of geography and the head of faculty for the various managerial functions. These include the monitoring of teaching and learning, to ensure that current strengths are maintained.

## HISTORY

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

### Strengths

- Teachers' good subject knowledge and understanding.
- The awareness of individual special needs and provision for these students.
- The attitudes and behaviour of students in history lessons.
- The most recent improvements and shared commitment for future improvement.

### Areas for improvement

- Results at GCSE, which are very low.

- The ability of students to recall and use what they have learned confidently and independently in written work.
- The challenge for the highest attainers, and the level of their achievement.
- Access to ICT resources, so that planned opportunities to use computers can be implemented.

166. In 2001, teacher assessments of students' standards at the end of Year 9 were well above average. The standard attained by students currently in Year 9 is average. This is significantly lower than the teacher assessments of the work of the previous Year 9 and, together with a disparity between teachers' predictions for GCSE and what the students gained, indicates that teachers are overestimating the standards reached.

167. Students enter the school with generally average standards. In relation to this, their achievement in Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory. However, a significant minority have difficulty in recalling and using what they know. For example, in a Year 7 lesson on the Norman Conquest, some students were unclear about basic details that they had earlier recorded in their exercise books. Year 9 students know the main changes of the Industrial Revolution. In general, students do better in class discussion than in their written work. Many have presented the information well in a variety of ways, including well-organised spider diagrams. However, there is too wide a variation in the quality of written work. A significant minority label diagrams and answer short questions correctly, but have limited capability to produce extended pieces of independent writing. In class discussion, most can interpret sources to find out about the past, as in a Year 9 lesson in which they learned about the working conditions for child workers in factories during the Industrial Revolution. However, many of these students needed considerable help from the teacher to recall basic chronological details from earlier lessons. Little work was seen that was securely at a higher level than that of the school's average attainers, indicating that the higher-attainers have not done as well as they should.

168. The results in GCSE were well below the national average in 2001. Results have significantly worsened since the last inspection, when they were slightly above the national average, with the most recent results continuing the declining trend. The students' grades secured were significantly below those predicted for them. Students did much worse in history than in their other subjects. This was equally so for boys and girls.

169. The standard of work of students currently in Year 11 is average, although stronger in oral work than in writing. For example, in a Year 11 lesson the teacher helped most to recall relevant information when answering questions about the League of Nations, but the students' skills in recording the information in independent writing were weak. Other written work explained different points of view about the extent of Hitler's blame for the Second World War, but did not present clear conclusions. Many of the students who take GCSE have literacy difficulties, particularly in independent writing. This lowers their results in examinations, and in written coursework, and so last year's students did badly in GCSE.

170. The achievement of students now in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory overall. Their knowledge and understanding develop satisfactorily. For example, most Year 11 students know the terms of the Treaty of Versailles and understand why it was unpalatable to Germans. They can link this to the rise of Hitler and failure of the League of Nations. Most are able to evaluate evidence for its usefulness, for example in explaining Japanese policy towards Manchuria during the 1930s. The work of students following the new syllabus in Year 10 shows that the majority select and organise information from textual and pictorial sources appropriately, to give a presentation about the position of women in Mediaeval England. However, the Year 11 students' work showed that the highest attainers are not reaching their full potential. The work of students targeted to gain grade A is not consistently of a higher standard than that of those with grade C targets.

171. The attitudes and behaviour of students in history lessons are good. Students are generally well behaved and courteous to their teachers. They usually participate well in whole class discussions and work quietly when required. However, a minority of Year 7 students finds it difficult to maintain concentration and effort when not being directly supervised.

172. The overall quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen during the inspection, and in a significant number of lessons teaching was good. Teachers have a good

subject knowledge and understanding. They plan a variety of useful activities, many of which provide opportunities for students to work with historical sources and improve their skills in interpreting evidence. Too few opportunities are provided for evaluating sources, for example by comparing their reliability. Clear explanations, instructions and guidance are given, and so students are well-informed about what they have to do and the purpose of their tasks. Although teachers generally include all students in class discussions, on a small number of occasions those who were less willing to participate were allowed to opt out. The best teaching had an enthusiasm that transmitted itself to students, as in a Year 7 lesson in which students showed high interest in devising and testing hypotheses about why people became monks in mediaeval times. The best marking is very good, being detailed, highly supportive and providing clear targets for improvement. This has been an important factor in the improvement over time shown by some lower-attaining students. The impact of written comments is often enhanced by being explained to individual students in class. Not all marking is of such a high quality however. Some is less regular and provides a limited number of comments and guidance.

173. Teachers have recognised the need to improve students' writing skills, and are providing good opportunities to develop literacy. For example, writing 'frames' are used to help students to improve the structure and content of their independent writing, and there is a good focus on the use of specialist vocabulary. A Year 10 lesson provided an effective opportunity to improve speaking skills, when students worked together in groups to plan an oral presentation for a specific audience, on the position of women in Mediaeval England. The lack of relevant books in the school library inhibits teachers' provision of opportunities for research and wider reading to extend students' learning in history. The subject satisfactorily implements the whole-school policy for numeracy. Activities observed during the inspection included several opportunities to work with graphs, when for example learning about population changes in the Industrial Revolution. Teachers are committed to providing opportunities for using computers in history, and ICT-based activities are planned for all units of work. However, there is considerable inconsistency in implementing these plans, due to difficulties in obtaining access to computers. This is an unsatisfactory situation.

174. Teachers show good and sensitive awareness of students with special educational needs. Individual education plans are thoughtfully referred to, and so support is related well to students' needs. This was shown in a Year 10 lesson in which the teacher organised groups of students to work together, supporting those who had difficulty in carrying out the work that everybody else was doing. In a Year 9 lesson, materials about factory conditions for child workers in the Industrial Revolution had been adapted well, with strong visual cues that enabled the students using them to have full access to the work given to the rest of the class. The effective help of a support assistant contributed to the students' success. The department is aware that it needs to provide more challenging work for higher-attaining students.

175. Improvement since the last inspection is unsatisfactory. This is because there has been decline from a position of relative strength, particularly in GCSE results. Many managerial functions have been carried out by inexperienced staff, who have made considerable gains in experience and confidence through having to cope with this situation. Very recent improvements indicate that the department is now in a stronger position to move forward. The leadership and management of history, within the humanities faculty, are now satisfactory. The faculty has improved its systems for supporting less-experienced colleagues when necessary, for example when students' low effort or disruptive behaviour might threaten learning. Although no evidence of this was seen in lessons during the inspection, discussions with staff indicated that students' inappropriate attitudes and behaviour have contributed to the underachievement in previous years. Staff share a commitment towards improvement. The school and the department view the poor GCSE results with appropriate concern. Thoughtful changes have been made to improve them, for example by introducing a new syllabus, considered more suitable for the school's students, for the current Year 10.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)**

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

Strengths
-----------

- The school has gained technology college status and has used this to increase the number of computers, improve technical support and provide high quality learning materials for mathematics, science and design and technology.
- A GCSE short course enables students in Years 10 and 11 to obtain a qualification in ICT.
- Timetabled ICT lessons have been introduced in Year 7.

#### Areas for improvement

- Coverage of the National Curriculum requirements for ICT in Years 7, 8 and 9, both within the subject and through other subjects.
- The number of computers, so that there are enough for teachers' and students' needs.
- The behaviour of a minority of disruptive students in ICT lessons, as it affects their learning and that of the rest of the class.
- Students' learning of new concepts and skills, through explicit teaching of them to the class.
- The access to computers for students following the short course in Years 10 and 11.

176. In 2001, the teacher-assessed ICT results in Year 9 were significantly above the national average. However, evidence from students' work and lesson observation suggests that these results were far too high. Students have not covered the full range of the National Curriculum during Years 7, 8 and 9, and because of this standards of attainment in Year 9 are below the national expectation. Whilst students use computers well to undertake simple word processing and desk top publishing work, they have weak skills in using computers for data handling, modelling and data logging. The main reason for this that students have not covered these areas properly, partly because subject departments cannot gain enough access to the computer rooms as they are heavily used by examination groups. Also, the school does not have an overall plan for other subjects to teach the various areas of the National Curriculum for ICT, and so the work that other subjects do cover is uncoordinated, and some aspects are not covered fully.

177. Examination results in Year 11 in 2001 were low. Students took a certificate in computer literacy and information technology, but the majority failed to complete all the modules. This happened because there were not enough computers for students to use regularly. Standards in the ICT short course in the current Year 11 are also below expectations because there are not enough computers. To overcome this, the school operates a rotation system with the computer rooms. The system means that students change both rooms and teachers during the course. Sometimes they have to learn completely new computer programmes because the computer rooms have different facilities. This prevents students making satisfactory progress in their work. Furthermore, depending on the group that they are in, some students get insufficient time in computer rooms. This unsatisfactory arrangement affects standards in the short course. Because of the lack of computers, students' achievement is unsatisfactory throughout the main school.

178. The teaching of ICT is satisfactory overall. Where ICT is used in different subjects, teaching and learning are often good. For example, students in Year 8 have been learning about electricity and mechanisms in design and technology. They have used computer programmes very effectively to guide them through the work and to provide them with feedback on their success. In art, teachers have made good use of ICT to help students make presentations about the work of different artists, and this has led to the production of display materials of high quality.

179. In taught ICT lessons, teachers have sound subject knowledge, and plan lessons using a variety of activities. They set relevant tasks and give good support to individual students. However, they pay too little attention to explicit teaching of new information and skills, through whole-class explanations. Students are usually asked to find about new concepts and ideas from books on their own, or to make their own notes, and this leads to misunderstanding. Students with special educational needs sometimes find difficulties with this work. Where teachers provide different work for these students, the resources used are often still too hard for them to follow on their own. This causes these students to lose concentration, slowing their progress. However, the higher-attaining students are stretched by the work given to them and make good progress.

180. The majority of students enjoy ICT lessons and are motivated by the subject. However, a minority of students, particularly boys, are very disruptive in some lessons and teachers do not manage their behaviour



effectively. For example, when students received warnings which were not followed up, they continued to disrupt learning for others. Overall, students' learning is unsatisfactory. They acquire new skills too slowly, and are not confident and independent learners. The lack of access to ICT resources also limits their learning.

181. Teachers make good use of opportunities in ICT to develop students' numeracy skills. For example, students in Year 7 were seen calculating averages and producing graphs using spreadsheets. Insufficient use is made of opportunities to develop students' literacy skills, such as by focusing on the use and spelling of key words in ICT. In using computers, students are protected from inappropriate content by a strong Internet filter, and the school has a good policy on safe use of the Internet.

182. As reported by the last inspection, the school does not fully cover National Curriculum requirements for ICT. The school has increased the number of computers and improved the quality of technical support for ICT. It has also introduced a taught ICT lesson in Year 7 and GCSE short course and GNVQ courses in Years 10 and 11. As a result, although the number of computers has increased, the number of courses requiring these computers has also grown. Many departments plan to use computers, but teachers are unable to gain access to computer rooms. The school has not identified which subjects should have priority, in order to ensure coverage of the National Curriculum. Leadership and management in ICT are therefore unsatisfactory, as is the improvement since the last inspection.

## MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Overall, the quality of provision in modern languages is **satisfactory**.

### Strengths

- Teaching is good in French and German, and so students often learn well in lessons.
- The monitoring and recording of students' achievement and progress are very good.
- The leadership and management of the department are good.

### Areas for improvement

- GCSE results in French and Spanish are below average, and results in German are well below average.
- Year 10 and 11 students' follow-up at home of what has been covered in lessons, to improve their achievement over time.
- Students' spontaneous, independent use of the foreign language.
- The unsatisfactory attitudes of some students towards language learning.

183. In 2001, the results in teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 were above average. These results were higher than in the previous year. Girls' and boys' results were similar. However, inspection evidence indicated that these results were not accurate. Standards are average overall in French, and below average in German. Results in Spanish were broadly average. A scrutiny of students' written work revealed that the standard of work of many higher and some average attainers in French and Spanish is broadly in line with national expectations. For example, higher attainers write short texts containing present, future and past tenses, with the aid of guidelines. They express simple opinions and give reasons, and are beginning to recognise very basic grammatical patterns. Many average attainers copy sentences and short dialogues fairly accurately, and write short paragraphs and dialogues when well supported. Lower attainers often experience difficulty with even basic copying of words and phrases accurately.

184. At the start of Year 7, some students have a basic knowledge of French vocabulary such as numbers, days of the week, months and colours. They are also able to give simple personal details. Many students have more limited knowledge than this, and a few have no experience of the subject. From this varied starting point, students' achievement in French, Spanish and German is satisfactory overall in Years 7 to 9. In a Year 7 French class, students understood a lesson conducted entirely in carefully selected French when supported by clear mime and gesture. By Year 8, many students have learned to repeat words and phrases, chorally and individually, with good pronunciation and intonation. A few students learn to read aloud fluently and accurately. By Year 9, higher attainers reply to questions in the foreign languages confidently, with good accents. Occasionally, students use the foreign language spontaneously to make

simple requests: they ask for paper, rulers or pens, the meanings of words or for permission to take off their jackets. Such spontaneous use of language and the use of the foreign language is too infrequent, however. The high attainers use dictionaries and glossaries successfully to look up the meaning of unknown words, but others need more training in dictionary skills.

185. GCSE results in French and Spanish in 2001 were below average, and results in German were very low. In 2000 the results were considerably higher in Spanish and German. Standards in French, German and Spanish are below national expectations. For example, in a Year 11 French class, students found it difficult to describe what they had done at the weekend and occasionally mixed Spanish and French in their answers. In another Year 11 class of low attainers, students experienced difficulty using simple numbers.

186. In Years 10 and 11, students' learning is satisfactory during French, Spanish and German lessons but unsatisfactory overall because students do not do enough work at home to consolidate what they learn in lessons. This is why many do not make sufficient long-term progress to ensure success in obtaining higher grades at GCSE. They do not remember what they have learned in previous lessons. For example, following a homework that involved learning vocabulary, students in a Year 10 Spanish class had great difficulty extracting details from a recorded text, and produced very low attainment in a simple vocabulary test. Evidence from students' written work and their recorded oral assignments for GCSE in all three languages confirmed that many students are under-achieving, although higher attainers are attaining standards in line with national expectations. Despite the good teaching in lessons in all three languages, students' achievement is unsatisfactory.

187. The teaching was good or better in over three-quarters of the lessons observed, and very good in over a third. All lessons were very well prepared and nearly always delivered enthusiastically and at a brisk pace, with very good use of teacher-produced resources. Most lessons were carefully matched to the needs and interests of students, with frequent changes of task and good coverage of the four skills (speaking and listening, reading and writing). This ensured that students, including those with special educational needs were motivated and learned well. Teachers generally used the foreign language extensively to develop students' listening skills. They set deadlines to motivate students and keep them on target. Lessons generally had a productive atmosphere, and relationships were good. Literacy skills are developed well in most lessons because of the attention teachers pay to pointing out grammatical patterns, accurate spelling and how to write effectively. The very best lessons consisted of a wide variety of linked activities, and were delivered with skill, enthusiasm and use of humour. Teachers made effective use of the overhead projector, cassette recorder, video recorder, computer and resource sheets. Occasionally, teaching was less dynamic and the use of the foreign language was not promoted to the full.

188. Students' behaviour is generally good in language lessons. Many younger students show good levels of concentration, contribute to all activities, settle to work quickly and concentrate well during lessons. However, a significant number of students do not have a good attitude to language learning and lack the study skills needed to be efficient learners. They do not always complete learning homeworks and written assignments, which slows their progress. Some of the higher-attaining boys are very careless in their written work. It is often poorly presented or incomplete, and they often fail to do corrections or redraft their work as indicated by teachers.

189. The department makes a good contribution to some students' cultural development, through trips to France. The language teachers work very well together, which has helped to raise standards of teaching. Assessment policies and procedures are very good and ensure that students' progress is well monitored. Most students are clear about National Curriculum levels and GCSE grades, which helps them to make progress. For several years the school experienced considerable difficulty in recruiting specialist languages staff, but the current team is a group of dedicated teachers with good linguistic skills.

190. The department is now led and managed well, but the improvement in modern languages is unsatisfactory overall. Results in GCSE in French, Spanish and German have not improved, partly because students' attitudes and completion of work outside lessons remain weak. However, teaching has improved recently, and the use of assessment data to track student progress is more sophisticated and effective. The department has introduced a modular GCSE course, which is enabling the students who are following it to do better than those who took the examination in 2001.

## MUSIC

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

### Strengths

- Good teaching, with interesting tasks and a fast pace of learning.
- Good management of the subject and its improvement.
- Interesting scheme of work with genuinely musical content and good opportunities for assessment.
- Very good provision for students' social and cultural development.

### Areas for improvement

- The teaching in some lessons to achieve a consistently high overall standard.
- The use of ICT within music.

191. Results of teacher assessment at the end of Year 9 in 2001 indicated that students' attainment was in line with national expectations. The attainment of students currently in Year 9 is also average, but the present good quality of teaching suggests that, by the end of the school year, standards will be above those usually found because Year 9 students are achieving well this year. They have a thorough working knowledge of the rudiments of music, including notation, they can analyse music they hear in terms of instruments, pace and style, and they are familiar with important characteristics of world music, particularly Indian and Balinese. Composing in the style of gamelan music is assured. Students perform their compositions confidently, co-ordinating rhythm and pulse accurately in pairs and larger groups.

192. Numbers taking GCSE in music have fluctuated in recent years, and results have varied from well above to well below the national average. The small numbers of candidates in 1999 and 2000 make comparisons with national averages of little significance. The progress of those who took music in 2001 was adversely affected by a shortage of staff and results were well below the national average. It was not possible to observe any lessons in Years 10 and 11 during the inspection, and so standards in Year 11 and students' achievement in Years 10 and 11 could not be judged. Taped evidence from 2001 GCSE candidates indicated that candidates composed authentically in the styles of their choice. Higher-attaining candidates showed a good knowledge of the capabilities of the instruments or voices for which they composed. They maintained consistency of style and mood within each piece and reflected a good understanding of elementary musical form. Some students showed very limited skills in both their composing and performing, but there were also good examples of vocal and instrumental performances. The best showed a very good grasp of the varied styles chosen, and these ranged from Gershwin to heavy metal.

193. In the lessons observed, which were in Years 7 to 9, teaching and learning were good overall. Students learned at a good pace because the lessons were carefully planned. Tight deadlines for each task ensured a high rate of productivity. Clear instructions and the teachers' very effective use of their practical skills when demonstrating enabled students to understand what was required and to learn efficiently. The interesting nature of the tasks meant that students were engrossed, concentrated well and were keen to achieve good results. The teachers' enthusiasm and good support for individuals and groups in practical work encouraged and enabled students of all levels of attainment to make good progress. This was clearly the case in Year 8, where, in a blues topic, some students managed to play the basic chord patterns accurately, while higher-attaining students added improvised melodies over the chords and produced a refined performance. In all the lessons observed, behaviour was good. Students treated equipment carefully, collaborated readily in small-group work, were trustworthy when working independently, and gave sensitive and thoughtful evaluations of each other's performances.

194. The head of music has held the post only since the beginning of this term, and is compiling a scheme of work that is potentially very good. Tasks already planned are interesting for the students and reflect National Curriculum requirements very well. Good opportunities for assessing students' work are built into every topic. A very good feature of both the planning and teaching is that lessons provide students with worthwhile musical experiences. These provide very good opportunities for students' social and cultural development. The small amount of written work provides a satisfactory opportunity for students to develop their skills in literacy. Resources of keyboards are very good, but storage arrangements are time-

consuming. Limited provision of computers at present restricts the department's opportunities to use ICT within music. The good range of extra-curricular activities was reflected in a concert that took place during the inspection. Instrumental tuition is available on a good range of instruments and in singing. Management of the department is now energetic and purposeful. The department reflects to an impressive degree a commitment both to developing high musical standards and to catering for the needs of all students. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory overall, and the capacity of the department to develop further is now very good.

## PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Overall, the quality of provision in physical education is **satisfactory**.

### Strengths

- The quality of some of the teaching, where a good range of teaching methods ensures good learning.
- Positive relationships often motivate students of all abilities.
- A good range of after-school activities provides opportunities for many students to extend their knowledge and skills.

### Areas for improvement

- The setting of individual targets for improvement.
- The challenge provided to the higher-attaining students.
- The time allocated to physical education in Years 10 and 11.
- Indoor accommodation, which at the moment is restricting some opportunities for students.

195. Teacher assessments in 2001 were significantly above the national average at the end of Year 9. However, evidence from lesson observation shows that standards are average. The attainment of the majority of students is in line with expectations in most areas of the physical education curriculum. Many students are able to apply the techniques, skills and competition rules of rugby and gymnastics. In rugby, students in a lower-attaining class had sound receiving and handling skills, but less awareness of the importance of making space to receive the ball at speed. In gymnastics, students were able to execute simple vaults. Most understood the concept of quality of movement, and illustrated this through their performances. Higher-attaining students were not given the opportunity to extend their skills through the execution of more demanding vaults. Year 9 students are still learning how to observe and analyse performances. Opportunities to evaluate their work helped them improve its quality, especially in gymnastics and health-related exercise.

196. Overall, students' achievement in Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory. In a gymnastics lesson, the students improved the quality of their performance in a range of simple vaults. In a Year 8 lesson on rugby, average-attaining and below-average students made significant improvements in passing and receiving and were able to apply these skills to a controlled game situation.

197. GCSE results in physical education for 2001 were average compared to schools nationally. Results have been improving over the last three years. GCSE results for dance improved in 2001, and were in line with overall school results. Standards in Year 11 are average, in physical education and dance. Although GCSE students' attainment is good in the practical aspects of the course, they do less well in written work. In a theory lesson, Year 11 students showed a sound understanding of basic physiology and anatomy although many were unable to apply their knowledge to the prevention of sports injuries. Students in a Year 11 aerobics lesson had sound balance and co-ordination skills, and developed a fairly complex sequence of movements while interpreting the music. In a dance theory lesson, Year 11 students had a sound understanding of the importance of key movements, and many had a good knowledge and understanding of appropriate terminology.

198. Students' achievement is satisfactory overall in Years 10 and 11. In a physical education theory lesson, the work of a Year 10 group showed an above-average level of knowledge. The students understood the important relationship between health and fitness, and the specific nature of fitness as it applies to different sports. In a Year 10 netball lesson, students' passing skills lacked accuracy, and many

students' footwork did not conform to the rules. However, in all year groups the achievement of higher-attaining students is unsatisfactory because they are not challenged sufficiently. There is too little use of ICT even in the GCSE course, although the personal exercise programmes were impressively produced using word processing skills. A good range of extra-curricular activities and fixtures with other schools gives students many opportunities to extend and develop their skills.

199. Students' attitudes to learning are usually good. Many are enthusiastic, well behaved, and co-operative, demonstrating a real enjoyment of the subject. They are generally attentive and sustain concentration throughout the lesson. However, occasionally this is not the case, slowing the learning of the class. Students often arrive at lessons late and then spend too much time changing – a significant amount of time is wasted because of this. Relationships between students and between students and staff are usually very positive, which is a significant factor in the progress made in many lessons. Students of all ages have too few opportunities to work independently, although very good examples were seen in aerobics and gymnastics.

200. Teaching and learning are good overall. All the teaching observed was satisfactory or better. In the good lessons, teachers' secure knowledge of the subject was conveyed to students through perceptive observation of performance, appropriate intervention and good teacher-directed question-and-answer sessions. Thorough planning, incorporating varied teaching strategies and an appropriate sequence of activities involving both individual and collaborative learning, is also a feature of these lessons. Discipline and class management are good. Weaknesses were observed in some lessons. Here, planning was not specific or detailed enough, and the range and type of activities was not appropriate, particularly with respect to challenging the higher-attaining students.

201. Teachers regularly assess students' performance during lessons, but evaluation by students themselves is not consistently applied. In a very good Year 7 gymnastics lesson that had been extremely well planned, students were given clear targets that were linked to assessment objectives for the lesson. Although the students were not totally conversant with these objectives, they were keen to meet their targets. They made very good progress as a result, and also because the class teacher used a variety of teaching strategies and managed the class very well. Teachers' recording of assessment information, using specific criteria linked to schemes of work and involving students setting their own targets, is under development. The assessment of GCSE theory work is providing useful information for students to improve but there is no consistent marking scheme.

202. Although the curriculum meets statutory requirements, the time allocated for students in Years 10 and 11 is not sufficient to meet the demands of the National Curriculum in appropriate depth. The arrangements do not provide a good preparation for post-16 leisure activities, and mean that students do not achieve as well overall as their learning in lessons would suggest is possible. Schemes of work are sound working documents although they do not provide specific guidance on developing the potential of the higher-attaining students. There is insufficient emphasis in many lessons on the importance of health-related fitness, and insufficient time overall to develop students' levels of fitness. The indoor accommodation for physical education is unsatisfactory. It restricts balance and choice in the curriculum, and students' achievement. The standard of cleaning in the department is poor, and constitutes a health and safety problem.

203. Management of the department is satisfactory overall. The day-to-day organisation of the department is good. However, the department lacks long-term planning to provide a clear educational direction for the next few years, and its short-term planning does not identify targets in enough detail. The arrangements for the teachers' professional development do not meet the department's needs and those of the school well enough. Departmental meetings are held regularly but do not have enough focus on teaching, learning and curriculum development. The head of department monitors teaching and learning, but its impact on improving standards in different activities is limited because there are too few opportunities for teachers to share the good practice that is identified. The department's role within the faculty of performing and expressive arts is still developing. Other than some administrative functions, the arrangement has few discernible benefits for staff or students. The physical education staff are committed, very generous with their time and good role models for students.

204. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory overall, although there is still some way to go. Planning in the department has improved considerably in the last two years. Assessment procedures are now much more effective but are insufficiently linked to individual student target-setting. Some lessons still lack appropriate challenge, especially for the higher-attaining students. There is now a more appropriate balance in what is covered within the physical education curriculum, although this is still restricted by the lack of time for Years 10 and 11. There is still too little time in many lessons for students' planning and evaluation.

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Overall, the quality of provision in religious education is **satisfactory**.

### Strengths

- GCSE results were above average in 2001.
- Teachers' good subject knowledge ensures detailed coverage of the syllabus.
- Students are managed well in lessons.

### Areas for improvement

- The range of learning activities, including the use of ICT.
- Monitoring the effectiveness of the teaching of religious education.
- The arrangements for assessing how well students in Years 10 and 11 are doing.

205. The results of the small group entered for GCSE in 2001 were above the national average. Results have improved since the last inspection, being good overall in the last three years. The results were higher than the standards observed during the inspection because the GCSE option group were helped to do well by additional revision sessions before the examination.

206. Standards in Year 9 are in line with the expectations of the local Agreed Syllabus for religious education. Students' achievement in acquiring knowledge and understanding of the key traditions and beliefs of major religions is satisfactory. In their work on religious festivals, higher-attaining Year 7 students' work contained enthusiastic descriptions of family life at Christmas, with explanations of its religious meaning. The lower-attaining students had found the demands of writing difficult, though they had clearly grasped the essential details about Christmas. The work of average-attaining students in all year groups is strong on description and presentation, but often misses the opportunity to explain the symbolic dimension. By Year 9, the higher-attaining students understand religious events and the symbolism that lies behind them, as was shown by a Year 9 lesson in which students followed a video extract about Jewish marriage with research from different texts.

207. In Years 10 and 11, there is a combination of core provision for all students and two different option groups, one for full GCSE and the other for a short-course GCSE. Overall, students' achievement is satisfactory, and standards in Year 11 are in line with expectations. In the work of a Year 11 GCSE class, the higher-attaining students were successful in their writing because their observations and evaluation about relationships and marriage were related to different faith beliefs they had learned about. Most students were aware of the need to relate questions of marriage and divorce to religious teachings. A few lower-attaining students are limited to descriptive accounts, for example of a Christian marriage ceremony. In a Year 10 lesson, higher-attaining students wrote a commentary for a slide show showing key features of a synagogue. Their efforts showed thoughtful consideration of the values, beliefs and sense of community held by practising Jews. Average-attaining students' answers on issues of moral belief such as euthanasia fell short of the expected standard as their writing was not sufficiently focused on the religious dimensions they had studied previously.

208. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, although examples of good and very good teaching were seen during the inspection. Learning activities are managed well. Teachers often showed a good focus on developing students' literacy skills. For example, the teacher carefully provided a Year 8 mixed-ability class with a writing 'frame' as a guideline for their writing, together with a bank of useful words and phrases for those who needed them. This enabled students of all levels of attainment to write to a friend

explaining what happens and why on the Jewish Sabbath, based on a video they had watched and some text-based research. Very good teaching enabled a class of high-attaining Year 10 students to build up their knowledge and understanding of worship and tradition in Judaism, through well-sequenced activities. Literacy difficulties sometimes slow students' learning. For example, in a GCSE revision lesson some students could not cope with the pace of the video and taking notes at the same time, and so were unable to make as much progress as they might have with more support. Occasionally, teachers do not pay enough attention to the needs of lower-attaining students. The marking of work is inconsistent, for example in the award of grades to students and in guiding them in matters of literacy.

209. The department's improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory overall. Optional classes for GCSE have contributed to results going up. The introduction of the assessment levels of the local Agreed Syllabus for religious education has allowed students' attainment and progress in Years 7 to 9 to be assessed and monitored. However, this is not as easily done in Years 10 and 11 as the core provision for religious education is assessed differently from the two GCSE classes. This is not a satisfactory arrangement. The department is led and managed satisfactorily. Although the arrangements for monitoring teaching are inadequate to ensure a consistent approach, good guidance is given to the teachers of religious education. The instruction and advice given to students for GCSE examinations leaves them in no doubt as to what is required, and how they can meet this challenge. However, the range of learning activities seen during the inspection, and observed in students' work, is narrower than that suggested by the department handbook. There is too little use of ICT, and the library provision is inadequate for students' needs, particularly for research to follow up homework tasks.

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

In the inspection, five 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 (n/a means that national data were not available to the inspectors).

***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	13	30	62	8	15	1.0	1.5
Chemistry	7	100	n/a	0	n/a	1.7	0.8
Biology	9	89	52	0	2	1.6	0.8
Physics	9	22	52	11	4	0.8	0.9
Graphic products	13	77	n/a	31	n/a	2.3	n/a
Business studies	19	47	77	0	12	0.7	1.7
Economics	1	100	74	0	22	2.0	2.0
Art	11	82	84	36	23	2.6	2.2
Drama	8	100	n/a	13	n/a	3.1	n/a
History	12	83	n/a	8	n/a	1.8	n/a
Law	10	100	n/a	50	n/a	3.3	n/a
English	14	93	n/a	43	n/a	3.1	n/a
French	5	80	n/a	40	n/a	2.2	n/a
Spanish	3	100	n/a	67	n/a	3.7	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	4	75	87	25	43	3.0	5.8
Biology	2	100	88	0	34	2.0	5.3
Physics	2	100	88	50	40	5.0	5.7
Graphic products	2	100	88	0	22	4.0	4.7
Business studies	9	56	92	0	32	2.2	5.5
Art	5	100	96	0	46	4.4	6.6
Theatre studies	8	88	93	13	31	3.5	5.5
Geography	2	100	92	50	38	5.0	5.7
History	3	67	88	33	35	4.7	5.5
Religious education	9	89	93	38	35	4.7	5.8
Law	9	100	n/a	11	n/a	3.8	n/a



English	17	100	95	18	37	5.4	5.9
---------	----	-----	----	----	----	-----	-----

### *Intermediate vocational qualifications*

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		Average point distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Business	15	87	n/a	0	n/a	0	n/a

## SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

210. The focus was on mathematics and chemistry. Biology and physics were also sampled. In 2001, biology and physics were taken at A-level by two and three students respectively. The results were below average, although satisfactory in relation to the students' GCSE grades on entry to the course. The AS-level results in biology were below average – all the students passed but none got higher grades (A or B), and their achievement was unsatisfactory, particularly for higher-attaining students. The AS-level results in physics were very low as the majority of students failed. Their achievement was unsatisfactory.

211. Two lessons were observed. The Year 12 physics lesson was good. The students recalled information well. The teacher was aware of their different levels of attainment, and was planning adapted activities for each student for the next lesson. In biology, Year 13 students worked in pairs to sort out the biochemical processes involved in respiration and photosynthesis, and very good learning took place. One pair needed prompts from the teacher, but the higher-attaining pair explained their findings well.

### Mathematics

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

#### Strengths

- Teachers' subject knowledge and awareness of examination requirements.
- The positive relationships between teachers and students.

#### Areas for improvement

- Catering for the full ability range, especially the higher attainers.
- Students' literacy skills and presentation of their written work.
- The management of the area of application of number, within the key skills provision.

212. Results in the A level examination in 2001 were below the national average. The results have fallen over the past four years. The relative performance of boys and girls is difficult to judge because of small numbers of students and changes in the gender balance from year to year. Students do less well in mathematics than is predicted by their GCSE results. Results in the mathematics AS-level examination, taken at the end of Year 12, were also below the national average in 2001. The results are attributable to poor student attitudes and staff inexperience with this new course. Five of the thirteen students who took mathematics in Year 12 have continued on to the second year of the A-level course.

213. The evidence of the students' work and the lessons observed shows that standards at the end of Year 13 are now average and students' achievement is satisfactory. This improvement is a result of more focused teaching and teachers' greater awareness of examination requirements. The work covers modules in pure mathematics, statistics and mechanics. Students know how to simplify surds and use logarithmic and exponential functions. Because they rely too heavily on their calculators, fractional answers are often converted to decimal form losing some accuracy and making further calculations more difficult. In statistics, students have a good understanding of continuous random variables. They have learned to use the binomial distribution, the normal distribution and the Poisson distribution. In mechanics, they know how to use equations of motion and calculate forces including frictional forces.

214. GCSE resit classes are offered for students wishing to improve their GCSE grade. The number of students attending these classes is low due to timetable clashes and poor attendance. At the time of the inspection, the majority of the students had retaken the examination and only three students remained on roll. In the lesson observed, the only student present was well supported by the individual attention of the teacher. On the basis of the work seen, standards in GCSE at the end of Year 12 are below average but students are achieving satisfactorily in relation to their earlier levels of attainment.

215. Further mathematics is offered as part of a consortium arrangement with another school. Only one student from Birchwood High School is currently taking AS-level further mathematics. Previously-completed work includes differential equations and integration by parts as well as a module on decision mathematics including sorting algorithms, Eulerian graphs and shortest path analyses. The standard of this work is above average and the achievement is good.

216. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, though with some significant weaknesses as well as some important strengths. Lessons get off to a quick start and teachers demonstrate very good subject knowledge, confident exposition and clear explanation of key facts. Relationships with students are positive and supportive. Planning is full, work is undertaken at a fast pace and time is used to good effect. However, teacher talk dominates in too many lessons, giving students insufficient time for active learning. Although lower-attaining students are supported well, this is usually at the expense of the challenge offered to higher-attaining students. Mistakes and misconceptions in written work are not always picked up, and errors such as cumulative frequency graphs drawn as a series of straight lines are not corrected. Homework assignments and review exercises are set regularly. Marking is usually undertaken to a very high standard, with diagnostic comments and model solutions. Students are set target grades but have too little idea of how these grades are to be met in subject-specific terms. Teachers have a very good awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of their students, although records in mark books are inconsistent and usually too brief to provide an oversight of students' mathematical attainment.

217. Students' attitudes and behaviour are good. Students are hard working, determined and supportive of one another. They enjoy positive and productive relationships with their teachers. Students complete work to a satisfactory standard, although their presentation skills are weak. Too much of their work, especially in Year 12, is untidy and badly organised. It is not building up into a record of the work covered that will be adequate for revision purposes.

218. The curriculum in the sixth form is appropriate to the needs of the students. The provision for literacy in the sixth form is satisfactory overall, although spelling errors are often missed. The provision for ICT is satisfactory in that the department makes some use of graphical calculators, although students have too few opportunities for work with computers within mathematics.

219. The teaching of key skills (application of number) in the sixth form is satisfactory, but the provision is managed ineffectively. The curriculum area leader for mathematics is not involved in the programme. The application of number module is intended to be delivered through the general studies course. GNVQ students are also timetabled for additional lessons in application of number, but these provisions are not linked. There is no scheme of work, and it is not clear how assessment against the required criteria is to be undertaken.

220. The provision for numeracy across the sixth form curriculum is satisfactory, although the whole-school numeracy policy is inappropriate for mathematics in the sixth form. Basic number skills are rehearsed in science through the use of percentages, ratio and index notation, although students have difficulty using mathematics and so need some support in their calculations. Algebraic skills are used well in chemistry for calculating equilibrium constants and in physics for calculations involving forces and motion. Students use anthropometric data to apply standard body measurements to design work in design and technology. Statistical work includes scatter graphs and lines of best fit in science. In a Year 12 chemistry lesson, students made good use of ICT to access pollution data, and subsequently made sense of this by importing it into a spreadsheet and creating graphs which were analysed and explained.

221. The leadership and management of the subject in the sixth form are satisfactory. The recently-appointed curriculum area leader makes good use of available data to analyse the department's performance in examinations, but there is insufficient monitoring of lessons to identify strengths and

weaknesses in teaching and learning. The department development plan has identified appropriate priorities for improvement. The department has responded well to the revisions of the post-16 examinations, although schemes of work are not sufficiently rigorous to provide a coherent framework for teaching AS- and A-level courses. The department is well resourced in terms of equipment, textbooks, graphical calculators and computers, but the library is wholly inadequate for sixth-form needs. Some of the temporary classrooms provide poor accommodation, especially in very cold or very hot weather.

222. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. Although students' attainment remains below average, the work seen in lessons indicates some recent improvement. The teachers' knowledge and understanding of mathematics are good but, as highlighted in the last report, teachers in some classes do not challenge students, especially the highest-attaining students. Students are well supported although they are given too few opportunities to develop their capacity to work independently. The department is suitably placed to continue to improve and to raise standards.

## Chemistry

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

### Strengths

- Teachers' subject knowledge is very good, and teaching and learning are good overall.
- Relationships between teachers and students are very good.
- Standards are improving as a result of better teaching.
- Students' attitudes to the subject are good. They enjoy chemistry, even though they find it challenging.

### Areas for improvement

- AS- and A-level results.
- The opportunities for independent learning, including in written work and using library resources for research activities.
- Students' understanding of the knowledge they are acquiring.

223. Students in the current Year 12 are achieving satisfactorily although standards are below average. Students are able to recall information they have learned, for example on heterogeneous and homogeneous catalysis, and apply it to practical work. They needed the help of carefully-structured questions from the teacher to develop an understanding of the mechanism of catalysis, and then record their understanding in writing using a prompt sheet. Their written work is usually short answers or worked examples. They have used index notation in their work, interpreted and plotted graphs and used ideas of ratio and proportion. The higher-attaining students present their work well, but the lower-attaining students have incomplete work in their books and have not responded to teachers' prompts to complete it.

224. There were no A-level students in 2001. The standards of work of current Year 13 students are below average, as were the 2001 AS-level results. Although all students passed, the higher-attaining students did not gain any A or B grades. In the lessons seen, students responded positively to the well-organised teaching. For example, they were helped to connect ideas about why transition metals are able to take part in oxidation-reduction reactions. Although students recall knowledge accurately, they have considerable difficulty in connecting all the pieces of information to gain an understanding of chemical principles.

225. Recent additions to the staffing of the department have been beneficial, and teaching is now good overall. Teachers use their very good subject knowledge and enthusiasm to encourage students to think rather than just acquire knowledge. As a result, good learning is beginning to take place and so standards are improving. This was seen in a Year 13 lesson on catalysis, where students thought about enthalpy changes in reactions and the effect catalysts had on activation energy. As they drew diagrams on the board, one boy said, "It all begins to make sense now".

226. Too much of students' written work is in note form or answers to structured questions. No examples were seen of extended writing, and few of research. When research is done, students use the Internet rather than books, and sometimes merely print out articles without comment. The school library has too few

books for them to use, and no scientific journals. The lack of suitable reference materials makes it difficult to enable students to develop research skills and become independent learners. However, when given opportunities for research activities, they respond well. For example, Year 12 students interrogated a database on air pollutants enthusiastically. Most feedback on how to improve is done orally in lessons or during the six-weekly review sessions. Their written work is marked for correctness. Although students are confident that the oral sessions give them enough information to help them improve their performance, the lack of a written record of the advice means that they cannot consult it independently at a later date. Overall, students enjoy studying chemistry, including those for whom it was not a first choice in Year 12, and relationships between students and teachers are positive.

227. The good teaching and learning now being developed results from sensible management decisions taken about the newly-introduced, modular course and about staff recruitment. There is now a commitment to team work and raising students' achievement. The new scheme of work does not identify enough opportunities for students to develop their communication skills, for example through discussion and presentations on moral and social issues. It does not define the specific objectives for students' learning clearly enough, particularly those relating to study skills and independent learning. The GCSE results of the students who study chemistry have often been too low for success, as the AS- and A-level course has not been suitable for them. In the past, the small numbers taking chemistry (and other science subjects) have made the provision very costly, and the results have not been satisfactory. The management of the subject and its recent improvement are satisfactory, but over the longer period its improvement is unsatisfactory.

## ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

The inspection focused on the only subject taught in this area, design and technology.

### Design and technology

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

#### Strengths

- The AS- and A-level results in graphic products are improving.
- Students have very good opportunities to use ICT.
- Relationships between teachers and the students are good.
- Management of the subject is very good.

#### Areas for improvement

- Students' skills in analysing existing products and using the information to extend the development of their own ideas.
- The opportunities to study design and technology for students who are not suited to an A-level course.

228. The A-level results in graphic products in 2000 were above the national average, but dropped in 2001 when there were only two students. The AS-level results in 2001 increased considerably, and the standard of work seen during the inspection is above the standard expected of students at this stage nationally.

229. In the work seen during the inspection, the attainment of students in Years 12 and 13 was above the expectation for their courses. This is reflected in the above-average AS-level results in 2001, showing the success of the department's recent work to raise standards. Students' achievement is good. The quality of the work produced by students following design and technology courses is now of a high standard. The coursework is closely linked to the examination mark scheme, and teachers encourage students to use the mark scheme as a guide when they are working. This ensures that all the important aspects of the work is covered. Teachers provide good opportunities for students to develop their basic skills, and to increase the complexity and refinement of their work in both food and product design. Students show good skills in analysing tasks in detail and gathering research from a range of sources. Their graphics skills are highly developed, and the standard of presentation of their coursework is very good. Students are weaker in analysing a wide range of products and then using the information for their own design ideas. As a result, students provide too little information on the limitations of other products and on how their own designs have

improved on the features of similar, existing products. Nevertheless, students apply the design process well and use a range of specialist statistical data, for example the standard measurements of the body, to ensure accurate dimensions and sizing of products. They also work to British Standards guidelines for manufacturing. This information is used well when testing the models and prototypes they develop. Students' ability to apply the design process has had a good impact on their ability to work independently. It has also enabled teachers to support them on a more individual basis. Working drawings and plans are well annotated, and students explain the development of ideas, methods and processes in good depth.

230. The quality of teaching and learning in Years 12 and 13 is good overall. A good emphasis is placed on the development of more advanced skills in both designing and manufacturing. Lessons are well structured, with a mixture of teaching the whole group and working with students individually. Lessons have clear objectives for students' learning, linked to individual needs and to the specialist information needed for projects. Teachers plan well for students to extend their knowledge and skills. For example, in a food technology lesson, students used a digital sensor to measure the temperature of the food during cooking, to check that safe cooking temperatures were reached. The teacher then set the students a more demanding task, to plot the temperature at varying intervals over a given time during the cooking process.

231. Teachers encourage the use of ICT to improve students' skills and to increase the quality and standard of their work. During lessons, students showed confidence in using a variety of ICT skills, such as computer-aided design to produce 2D and 3D design drawings and plans. Students have used computer-aided manufacturing resources to plan and produce products, for example packaging ideas, and the Internet to research information. The majority of students use ICT well to process and present data from market research work, and to increase the quality of the overall presentation of their work. Lower-attaining students have made less use of specialised graphics software to support their design ideas.

232. Students apply a good level of numeracy skills, for example the use of standard hand and body sizes when developing toys for toddlers. They also work to scale when developing prototypes and when using computer-aided design. They are familiar with a wide variety of technical terms associated with the subject, and apply them accurately in their written work. Writing skills are used effectively in their individual work.

233. The good relationships between students and their teachers have a positive impact on their learning. Students take their work seriously and are keen to do well. As a result they discuss their work in depth with their teachers, and readily take on board the help and guidance they are given.

234. The management of the subject is very good. The head of department has focused on raising standards. Schemes of work are well linked to the work in class. Systems to monitor the achievement of students following both A-level and AS-level courses are good. Regular tutorials enable students to discuss their progress in depth with their teachers, and then focus on areas for development. This has had a good impact on learning as it has helped students to evaluate their own strengths and weaknesses as they progress with their individual pieces of coursework. As a result of the difficulties in recruiting specialist teachers, the courses planned as part of the technology school development have been postponed. Consequently, students who are not suited to AS- and A-level study do not have the opportunity to follow a course in design and technology. The improvement since the last inspection is good. The A-level and AS-level courses are now well established with an increasing number of students. Results have improved, and teaching and learning are now better than previously.

## **BUSINESS**

235. No subjects were focused on in detail, but the courses in business studies and economics were sampled. Business studies is a popular subject at AS- and A-level. After several years of comparatively good results, the school's AS- and A-level results fell in 2001, and were considerably lower than nationally. Business is also taken as a GNVQ course, at intermediate level. Almost all the students gained a qualification. Economics was taken by one student at AS-level in 2001, gaining a low pass.

236. During the inspection, two business lessons were observed. In both, the students' learning was unsatisfactory because of weaknesses in the way the learning activities were organised and the lack of challenge. Students' attendance has been irregular, and their numeracy and literacy skills are weak. The

standard of their work was below expectations for the course. A key skills lesson was also observed, in which the GNVQ business students used Microsoft Word. Their learning was satisfactory overall, although the pace was somewhat slow. Most of the students successfully extracted information from a text and rewrote it in their own words, but they needed more technical support in using the software than the teacher was able to give and no technician was available to help.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

237. The school does not offer courses in this area.

## **HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL**

238. The school does not offer courses in this area. Students are provided with limited opportunities for physical education during their recreational activities time, but only a minority take advantage of what is available.

## **HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE**

239. The school does not offer courses in this area.

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

240. The school offers art, drama and music at AS- and A-level. These were not focused on during the inspection, but two lessons were observed. Art is an increasingly popular subject, but results have been comparatively low. However, very good teaching of a Year 13 group doing still life drawings progressively developed their skills, knowledge and understanding. The students' attainment was below average, but their achievement was satisfactory given their attainment on entry to the course.

241. Very small numbers have taken A-level music in recent years. Results have been low, but the school considers that the students' attainment reflected their abilities. The teaching observed was well prepared and carefully tailored to the student's needs, but a lack of knowledge, confidence and skills held back the student's learning.

242. Drama could not be observed due to the absence of the teacher. AS-level results were below average, although all students gained a pass. A-level results in theatre studies were also below average in 2001.

## **HUMANITIES**

243. No subjects in humanities were focused on during the inspection, but geography, history, religious education, law and psychology were sampled.

244. A few students have taken geography courses. The two Year 13 students achieved their A-level targets in 2001. Year 12 students were unable to complete their coursework due to the foot and mouth epidemic, and so they were unable to take the AS examination. Their work is to be carried over to the A2 examination at the end of Year 13. One lesson was observed during the inspection. This was good. It had been planned in response to the teacher's marking of a word-processed extended essay. After guidance on the weaknesses in their work, the students were given the opportunity to refer to examination board criteria to help them improve its quality.

245. History is more popular than geography, but AS- and A-level results are below average. In the Year 13 lesson observed, standards were below average but students' learning about the civil rights movement was good because of the teacher's good subject knowledge and effective use of video to help students understand the importance of the bus boycott.

246. Religious education was taken at A-level, with overall results that were below average in 2001. A Year 12 lesson was observed, on religious teaching relevant to abortion. The students talked sensitively about the arguments for and against abortion, prompted by the teacher. Their learning was satisfactory.

247. All the students who took AS- and A-level law passed in 2001, but overall the results were below average. One lesson was observed, in which Year 12 students considered the changing nature of law in society. Good teaching, with clear explanations and lively presentation of information and ideas enabled the class to make good progress. Their attainment was below expectations as they had limited knowledge and their learning skills were weaker than is required for success at A-level.

248. Psychology has been introduced in Year 12, as an on-line course which is delivered by an interactive television link. It was initially popular, but numbers dropped because many students were not confident, independent learners able to cope with distance education. The learning in the two on-line sessions sampled was satisfactory. Through the television link, the teacher discussed the topic of hypotheses, basing the questioning on the textbook and worksheets issued to students. The students made satisfactory gains in their understanding, helped by the teacher's prompts and encouragement.

## **ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION**

249. English, which is a popular subject, was a focus of the inspection. In modern languages, French and Spanish are taken by small numbers of students. The focus was on French, but Spanish was also sampled in Years 12 and 13. The last A-level results in Spanish were in 2000, when the two candidates gained a grade A and a grade E. All three students passed AS-level in Spanish in 2001. Three lessons were observed, all of which were good. The teachers conducted the lessons entirely in Spanish, which greatly enhanced students' oral fluency and listening comprehension. Students enjoyed the lessons and made good progress in listening, speaking and reading. A scrutiny of students' course work revealed good standards in their written work.

### **English**

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

#### **Strengths**

- Students' quality of discussion is good.
- Teachers use their good subject knowledge effectively to coach, prompt and stimulate students.
- The department is well managed.

#### **Areas for improvement**

- Opportunities for students to develop and express their ideas independently.
- The style, tone and quality of students' writing.

250. In 2001, overall A-level results were average compared to schools nationally. However, few students gained higher grades (A and B) – the proportion was approximately half that nationally. Nevertheless, the results were satisfactory in relation to the students' GCSE results two years previously. AS-level results were better, with nearly half the students obtaining higher grades. Boys did better than girls. Nearly all the students chose to go on to a second year of study of the subject. At AS- and A-level, the English results were better than those for most other subjects.

251. Standards are similar to the examination results, and are average overall. Students' attainment on entry to their AS- and A-level courses has been below average. In relation to this, their achievement is good because of effective teaching. The quality of students' spoken contributions in lesson is often very good, and boys are as fluent as girls. In their first term of the AS-level course, students have been quick to learn how to approach the study of literary texts. For example, in exploring the social context underlying Jane Austen's 'Pride and Prejudice', Year 12 students made perceptive observations on the status of marriage, assumptions about the family and the role of women in the period.

252. In Year 13, A-level students readily grasp more complex meanings in the texts they are studying. For instance, one group of students discussed the character of Stevens in Kazuo Ishiguro's 'The Remains of the Day'. They explained the inhibition and uncertainty of the character as an individual before going on to draw deeper conclusions about the theme of the novel and the way in which individual characters reflect a changing era. The teacher's good subject knowledge was a key factor in challenging them to develop their ideas in depth during the discussion. However, students' writing does not convey fully the understanding and insight which they show in class discussion. Too often, ideas are not expressed fluently and organised coherently, and students struggle to adopt the style expected of a formal essay at this level. Students make good use of computers at home, to locate background information on the Internet, and to draft and present written assignments. The library provides an inadequate range of material to support advanced studies effectively, limiting students' opportunities for independent study and extension work. This contributes to the higher-attaining students not achieving to their full potential.

253. Students' attitudes to English are good. They show enthusiasm in lessons, learning from and respecting others' ideas, and rising to the teachers' high expectations of their ability to express themselves clearly in oral activities. They try hard when writing, and take notes conscientiously. These strengths contribute to their good achievement.

254. Teaching is good because it is planned carefully to build on the skills and experience students bring with them from their GCSE work in English. Teachers deploy a variety of approaches and methods in class, holding students' attention well and capitalising on their enthusiasm and interest. Teachers expect students to think for themselves, for example challenging students to draw their own conclusions and to illustrate them with examples from the text. As a result, students develop habits of thought and expression in which they are enquiring, confident, and original. However, the constant support and prompting they are given means that students have too few opportunities to work independently. They are also given too little guidance on how to convey their ideas in essays, using an appropriate tone and formal style of writing, and so students tend to write as they would speak, or dwell on narrative detail at the expense of analysis.

255. The department is well led and managed, and its improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory. Teachers check their students' progress regularly, and so individuals are told clearly how well they are doing and what they must do in order to improve. This has helped the department to raise results.

## French

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

### Strengths

- Teaching is good, and teachers' subject knowledge and linguistic skills are very good.
- Teachers use French effectively as the normal means of classroom interaction.
- Relationships are very good.

### Areas for improvement

- The use of ICT to enhance learning.
- The work students do to consolidate and extend what they have learned in lessons.

256. The school's last examination results at A-level were in 2000. These results were good. The three students gained two A grades and one C grade. The results in AS-level in 2001 were below average.

257. Standards in French are average overall. The work seen in lessons and in students' files during the inspection showed that their achievement is satisfactory. The high attainers' achievement is good. For example, they acquire new vocabulary quickly and use new grammatical structures correctly. They use dictionaries well to check meanings and develop good reading and listening skills. They are generally good at seeing language patterns and are able to manipulate structures once they have been introduced. Some are very good at giving their opinions and stating reasons orally. Teachers conduct lessons almost entirely in French and make good use of recorded material for listening activities. Consequently, students do well in speaking and listening. The pronunciation and intonation of most students are very good. Students in Year



13 generally speak with confidence, and express their opinions clearly and accurately. Some students in Year 12 are hesitant in oral work, although they speak confidently and fluently on familiar topics. Students understand the gist of and extract details from a wide range of written texts in French. They produce a wide variety of written work, ranging from notes and exercises to extended projects and presentations. The higher attainers are very accurate in their writing, and use a good range of structures with rich vocabulary and expressions. They have a good knowledge of grammar. However, some Year 12 students' knowledge of grammatical structures is insecure.

258. Teaching is good. The teachers have very good subject knowledge and are very competent linguists. Lessons are well prepared, and have clear and appropriate aims. Lessons proceed at a brisk pace, and good use is made of tight deadlines to ensure that students remain on task and produce high-quality work in a short span of time. Teachers develop students' speaking by skilful guided questions and interesting cues and prompts. Lessons contain a rich variety of activities that are logically linked and motivate students. Good use is made of a range of authentic listening and reading resources. Teachers also make good use of audio-visual resources in lessons, but give students too few opportunities to use computers to support their learning of French. Teachers frequently praise students for their efforts and correct errors constructively, enabling students to make good progress.

259. Students are very attentive and willing in lessons. They are enthusiastic, and participate fully. They frequently ask questions for clarification, and seek help if they do not understand. This aids their progress significantly. Relationships between students and their teachers are very good. However, students' progress is slowed by many not doing follow-up work (such as learning new vocabulary and grammatical structures) as thoroughly as they should, which is why their achievement over time is lower than their learning in lessons.

260. French is now led and managed well, and its improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory. The staff have developed a common approach to teaching, assessment and correcting students' work. The contribution of the French 'assistante' also develops students' confidence and fluency, as also do the work placements which some students do in France.