

INSPECTION REPORT

THE COTTESLOE SCHOOL

Leighton Buzzard

LEA area: Buckinghamshire

Unique reference number: 110533

Headteacher: Barbara Howse

Reporting inspector: Michael Merchant

27368

Dates of inspection: 29 April - 3 May 2002

Inspection number: 192865

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Modern
School category:	Foundation
Age range of students:	11 to 18 years
Gender of students:	Mixed
School address:	Aylesbury Road Wing Leighton Buzzard
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Julian C Price
Date of previous inspection:	November 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
27368	M. Merchant	<i>Registered inspector</i>		What sort of school is it? The school's results and students' achievements. How well are students taught? How well is the school led and managed?
14066	G. Hoggard	<i>Lay inspector</i>		Students' attitudes values and personal development. How well does the school care for its students? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
30563	J. Pentlow	<i>Team inspector</i>	Citizenship.	
27585	H. Hounslow	<i>Team inspector</i>	Science.	
30899	K. Boden	<i>Team inspector</i>	Design and technology.	
18888	J. Boulton	<i>Team inspector</i>	Physical education.	
12885	J. Hunt	<i>Team inspector</i>	Mathematics.	
31332	J. Marshal	<i>Team inspector</i>	Modern foreign languages.	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to students?
1578	M. Sinclair	<i>Team inspector</i>	Religious education.	
1723	M. Milton	<i>Team inspector</i>	Geography; Information and communication technology; Equal opportunities.	
4757	D. Morris	<i>Team inspector</i>	Art and design.	
15576	D. Nebesnuick	<i>Team inspector</i>	History; Business education.	
30643	L. Soden	<i>Team inspector</i>	English; Drama.	
12276	T. Payne	<i>Team inspector</i>	Music.	
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

The Cottesloe School is an average sized secondary modern school of 999 boys and girls aged 11 to 18 serving a very wide rural area of east Buckinghamshire and parts of Bedfordshire. It has grown rapidly since the last inspection. A very small number of students (11) are from minority ethnic groups. A few students have English as an additional language and none are in the early stages of language acquisition. The percentage of students on the special educational needs register, including those with statements, is in line with the national average. The majority need help with profound and multiple learning difficulties and dyslexia. A small number need help for moderate learning, emotional and behavioural disturbance and speech or communication difficulties. The proportion of students qualifying for free school meals is well below average. The profile of students' attainment on entry to the school is below average but has improved as the school has grown. As a result of the county's selection procedures, the school does not receive many students who attained highly at primary school.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

The Cottesloe School is an effective school and is showing signs of real improvement since the arrival of the new headteacher at the beginning of the year. The school is well managed and the headteacher provides strong and highly visible leadership. Students' welfare is a high priority and the care they receive is good. Teaching has improved dramatically and standards are now moving upwards. The school gives satisfactory value for money.

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

- Standards seen in English and drama are very high.
- Teaching is good. Well-focused teaching is promoting enthusiastic and well-motivated students, and effective learning at a productive rate.
- The school is well led and managed, and effectively governed. Under the head teacher's excellent leadership, there is a very real and shared commitment to move the school forward.
- The school cares well for its students. Relationships are very good, and attitudes are positive.
- The provision for students with special needs is very good and they make good progress.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

- Standards in Years 10 and 11 are too low, particularly in mathematics, information and computer technology, music and religious education.
- Statutory requirements in aspects of its curriculum.
- The use of assessment information to plan the next steps in learning and to identify students who are in danger of underachieving.
- Using the skills and expertise of the more effective teachers to spread good practice through the school.
- Social facilities for students.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. The last inspection report highlighted four major issues for improvement, two of which have been wholly resolved. Management is now more effective and the Sixth Form is efficient. Standards in English have improved significantly, but they have barely improved in science and have declined in mathematics. However, teaching has improved considerably and the proportion of satisfactory or better teaching is far higher than at the last inspection. The new, clear and well-focused school leadership is driving the school forward.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1999	2000	2001	2001
GCSE examinations	D	E	D	B
A Levels/AS Levels	E	E	N/A	N/A

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

Year 9: English was well above average: mathematics and science results were average. All three subjects improved in 2001 (this is an upward trend) but English and science improved faster than mathematics. Boys attained better than girls in science.

GCSEs: In 2001, 90 per cent of students gained at least one grade A*-G. Forty two per cent gained five or more grades A*-C. This shows an upward trend compared with previous years. Realistic and achievable targets are set for several years ahead.

GCSE subjects: In 2000 and 2001 standards were well above the average for similar schools in English language, science and French. They are above average in design and technology but below average in mathematics and history and well below average in geography. Standards were very low in art and physical education.

Standards seen: Work seen during the inspection in Years 7 to 9 was above average in English and drama. It was average in mathematics, science, art and design, design technology, geography, history, physical education, religious education. Standards are below average in information and communication technology, music, and modern foreign languages. In Years 10 and 11 standards seen are well above average in English, drama and above average in art and design. Science, design and technology, history, physical education are broadly average but mathematics, geography, information and communication technology, modern foreign languages, music, religious education are all below average.

Achievement (progress): This is well above average in English, drama and above average in art and design, geography, history, modern foreign languages, physical education. Progress is as expected in mathematics in science, design technology, music and religious education (Years 7 to 9). It is below that expected in mathematics (Years 10 and 11), information and communication technology and religious education (Years 10 and 11).

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Good. Students show great enthusiasm for learning. They are proud of their school, respect their teachers and appreciate the importance of working hard to attain good grades at GCSE. They speak with pride about the school's secure atmosphere.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good. Students behave well and often very well. A few students find it difficult to co-operate or to be attentive and succeed in spoiling lessons.
Personal development and relationships	Good. Students appreciate the good relationships they have with teachers and with each other, although some struggle to work independently.
Attendance	Satisfactory. Similar to the national average and slowly improving

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of students:	Years 7 – 9	Years 10 – 11	Years 12 – 13
Quality of teaching	Good	Good	Good

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

The quality of teaching has improved considerably: 95 per cent of lessons are satisfactory or better, 63 per cent are good or better and 21 per cent are very good. Teaching was excellent in five lessons. The proportion of good teaching is similar in all years and is reflected in the quality of learning, which is good in Years 7 to 9 and good in Years 10 and 11 where students are beginning to work independently. Teaching is particularly effective (good in over 80 per cent of lessons seen) in art and design, English, drama, geography, history, physical education and science. It is good in design and technology and satisfactory in information and communication technology, mathematics, modern foreign languages and religious education. Teaching is unsatisfactory in music.

The school meets the needs of all its students well. The teaching of literacy skills by subject teachers is satisfactory overall and good in history, geography and art and design.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Satisfactory overall, but unsatisfactory in Years 10 and 11. There are breaches of statutory requirements in information and communication technology (little contribution from other subjects), too little time for French, German and religious education. Unsatisfactory arrangements are also found in science and physical education in Years 10 and 11.
Provision for students with special educational needs	Good overall and very good in the special needs department. Whether they have emotional and behavioural problems, specific learning needs or both, students receive very good attention to help them cope.
Provision for students with English as an additional language	Satisfactory. The small numbers of students with English as an additional language make as good progress as others in the school.
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good overall but spiritual development is only satisfactory. Most teachers convey strong messages about moral values, community responsibilities and social standards.
How well the school cares for its students	Good. Systems to support students are well established.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Good overall. The new headteacher is providing excellent leadership and is very well supported by the leadership team. The quality of leadership of middle managers, however, is too variable.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors provide very good strategic direction to the school and understand well its strengths and weaknesses, but they have not addressed important breaches of statutory requirements on areas of the curriculum.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Satisfactory. Although the school recognises many of its weaknesses the action taken to remedy them has not always been fully effective.
The strategic use of resources	Very good. The school manages its budget carefully and applies the principles of best value satisfactorily.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The school is approachable. The communication between home and school is effective. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inconsistencies in standards attained. Behaviour especially smoking and bullying on the buses home. Poor information regarding students' progress. Parents' meetings are not helpful.

Inspectors agree with parents regarding the approachability of the school, inconsistencies in standards and the quality of reports. They found no evidence, however, to support parents' comments on behaviour.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The Cottesloe School has an open access Sixth Form with 50 students of all abilities. The school offers a limited range of Post 16 courses that meet the needs of those students in Year 11 wishing to continue their studies in the Sixth Form. It also makes good provision for students who might not otherwise have continued in Post 16 education. Options include one and two-year flexible programmes incorporating A and AS Level GCE subjects, together with NVQ, Intermediate GNVQ and Advanced Level vocational courses. Three students have special educational needs, one of whom has a physical impairment.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

This is a satisfactory Sixth Form. The Sixth Form provides a limited range of academic and vocational courses to meet the needs of all students. However, the take up of courses by the higher attaining students in Year 11 is low and in 2002 only two A and AS Level courses are running, although others were offered. The attainment of students when they enter the Sixth Form is below average. Students benefit from good teaching and build on their achievement at GCSE to reach overall standards that are in line with the national average. Students' progress and achievement are good. Leadership and management of the Sixth Form are sound. The Sixth Form gives satisfactory value for money and is cost effective.

STRENGTHS

- Students achieve well.
- Teaching is good overall.
- Students' work is assessed well and they are given constructive advice on how to improve.
- Curriculum provision in the Sixth Form matches students' needs and aspirations very closely.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

- The school is in breach of statutory requirements in respect of religious education.
- More regular provision for personal, social and health education.
- Study accommodation with more information and communication technology resources.
- More opportunities for enrichment and personal development.

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 the 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
English Literature	Very good. Examination results were above the national average in 2001. Present students achieve standards that are often higher than would be indicated by their prior attainment. Students respond with maturity and enthusiasm to teachers' very high expectations and meticulous planning.
Information and communication technology	Satisfactory. The attainment of these students is at the expected level. Teaching is satisfactory overall.
Business Education	Good. Results in 2001 were above the national average. Present students on the Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education course are achieving well as a result of good teaching. Assessment is rigorous and contributes to the good progress made by the students.
Design and Technology	Good. Examination results in 2001 were below the national average. Standards in designing and making seen during the inspection are above average and students' achievements are good. Teaching is good and encourages much independent learning.
Sports Studies	Very good. The attainment of the majority of students is at pass standard and several students in both year groups are attaining above this level. A feature of the very good teaching is the specialist knowledge of the teachers and their very good relationships with the students.

Most other Sixth Form courses were sampled. Teaching was good overall and in one English lesson teaching was excellent.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Satisfactory. The school provides good induction procedures that ensure students select appropriately from the courses offered. The procedures for assessing students' attainment and progress in individual subjects are good and marking is helpful and informative. The monitoring of students' overall progress and target setting is unsystematic.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the Sixth Form	The leadership and management of the Sixth Form are satisfactory and based on clear aims and values. There is a strong commitment to growth, improvement of standards and equal opportunities. Targets for development are clearly set but there is not enough monitoring by the senior management team to establish what has successfully been achieved. The effectiveness of the head of Sixth Form has been constrained by staffing shortages.

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">• Teachers know them well and are very approachable.• They have very good relationships with their teachers.• They receive helpful advice about choosing their subjects and flexibility when settling in to their courses.• They can study independently.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• They would prefer to be treated more like adults and have their views acted upon.• They want information about their progress and the availability of advice about routes after the Sixth Form.• There is no Sixth Form study area with information and communication technology resources for independent use.• The amount of enrichment activities.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

1. Attainment refers to the standards students achieve compared to national averages. Standards are also compared with results obtained in similar schools, that is those modern with a similar uptake of free school meals. 'Achievement' refers to the progress students make in terms of where they started when they entered the school, or when they started their General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) courses. Thus good achievement does not necessarily mean that standards are above average, but that students do well and make better than expected progress.

2. Students enter the school with broadly average levels of attainment as measured by the average points score they attained in tests taken at the age of 11. However, because of selection in Buckinghamshire, some 30 per cent of the higher attaining students go to the grammar schools. Very few of the students that come to The Cottesloe School then, have attained the higher levels in these tests. The school, therefore, does not have the full ability range when students enter in Year 7 and so prior attainment is below average. However, as the school has grown it has attracted more students from neighboring counties where there is no selection and also some students who, although they have passed the selection tests for the grammar school, choose to come to The Cottesloe School. Consequently, the ability of students when they enter the school has improved and the present Year 7 has higher levels of prior attainment than those students who entered the school in 1996 (i.e. those students who took their GCSE in 2001).

3. End of Year 9: Students are expected to reach at least National Curriculum Level 5 in English, mathematics and science national tests taken at the end of Year 9. Level 6 and above are referred to as higher levels. In 2001 the national percentage of students reaching Level 5 and above (with Level 6 and above shown in brackets) was 82 per cent (44 per cent) in English, 70 per cent (35 per cent) in mathematics and 78 per cent (26 per cent) in science. Average points scores are also calculated. Level 5 is worth 33 points. A student achieving Level 5 in all three subjects would therefore have an average points score of 33, which was also the national average points score in 2001.

4. The table below shows attainment in the three core subjects of English, mathematics and science in 2001.

Attainment of National Curriculum Level 5 and above compared with:

	All schools	Similar modern schools
English	Well above average	Well above average
Maths	Average	Average
Science	Above average	Above average

Attainment of National Curriculum Level 6 and above compared with:

	All schools	Similar modern schools
English	Well above average	Well above average
Maths	Below average	Below average
Science	Average	Average

Average points compared with:

	All schools	Similar modern schools
English	Well above average	Well above average
Maths	Average	Average
Science	Average	Average
All Core	Above average	Above average

5. The overall trend over the last five years is upwards and test results are improving at a rate faster than that of other schools nationally. Attainment is better in English because skillful teaching in Years 7 to 9 successfully gives students the skills they need to be successful in these national tests. In mathematics, the attainment, particularly of higher attaining students, is held back by difficulties in staffing and weaknesses in the management of the department. Science results are strongly influenced by students' average levels of literacy and numeracy skills, which makes it difficult for them to attain the higher levels.

6. There is little difference between the percentage of boys and girls reaching Level 5 (an improvement since the last inspection), but at the higher levels in the last two years, girls have done better in English and boys do better in mathematics and science.

7. It is important to remember the below-average standards overall that students have when they arrive at The Cottesloe School. Comparing students' average points score at the end of primary school with results they attained at the end of Year 9 shows that progress in English is very good and that progress is in line with that expected in mathematics and science. Taking all three core subjects together, achievement is good. Over three years, the school is therefore teaching the students more knowledge, understanding and skills than might be expected. Students with special needs do better than could be expected because of the very good support they receive from the special needs department. The faster rate of progress seen in English is because of the very effective teaching which is very well directed at enabling students to quickly and confidently acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in the national tests at age 14.

8. Standards seen in other subjects during the inspection in Years 7 to 9 are:

Well above average	Drama.
Average	Art and design, design and technology, geography, history, physical education, religious education, modern foreign languages.
Below Average	Information and communication technology (ICT), music.

Progress and achievement in other subjects in Years 7 to 9 are:

Well above average.	Drama.
Above average.	Art and design, geography, history, physical education.
Average.	Design and technology, modern foreign languages, music, religious education.
Below average.	Information and communication technology.

9. In those subjects where students attain well and make good progress good teaching is the norm. In history and geography, a new head of faculty has had a very powerful impact on energising these subjects and has started to reverse the downward trend in their attainment seen over the last four years. Again, the very good subject leadership in physical education creates a good climate for learning because the head of department supports other teachers in the department very well. Progress is held back in ICT because of weaknesses in the curriculum: few other subjects make the contribution to the development of ICT skills that they should. In all subjects the arrival of the new headteacher in January

and of two new deputy headteachers a little later has had an immediate influence on standards. The strong presence of the head around the school, her classroom observations of teaching and her support for colleagues facing challenges have had the effect of spurring on all teachers to give of their best.

10. The school does not monitor attainment by using the ethnic backgrounds of their families but direct observation of their work shows that their attainment and progress is in line with other students at the school.

11. End of Year 11: In 2001 nationally, 48 per cent of students attained five or more grades A*-C, 91 per cent attained five or more grades A*-G and 96 per cent attained one or more grades A*-G. The average total points score was 39 (calculated by 8 points for A*, 7 for A, etc).

12. The table below summarises the attainment of students in the 2001 GCSE examinations compared to:

	All schools	Similar modern schools
Proportion attaining five or more grades A*-C	Average	Average
Proportion attaining five or more grades A*-G	Average	Average
Proportion attaining one or more grades A*-C	Average	Below average
Average points score	Below average	Below average

13. These results are a little higher than in 2000 but the rate of improvement, as measured over the last four years, is lower than that of other schools nationally. The gap between the average point score at The Cottesloe School and other schools nationally as measured over the last four years is widening. The school met its (modest) target of 41 per cent of students attaining five or more grades A*-C, but failed to meet its target of 95 per cent of students attaining five or more grades A*-G. Comparing students' average points score at the end of Year 9 with the score they attained at the end of Year 11 suggests that between 1999 and 2001, although achievement is satisfactory overall, too many students achieved below what could be reasonably expected. Progress overall, from Year 7 to Year 11, is satisfactory.

14. In English nearly two thirds (62 per cent) of all students attain grade C and above (girls do slightly better) and in 2000 and 2001 all attained grade G and above. Nearly all students in Year 11 take English literature, and the percentage attaining grades A*-C is consistently above average. Students achieve satisfactorily in comparison with their attainment at age 14, but make good progress in relation to their standards when they entered the school. Mathematics results are below average (particularly for girls in 2001): they have declined over the last four years with the exception of 2001, which saw a reversal of this trend (significant developments in this department are described in paragraphs 121, 122 and 123). This contributed to the relative decline in the overall points score at GCSE. Although achievement in mathematics is satisfactory by the age of 16 in relation to students' prior attainment when they entered the school, progress from age 14 to age 16 is unsatisfactory. This is because staffing difficulties have not been managed well by the department and this has had a detrimental effect on older students. In 2001, attainment at grades A*-C in science was broadly in line with national averages and this represents satisfactory achievement. Here, attainment overall is held back because too few students are entered for the double award GCSE in science. As well as depressing the science results, this is a major reason why the GCSE average points score for the school is not as high as it should be.

15. Another reason why the schools' average points score is below average is that students at The Cottesloe School only take on average 7.9 subjects at GCSE compared to 9 in schools nationally. These and other curriculum weaknesses which are holding back standards are developed in paragraphs 53 and 54.

16. In art and design, GCSE results in 2001 showed a sharp drop to well below average because of the unavoidable absence of both permanent members of staff for most of the year. Overall GCSE results in design and technology in 2001 were a little above average but were held back by difficulties caused by the long-term absence of key members of staff. Geography standards have risen since last summer but are still below national averages as are those in history. Standards in ICT are too low because students are not following an examination course and some of the work is too easy for higher-attaining students. Consequently, standards at the end of Year 11 are below national expectations. Attainment in French in the GCSE examinations, is above the national average and above the average for the school but is not as high as it could be because students do not have enough curriculum time in Years 7 to 9 and consequently have to make up lost time. In German, the proportion of students gaining grades A*-C was below the national and the school average for this reason. The percentage of students who gained A*-C grades in physical education in the 2001 GCSE examinations was well below the national average because students had no dedicated GCSE lessons but were taught with students not entering the examination in their statutory curriculum time.

17. There are two main reasons for the variability in standards between subjects. Firstly, the school has faced some quite severe staffing difficulties over the last four years. Although the situation has now stabilised, the disruption to teaching in some subjects (mathematics, design and technology, art and design, history, geography, music and religious education) is still being felt amongst the older students. Secondly, the school recognises that weaknesses in its curriculum, particularly in Years 10 and 11, are holding back standards, especially in ICT, modern foreign languages, religious education and physical education. This explains why overall, the quality of teaching and learning seen was good, whilst achievement was only satisfactory.

18. The school analyses its results carefully to highlight any significant difference between boys and girls or teaching groups but not by ethnic groups. Direct observation of work however, shows that the very few ethnic minority students do just as well as others, and sometimes better.

19. Standards seen during the inspection in Years 10 and 11 are:

Well above average.	Drama.
Above average.	Art and design.
Average.	Design and technology, history, physical education.
Below average.	Geography, ICT, modern foreign languages, music, religious education.

Progress and achievement in Years 10 and 11 are:

Well above average.	Drama.
Above average.	Art and design, geography, history, physical education.
Average.	Design and technology, modern foreign languages, music.
Below average.	Information and communication technology, religious education.

20. The fact that overall standards in literacy are only average has a significant impact on all other subjects. Many students lack a sophisticated vocabulary and use too much colloquial language in formal speaking. Students' use of language is encouraged across all subjects. Students make brief contributions to question and answer sessions, but are not adept at giving a sustained response. Listening skills are good. They are nurtured in most subjects, and by the school's determination to instill respect. Students understand the importance of listening to each other and by the end of Year 9 they willingly share their views, without being prompted. High attaining GCSE students communicate their ideas clearly. Improving reading remains a high priority and good use is made of key words in all subjects. In history, key words are particularly well used to reinforce students understanding and to extend their vocabulary. In this way, students are beginning to acquire the vocabulary to work independently on texts. High attaining Year 9 geography students successfully tackled a novel by Isabel Allende competently. By the end of Year 11, average and low attaining students read, enjoy and interpret GCSE texts at a reasonable level. Many students have average writing skills. In too many subjects, the opportunities for extended writing remains limited and marking of students work does not help to support the development of writing.

21. Students enter the school with average standards of numeracy and the development of numeracy skills through the school is satisfactory. The Key Stage 3 strategy has been successfully introduced. Spatial awareness is developed well in art and design and fractions and mental arithmetic is encouraged in physical education.

22. The use of ICT by other subjects does not meet the requirements of the law, and so standards are below average. The school does not know what skills students have because they do not map out how other subjects make contributions to ICT. Students develop word processing skills in English but not all students use data logging in science and there is no computer-aided design in art and design and design and technology.

23. The attainment and progress of boys and girls varies significantly in particular subjects. The school has provided training for all staff on improving boys' standards. In English and history, for example, action is being taken to increase the standards boys attain but in modern languages and design and technology, action has not yet been taken. The progress made by older disaffected students is monitored and the school seeks to provide an appropriate curriculum for the needs of this small number of students. Students with special needs and the gifted and talented make as good progress as do their peers. No students with English as an additional language are at an early stage of English language acquisition, and this small group of students make similar progress to their peers.

Sixth Form

24. Students attain standards which are in line with the national average in their examination courses overall. Standards have risen from those reported at the time of the last inspection and there has been a rising trend in attainment over time. However, there are very small numbers of students on each course thus making comparisons with national averages, both past and present, difficult to discern.

25. In 2000, 8 students entered for less than two GCE Advanced Levels or Advance Supplementary (AS) equivalent and averaged 3 points each compared with a national average of 2.7. In 2000, 13 students entered for two or more GCE Advanced Levels or AS equivalent averaged 9 points in comparison with a national average of 18. Students entered for advanced vocational qualifications in 2000 scored 7 points, just below the national average. Female students attained higher results than their male counterparts in A Level courses but the results of male students were nearer to the national average in vocational courses. In 2001 standards attained in all subjects, except science, geography, history, biology and art, were at least in line with the national average and above in leisure and

tourism, English literature and business. Overall the number of higher grades attained was low. The differences in results between subjects and the number of higher grades attained were due mainly to the below average attainment of students entering the courses.

26. The standard of work of present students is in line with the national average overall. Attainment is well above in business education. It is above in English, design and technology and leisure and tourism. Students' attainment is in line with the national average in ICT, sports studies and art. The overall attainment of students on entry to the Sixth Form is below the national average based on their GCSE points score. There is open access to the Sixth Form, so not all students attained highly in their GCSE examinations at the end of Year 11. The majority of students, including those with special educational needs, achieve well in their time in the Sixth Form. In 2001, most students attained above their predicted scores based on GCSE points score compared to national averages.

27. In 2002, 94 per cent of students who started the year have remained in the Sixth Form. In 2001, the majority of students who embarked on a Sixth Form course completed it either in Year 12 or Year 13. 42 per cent of students continued their studies to higher education (including those taking art Foundation Courses) and 32 per cent went into further education (including training for the police force).

28. No key skills in numeracy, communications or ICT were being taught at the time of the inspection. Plans for the development of these and general studies feature in the Sixth Form action plan.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

- * Students' attitudes to school are good.
- * Behaviour is good.
- * Students' personal development and relationships are good.
- * Attendance is satisfactory and is close to the national average.

29. Parents agree that attitudes to school are generally good and students show great enthusiasm for learning. For example, in a Year 11 history lesson looking at the Russian purges students made many varied contributions to the discussion. The same year group in an art lesson volunteered very good and interesting ideas, and worked productively. Extra-curricular clubs, especially in sport, are well attended. Physical education lessons in general generate hugely positive attitudes and responses.

30. Behaviour in and around school is also good, with a few lapses. In a mathematics lesson, Year 11 students with special educational needs tried very hard and responded well to the teacher's encouragement to apply their knowledge of numeracy to real-life scale plans. In corridors, students hold doors open for each other and for visitors; school and personal property is safe, although there is some minor graffiti in a few places. In a few cases classroom behaviour is less than satisfactory. For example in Year 9 French lesson, looking at visits to the cinema, some students made little effort, Year 8 students in a religious studies lesson showed an underlying lack of respect and in music some students, especially boys, had little inclination to listen to the teacher. Such behaviour is often, but not always, linked to lacklustre teaching.

31. Caring and supportive relationships are strengths of the school. Year 9 for example, in a physical education lesson on rugby mauls, were supportive of one another, willing to help sort out their friends' techniques and all participated well. Students with special needs, and the very few ethnic minority students, are well integrated into the life of the school. Students themselves say the school is warm and friendly. There is little evidence of oppressive behaviour, and although minor bullying occurs, students say it is quickly dealt with. However

they do not always reflect on their behaviour or its impact on others. Some Year 11 students in a design and technology lesson, for example, had some dogmatic and inflexible opinions, showing little consideration of the views of other students. Assembly themes were not, in general, well recalled by students. Although in general they show respect for their teachers, there were occasions where far too many requests to listen were ignored, and on occasion boys dominated the class. Sometimes there is a simple lack of awareness, as in a Year 10 lesson on leisure and tourism where students equated 'Jewish' with 'non-English' and showed little understanding of other cultures or religions.

32. Where they can students are keen to take responsibility and show initiative. For example they act as receptionists in Year 9 or assistant librarians in Year 10. There is also a 'buddy' system linking selected Year 10 and 11 students with younger age groups. However apart from some work for charity there is not much opportunity for personal development or independent study and this is an area that could fruitfully be developed.

33. Attendance is satisfactory at 91.6 per cent (slightly better than the national average) although in Year 11 it dips to 89.5 per cent. Many of this year group have a relaxed attitude to attendance, for example starting their study leave early. Unauthorised absence is average at 1.1 per cent. Exclusions last year were of 14 girls and 19 boys, all fixed-term, which is low in comparison to local schools and to the national average.

34. The school monitors incidents of racial harassment and responds appropriately to the occasional incidents. In the lessons seen, students had positive attitudes towards each other and no groups of students were excluded from participating in any lessons or other activities. Students are respected by teachers, and students report that their teachers and the matron are very accessible and helpful. The school provides specialist counselling for particular students.

Sixth Form

35. Reviews of students' work take place in individual subject areas but the head of the Sixth Form does not monitor or measure students' overall progress and personal development. Staffing shortages have limited the time available to interview students and also to complete the personal, social and health education programme.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

- * In all years teaching is good.
- * Learning is good in all years.

36. The quality of teaching has improved markedly since the last inspection. It was satisfactory or better in 95 per cent of lessons observed during the inspection: 63 per cent was good or better, including 21 per cent which was very good and five lessons when it was excellent (excellent lessons were seen in: English, drama and geography). The percentage of good teaching was similar in all years which was reflected in the quality of learning as well. Almost 25 per cent of teaching was very good in Years 10 and 11. Teaching was unsatisfactory in one information and communication technology (ICT) lesson, two French and three music lessons, and one science lesson.

37. Teaching was particularly effective (good in over 80 per cent of lessons seen) in art and design, English, drama, geography, history, physical education and science. Teachers have good knowledge and understanding of their subjects which they share well. Apart from one Year 9 lesson, which was spoiled by a few difficult students, teachers confidently and successfully taught lessons outside their main specialism.

38. Teachers' planning is good overall, with good schemes of work established. Examples of exemplary planning which accelerated students' learning were seen in English, drama, history, geography and science. Students learn basic art skills very well because the schemes of work are methodical and well planned. Teachers have recently focused on sharing the objectives for lessons, making it quite clear what students are meant to learn. Just occasionally too long is spent doing this rather than grabbing students' interest and moving on fast. With students who find it difficult to concentrate, the first few minutes can set the tone of the lesson.

39. In one Year 11 French lesson, too long was spent describing the topic title, rather than its relevance and interest. Many science lessons start with good snappy introductions and explanations, which establishes the pace effectively. Drama teachers are good at sensing when to change the pace of a lesson, but music and ICT lessons did not contain enough different activities to keep interest and attention alive. Mathematics lessons incorporating the Key Stage 3 Strategy are effective because at least three different activities take place. Students particularly enjoy the mental mathematics sessions (which they are used to from primary school). History and many geography lessons are brought alive by the teachers' very good use of material which is in the news

40. For The Cottesloe School students, the relevance of school to real life is particularly important. When they can see the point of a topic they are far more likely to acquire knowledge and skills, and to be productive. Hence the effort many students made in the following example lessons:

- * English - discussing humour and gender issues after reading *Twelfth Night*;
- * drama - where questions were linked to television characters in soap operas;
- * design and technology - designing a game/quiz;
- * humanities - following a unit of work on stereotyping;
- * ICT - downloading images from a NASA satellite;
- * personal, social and health education - discussing issues related to punishment;
- * science - investigating the use of different substances.

41. Not only do teachers make clear their high expectations of what students can achieve (which they do better in Years 7 to 9 than higher up the school), they also share with students examples of work at different levels, and give guidance about how to achieve them. This is directly linked with students' understanding what levels they are at, how they are learning and what they need to do to improve. This happens well in English, French and history but less so in mathematics, ICT and religious education.

42. How successfully teachers control behaviour has a direct impact on the content of the lesson and on how students learn. In a calm atmosphere, valuable discussions can take place and several such lessons were seen in English, drama, history, geography and design and technology. When behaviour is a problem, teachers resort to handing out worksheets, or lack confidence to involve students more fully in the lesson for example in a minority of science and music lessons.

43. All teachers are aware of the importance of developing students' literacy and numeracy skills but some subjects, for example history, pursue literacy and numeracy with particular determination having incorporated them into their schemes of work. Writing frames are used successfully in geography and in history. Most classrooms contain

displays of key specialist vocabulary, although these could be referred to more often. Insufficient discussion in music holds back students' speaking skills. Students are not always reminded of the work they have covered in mathematics, so that they can remember how to draw graphs and what scales to use.

44. It is clear that students' concentration and interest is directly linked to the quality of teaching, but there are already signs, particularly in Years 10 and 11, that students are beginning to work independently. Students on the design and technology general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) course show considerable perseverance and independence as this course appeals to them. Several teachers lack confidence to use ICT in their subjects (partly because they have so little opportunity) but those that do so regularly, particularly in English, usually have successful lessons.

45. Teachers set homework regularly but some subjects consider its content more carefully than others. Particularly well prepared homework is set in English, history and geography. Helpful comments about how to improve work are given in English but not enough specific guidance is given in mathematics. Most teachers are now using marking and assessment data more constructively than at the time of the last inspection. However, some teachers are not using it enough to determine when it is best to teach certain topics, how to adapt material for individual students, how to help students to revise, or whether topics should be repeated because pupils have not fully grasped it.

46. Teaching in tutor time also contributes to aspects of students' learning and personal development but is very variable in its quality. The great majority of tutors use the time productively, covering things such as issues raised in assemblies and personal, social and health education, reminders about standards of behaviour, checks on homework diaries and targets, and discussion about students' concerns or achievements. During the inspection some excellent examples of valuable tutor time were seen:

- * students working in groups to think about aspects of the environment;
- * discussing students' self esteem and personal qualities;
- * students making considered and mature comments on the nature of news as they looked at extracts of different types of newspapers;
- * discussing the arrival of a new student and what the group could do to be welcoming;
- * defining and expanding on words students had heard in the news recently;
- * checking that students had all the right materials for the day and explaining why organisation is so important;
- * working on a word search sheet which reinforced several key words related to numeracy.

47. Provision for students with special educational needs is very good and students with special educational needs make good progress. The younger special educational needs students have very good access to ICT where many use a programme specifically designed to develop their skills in literacy and numeracy. This too is well managed by the teaching assistants. Gifted and talented students are clearly identified and the department is working with others to cater for these students.

Sixth Form

48. Teaching is good overall. In 76 per cent of the 21 lessons seen during the inspection, the quality of teaching was good or better. In 19 per cent of lessons, teaching was very good including one excellent lesson. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen. Teaching was good or better in all but one subject with particularly high proportions of very good teaching in English. Teaching is better than at the time of the previous inspection, especially in the amount of very good teaching.

49. The structure, pace and challenge of lessons are strong features of teaching in the Sixth Form. Teachers have very good subject expertise that is shared very effectively with students, enabling wide gains in subject knowledge. In sports studies, for example, a member of the science department teaches some of the scientific units of the course. Skilful questioning and group discussion in many subjects especially in design and technology and sports studies promotes deeper understanding and helps students to learn better. Good records of students' progress are kept by their teachers and in vocational subjects very good constructive feedback is given to help students improve their assignments. However, students are often unaware of their target grades, for example, in design and technology.

50. Teachers plan very well and use the available resources effectively. In English, planning always includes a starter activity that focuses on aspects of language and a plenary section. As a result of this good planning students make good gains in knowledge and understanding of their subjects and their work is well organised. In all subjects opportunities are planned to develop students' independent learning and research skills. Teachers encourage independent research by encouraging students to investigate topics and then present their findings to the class. Examples of this good practice were seen in English and sports studies during the inspection. However, the lack of access to computers and the Internet has an adverse impact on the development of students' independent learning skills. In business education this limits students' means of researching company information.

51. The very positive relationship between staff and students adds to the effectiveness of lessons. In business education there is a high level of mutual respect. In English literature the teachers have established a good working relationship with their students and in sports studies much learning is a result of controversial and open discussion.

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

- The quality and range of learning opportunities are satisfactory.
- The appropriate statutory curriculum is not fully in place.
- Provision for students' spiritual, including moral, social and cultural development is good.

52. Overall, the school offers a satisfactory range and balance of subjects but there are some important breaches of statutory requirements. The provision for students with special educational needs is good, as are the strategies for teaching literacy skills. The range of extra-curricular activities is satisfactory and all students have equal access to the whole of the curriculum. All students start two modern foreign languages. Personal, social and health education is satisfactory, but the provision for careers education is good and includes work experience in Year 10. Links with the community and partner institutions are both satisfactory.

53. In Years 7 to 9, in addition to the subjects of the national curriculum and religious education, the school offers drama and a second modern foreign language for all. Although all students have a period of information and communication technology (ICT) each week, National Curriculum requirements are not met in that ICT is not incorporated into the teaching and learning of other subjects of the curriculum. In music, the statutory requirement for regular opportunities for singing is not met. Although all students take French and German initially, the arrangements for this are unsatisfactory. Both languages

are taught in the time normally allocated for one. The alternation of languages breaks the continuity of learning, and after three years students have the equivalent of less than two years' experience in either language. Consequently standards are below average at the end of Year 9 in both subjects.

54. In Years 10 and 11, students follow a programme of compulsory and optional courses, to a total of seven subjects, eight for those taking dual-award science. The school offers two vocational courses, in leisure and tourism and in business studies, both, unusually, to the Intermediate Level of General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ). National Curriculum requirements are not met in three areas. Information and communication technology (ICT) and religious education are taught in rotation and the time allowed is insufficient to meet the requirements of either subject. A modern foreign language is not taught to all students and the two-thirds of the year group who do not take either French or German have not formally been disapplied. Currently, all students are allocated six periods for science but a number use only four periods and take single-award science and use the remaining periods for option support. This is not a good use of the time. Far more students should take dual-award science. The arrangements for physical education are unsatisfactory. Currently, those taking the GCSE course are taught alongside those taking the core course; the requirements of the two courses are different and neither is met adequately.

55. The new leadership team is aware of the shortcomings in the curriculum and is formulating plans to overcome them.

56. The provision for careers education is good. A detailed programme has been worked out for Years 7 to 11, with particular emphasis on Years 9 to 11. The course is taught mainly by form tutors, with input from the head of careers and the careers service. The school has a service agreement with the county careers service for one half-day per week. All students in Year 10 spend two weeks on work experience. They either arrange their own placements or placements are found by the Aylesbury business partnership; in both cases these are checked to ensure that they meet safety and insurance requirements. Students on work experience are visited by the careers co-ordinator or members of staff. Students completing a logbook to a sufficiently high standard can gain gold, silver or bronze certificates awarded by the business partnership.

57. The distance that many students have to travel and the short lunch hour limit the number and range of extra-curricular activities. Nevertheless, sporting activity is strong. A range of sports is offered, and teams and individuals are successful in local and regional competitions. Apart from art and regular drama productions, the cultural life of the school is poor, and there is little extra-curricular music. Few interest clubs are offered apart from mini-bridge, though many students take part in the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme. Learning support offered in many subjects, particularly in the spring and summer terms.

58. The school has good links with feeder primary schools. The head of Year 7, who remains constant rather than moving up with the year group, has built up a strong relationship with them; she knows the schools well, visits them and collects valuable information. The transfer and induction arrangements are very good. The design and technology department has established good curriculum links. Relations with other secondary schools are limited, although a link has now been formed with a Beacon school some distance away, which it is hoped will prove useful. For a number of years, the school has had links with a special school in nearby Wingrave. The school is part of the local community, which makes use of its facilities for clubs, sports, courses and drama. Students visit residential care homes for the elderly and take part in fund-raising events for local and national charities.

59. All students with special educational needs are fully involved in the activities of the school. The special educational needs department also arranges many activities for students with special educational needs. These are an outstanding features of the department and a strength of the school. They include support in managing anxiety, for fostering social skills, and in anti-bullying. The teaching assistants, who are well qualified, make a significant contribution to this work, taking direct responsibility for certain courses.

60. Positive attitudes are promoted through the curriculum and general life of the school. There are weaknesses in the curriculum which disadvantage large numbers of students and not just particular groups of students. The school has effective strategies for teaching the basic skills of literacy and numeracy, but not those of ICT. These weaknesses result in the curriculum not meeting the interest and particular needs of all students. The school has sound policies for equality of opportunity and social inclusion. About one third of the Year 9 students have a very good opportunity to learn about people with disabilities through working in a special school as part of their personal, social and health education course.

61. Overall provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is good. An insufficient focus on embedding the school policy and an audit of current activities inhibits the sharing of good practice.

62. Provision for spiritual development is satisfactory. A few departments make a positive contribution. Students in history reflect on the medieval church and spiritual values. Art enables students to interpret questions about life and death when sketching life in the First World War trenches or through their work on the Holocaust. Year 11 geography students consider that they are given opportunities to respect themselves and others. In other subjects, such as science, opportunities for moments of awe and wonder are missed when students study the solar system or birth. Too little curriculum time reduces the capacity of religious education to explore deeply the quest of man for meaning, purpose and identity. Assemblies are not good at promoting spiritual development. As at the time of the last inspection, the statutory requirement for a daily act of collective worship is not met although inadequate accommodation makes this difficult.

63. Students' moral education is good. Many subjects effectively support considerations of right and wrong. The personal, social and health education programme explores a range of issues such as crime and students in religious education debate a number of moral dilemmas such as abortion. Fascism is directly explored in history lessons. In science, students consider issues such as intensive farming and genetic engineering. Information and communication technology (ICT) provides opportunities for students to present projects that consider the moral implications of animal testing. Physical education teachers inculcate ideas of fair play and sportsmanship. Whole school policies stress correct conduct. The behaviour management policy highlights right and wrong attitudes and behaviour and this is reinforced by a credit system that rewards good responses. Parents state that the school promotes strong moral values during the drug education programme and drama lessons when students act out conflict. Clear values that encourage students to consider others are promoted. Consequently, there is strong support for school run charities such as Children in Need.

64. Participation in these activities also enhances social development, which is good. There are many opportunities to collaborate in music, drama and sport where students react as part of a group and learn to rely on each other. Co-operative work in pairs or small groups is a feature of many lessons. A range of extra-curricular activities helps students to achieve success in a variety of social settings, thereby enhancing self-esteem and facilitating personal development. An extensive display of the students' art has the same result. Students have access to a counselling service to help them overcome difficulties. The school successfully creates the conditions that allow students to develop social awareness and skills, with good relationships a key aspect of this provision.

65. The development of cultural awareness is good. A range of visits to theatre, museums and galleries contribute to broadening cultural horizons, as does the extra curricular programme. Work experience provides opportunities to be involved with the local community. There are strong links with the youth worker of the local church. The curriculum is good at increasing an understanding of cultures from a different time or place. Students learn about Aboriginal, African and Chinese art. They study the history of Black Americans. Religious education teaches the beliefs of the main faith communities with due regard to modern developments. The English department organises a good display on living in multi - cultural Britain Overall however, students are not provided with a very good range of experiences that will enable them to recognise and comprehend the challenges faced by communities in a multi - ethnic society. Although modern language students learn about 'guest workers' in Germany and French North Africans, there are too few opportunities for students to consider the economic, social and cultural impact of the diverse ethnic groups who live in Britain.

Sixth Form

66. The small number of students in this open-access Sixth Form, limits the subjects that can be offered. Nevertheless the curriculum fully meets the needs of the school's Sixth Form students and provides opportunities for those who, otherwise, would not continue their education post 16. In addition to nine AS Level courses, the school runs courses in NVQ football, GNVQ business, leisure and tourism and ICT and Business Technology Education Council (BTEC) sports studies. Nevertheless, the statutory requirement to teach religious education is not met, the quality of personal, social and health education taught in tutor time is uneven and little is provided in the way of enrichment activities. Sixth-form work experience in Year 12 is organised through business, leisure and sports studies courses. The careers section in the library is extensive and up to date, and students have access to careers software.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

- * Procedures to provide for students' educational and personal support are good.
- * There are good procedures for child protection and for ensuring students' welfare.
- * The use of assessment information to help teachers plan the next steps in learning is unsatisfactory.

67. The school has a strong pastoral system and has maintained close personal attention to students despite its recent expansion. There is a particular strength in the variety and depth of support offered, which parents recognise. Academic assessment, like much else in the school, varies greatly across departments but is just satisfactory overall. It has not improved greatly since the last inspection. Nearly all students come in with test results from the national assessments taken at primary school and are given further baseline tests on entry. Together with interim assessments, staff are beginning to use this information to predict scores in Year 9 national assessments and also at GCSE Level. The aim is for each child to do an assessed piece of work each half term which generates targets for improvement. However there is considerable variability in practice.

68. In English, it is very good. There is a common approach to marking, and thorough and detailed tracking systems which inform planning. The department produces 'misconceptions and mistakes' sheets which are then used to adjust the curriculum taught. In science students are tested frequently and their levels matched against target grades; students all know where they are. However the department is not yet informing students well enough about how to improve: the data they hold is not yet ready to enable them to modify the curriculum. Modern foreign languages also do regular assessments and track

students' progress closely, as do the history department. However in mathematics, assessment is unsatisfactory because it is so inconsistent in record keeping, grading of work and marking homework. In information and communication technology (ICT) inconsistent practice means that assessment booklets are not linked closely to normal classwork. There are weaknesses also in religious education; in other areas such as music and art, staff have a reasonable knowledge of students' abilities but do not use it to improve their standards. For these reasons the use of assessment to inform planning is overall judged unsatisfactory.

69. Support for children with special needs is good. They are quickly identified and given individual education plans which also contain suggestions for parents. An unusually wide range of help is offered to students such as help for underachieving boys, bereavement counselling, anger management, stress reduction and even extended education plans for gifted and talented students. Students are well guided and supported through option choices for GCSE and the Sixth Form, and their parents are involved too. Suitable guidance is given on careers in a format appropriate to the age group, and work experience placements are closely monitored. If pastoral tutors pick up concerns about students underachieving in Year 11, they offer help and mentoring, although its results are not yet being closely monitored. Child protection procedures are satisfactory. The deputy head teacher (Pastoral) is the designated officer and staff work closely together through the pastoral system. Their good knowledge of students means that concerns are quickly picked up and dealt with.

70. The management of behaviour is generally good. Students all understand and follow the code of conduct (with occasional lapses), 'Praise' or 'concern' sheets are used to inform parents throughout the year, and form tutors also collate information from departments to produce three targets for improvement (which may be academic or behavioural). However not all departments contribute to these interim assessments. A system of rewards and sanctions is fully understood by students: for good behaviour and achievement there are credits, certificates and celebration assemblies; less positive behaviour or effort may culminate in internal exclusion to a special room. This appears successful in that many students only go once or twice. Students and their parents agree that any bullying is quickly sorted out. The form tutor system is also used to address pastoral matters, though this is variable in practice. In the best cases tutors discuss subjects and homework with students and monitor their individual targets, but at the other extreme students simply chat or waste time.

71. The programme for personal, social and health education is variable in how it is taught. Major areas such as drugs education, contraception, careers and friendship are covered as they should be, but the current system of having most such lessons in form time inevitably places time constraints on what can be achieved.

72. The procedures for monitoring attendance are satisfactory. The school uses a computerised system and latecomers must check in at the front desk. A first-day response is made to certain students and parents are regularly reminded of the importance of attendance; holidays, for example, are not authorised at all. However both in the Sixth Form and in Year 11 there are some anomalies between published figures and the situation in classes-some students appear to take time off on a casual basis. Though the school is not able to enlist the help of the education welfare officer for Year 11, it could monitor attendance more closely.

73. In general the school is a warm and caring environment for students despite its recent expansion, staff have not lost touch with the need to care for individuals. A thorough induction programme for Year 7 smoothes the path into secondary education. Students are treated with respect and consideration, and all feel there is someone they can turn to. The school matron is an invaluable asset, dealing with matters of first aid, running some

sessions in personal, social and health education lessons and maintaining student records. She also acts as an unofficial 'listening ear' for troubled students and offers a sanctuary in her room, for example for a student recovering from a debilitating illness to rest. Safe working practices are observed in practical subjects such as design and technology and science, and there is sensible management of risk assessment.

74. Provision of social facilities for students is poor. There is nowhere pleasant to eat their packed lunches apart from the overcrowded hall, few places to sit and no protection from heavy rain. Toilet facilities are not always up to the standard required. Some staff allow students to use form rooms at lunchtime, others do not, resulting in an unacceptably wide variation of experience. Large groups of students were observed standing outside in the rain, or hanging around the overcrowded corridors; a number of budding romances are conducted very openly with no comment from staff although plenty from the (mostly male) observers.

Sixth Form

Assessment

75. The systems for assessing students' attainment and progress in subjects are good. Students all feel they have a good knowledge of where they are up to; teachers willingly discuss progress, predict grades and set appropriate targets. Procedures for systematically monitoring overall progress are in place but not yet being fully implemented. Due to staffing shortages the head of Sixth Form has not been able to carry out all the student review interviews planned and has therefore limited them to those students experiencing difficulties.

Advice, support and guidance

76. The quality of educational support and guidance provided in the Sixth Form is sound. Students confirm that the supportive atmosphere and good relationships with staff help them to achieve well. The school provides good induction procedures which ensure students select appropriately from the courses offered. The Sixth Form brochure is well laid out and offers guidance on such matters as 'Life in the Sixth Form' and detailed course outlines. The majority of Sixth Form students move on from Year 11 and are well guided by their tutors, whose close personal knowledge of their students enables them to offer good advice, for example by offering each one an individual interview to discuss choices before taking GCSE examinations. The programme for personal, social and health education is satisfactory but varies in how it is taught: staff illness has also affected it. Students feel some areas such as drugs awareness and careers guidance are useful and relevant, but other topics less so. Monitoring of attendance is somewhat relaxed and would benefit from a more rigorous approach: for example, some students negotiate time off individually and the main office does not always know this. In an emergency there could be some confusion over who is actually on site.

77. Students feel, and the inspection team agrees, that the Sixth Form area is too small, and they do not have exclusive access to it. There is a singular lack of quiet study areas and no dedicated computers. Students may use the machines when free but this often means sitting in with other classes.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

- * The parents' views of the school and the effectiveness of the schools' links with parents are satisfactory.
- * The impact of parents' involvement on the work of the school is satisfactory.

78. Parents' views of the school are mixed. About 40 per cent of parents returned questionnaires and 48 came to the pre-inspection parents' meeting. Nearly all felt their children are happy at school and are making good progress, due to the good teaching they receive. They feel the school has high expectations for their children and is trying to help them become mature and responsible adults. Some parents of children with special educational needs also praised highly the support they receive.

79. However there were a number of concerns expressed, some quite forcibly. They chiefly complain of inconsistencies, in standards achieved and expected, (for example in mathematics), in behaviour management and in relationships with the school. A sizeable minority felt behaviour was not always good, and mentioned such examples as smoking and bullying on the buses home. Although there was some disruptive or thoughtless behaviour in lessons, the inspection found little evidence to support this view overall. About 30 per cent of respondents said the school did not provide an interesting range of activities, and that homework was inconsistently set and marked. The inspection found these criticisms to be justified.

80. A large number of parents felt the school was approachable, but a substantial minority complained of the information they received, especially about progress. The inspection found some evidence to support this view, in that pastoral staff work very hard to keep in touch with parents (for example through regular 'surgeries') but the new format of parents' evening, when parents saw only form tutors rather than subject teachers, has not been wholly successful. In addition, annual reports to parents are unsatisfactory because they do not contain enough information about what students know, understand and can do. Some subject teachers tell students how they can improve, but many do not give clear guidance. Design and technology reports, however, are commended as being very thorough and helpful. Such good practice could be shared with advantage.

81. There is also some inconsistency in the written material provided for parents. The prospectus and Sixth Form brochure are both full and detailed - the former professionally produced. However the governors' annual report to parents lacks several statutory items, such as national assessments in Year 9 or the next election of parent governors. There are regular newsletters, and pastoral staff send home information, often on special postcards, about achievements and also concerns. Homework diaries are often, but not always, used well to communicate with home. The special educational needs co-ordinator is very proactive in forging links with parents and there is a high turnout for annual reviews.

82. In general parents are very supportive of the school - they willingly come in to discuss support for behaviour, for tutor-parent reviews and to drama performances. A number of parents also help the physical education department with coaching and extra-curricular sport. There is an active parent-teacher association.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

- * The leadership of this effective school, by the headteacher and key staff, is good.
- * The school monitors and evaluates its performance satisfactorily and takes effective action.
- * The strategic use of resources, including specific grant and other funding is very good.
- * The principles of best value are applied satisfactorily and the school provides satisfactory value for money.

83. The dedicated headteacher works extremely hard and delivers excellent leadership. She has galvanized the school and this has undoubtedly contributed to the improved atmosphere and higher attainment of students. Upon her arrival in January of this year, she immediately embarked on a programme to ascertain the school's strengths and weaknesses. To this end, every teacher was observed teaching and all were invited to an individual discussion with the head and their views fed into the interim school improvement plan. Through the head teachers' greater visibility around the school and much improved communication between the leadership team and staff, a much stronger shared commitment to succeed has been created. Staff are beginning to believe in themselves and what they can achieve for the school and its students. The head teacher has succeeded entirely in sharing her vision of where the school is going with staff and has won their support in helping her realise it. This vision is very well expressed in the school improvement plan, which is entirely appropriate with its twin emphases on raising attainment and improving teaching and learning. Thus the headteacher, with very good support from the recently appointed and expanded senior management team, has succeeded in establishing a community which, whilst being proud of what has been achieved to date, is aware that much more needs to be done.

84. As a way of finding out exactly what was happening around the school, and to focus the senior management team on their roles and responsibilities, the headteacher is developing systematic and rigorous self-evaluation. She, senior and middle managers report regularly on their progress related to all aspects of school life. Having established a culture of accountability, the focus of this monitoring, particularly by the senior management team, is now, rightly, being directed to working with individual departments to improve standards. With such systems in place the school can now build on its strengths and focus on eliminating areas of weakness in some subjects.

85. The overall quality of leadership at middle management level is variable and is overall just satisfactory. Leadership and management are very good in English and drama: good in art and design, design and technology, geography, history and modern foreign languages: satisfactory in science and unsatisfactory in mathematics, information and communication technology (ICT), music and religious education. Most heads of departments have established clear educational direction for the work of their departments and some monitor standards effectively. This good practice is not shared by all, however. Standards are improving fastest in departments where there the head of department provides a clear direction for the subject, motivates colleagues, monitors teaching and spreads good practice. These have been important factors in raising attainment in English, drama, geography and history. Where weaknesses exist, the monitoring of the work of the subject is unsatisfactory and the deployment of staff is not well managed. More time needs to be given to middle managers for them to carry out their roles as quality assurance managers, thus ensuring that good teaching and learning are consistently achieved in their departments. Although there is some developing good practice, for example in English, assessment is not used consistently across the school to monitor standards, to set targets for improvement or to support the planning of the teaching.

86. The governing body has a very good working knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses and has played an influential part in working with the new head teacher and senior managers to create a strong strategic direction for the school. Giving freely of their time, they have developed frequent informal contacts with staff at all levels, together with a programme of more formal subject reviews and presentations, ensure that governors understand clearly the challenges that face the school. They play an active role in monitoring and supporting its work and have intervened when underachieving departments have been identified. They provide very clear direction by working closely with the senior management team to identify areas for development and to set targets for improvement. The school has fully exploited the professional strengths and experience of the governors, (for instance, the chair of the personnel committee is a human resource professional) and has realised their potential contribution to strategic planning. They are well aware of how well students are doing compared to those in similar schools, and of the progress they are making.

87. A number of statutory requirements are not fulfilled. Not all pupils in Years 10 and 11 receive their entitlement to ICT, and ICT is not taught effectively across all subjects. The school does not ensure a regular daily act of collective worship. Governors do not assess how effective their spending is in helping to raise standards.

88. Financial planning is very good. This planning benefits from the contribution of the senior manager's expertise to the financial management of the school. The school manages its enhanced budget, additional funds and grants well, particularly to secure improvement in staffing. The focus of recent budget decisions rightly, has been addressed to reducing the school's deficit, which means that resources for learning remain modest. The school applies the principles of best value. It consistently applies the principles of comparison, challenge and competition but it does not have a system for consulting parents over major changes in the allocation of resources, nor does it have a mechanism to evaluate the impact of its spending decisions upon standards in the classroom. The specific grants the school attracts are spent appropriately. Some of the funding for special educational needs helps to maintain small group sizes particularly for lower attaining classes. The costs of running this averaged-sized school are high.

89. Routine administration of the school's budget is good. The school makes effective use of new technology to monitor spending against the budget and to provide accurate up-to-date information. There are well-defined procedures to ensure best value purchasing. Routine administration is very efficient and ensures that the school runs smoothly.

90. The current school improvement plan includes targets to improve inclusion, and these targets are being successfully achieved. The school monitors the attainment of different groups of students, including boys and girls, and is taking action to raise the attainment of boys. There has been satisfactory improvement in provision for equality of opportunity since the last inspection as there is a stronger emphasis on academic aspects of personal development, sound lesson planning for students of different levels of attainment, and teachers no longer rely too heavily on teaching assistants to support students with special educational needs. The school's mission statements emphasises inclusion and the experience and development of all students in the schools. However, the school's policies and procedures for students with special educational needs and the gifted and talented are not consistently implemented by all subject departments. Overall, there is good provision for inclusion; the main weakness in provision is the lack of consistency in implementation of policies between different departments.

91. Accommodation is satisfactory. There has been a considerable building programme since the last inspection and the issues highlighted have been largely corrected. The 'limited' facilities reported at that time have been remedied by a new Sixth Form centre and a teaching block. These now provide good facilities for learning but an increasing school population is putting pressure on the Sixth Form centre, where students find it increasingly

difficult to find study space, and on corridors and social areas. This was clearly demonstrated during the inspection when 'wet break' arrangements caused considerable congestion. The lack of covered walkways causes discomfort in bad weather conditions.

92. There are sufficient classrooms and specialist areas to cater for the present demands of the curriculum. Old temporary buildings have been replaced with modern equivalents as a way of easing accommodation until the present 'bulge' in numbers declines. Accommodation in science and business studies is very good and in all other subject areas is at least satisfactory. Excellent displays of students' work enhance the good facilities in physical education and very good displays in art provide a stimulating environment for creative activity. All technology subjects are taught in specialist areas but some rooms are small for the size of groups regularly using them. The music room is supplemented by instrumental practice cells, and the number of rooms for teaching religious education needs to be increased.

93. Accommodation is effectively managed by a property committee which not only deals with daily maintenance but also formulates plans for strategic development. Extension of physical education facilities is planned, for example, by the purchase of additional land to create an all weather facility. There are good arrangements for joint use of school buildings and facilities with the local community and for future expansion in this area. Good working arrangements with the local authority ensure that repairs and maintenance are carried out promptly and to a good standard. Money has been allocated for major repairs to external woodwork. Internally and externally the site is kept in good order and there is an absence of graffiti. Risk assessments have been carried out and the site has been monitored for ease of access by students with restricted mobility. Money has been found to complete the installation of a lift in the new teaching block and, although the provision of ramps for wheelchair access is does not extend to many entrances, this will mean that no student will be denied access to any part of the curriculum.

94. Learning resources overall are satisfactory. Classrooms are mostly well equipped. Resources to support learning are good in English, science, history and physical education. They are satisfactory in mathematics and in all other subjects except ICT. The weakness in provision is the number and availability of computers, and this includes for students' independent research, especially in the Sixth Form.

95. Staffing is satisfactory. Although the school has an adequate number of staff to teach the National Curriculum and religious education, the match of staff experience and qualifications to lessons varies from very good to unsatisfactory across subjects. The school finds it difficult to recruit and retain staff in common with many schools in the area. In English, science, geography, physical education and business studies staff are very well qualified and this impacts positively on standards. In art, the head of department is a practising artist, and in business studies the staff have commercial experience, which strengthens teaching. In ICT, although there is an adequate number of teachers, learning is affected by the lack of subject expertise in this area. Staff illness and long term absences have resulted in the use of temporary staff in subjects such as mathematics, design and technology, history and religious education where learning has been affected by the lack of continuity caused by the heavy use of supply teachers. In mathematics, for example, some classes have more than one teacher and several classes have three teachers; this arrangement causes discontinuity in learning. In modern foreign languages, some non-specialist teaching is caused by the curriculum arrangements within the subject. In geography there is no teacher in charge of the subject and in religious education the teacher in charge is not a specialist. These staffing difficulties have been beyond the school's control and the use of supply staff has proved expensive. There is a suitable balance of men and women teachers and of staff with more experience and those newer to teaching.

96. Classroom assistants who support students with special needs are well qualified but there are no men to act as role models for this group of students. The number of non-teaching staff giving good support to learning includes technicians who work in science, design and technology and ICT but there is no technical support in art or music, which imposes additional pressures on teachers in these subjects. There are no foreign language assistants for both French and German. There is a sufficient number of administrative, caretaking and catering staff.

97. There is a rigorous induction system for staff new to the school, which is joined by more experienced staff as appropriate. Appraisal of the non-teaching staff is being introduced. Professional development is well organised with in-service training suitably linked to the needs of the school and individual teachers. The new headteacher has observed all staff teaching and this has helped identify their professional training needs. A full staffing review is planned to take place in June. The school enjoys good relationships with teacher training institutions and school and students benefit from this.

98. Since the last inspection there has been good improvement in staffing. The expansion of the school has resulted in fewer non-specialists teaching and an increase in the number of technicians and administrative staff. The professional development of staff now is more systematically organised.

99. Given recruitment problems nationally, the school can be proud that it has managed to fill several teacher vacancies this year.

100. Statutory requirements for the provision of special educational needs students are met. Students are identified early and they are thoroughly assessed. Proper procedures are followed in order to gain maximum support. An appropriate register of special educational needs is kept and assessment of students' progress is carefully monitored. All the necessary documentation is of a high standard.

101. The special educational needs base is well resourced and forms a comfortable, non-threatening workplace, which allows students to settle easily and concentrate. It is a popular meeting place at lunchtimes where students with special educational needs can enjoy a range of learning activities such as draughts and dominoes. Levels of personal support are high and good guidance is given to special educational needs students. The school makes a considerable effort with special arrangements for them, such as arranging for extra time for a particular student's GCSE examinations. Very good progress has been made since the last inspection report. Leadership and management of the department are excellent. The team of teaching assistants is very strong, benefiting from a culture where they are encouraged to develop expertise in areas that assists students' learning.

Sixth Form

Leadership and management

102. The leadership and management of the Sixth Form are satisfactory. The school's aims are fully reflected in the planning of the Sixth Form. Procedures for monitoring and evaluation have not been fully implemented in some areas and the senior management team has not supported the head of Sixth Form sufficiently. The Sixth Form is part of the school's appraisal system and satisfactory strategies are in place to monitor teaching. A target for development is to increase the number of students in the Sixth Form. There are very good induction procedures. These give Year 11 students early advice, guidance and written information about their future options. The head of Sixth Form keeps good statistical information about the prior attainment and progress of Sixth Form students.

103. Students also have management responsibilities as head boy and head girl and a few students support less able students in the main school. However, the involvement of the Sixth Form with the main school and the local community is recognised by the school as a priority for further development. Accommodation is in a small new block where one room is used as a Sixth Form social area. All other rooms are used for teaching and the accommodation does not provide Sixth Form students with any study areas or access to computers. Many students find their own areas to study and these include going back to subject bases in order to use ICT resources.

104. The balance of funding for the Sixth Form is well planned. The Sixth Form is cost effective and gives satisfactory value for money.

105. In the Sixth Form, there is a good match of staff to the needs of the curriculum. This is very good in physical education where for example, a science specialist contributes to the sports studies programme. However, staffing shortages have impacted upon the work of the head of Sixth Form. At the time of the inspection, she had to be a form tutor for one of the Sixth Form groups with the result that she did not have time to fulfil her full duties in supporting students.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

- Raise standards throughout the school and increase the proportion of pupils gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C, especially in mathematics, information and communication technology (ICT) and music by:
(Paragraphs: 13, 14, 18, 41, 66, 67, 76, 90, 103)
 - * making sure that teachers know and apply a range of teaching methods to meet the differing individual learning needs of pupils;
 - * monitoring the attainment and progress of pupils by their ethnic, linguistic and cultural background;
 - * making better use of the school's assessment information to set individual targets for pupils, monitor their progress towards attaining these targets and intervene when pupils are in danger of not meeting them.

- Review the structure of the curriculum to:
(Paragraphs: 53, 54, 87)
 - * increase the amount of time for French and German and for physical education in Years 10 and 11;
 - * ensure that a separate course in religious education is taught in Years 10 and 11.

- Improve the use ICT in all subjects by:
(Paragraphs: 22, 54, 181)
 - * auditing which subjects find it difficult to access computers and deciding how to improve the situation;
 - * providing time for the head of ICT to monitor and develop ICT in all areas;
 - * increasing teachers' confidence to use ICT in their subjects.

- Disseminate the many examples of good practice in teaching and departmental leadership by:
(Paragraphs: 84, 85, 90, 97)
 - * finding ways for all teachers to share good practice and innovative ideas;
 - * finding time for the more successful heads of department to mentor and advise the less successful.

- Improving the social facilities for students by:
(Paragraphs: 74)
 - * providing somewhere pleasant for students to eat their lunch;
 - * ensuring that students have somewhere dry to wait for buses.

- In addition to the main areas for improvement, the governors and senior managers should consider including the following points for inclusion in their action plan:
 - * ensuring that a daily act of collective worship takes place,
 - * improving the quality of reports to parents,
 - * ensuring that more subject teachers are present at parents' evenings,
 - * making better provision for students' spiritual education.

Sixth Form

- Improve the curriculum Post 16 by:
 - * providing for religious education as required by law;
 - * making more regular provision for personal, social and health education.

- Improve facilities to encourage learning by:
 - * improving study accommodation with more information technology resources;
 - * providing more opportunities for enrichment and personal development.

(Paragraphs: 66, 76)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7–11	139
	Sixth Form	21
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students		130

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
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Years 7–11

Number	5	28	44	45	7	0	0
Percentage	7	20	32	32	5	0	0

Sixth Form

Number	1	3	13	4	0	0	0
Percentage	5	14	62	19	0	0	0

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

Information about the school's students

Students on the school's roll

	Y7–Y11	Sixth Form
Number of students on the school's roll	949	50
Number of full-time students known to be eligible for free school meals	38	N/A

Special educational needs

	Y7–Y11	Sixth Form
Number of students with statements of special educational needs	136	3
Number of students on the school's special educational needs register		

English as an additional language

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

Student mobility in the last school year

	No of students
Students who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	31
Students who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	42

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	7.3
National comparative data	1.18

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	1.1
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year:	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	97	95	192

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	75	75	78
	Girls	83	60	71
	Total	158	135	149
Percentage of students at NC Level 5 or above	School	82 (60)	70 (65)	78 (56)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of students at NC Level 6 or above	School	44 (22)	35 (30)	26 (10)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	62	71	76
	Girls	85	55	66
	Total	147	126	142
Percentage of students at NC Level 5 or above	School	77 (69)	66 (74)	74 (59)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of students at NC Level 6 or above	School	29 (23)	41 (42)	32 (15)
	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	83	75	158

GCSE results		5 or more grades A*-C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of students achieving the standard specified	Boys	27	72	79
	Girls	40	72	74
	Total	67	144	153
Percentage of students achieving the standard specified	School	42 (32)	91 (91)	97 (96)
	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	34.1
	National	39

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

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

Attainment at the end of the Sixth Form (Year 13)

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-Level or AS-Level examinations:	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
		2001	10	9

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	9.2	13.8	11.4	N/A	N/A	N/A
National	18.6	19.3	18.9	N/A	N/A	N/A

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	13	84.6
	National	N/A	N/A

International Baccalaureate		Number	% success rate
Number entered for the International Baccalaureate Diploma and the percentage of those students who achieved all they studied	School	N/A	N/A
	National	N/A	N/A

Ethnic background of students

	No of students
Black – Caribbean heritage	4
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	2
Indian	1
Pakistani	3
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	1
White	923
Any other minority ethnic group	5

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	38	0
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–Y11**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	58.7
Number of students per qualified teacher	17.1

Education support staff:**Y7–Y11**

Total number of education support staff	12
Total aggregate hours worked per week	298.25

Deployment of teachers:**Y7–Y11**

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	73.1
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Average teaching group size:**Y7–Y11**

Key Stage 2	N/A
Key Stage 3	24.9
Key Stage 4	22.5

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000/2001
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	£
Total income	2661047.00
Total expenditure	2706788.00
Expenditure per student	2709.49.00
Balance brought forward from previous year	163968.00
Balance carried forward to next year	91197.00

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	18.6
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	27.2

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	2
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	3
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	2

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out
Number of questionnaires returned

999
395

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	29	57	9	5	0
My child is making good progress in school.	30	58	7	2	3
Behaviour in the school is good.	15	55	14	5	11
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	17	49	22	9	3
The teaching is good.	16	59	12	2	11
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	12	41	32	15	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	34	50	11	3	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	35	54	6	2	3
The school works closely with parents.	8	40	37	11	4
The school is well led and managed.	15	50	9	3	23
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	20	56	13	3	8
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	10	33	22	8	27

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 very good.

Strengths:

- The teaching is very good.
- Very high standards seen in students' work.
- Planning and assessment are exemplary.
- The collegiate and consistent approach of all English teachers led by the head of department is very good.
- Students' response and attitudes are very good.

Areas for improvement:

- Marking takes up too much time.

106. In recent years, students' attainment on entry to the school in English has been broadly average, but the school's secondary modern status has resulted in few students arriving with high levels of attainment. By the end of Year 9 students of all levels of attainment have progressed well because of the very good provision in English. They achieve good standards compared with their levels of attainment on entry to the school. By the end of Year 11 students achieve at least satisfactory and often good standards because of exemplary planning and preparation for examination courses.

107. In the national tests taken at the end of Year 9 in 2000, the proportion of students reaching at least the expected Level 5 was above the national average. The proportion of those at Level 6 or above was also above the national average. Girls outperformed boys at both levels. When these results are compared with schools in similar contexts, students' performance was well above average for that group of schools. Students perform better in English than in science and mathematics, and results are improving faster than the national average. These good standards at the end of Year 9 reflect teaching that is effectively focused on giving students the skills that they need to succeed in National Curriculum tests.

108. By the end of Year 11 students achieve average standards which represents good achievement in relation to their prior knowledge and understanding. Many students whose prior attainment would put them into the D-G target range at GCSE achieve grades C and above. The proportion of A*-C grades in GCSE English and English Literature was just above average when compared to all schools and above average when compared to similar schools. GCSE results for English, English Literature and drama are amongst the most successful in the school and above those for science and mathematics. Girls continue to outperform boys but the gap is narrower than at the end of Year 9. One reason to explain why attainment was higher in Year 9 than Year 11 in 2001 is that the department is very competent at preparing students to succeed at national tests but it is harder to prepare the same students to succeed at GCSE because many of those students find it difficult to retain knowledge over a long period of time. The work seen, however, indicated very good levels of attainment will be achieved in the coming summer examinations.

109. In the work seen during the inspection, standards were well above average at the age of 14, which represents very good achievement. In Years 7, 8 and 9 students are confident speakers and they respond well to detailed questioning about texts, which are often complex and challenging. In a Year 7 class students define simile and metaphor confidently and use these figures of speech effectively to extend their own writing. A higher

attaining Year 9 group, working on persuasive writing, analyses the effect of techniques, such as alliteration and the use of the imperative voice, to build an effect. Students of all levels of attainment are anxious to read aloud and they respond with enthusiasm to lessons that invariably demand their active participation.

110. Standards are well above average at the age of 16. Meticulous planning, combined with consistently high expectations, ensures that students at all levels of prior attainment achieve well. In a Year 10 lesson, students who had experienced previous difficulties in English responded with enthusiasm and interest to preparing overhead projector transparencies to support their presentations. These students achieved standards well beyond what might be expected. Students demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of texts such as *An Inspector Calls*. They annotate texts carefully and write about them thoughtfully. In Years 10 and 11 students routinely use presentations and role-play to explore texts and deepen their understanding. The impact of effective drama teaching is evident in students' confidence and their repertoire of skills.

111. The explanation is probably that the department is very competent at preparing students to succeed at national tests at the end of Year 9. It is harder to prepare the same students to succeed at GCSE. The work seen however indicated very good levels of attainment and department targets for this summer and the coming years predict well above average results.

112. The department's focus on literacy has made an important contribution to the standards that students achieve in reading and writing. Students are given effective ways to interrogate and organise information. The use of grids and other writing frames helps students to clarify their thinking and understanding. This detailed preparation leads to good standards of writing for students at all levels of attainment and allows them to become increasingly independent learners. The department has a consistent approach to the use of key words to equip students with a technical vocabulary to describe and analyse language. Students have an impressive grasp of this vocabulary and most are able to describe the effect of literary devices in the texts that they are reading. Schemes of work have been rewritten in response to the Key Stage 3 Strategy and the English department is consistent in the use of well planned activities to target and consolidate aspects of knowledge about language. Schemes of work are planned to increase students' confidence and competence in the use of information and communication technology (ICT) which they use for research, desktop publishing and word-processing.

113. The department has made very good progress since the last inspection and is now recognised as a 'leading department' in Buckinghamshire. The department has raised standards of attainment and students achieve very well because of the high standards demanded by every single member of the team. This consistency of approach has been a focus for development and the English department is rightly regarded as a strength of the school.

114. The quality of teaching and learning is very good overall, with examples of excellence. All teaching was satisfactory or better and it was very good or excellent in over 60 per cent of lessons. Teachers have a clear sense of pride in their department and work very hard in order to continue to improve. The team sets itself high standards and this sense of rigour is conveyed to the students, who respond very positively to the demands placed on them. Planning is a particular strength and schemes of work contain detailed planning for each lesson. The department takes great care over the grouping of students when they move out of teaching groups that contain students of all abilities at the end of Year 7. In Year 8 students are placed in groups according to their learning needs and plans are altered to take account of these needs. For example a Year 9 group, containing a number of

students with special educational needs, tackled *Twelfth Night* through a number of short activities including acting passages of dialogue. Prompt cards were available to support the tasks but they were not needed, as students were confident in their work and achieved standards that were well beyond what might be expected from their prior attainment.

115. Assessment practice in the department is exemplary. Record keeping is detailed and thorough and leads to accurate target setting for individual students. Students are clear about their targets and their current level of performance. Most importantly they are clear about what they need to do to improve and reach their targets. The marking of assessment pieces is used to gather information about common areas for improvement. These are recorded and used to inform future planning. Assessed pieces are also marked by different teachers to ensure that standards remain consistent. The department has rightly identified the need to investigate the large amount of time that is being used to mark every piece of written work that students produce.

116. Students with special educational needs are supported very effectively and achieve very well when compared to their prior attainment. Most of them are entered for GCSE at the end of Year 11 but a very small number are also entered for a Certificate of Achievement in English in order to make sure that they gain a qualification at the end of Year 11. High attaining students are identified and their needs are met through systematic planning. As boys achieve less well than girls at the end of Year 9 and Year 11 the department has investigated ways of supporting and motivating boys in order to raise their achievement. Members of the team have attended training in order to understand the issues that may affect boys' learning and this knowledge is reflected in departmental planning. Although the gap between boys and girls' attainment remains wide at the end of Year 9, it is beginning to close by the end of Year 11. Boys' attainment is rising in response to teaching which, through the use of carefully chosen texts and approaches, is successful at motivating and engaging boys.

117. Teachers have a secure knowledge of their subject and use a wide variety of teaching methods in lessons. Expectations are uniformly high and teachers use a well-judged blend of challenge and support to build students' skills and understanding. Learning objectives are made clear at the beginning of all lessons and re-visited in order to consolidate the learning that has taken place. The department places an emphasis on putting all texts in their historical and social context. The detailed planning that supports this approach makes a valuable contribution to the school's wider curriculum and to students' moral, social and cultural education.

118. The leadership and management of the English department are very good. Departmental documentation provides a vision for the place of English in the curriculum and the thinking that informs and shapes the department's work is clear. The head of department has worked hard to create a collaborative and united team, which leads to a consistent approach. Monitoring of practice takes place within a climate which leads to the sharing of best practice and the identification of departmental priorities. Professional development is a strong feature and has contributed to a climate of innovation and reflection. This is a fine department which makes a significant contribution to raising standards across the school.

Literacy across the curriculum

119. The English department has taken the lead in developing literacy across the curriculum in line with the Key Stage 3 strategy. Within the department there is an intense focus on literacy which informs teaching at all levels. Whole school training has taken place and a handbook has been produced to support a variety of approaches to literacy across the school. Students' use of language is encouraged across the curriculum and developed by opportunities for extended talk. All subjects make a good contribution to the use of key

words which are displayed at the start of lessons. In history key words are consistently reinforced and students have good opportunities for listening and sorting evidence. In a Year 9 geography lesson students read a passage from a novel by Isabel Allende which led to good opportunities for speaking and listening and collaborative work. Literacy monitoring across the school has not yet started and it will be an important element in moving on from the use of key words to the consistent provision of frameworks to support students' writing. In some subjects opportunities for extended writing remain limited and marking does not consistently address literacy issues. The school has made an effective start in improving literacy standards and now needs to develop the approach to make sure that students receive consistent support in improving writing.

Drama

120. Students achieve good standards in drama. Results at GCSE are amongst the most successful in the school. Drama is rightly regarded as a strength of the school, providing many students with a rich experience both in lessons and through extra-curricular activities. Very good teaching for students in every year is equipping them with a range of skills that support their learning across the curriculum. The quality of teaching in all lessons observed was good or better. Planning is detailed and thoughtful and provides opportunities for students to address many sensitive issues. Students are able to use drama conventions successfully and present and refine their ideas with confidence and concentration. Students respond to drama lessons with enthusiasm and maturity. The leadership and management of drama are good and have led to a department that sets and achieves high standards. Drama makes a positive contribution to the social, moral and cultural life of the school.

MATHEMATICS

Overall, the quality of provision in mathematics is unsatisfactory.

Strengths:

- Teaching is satisfactory.
- Attitudes and behaviour of students are good.

Areas for improvement:

- GCSE results which are below average for all schools and well below average compared to similar schools.
- Lack of information and communication technology (ICT) to support teaching and learning.
- Unsatisfactory management of the provision with ineffective monitoring and evaluation procedures.
- Unsatisfactory staffing arrangements.

121. Standards of attainment of students towards the end of Year 9 are average. In 2001 the percentage of students reaching the expected level in the national tests was close to the average for all schools and for similar secondary modern schools. However the percentage of students achieving higher levels in the national tests was lower than average. Attainment in mathematics at this stage is similar to that in science but is significantly lower than in English. Attainment on entry to the school is broadly average so that students between the ages of 11 and 14 make satisfactory progress in mathematics. Similarly students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress. However, higher attaining students at this stage do less well in mathematics than they do in the other two core subjects. There is no significant difference in the performance of boys and girls at this age.

122. The standards of attainment of students towards the end of Year 11 in mathematics are well below average. In 2001 less than one third of the students entered for the GCSE achieved grades in the range A*-C. Whilst this was an improvement on the results in 2000 they remained below average for all schools and well below those for similar schools. Students' performance in mathematics at the age of 16 is below that in science and significantly below that in English. Since students enter Year 10 at average levels of attainment in mathematics the majority of students make unsatisfactory progress during this stage. Similarly high attaining students and those with special educational needs also make unsatisfactory progress at this stage. There is no significant difference between the performance of boys and girls at the age of 16. The improvement in GCSE results in 2001 compared to 2000 has been caused by an improvement in staffing (and consequently teaching and learning). Although the staffing arrangements at the time of the inspection are still unsatisfactory, they still represent an improvement on those that existed previously. In previous years there had been considerably more changes in teachers, long-term absences and even greater use of sometimes unsatisfactory supply staff. This had a greater impact on the progress of the students than the unsatisfactory staffing arrangements that exist now.

123. Standards of work seen are average for students at the age of 14 but below average at the age of 16. There is a greater emphasis on the further development of students' numeracy skills particularly in the lower school. As a consequence of this most students are becoming more confident when handling problems involving the use of number and general skills are rising. A higher attaining Year 9 class for example showed secure knowledge and understanding of the meanings of aspects relating to statistics including mean, mode and range. They were also able to calculate circumferences of circles using the appropriate formula when undertaking work in preparation for the forthcoming national tests. On the other hand students in a lower attaining Year 11 class lacked confidence in attempting to undertake examples involving the calculation of probabilities. Many required significant support from the teacher in order to make further progress with the examples that had been set for them to undertake. Skills in using information and communication technology to support the mathematics work are underdeveloped throughout the school. Staffing arrangements including the deployment of teachers are having an adverse affect on the standards of work produced by the students. In particular:

- * use of several non-specialist, part-time and supply teachers;
- * previous long-term illnesses of staff;
- * deployment of non-specialists to the lower attaining classes;
- * lack of liaison between the mathematics department and the non-specialists that are involved;
- * the use of more than one teacher split classes. Some classes have three teachers for mathematics in a week.

124. Teaching and consequently learning are mainly satisfactory. About one quarter is good or very good. There is no unsatisfactory teaching. All lessons are well planned. Most contain an appropriate range of activities with students working as a group, sometimes in smaller groups and on an individual basis. Teachers give clear explanations during the group work. Most teachers make appropriate use of questioning of the students to check their level of understanding. In a few classes good use is made of overhead projector transparencies to support aspects of the work. One very good lesson involving a very lively and interesting presentation by the teacher enabled the students to visualise different shapes of polygons. In several classes, however, there is evidence of teachers having too low expectations of the students and of the students not being challenged enough. A few classes involve group work during which there is only limited questioning of the students. The pace in a few lessons is slowed because the teacher has to maintain acceptable levels of discipline. Many teachers only keep limited records of students' progress particularly in terms of their responses to the homework that has been set for them to undertake. Learning and progress of students in some classes are particularly impeded because too many teachers teach the same class. Several classes have three different mathematics

teachers. This arrangement causes discontinuities in terms of the students' experiences because they constantly have to adjust to the styles and approaches of different teachers.

125. Most students have a positive attitude to their mathematics work. With a few minor exceptions behaviour is good. Most students respond well to the questions that they are asked during the group work. Although a few students have short concentration spans, are easily distracted and fail to make further progress with the task they are undertaking, most students are well motivated. Work undertaken is generally well presented. Some students in a number of classes make incomplete and poor responses to the homework that has been set for them to undertake. There were a relatively high number of students absent in some classes.

126. Many mathematics classes involve activities designed to further develop and support students' numeracy skills. These activities are generally successful. The mathematics curriculum, however, fails to meet statutory requirements. Although a number of lower attaining students in Year 7 make use of specialist computer software for numeracy, most students make no use of ICT to support their mathematics work. Schemes of work have been developed but the school recognises that significant further work requires to be undertaken on aspects of these.

127. The assessment of students lacks consistency and is unsatisfactory. Although homework is regularly set, it is not always formally marked or graded on a regular basis. Marking is variable in terms of its quality. Some is thorough and provides detailed feedback to the students on how they might improve their work. Other marking includes little or no feedback to the students. Some of the marked work is graded whilst other work is not. Where work is graded, the grading often does not follow school policy. Teachers' records of progress of their students are variable. The school has recognised that there is a requirement to improve the procedures relating to assessment. It is planned that there will be more regular formal assessment of the students. Grading of work will be more closely related to National Curriculum Levels up to the age of 14 and to GCSE grades from 14 to 16.

128. Management of the department is unsatisfactory. Although some of the teachers meet on a regular basis much time is spent on the discussion of basic administrative issues rather than on issues that are likely to lead to improved standards. Attendance at these meetings is low with frequently only about half of the teachers involved being present. Monitoring and evaluation procedures include observations of teaching and learning and checks on the setting and marking of work. However inconsistencies in assessment across those involved in the teaching indicates a lack of effectiveness in terms of the monitoring procedures. The department makes use of several non-specialist, part-time and supply teachers. There have also been some significant long-term illnesses of staff. This is having an impact on standards as explained earlier. Difficulties in the recruitment of specialist mathematics staff have had the effect of interrupting the learning of students. Currently non-specialist teachers tend to be given the lower attaining students to teach. There is little contact between staff in the mathematics department and several of the non-specialist teachers. Several classes have more than one teacher for mathematics.

129. Specialist mathematics rooms are of good quality. They are well decorated and furnished. There is good use of display materials including students' work. There is an adequate level of resources including textbooks to support the work.

130. Overall there has been unsatisfactory progress since the last inspection. Although there is now no unsatisfactory teaching and numeracy skills have improved many other weaknesses remain. GCSE results are below average and progress of students between the ages of 14 and 16 is unsatisfactory. Aspects of management including monitoring and evaluation procedures require improvement. Current staffing arrangements mean that standards are not rising.

Numeracy across the curriculum

131. Numeracy skills are now generally satisfactory. Aspects of mathematics classes involve activities including mental starters that are designed to further develop and support students' numeracy skills. These activities are generally successful. Good use is now being made of numeracy to support work in English, art, history and physical education. In English there is an emphasis on numeracy and some use in plays. In art, notable aspects include work involving spatial awareness, three-dimensional models and in proportions. In history numerical aspects are identified in lesson plans and use is made in chronology. In physical education numeracy work involves fractions and numerical questions provided for students in the context of their work. Students with special educational needs also make good use of numeracy when playing mathematical games during lunch times. In all other subjects use of numeracy is satisfactory except for ICT. Although some use is made of numeracy in databases and spreadsheets students do not have sufficient opportunities to solve problems as part of the work in this subject.

SCIENCE

Overall, the quality of provision in science is good.

Strengths:

- Teaching and assessment procedures are good.
- Well qualified staff work in very well designed laboratories.
- The attitudes of the students are very good.

Areas for improvement:

- Standards throughout the school.
- Finding a GCSE course which better matches the needs of the students.
- Use of assessment to modify the curriculum.
- The proportion of students taking Double Award Science.

132. Students enter the school with standards in line with the national average for all schools, although there are fewer higher attaining students than would be expected. Standards at the end of Year 9 remain average when compared with all schools but are above the average for similar secondary modern schools. For the three years up to 2001 there was a slight downward trend in results. Last year there was a significant improvement in average point scores, which were close to the national average. Results in 2001 for science were better than those in mathematics but significantly lower than those in English. Students achieve the results in science that might be expected based on their attainment at age 11, whereas in English achievement is above expectations and in mathematics it is below. There is no significant difference in the performance of boys and girls.

133. Standards at GCSE are close to the national average. Very few students achieve the highest GCSE grades. The proportion of students who take the Double Award course falls well below the national average. Overall results have increased steadily over the last 3 years from well below the national average to about the national average. Students achieved GCSE results in 2001 which were close to what might be expected based on their

attainment at the end of Year 9. Achievement in science for students at the end of Year 11 is similar to that in English but better than that in mathematics. Results vary from year to year but there is no significant difference in the performance of boys and girls.

134. Most students have average literacy and numeracy skills, which makes it difficult for them to obtain the highest level/grades. Their explanations of scientific principles are often superficial. They cannot apply their knowledge well. A significant number of students have great difficulty with calculations, which are required for both their terminal examination and their coursework. Generally students have low levels of recall and understanding of work carried out the previous year. This is why it is so important for the department to find a course more suited to their needs. Teachers make some provision for gifted and talented students through extra lessons and trips but there is still more to be done for these students. Students with special educational needs make good progress particularly when the teacher and support assistant work well together. Most teachers use the technical language of the subject well and improve the students' literacy skills by the use of key words. Students' standards in information and communication technology (ICT) are unsatisfactory because they do not have sufficient opportunities to use computers and data logging equipment. Standards in ICT will improve when the newly equipped computer room becomes operational.

135. Overall the quality of teaching and therefore of learning, is good. In about sixty per cent of lessons the teaching was very good. The quality of teaching has improved considerably since the last inspection. This hard working team of teachers can be justifiably proud of the work they do to improve students' learning. However, they do not do enough to improve students' long term learning by that the good work in the classroom can be translated in to better results. There is no significant difference in the quality of teaching for students of different ages. The very good scientific knowledge and understanding of the teachers are the foundations for their good practice. Teachers have good relationships with their students and as a result students quickly get down to their work in the classroom. Students learn well because teachers use a wide range of resources and methods confidently to make their lessons interesting. Teachers organise the students well in the classroom so that most have every opportunity to learn. Teachers set clear objectives for every lesson, and mark students' work regularly, although the quality of marking is variable particularly in respect of the use of scientifically supportive comments. The reports to parents are unsatisfactory as they do not identify sufficiently what students can and cannot do in science. Teachers give high priority to the level or grade students are working at when they share test data with them. However teachers do not give students sufficiently precise targets about what they need to do to improve.

136. Overall students learn well. Year 7 students made very good progress when planning an investigation about the energy content of foods. A key feature of this lesson was the way the teacher stressed the need for students to apply the principles of fair testing correctly, which is so important for the development of the students' investigative skills. When finding out how the physical and chemical properties of metals link to their different uses Year 8 students learnt well. The teacher gave the students the opportunity to improve their understanding through the careful choice of examples and questions. In a revision lesson about refraction Year 9 students learnt well why light bends when travelling between different materials. The teacher used a wide range of resources and methods to aid the students' learning. Importantly teachers adapt their teaching very carefully to the ability of their students. For example the lowest attaining Year 10 students learnt well about the principles involved in distillation. Careful planning, together with a patient approach enabled the students to understand well how two liquids can be separated based on the difference in their boiling points. Year 11 students learnt well when revising sexual reproduction. The teacher controlled a potentially difficult lesson well through his superb relationship with the students. Not only were the technical aspects of this topic handled

sensitively but also this very experienced teacher managed to cover the relationship side thoroughly without embarrassment to the students. A key factor to the good learning is the way teachers use such a wide range of methods and resources to capture the students' interest.

137. The quality of students' written work indicates that their attitudes to high academic achievement are very good. In nearly seventy per cent of lessons the attitudes and behaviour of students was excellent. Students work very well together carrying out experiments and move responsibly around the laboratory to collect materials and equipment. They follow their teachers' instructions to wear safety glasses and consequently work safely. Behaviour is mostly very good. Students generally have respect for others, which they demonstrate by putting up their hands to answer questions. Sometimes students spoil otherwise worthwhile answers by calling out. They have very good relationships with their teachers and each other. When talking to each other and their teacher they are courteous and polite.

138. Assessment procedures are very good. All students have good knowledge of the current level or grade they are working at. Nevertheless the department has not made sufficient use of this assessment information to guide curriculum planning. Far too many students are entered for Single Award science without taking another GCSE course in the extra available time. It is reasonable to assume that those students who obtained an A*-C grade in the Single Award would also have obtained a result in this grade range at Double Award. Consequently those students have lost the opportunity to obtain an additional GCSE grade. Importantly from the school's point of view its overall results have been depressed unnecessarily. The GCSE course on offer is not the most suitable for these students. Students have weak long-term memories. They would benefit from a course which tested them more frequently rather than one which tested them only at the end of two years.

139. The head of department provides sound leadership. Not least of the head of department's many strengths is the ability to bring about the very positive team spirit that exists in the department. Given the support from the School for the changes referred to, the head of department has the leadership quality to take the department forward and to bring about a rise in standards. Good teaching in very good accommodation, together with very supportive students, can raise standards once a better curriculum is in place. The technician team is efficient and supportive and makes an important contribution to the work of the department. The department will be in a very good position to deliver the ICT requirements of the science curriculum once additional sensors and software licences are purchased. The department gives due attention to health and safety.

140. Overall the department has made good improvement since the last inspection. Teaching is much better. The problems associated with ICT, improving teachers' non-contact time, and improving students' application of their knowledge are still outstanding.

ART AND DESIGN

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

Strengths:

- Very good teaching and professional demonstration leads to very good learning by the students.
- There are very good displays of students' work in the art studios and around the school.

Areas for improvement:

- The use of information and communication technology (ICT) for creative purposes.
- Improving students' knowledge of their own learning.

141. General certificate of secondary education (GCSE) results for grades A*-C in 1998, 1999, and 2000 were in line with national averages. In 2001 there was a sharp drop to well below average. Performance indicators show that students did worse in art in that year than in almost all their other subjects. The reason for this unusually poor performance was the unavoidable absence of both permanent members of staff for most of the year, and the consequent disruption of the work of Year 11 and Year 10 students. Alternative staffing arrangements did not succeed in remedying the situation. Inspection evidence shows that thanks to very good teaching and their own efforts the current Year 11 group are on course to improve markedly on last year's results though the effects from their experiences when in Year 10 are still being felt to some extent. The present Year 10 look set to recover the lost ground completely and achieve at least in line with national averages again next year.

142. In work seen during the inspection students' attainment is average by the end of Year 9. Given slightly below average attainment on entry to the school this represents good achievement. Students acquire satisfactory and often good observational drawing skills evident for example in their studies of the horse. These show satisfactory understanding of proportion and use of line. Imaginative drawings are often of a high standard. Students use colour effectively in crayon, pastel and water colour, and control these mediums well. They experiment to good effect with unusual techniques such as Chinese brush drawing. There is an unusually impressive body of work in three dimensions, much of it showing the influence of research into African art for example Ashanti dolls, and work based on Benin bronze heads. Students gain acquaintance with a good range of art and artists such as Dali and surrealism, Picasso and cubism. They have a satisfactory knowledge of these and use art vocabulary correctly in discussing them.

143. In work seen during the inspection standards are above average by the end of Year 11. From average standards at the end of Year 9 this is good achievement. During those two years observational drawing and painting skills improve markedly. Able students are very productive and their portfolios show large quantities of work exemplifying good drawing and painting techniques and some very good three-dimensional work based on African and Asian studies. Some of these are displayed around the school forming part of the generally excellent displays of students' work. Art vocabulary and knowledge of art, artists and craftspeople such as William Morris are good and students make good connections in their own work the work of such artists. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used to present work and research it, but is not yet developed as a creative tool.

144. The quality of teaching is consistently very good at all stages, resulting in very good quality of learning throughout. Teachers have very good knowledge and understanding of the subject and are accomplished artists. They give confident and compelling demonstrations for example of drawing horses using Chinese brush drawing technique, which lend authority to their teaching and inspires the students to emulate their very good example. Planning and timing of lessons are very good and the use of time targets is

successful in injecting pace and urgency into the lessons. Students responses are very good. They are interested and enjoy art lessons: Year 7 for example enjoy their Chinese brush drawings, and produce good work, Year 8 enjoy reproducing Dali's Roman Cavalier. Year 11 enjoy developing ideas for their examination preparation. One student for example works on a painting of the Holocaust linking it with Breughel's painting 'The triumph of death', and another works on a very good pastel study of a contemporary image of a skateboarder. It is a pity that lessons are so short as the time passes all too quickly. Students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress; an artistically gifted Year 10 student makes outstanding progress evident in a portfolio of work notable for its excellent quality and quantity.

145. Management of the department is good. The Head of department provides an inspirational and powerful lead to the subject which impacts strongly on teaching and learning. Schemes of work are thorough and imaginative and assessment is conscientiously done. Despite this, a number of students when questioned were vague about how they were doing and how they could improve, emphasising the ongoing need to make sure assessment information really is understood by all the students. The department makes a good contribution to students' literacy through constant use of art vocabulary and vigilance over students' understanding of it. Some important aspects of numeracy such as proportion, estimation of size, perspective, and spatial awareness feature in the curriculum.

146. The department lacks sufficient resources for ICT, though it is adequately resourced in other respects. Accommodation is tight and storage space inadequate; there is only one sink in the main art room. There is nowhere that work can be left out and returned to whenever the student wants or needs to. Mostly it has to be done at home inhibiting any large scale work and making dialogue with teachers about it difficult. There is no technician for art.

147. Since the last inspection there has been some improvement in overall time allocation and assessment procedures. Improving teaching has resulted, until last year there was an improving trend in GCSE results, representing good improvement.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

148. Overall, the quality of provision in design and technology is satisfactory.

Strengths:

- Good teaching and well-planned lessons develop good relationships with students.
- Work in GCSE textiles is of a high standard.
- There are good procedures for assessing students' work.

Areas for improvement:

- Standards of work in resistant materials and food technology.
- The use of assessment data to inform Year 10 and 11 students more clearly of target grades and progress towards them.
- The provision of resources for computer-aided design and manufacture.

149. Teachers' assessments for Year 9 students in 2001 indicate that students are attaining below average standards. Inspection evidence shows that students are attaining standards in line with the national average. There are satisfactory procedures for ensuring that assessment is consistent across all design and technology areas but experience of practice in other schools would provide a more accurate picture.

150. General certificate of secondary education (GCSE) results in 2001 were a little above average which represents a small increase on previous figures. However, when the results for each technology subject are considered separately there is a marked difference in performance. Results in textiles technology are well above average, in graphics they are average, whilst in resistant materials and food they are below average. These results reflect students' prior attainment levels in the subject. Difficulties caused by the long-term absence of key members of staff have had a detrimental effect on standards, particularly in resistant materials. Girls' examination performance is better than boys because, in general, their responses to the design folio elements of the course are more thorough. Comparative figures show that students achieve better results in technology than in many other examination entries.

151. In work and lessons seen, attainment for students at the end of Year 9 is average representing satisfactory achievement. Some higher attaining students are able to produce research material from a variety of sources and generate a range of initial ideas. Analysis skills are not well developed and many folders contain only basic research. Students are able to use adequate graphic skills to convey initial ideas but only a few higher attaining students draw with enough detail and clarity to aid planning and manufacture. Lower attaining Year 8 students who were designing and making 'pick-up' devices, for example, were not able to explain clearly how their mechanism worked. A few higher attaining students understood how the jaws could be made to release their grip and had clear drawings to show this. Students are introduced to a good design methodology. Courses are supported by well-structured materials that enable lower attaining students and those with special needs to make an appropriate response to each aspect of designing and making. Students work better on practical tasks than written and graphic ones. Boys and girls in a Year 9 group, for example, worked in an organised way and attained similar standards as they soldered electronic components, operated machine drills and used computers to complete an electronic game.

152. Students at the end of Year 11 achieve satisfactorily and their attainment is average. Standards in textiles technology are well above average. Students are able to work independently to compile well-researched design folios containing detailed analysis and high standards of presentation. Practical outcomes are made to a high standard of craftsmanship and represent considerable commitment from students and teachers. In graphics, a few higher attaining students use information and communication technology (ICT) skills to enhance the presentation of their work and process data. Not all research material, however, is used effectively. One higher attaining student, for example, had used the computer to generate and manipulate images of high quality but had not analysed and annotated his work to explain his progression of thought. In food technology, students follow a good design methodology but only a few higher attaining students have folders containing in-depth research and development. Standards in resistant materials are below average. Students do not have well-developed independent learning skills and need considerable guidance from teachers. Introductory tasks for Year 10 resistant materials students follow much the same format as those of earlier years. Consequently they attract a similar level of response and many Year 10 design folders do not contain work of significantly greater quality than that seen at the end of Year 9. Standards of both design and manufacture of GCSE projects are below average. Students are not able to represent their ideas with clear 2 or 3 dimensional drawing and many folders are poorly presented. Manufacturing skills are weak and practical work is not finished to a good standard. Recent staffing difficulties have affected the quality and continuity of experience for these students.

153. Students enter the school with broadly average levels of attainment and with an inconsistent background in design and technology skills. By the end of Year 9 students were able to make a greater personal contribution to a design project. Students in Year 9 graphics, for example, were able to compile and use time planning charts to track the progress of their work. Students with special needs produced similar standards to others in the subject and made similar progress. Achievements at this age are satisfactory and

progress by the end of Year 11 is satisfactory. Students are able to build on previous experiences and make satisfactory progress in both their ability to design and make and in their development of personal skills. This is particularly marked in textiles where students make rapid progress from Year 10 to Year 11 work. Students' achievements in resistant materials have been adversely affected by lack of continuity caused by staffing difficulties.

154. Teaching, and therefore learning, is good in three-quarters of lessons and satisfactory in the remainder. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen. Teachers have established good working procedures that ensure that students work with a sense of purpose, due regard for safety and consideration for others. This contributes to the positive learning atmosphere in most lessons seen. Because teachers have established good relationships they manage the activity of mixed ability classes across a wide range of practical processes effectively. In one well-taught textiles lesson, for example, Year 8 students of all abilities were absorbed in hand and machine stitching. Because of good individual help and advice, one lower attaining student was able to complete the pinning and tacking of the strap for her shoulder bag whilst a higher attaining student combined problem-solving skills with practical knowledge as she became absorbed in the extension work. Teachers support students' literacy development well by emphasising the correct use of technical vocabulary. There are no specific strategies for supporting students' numeracy development but good practice is evident in teaching. On the few occasions when teaching was only satisfactory it was because normally good relationships had become strained by teachers' attempts to deal with unsatisfactory student attitudes. Good arrangements have been made to cover the long-term absence of two teachers. The employment of one specialist supply teacher has maintained the continuity and progression of work for some students but despite the best efforts of non-specialist supply teachers the quality of experience for others has been affected. Teaching is monitored once each year but good practice is only promoted through informal discussion. Teachers receive good support from two part time technicians.

155. The leadership and management of the department are good. Good management has minimised the adverse effects of a period of disruption caused by staffing difficulties. Timetable changes, for example, have ensured that no one group of students has been unduly affected and strenuous attempts have been made to set appropriate work. Policy documents and schemes of work are detailed and procedures for assessing students' work are thorough. National Curriculum Levels are communicated to students and GCSE students receive good oral reports on the progress of their work. Assessment data, however, is not used in a systematic way to identify underachievement or to set targets for students. The curriculum in all years is broad and balanced but there is no opportunity at present for students to continue with electronics in Years 10 and 11. The lack of computer-aided manufacturing equipment prevents students from experiencing these processes at first hand. Whilst access to computers is sufficient for students' use in lessons their effectiveness is limited by lack of network facilities and suitably advanced software packages.

156. Since the last inspection there have been satisfactory improvements in student attitudes, departmental organisation, and standards in Years 7 to 9. The quality of teaching has improved and standards have risen in textiles.

GEOGRAPHY

Overall, the quality of provision in geography is good.

Strengths:

- Good teaching helps secure an interested, hard-working response from the students.
- The more effective schemes of work and assessment procedures are helping to improve teaching and learning.
- There is a good team of committed teachers.
- The leadership and management of the subject ensure that action is taken promptly to address any weaknesses.
- There is effective teaching of specialist vocabulary.

Areas for improvement:

- GCSE standards are rising but are still not high enough.
- Students rarely complete longer pieces of writing.
- Teaching does not make enough use of information and communication technology (ICT).

157. In the teachers' assessment of students in Year 9 in 2001, the proportion of students reaching the expected standard was well above average for the school as a whole. This assessment is unreliable and better procedures have been introduced during the current school year. GCSE results in geography have fluctuated over the last three years, but in 2001 were well below the national average for all schools. These results were also below the average for the school, and the results of students taking geography GCSE were generally lower than their results in other subjects. Girls' results were much better than those of boys.

158. By Year 9, students' standards match national expectations. For example, they follow a structured line of enquiry about migration from Mexico to California, are aware how physical and human processes interact, and they explain the migration process they are studying. A weaker aspect of students' standards is that they complete relatively few longer pieces of writing. For the Year 11 students taking GCSE geography, standards have risen since last summer but are still below national averages. For example, many students know river processes and understand how they help create different landforms. Some coursework is of a high standard. These studies are very well structured, involve the careful analysis of a range of relevant information and include well-argued conclusions. A significant number of below average students often lack a clear focus in collecting relevant data for the chosen question of hypothesis, and their analysis lacks explanation.

159. Students in Years 7 to 9 show good levels of achievement. When they first enter the school, there are relatively few students reaching the higher levels of the National Curriculum but by Year 9 the expected proportion of students is approaching the higher level. Students' achievement is good because of the good teaching and the improvements that have been made to the curriculum and assessment during the current year. The achievement of the Year 11 students is now good, because during the current year improvements have been made to the teaching of coursework, the guidance on which lessons are based and to the assessment of students. However, because these improvements are relatively recent, they did not impact on the work of the current Year 11 students when they were in Year 10 and so have not yet had their full effect on raising standards. In both Years 9 and 11, the work is sufficiently challenging for gifted and talented students, who receive effective individual support from teachers. Students with

special educational needs achieve well in terms of their gains in knowledge, understanding and skill, but there are often weaknesses in their written work, including GCSE coursework. The small number of students from ethnic minority groups achieve as well as other students.

160. Teaching and learning are good in all years. The improvements that have been made to curriculum planning and assessment are not yet fully implemented and so there is still scope for further improvements to students' learning. Strengths of the teaching and learning include the use of activities to develop students' thinking and problem-solving skills. Teachers have very good levels of subject expertise so they almost invariably give lucid explanations and always use sequences of questions to extend students' understanding. A particular strength is the very effective teaching about geographical vocabulary which helps develop students' understanding of their work. A common feature of lessons is that there is a brisk pace of learning so that much is achieved in the available time. There is very effective class management which secures a very good response from the students who are interested, well behaved, keen to learn and sustain their concentration well. In classrooms, there are stimulating displays of students' work from Years 7 to 11 and these help to create a positive ethos for learning. Students' work is almost always thoroughly marked, with some targets for improvement. Occasionally, however, the marking of students' work is too general and does not make clear what they have done well or how they can improve. Good opportunities are provided for work in small groups, which helps the students improve their speaking and listening skills.

161. Occasional weaknesses in teaching and learning include diagrams that are unclear and an occasional learning objective that is too general to be helpful to students. Students use very few annotated sketch maps or diagrams in their own GCSE work. More common weaknesses are that students' targets for improvement are rather general and not specific to their learning in geography, and students receive insufficient support to help them write at length.

162. New guidance has been written this year to form the basis of teachers' lesson plans. The guidance is of a good quality and is especially helpful for planning work to match students' differing levels of attainment. There is a strong and effective emphasis on improving students' understanding of vocabulary but not enough support for students' writing. There is a satisfactory contribution to the development of students' numeracy skills. The department does not use ICT enough in teaching, although students are often referred to relevant web sites for their homework. For the GCSE course, it would be useful to review the number of case studies used to ensure that they are used efficiently. Good procedures have been introduced this year to track the progress of each student and set targets for improvement but they are not yet consistently implemented.

163. The leadership and management of geography provided by the head of humanities are good with some outstanding features. Weaknesses in standards have been identified and appropriate steps taken immediately to address them. There is a good, well-structured development plan that focuses on improving teaching and learning. Steps have been taken to raise boys' standards at GCSE and it will be important to monitor the effectiveness of these measures. During the current school year, there has been a rapid rate of improvement. A weakness in leadership and management is that the monitoring of most lessons is informal.

164. There has been satisfactory improvement since the last inspection. Year 9 standards have been maintained at matching national expectations. GCSE standards are still below national averages, although they are now rising. Provision for students with special

educational needs and the gifted and talented has improved. Teaching was satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection and is now good, and includes improved marking. All of the teaching is by subject specialists. Procedures for assessment during Years 7 to 9 are now good.

HISTORY

Overall, the quality of provision in history is good.

Strengths:

- Teachers' planning, knowledge and enthusiasm for the subject are very good.
- The departmental leadership and management are good.
- Relationships are very positive.
- Students' attitudes towards history are very good.
- Assessment and student target setting are very good.

Areas for improvement:

- GCSE standards, particularly those of boys.
- A local history module in the 1750-1900 unit.
- Access to the information and communication technology (ICT) resources.

165. Standards at the end of Year 9 and Year 11 are broadly average. This judgement is confirmed by the evidence from inspection. In the 2001 GCSE examination results in the A*-C range were well below average and around national average at A*-G. Girls did much better than boys in the examinations and have done so over the last four years. The quality of teaching and learning during the inspection was good and standards are rising, although difficulties in teacher recruitment are producing an uneven learning experience for the students.

166. The evidence shows that students of all levels of attainment make good progress in their first three years in the school, including those who are gifted and talented and those with learning difficulties. Progress is good because of the good teaching and the improvements made to curriculum planning and assessment. Students develop a wide range of historical skills, including the interpretation of appropriate historical evidence and data, the analysis of difficult historical issues and the understanding of chronology. They use a wide range of learning materials including thematic worksheets, pictorial evidence, timelines, videos, library sources and a comprehensive range of primary and secondary source material. The handling of different forms of historical data is secure and students are able to work individually and in pairs to develop their understanding of history. Students are given many opportunities to handle historical material, to interpret and to develop their historical understanding. In Year 7 students are able to identify and discuss the different roles within the mediaeval village structure and they are able to sort castle building evidence using ICT. Students' historical understanding is extended in Year 8 by analysing the arguments for and against eighteenth century slavery. The classroom activities ensured that all students were fully involved in the decision-making and as a result good learning took place. By Year 9 students interpret World War I source material accurately and evaluate different attitudes and emotions towards the war.

167. Students continue to make at least satisfactory progress throughout Years 10 and 11 as they build upon the foundation of skills and knowledge acquired in the earlier years. By the end of Year 11 students have developed a good understanding of the different types of documentary evidence used to interpret the Russian purges of the 1930s. There is a greater emphasis on developing extended writing skills, the making of their own notes often from visual materials and the interpretation and use of primary and secondary source material. In Year 11 students are encouraged to make oral contributions and to discuss

complex issues such as source reliability and the impact of different personalities. Some very good group work was observed in these years and students' involvement in their own learning is high. Thorough examination preparation is built into the comprehensive scheme of work and there is a strong emphasis on raising standards. The students have a good knowledge of their own progress through the assessed assignments, which also include targets for performance improvement. Students in the projected GCSE grades C/D range have individual support programmes to improve their learning. This strategy, which has been introduced by the new head of department, is supporting students' progress.

168. Teaching is good overall, and ranges from very good to satisfactory. This quality of teaching is reflected in the good level of learning. The quality of teaching is better where the teacher is permanent. During the inspection two-thirds of the staff were on temporary contracts. There is considerable evidence of well-planned and well-structured lessons. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and are enthusiastic about their subject, which they are able to share with the students. Teachers use a wide range of strategies to develop the students' learning. Most lessons begin with a question and answer session where the teacher is able to prompt and support good student learning. The activities that follow are activity based with opportunities for all students to develop their historical skills. There are very good whole class discussions at the end of each lesson that reinforce the learning that has taken place. As a result of the carefully structured lessons, students' learning is good and involvement and enthusiasm are very high.

169. The atmosphere in classes is purposeful and organised and students are able to work successfully to gain historical skills. Historical ideas are clearly and thoroughly explained and developed and there is good evidence of teachers using their knowledge, enthusiasm and teaching skills to develop students' understanding at all levels of competence. Teachers challenge students to raise their standards and these high expectations are rewarded with student commitment and progress.

170. Overall the standards of behaviour are very good. The strong relationships observed in the department underpin learning and the acquisition of skills. Very good interpersonal relationships are one of the strengths of the history department. Good examples of students listening carefully to each other were observed and co-operation amongst students in all years was high.

171. The management of the department is good with some outstanding features. The head of the department gives very clear leadership and has very good knowledge of how the department can build upon its existing strengths. He has been in post since September 2001 and has already rewritten the handbook and strengthened the schemes of work, which are now very thorough and comprehensive, although there is as yet no local history unit in the 1750-1900 module. The fieldwork programme has been revised and there are good opportunities for student learning outside of the school environment. All lessons have detailed lesson plans. The head of department gives strong leadership to his mainly temporary staff. Homework is set regularly and marking supports progress, learning and achievement. Teachers' comments are supportive and encouraging particularly in the lower years and then become more diagnostic in Years 10 and 11. Students have a good knowledge of their own learning through the recently introduced target setting and this should have a positive impact on standards.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

Overall, the quality of provision in ICT is unsatisfactory.

Strengths:

- There are now six computer suites.
- GCSE students in Year 10 are mostly making the expected progress at this stage of the course.

Areas for improvement:

- Most other subjects do not make the use of ICT required by the National Curriculum.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) standards are too low for most students.
- The curriculum for many students does not enable them to achieve well.
- Assessment is not used consistently to guide the planning for students' next steps of learning or to evaluate and improve the curriculum.

172. In the teachers' assessment at the end of Year 9 in 2001, the results for ICT were below national averages and below the school's averages for other subjects. The main reasons for these low results were weaknesses in the curriculum and assessment. In 2001, no students took public examinations in ICT and so there are no examination results for the subject. Public examinations have been introduced for some of the current Year 10 students.

173. The standards of the current Year 9 students are below national expectations as students have, for example, insufficient opportunities to select and structure information for particular purposes and for different audiences. Students do not combine the use of ICT tools within the overall structure of an ICT solution. In Years 7 to 9, there are some examples of students reaching the expected standards of work as when a Year 8 student completed a report on using a spreadsheet to calculate conversions between different currencies, and a group of Year 9 students used PowerPoint software to give a presentation on a controversial issue.

174. In Year 11, students are following a commercial work programme, and its use by the school includes text and ICT based resources. A number of Year 10 students follow the same work programme. They are not following an examination course. These students cover a wide range of work in ICT and are developing a sound knowledge but have done little practical work with ICT for specific purposes. Some of the work is too easy for higher-attaining students. Consequently, standards at the end of Year 11 are below national expectations.

175. In Year 10, two classes are following a GCSE course in ICT. The other Year 10 students have chosen to follow the same commercial work programme as the Year 11 students or to take RSA Stage 1 examinations in word processing and spreadsheets. The students taking the GCSE course have mostly made the expected progress at this stage of the course. In their coursework, students are relatively weak in comparing different designs of the same type of document and the evaluations they make of their work are sometimes very brief. Those students following the RSA course are producing some work that meets the expectations of the course.

176. In Years 7 to 9, gifted and talented students have insufficient opportunities to use and apply their ICT skills to solve problems and so mostly do not achieve as well as they should. This also applies to some students in Years 10 and 11, although a small number of gifted and talented students are taking the GCSE examination in ICT at the end of Year 10. They are mostly achieving very well because teaching has enabled them to work at a rapid pace. Students with special educational needs achieved well in some lessons seen. The

commercial work programme used in Years 10 and 11 is also used in Years 7 to 9. Its use by the school involves too many worksheets that do not secure a good response from many of the students with special educational needs so that many sheets are not completed. Some of the tasks on the worksheets are too easy for the students for whom they have been set. The small number of students from ethnic minority groups achieve as well as other students.

177. The teaching seen usually resulted in satisfactory learning, but the effect that teaching has on students' learning over longer periods of time is generally limited by significant weaknesses in the curriculum and assessment for ICT. Relationships between teachers and students are generally good and class management is effective, so that students use the time for individual work well. Students in Years 7 to 9 respond positively to the teaching and are well behaved and hard working. In Years 10 and 11, students' responses are variable. For example, in one lesson students behaviour and attitudes were good and they tackled their tasks conscientiously, while in another several students were unmotivated and achieved little, partly because they were not motivated by a non-examination course that did not relate directly to their work in other subjects. Teachers monitor and support individual students effectively during individual work and this helps students learn. Learning objectives are shared with students at the start of each lesson and there is a good focus on the subject's key vocabulary.

178. There are some weaknesses in teaching and learning. Occasionally, teachers' explanations lack clarity and this slows students' learning about, for example, creating a web site or data handling. There is an overuse of worksheets that are not always well matched to students' learning needs. Too much of the display in the computer rooms is of worksheets and information sheets with little students' work to make clear the expectations about presentation and standards. In some lessons, students are doing so many different tasks that it is difficult for the teacher and students to review the learning at the end of a lesson.

179. The school's use of the commercial work programme for Years 7 to 9 does not enable students to meet the expectations of the National Curriculum at the end of Year 9. The school's use of this programme is not a good preparation for GCSE as it does not provide students with the foundation of skills to undertake coursework or ensure that they are familiar with the software that they will need to use. A start has recently been made to introducing projects that require students to apply their ICT skills in each of Years 7, 8 and 9. All students in Years 10 and 11, except those who take the GCSE in ICT, are taught ICT as part of a complex rotation of subjects that hinders progression in teaching and learning. The school has recognised that this arrangement is unsatisfactory and will be changed from next September when all Year 10 students will take a full or half GCSE in ICT. The schemes of work for ICT lack learning objectives and guidance on teaching activities. The ICT curriculum makes a satisfactory contribution to students' literacy and numeracy skills.

180. The ICT assessment policy includes the marking of students' work in Years 7 to 9 according to National Curriculum criteria and the setting of targets for improvement. However, this is not yet fully implemented. Students in Years 7 to 9 have assessment booklets but these are not relevant to all of the work they undertake. Teachers have thorough records of students' test and worksheet scores from the commercial work programme. However, assessment data is not used to evaluate teaching and the curriculum. Overall, the quality and use of assessment are unsatisfactory.

Information and communication technology across other subjects of the curriculum

181. The use of ICT by other subjects does not meet the requirements of the National Curriculum. The use of ICT by other subjects has not been mapped so that the school does not know what ICT skills are being used or taught. There are examples of good use of ICT, for example in English, but most subjects do not meet statutory requirements. In English, students use word processing and ICT-based sources for research, while not all students use data logging in science and there is no computer-aided design work for all students in design and technology. Good use is made of ICT by students following the GNVQ Leisure and Tourism course in Year 10. The school has already identified the use of ICT by other subjects as an area for improvement.

182. An acting co-ordinator for ICT has held the post for a relatively short period of time. At the time of appointment, there were significant weaknesses in ICT provision such as the absence of any examination courses. Until very recently, the co-ordinator was the only qualified ICT teacher and this has hindered progress in developing the teaching of ICT. The school has made unsatisfactory progress with ICT since the last inspection. Issues identified during that inspection have not been addressed: the curriculum is still unsatisfactory for Years 10 and 11; ICT is still not integrated into all subject areas; and provision does not meet National Curriculum requirements. The proportion of computers to students has improved significantly and is now broadly average. There are now six computer suites in the school. The overall management of ICT is unsatisfactory.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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

Strengths:

- Results in GCSE examinations in French are good.
- Teachers have high expectations of what the students can achieve.
- The monitoring of students' progress is good.

Areas for improvement:

- Curriculum arrangements.
- Setting tasks appropriate to the differing levels of attainment in each class.
- The use of the visual image and information and communication technology (ICT) in teaching.

183. By the end of Year 9, standards are below average for both French and German, particularly the latter. In the GCSE examinations the proportion of students achieving grades A*-C is above the national average and above the average for the school. All students entered gained at least a grade G. Students performed better in French than in most of their other subjects. In German, the proportion of students gaining grades A*-C was below the national and the school average. In both subjects, girls perform better than boys.

184. The division of the available periods between French and German in Years 7 to 9 results in neither subject having enough time. Less material is covered and standards are not high enough. In particular, students have not mastered the past and future tenses in either language, which limits what they can understand, say and write. Listening skills are satisfactory as a result of the teachers' constant use of French or German for classroom communication. Students make a good start orally and in Year 7 higher-attaining students can talk confidently about themselves and their families with satisfactory pronunciation and intonation. Lower-attaining students are less accurate, both grammatically and in terms of fluency and pronunciation. In German, students had difficulty in grasping the notion of the accusative case. Lack of time means that students make less progress by the end of Year

9 than would be expected. Whilst vocabulary increases, even the most able students are not able to relate events in the past with any confidence. Not enough time is devoted to writing skills and higher-attaining students do not have enough opportunities to write at length. Lower-attaining students have difficulty in writing even simple sentences.

185. In Years 10 and 11, students make progress in all four skills but overall standards are no more than satisfactory. They are higher in German than in French. Much of the work consists of improving technique for the modular examinations, which occur at intervals. Higher-attaining students write accurate French or German on topics relating to themselves, their families, school, holidays and future plans. Students writing in German, as opposed to French, do so at greater length, using a wider range of tenses, structure and vocabulary. Listening and reading skills are competent in both languages. Oral skills are limited. Whilst with practice and preparation students can talk about themselves with reasonable fluency, they find difficulty in holding a conversation. In a French revision lesson on future plans, only the higher-attaining students were able to respond to the prompts with any accuracy; some did not recognise the question forms, others could not manipulate the tenses and in all cases the range of vocabulary used was limited. A similar lesson in German produced better but still not strong results.

186. Students make slow progress in Years 7 to 9, because of the unsatisfactory curriculum arrangements, but at least satisfactory progress thereafter. As a result of skilled examination preparation by the teachers, they achieve well in French in the GCSE examination. Achievement in German has been less good but the current Year 11 is in line to achieve well also. Students are generally attentive and keen to do well and this contributes to the good results obtained. Lower-attaining students and those with special educational needs are less committed, particularly in Year 9, since they know that they will not be continuing the subject in Year 10; they are less attentive and their written work is often incomplete and badly presented.

187. The overall quality of teaching is sound, and in a few lessons it was good. Teaching was unsatisfactory in two lessons. Teachers are committed and have high expectations of what the students can achieve. The teaching of basic skills is sound and in Years 10 and 11 teachers are skilled at enabling the students to make the most of what they know in examinations. The extensive use of French and German for classroom communication contributes to students' generally good comprehension of aural texts. Lessons are generally well planned, with a sequence of varied activities to reinforce students' learning. In some lessons, however, the learning objectives are not made sufficiently clear, so that students' efforts are less focused and the learning less effective. For the most part, the same tasks are set for all, irrespective of prior attainment, with the result that the more able are not challenged and the lower-attaining students are out of their depth. The department does not make enough use of the visual image to convey meaning without recourse to translation or lengthy explanations in French or German. Little use is made of ICT. Students' work is marked regularly and precisely, but for the most part does not indicate the level at which the students is working or indicate how the work can be improved. Teachers ensure that students learn about life in French and German speaking countries and how it compares with their own, thereby making a significant contribution to students' cultural development.

188. Curriculum arrangements are unsatisfactory, not only in Years 7 to 9, as indicated above, but in Years 10 and 11. The current requirement to take a modern foreign language in Years 10 and 11 is being ignored. Whilst it is possible to allow a few students exemption from the national curriculum under current regulations, this route is not being followed. Instead, French and German are being put into the options and very few are opting to take them. Assessment procedures are good and, particularly in Years 10 and 11, students' progress is monitored very carefully, enabling more of them to be successful.

189. The department works well as a team and is well led. Teaching and learning are monitored but more mutual observation would enable good practice to be shared. Since the

last inspection, standards in GCSE examinations have improved, as have planning and assessment procedures. The teaching remains committed and if standards in Years 7 to 9 remain weak, the unsatisfactory curriculum arrangements are the prime cause.

MUSIC

Overall, the quality of provision is unsatisfactory.

Strengths:

- The leadership of music is enthusiastic, committed and very hardworking.
- The range of opportunities in instrumental tuition is good and involves an above average number of students; teaching is good.

Areas for improvement:

- Standards of attainment and achievement.
- The quality of teaching and learning.
- The time is given to the teaching of music in Years 7 to 9.
- Student attitudes.
- The range of opportunities, numbers involved and standards reached in extra-curricular work.

190. Students enter the school with very variable musical experience related to the quality of their musical education in their previous schools, their personal interests and level of home support. Some enter with above average experience but most students enter with below average attainment in music and teachers' assessments confirm this. By Year 9, when students are 14, standards remain below average and so their achievement is satisfactory. One reason why progress is not faster is the low time allocation given to music, a point made in the last inspection report. Most students are working close to the expected levels but some talented students attain higher. Students sing satisfactorily in Year 7 but sing irregularly and insufficiently to develop their skills or meet the statutory requirements of the National Curriculum. Instrumental skills are underdeveloped; many students find it difficult to keep time in ensemble and students are given insufficient opportunity to use their own instruments. Students' composing skills are underdeveloped. The music-reading skills of most students are poor; students use letters under notes. Students listen respectfully to each other when performing but their general musical knowledge, for example of instruments, composers, forms, structures, artists and well known pieces of music is poor.

191. In recent years, GCSE results have been below average in years when students have been entered for the examination. Students have achieved poorly in relation to their other subjects. In Year 11 two enthusiastic students are studying the subject in after-school sessions and show above average attainment levels. In the Year 10 group, there is a very wide range of attainment; standards are below average. Their achievement is satisfactory given their below average levels of attainment in Year 9. Composing skills are underdeveloped but good quality work is produced by high attaining students including those who have received support from outside school. The lack of computers in the department has disadvantaged students. Students' general musical knowledge is below average.

192. Teaching and therefore learning is unsatisfactory. In instrumental tuition, teaching is good. In classwork, teachers show secure subject knowledge so that they teach confidently and make good use of their musical skills, for example in accompanying. In the better lessons, students understand the objectives; the presentation of information is lively but there is too much teacher talk and insufficient attention to presenting information visually or to developing musical vocabulary. The new head of department is developing schemes and lesson plans but a major weakness is that there is too much study of music and not enough

making of it through which students learn; this affects the attitudes of students. Expectations are sometimes too low and students, especially the high attaining students, are insufficiently challenged. As a result, many boys especially become bored and attitudes are neutral or negative. Students with special needs are well integrated and make similar progress to the other students. Lessons have clear structures but often run out of time.

193. The management of students is satisfactory with some younger classes but is less secure with other groups. As a result, relationships are variable and poor in some classes such as Year 10. Lessons start briskly but the pace of lessons is often too slow and tasks do not engage the students sufficiently at different levels so that their interest wanes and too little is learned. Students enjoy practical work but they dislike the academic approach and didactic style. As a result, behaviour varies from good to poor, which affects the progress of everyone and the atmosphere. Most students work productively and give good support to each other but the majority lacks the skills and confidence to tackle many of the tasks. Music technologies are not used enough and the music room has only recently acquired a computer. Assessment does not always give enough support to students to improve their work, for example by giving them advice about how to sing better. Insufficient use is made of homework to extend students' learning.

194. The provision for music and standards have been affected by many staff changes in recent years. The management of music is not yet satisfactory because the new teacher has not had time to implement the necessary changes and because there is too much unsatisfactory teaching. The teacher in charge of the subject is very enthusiastic, committed and hardworking but she has insufficient time within the timetable to manage the department, and there is no technical support resulting in great pressures on her. Schemes and policies are being developed but there is not enough monitoring and evaluation of the subject's performance or of instrumental tuition. Assessment is appropriate and used to review planning. Appropriate curricular links with the primary schools are being developed. Keyboard resources are good and support students' learning well but there is an urgent need for tuned percussion instruments such as xylophones and glockenspiels to enhance creative work, additional computers, audio equipment, TV, video, overhead projector and music for the library. These constraints limit the opportunities to make music in the classroom.

Instrumental tuition

195. Twenty-seven boys and 63 girls receive instrumental or voice lessons from eight visiting teachers. This represents over nine percent of the school's population and is an above average number in relation to similar schools. Standards are broadly average. Teaching is good and some very teaching was observed in wind tuition. The progress and achievement of students are good in relation to their ages and the time they have received tuition as seen in lessons and the first lunchtime concert held during the inspection. Students do not have practice books. Instrumental tuition makes little impact on the quality of students' musical experiences in the classroom because students make insufficient use of their own instruments in classroom work. The range of extra-curricular activities in music is limited to the small girls-only choir. The school produced extracts from a number of musicals last term. The use of live and recorded music in assemblies is underdeveloped and music makes insufficient contribution to students' personal development.

196. Since the last inspection, standards and the quality of teaching and learning have deteriorated but the accommodation has been improved.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Strengths:

- Teaching is good overall.
- Students achieve well.
- The leadership and management of the department are very good.
- Students' attitudes are very good and they have very good relationships with their teachers.
- The quantity and range of display in all areas of the department is excellent.

Areas for improvement:

- The attainment of students in the GCSE examinations.
- Curriculum organisation to give GCSE students the opportunity to work as a group in the same number of lessons as all other GCSE subjects and not as part of their statutory entitlement.

197. The majority of students have below average attainment levels when they join the school in Year 7. The school has test results that show that students lack experience in several areas of the National Curriculum, for example, in many elements of fitness. Standards seen during the inspection confirm that standards are below average when students enter school. Netball is a new activity for many girls in Year 7 and in the lesson observed during the inspection they lacked basic ball handling skills and spatial awareness. Students make good progress in all years to reach average standards by the end of Year 9 and Year 11. Their achievement is good because they are taught consistently well, are enthusiastic and they always participate in their lessons.

198. By the end of Year 9 students attain levels that are in line with national expectations because they have experienced a well planned programme of activities that progressively improve their agility, co-ordination, ball skills, health and fitness. Girls in Years 8 and 9 have good dribbling, passing and shooting skills in basketball. Boys develop good performance skills and a clear understanding of the rules and tactics in rugby as they move through the school. Students are mostly fit, energetic and understand the reasons for warming up and stretching. Students' analytical and evaluative skills are not well developed and teachers do not always address this strand of the National Curriculum sufficiently in their teaching.

199. The percentage of students who gained A*-C grades in the 2001 GCSE examinations was well below the national average. All students gained a grade in the A*-G range. Results in the A*-C range have gradually fallen over the last five years. In 2001, most students attained better in the practical activities than in the theoretical aspect of the course. Students' results were not as good as those attained in their other subjects. The main reason for the low number of A*-C grades is that students had no dedicated GCSE lessons but were taught alongside students who are not entered for the examination. The statutory programmes of study of the National Curriculum for Years 10 and 11 do not examine aspects in sufficient depth for students to attain higher grades at GCSE.

200. At the end of Year 11 students attain average standards and a few boys and girls reach standards above this level. A few girls attain below standards in basketball and a few boys play rugby with speed, skill, energy and very good team spirit.

201. The time allocated to statutory lessons is above the national average and students all

take an examination at the end of their course. They are entered for the Junior Sports Leaders Award, the certificate of achievement or the GCSE examination. Boys in Year 11 are divided into ability groups for the theory lessons and the standard of work in the higher group is above average. They have a good understanding of body types and can relate muscle development, height and weight of athletes to different sports. Although written work is mostly very well presented, a few students do not take sufficient pride in their work because they are not studying for the GCSE examination. Teachers do not monitor notebooks sufficiently to ensure each student will have a good learning resource at the end of the course and all work is completed. Four theory lessons take place at one time and most groups are taught in a variety of classrooms away from the excellent displays of work in and around the physical education areas. This limits teaching methods and students learning. Teaching GCSE as part of statutory physical education is the main cause of these problems.

202. A few individual students and teams achieve high standards in district and county competitions in athletics, football, basketball, rugby, swimming, cricket and netball. The attainment of these students is well above the national average and they benefit considerably from the many opportunities offered by the hard work and dedication of their teachers. Students enjoy the good extra-curricular provision and are keen, interested and regularly participate. They appreciate the reward system and the sports presentation evening but better use could be made of the lunchtime for teacher led activities.

203. The quality of teaching and therefore of learning observed during the inspection was all good or better, with nearly one third of lessons being very good. There are seven teachers in the department, all specialists. Five have responsibilities in other areas of the school. In the best lessons, students benefit in their learning because a wide variety of progressive tasks are set and very good relationships have been established with students. Objectives are shared with students at the start of each lesson and good summaries at the end ensure that learning is well focused. Most teachers have good knowledge of the subject and are able to give high quality demonstrations of techniques. This gives students a good visual image of the activity and shows them clearly how to improve their skills. The 50-minute lesson is used well. The short length of time is not suitable for physical education lessons but students work at a very good pace and teachers ensure that every minute is used well, for example lesson objectives are discussed and students are encouraged to stretch while they are changing for the activity.

204. The head of department provides clear educational direction and very good leadership for the subject. He leads by very good example with his teaching and supports members of the department well. There is a well-thought-out action plan and the ethos of the department is reflected in its aims of achievement, commitment and excellence. The department benefits from having good support from parents. A few parents help with coaching cricket and rugby and others provide support and transport for teams. Assessment is very thorough. Fitness and skill tests are a regular part of the process. Many improvements have been made since the previous inspection. Statutory requirements are now met at in Years 7 to 9, the quality of teaching has improved and is more consistent, the sports hall and new changing accommodation have extended and upgraded the facilities and Sixth Form courses have been established. Improvement since the last inspection, therefore, is good.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Overall, the quality of provision in religious education is unsatisfactory.

Strengths:

- The GCSE short course introduced for Year 10 students.
- Resources have improved and are well organised and chosen.
- Lesson plans, especially those that use visitors to team-teach.

Areas for development:

- The delivery of the statutory curriculum.
- Assessment of students' work.
- Tasks that reflect students' individual learning needs.
- The effective use of marking and homework to raise standards.
- The monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning.
- The development of information and communication technology (ICT) to support the teaching and learning of religious studies.

205. There have been no nationally accredited courses in this subject since before the last inspection and there is no formal teacher assessment of the attainment of 14 year olds. No judgement can be made on standards achieved by students over the past few years.

206. In the work seen during the inspection week, attainment at the end of Year 9 is in line with the expectations of the Agreed Syllabus. This reflects overall satisfactory teaching and learning. Students make sound progress and achieve satisfactorily during lessons and over time. Year 7 knew about places of worship and artefacts in a synagogue. They could use the correct language to describe these aspects. However, learning was not good because there was not enough stress on the main function of a synagogue as a house of worship and the role of prayer in religion. Year 8 students learn about the gift of new life, baptism and first communion. A Year 8 class increased their knowledge of Moses and made some interesting comments about his leadership qualities although the quality of learning would have been higher if there had been greater links with religious ideas such as faith and commitment. By the end of Year 9, students have made steady progress and have learnt the basic tenets and traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. They have considered fundamental issues such as the crime and punishment in relation to religious teaching, but had not pondered questions about the nature of goodness and evil in sufficient depth.

207. Standards in the new Year 10 GCSE short course are average and progress over the past six months has been satisfactory. This is because overall teaching and therefore learning, is satisfactory. For example, some students produced good work on the resurrection but there was a lack of a high level of understanding about the nature of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. There were insufficient regard to religious concepts and detailed references to religious texts. A Year 10 benefited greatly from the skilled and interesting input of a local Church Youth Worker, making good progress in a lesson that discussed the idea of a Just War. Students were engaged by the account of his family's pacifist stance and increased their knowledge about how such views linked with the teaching of St Augustine and Aquinas. Good references to historical and current events increased debate, thereby facilitating learning.

208. Year 11 students are not following any accredited course and are only taught one religious education lesson a week for a third of the academic year. There are no detailed written schemes of work and students do not generally record their work in a book. No books were available for scrutiny. Attainment and achievement over time is unsatisfactory. Only two lessons were seen. In one, the question of surrogate parents was considered. The teacher used a good range of newspaper articles to stimulate interest and students increased their awareness of the arguments for and against the practice. They had

acquired some knowledge of the relevance of Christian teaching. A rushed plenary failed to deeply reinforce and extend this understanding. This was not the case in the other lesson, taken by a supply teacher, where students showed remarkable maturity and forbearance when presented with the same exercise for the third time.

209. There was one good lesson in Year 10 and all other lessons were satisfactory. Resources were often good, relevant and well chosen. Individual teaching within the classroom was good. Students benefited from a consistent regard for their self-esteem and a sensitive understanding of their difficulties. The assessment of students' understanding in lessons increased learning. Lesson planning was generally good and especially effective in involving visitors in team teaching that significantly extended students' knowledge. There was a continuous focus on religious vocabulary although other aspects of Literacy such as the correction of spelling and punctuation were less strong. Classroom management did not always ensure that all students consistently concentrated on their work. There were too few opportunities for research, which would have increased students' involvement in their own learning. Higher achievers and students with special needs improved their understanding because of the good discussions that were a feature of certain lessons. However, they did not benefit from the continuous identification of tasks that specifically related to their academic levels. Poor marking and the infrequent use of homework to reinforce and enhance knowledge reduced the students' ability to achieve well. Information and communication technology (ICT) was hardly used to support the subject.

210. Overall, students' attitudes to the subject are satisfactory. Older students respond well to a range of current issues, especially when challenged by adults who have good subject knowledge and commitment to religious studies. The majority of students aged 11 to 14 are diligent and well behaved although some found it difficult to work hard throughout the lesson and to stay on task. Students reacted with maturity to new supply teachers and the quality of the relationships between the students and with adults on a one to one basis are good. Independent learning skills are underdeveloped.

211. A new teacher in charge of religious studies was appointed just over a year ago and positive changes have occurred since then. Schemes of work have been introduced for Years 7, 8 and 9. Year 10 is in the first year of a GGSE short course. Resources have been substantially improved with some well-chosen videos. The librarian has been most helpful in building up the department's good collection of relevant and stimulating newspaper articles. Some good worksheets have been prepared. The religious studies department is no longer an isolated unit and is now becoming an integral part of the humanities faculty. The new head of this faculty, and the teacher in charge of the subject, has identified appropriate areas for future development. These include the introduction of a systematic approach to the assessment of students' knowledge and understanding so that learning tasks and targets accurately reflect their needs and potential. The problem of an unsatisfactory staffing structure is recognised, as it was by parents, and exemplified by the three supply teachers seen during the inspection. There are plans to improve this situation. There is only one full time specialist teacher who takes 23 classes a week, which causes problems in the organisation and marking of homework. The monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning are under-developed and not yet effectively used to raise standards. The school is not meeting its statutory obligations to deliver the religious education curriculum. Overall, current provision is unsatisfactory despite the improvements that are now taking place.

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

212. 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.

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

GCE AS Level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Biology	2	N/A	52	N/A	2	N/A	0.79

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
Art and Design	3	67	96	33	46	4.67	6.57
Communications Studies	4	100	93	N/A	31	5.5	5.53
English Literature	5	100	95	40	37	6.00	5.91
Design and technology	2	100	91	N/A	30	5.00	5.38
Geography	2	N/A	88	N/A	38	N/A	5.74
Business	6	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	15.00	10.45
Leisure and tourism	1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	18.00	10.06

Intermediate vocational qualifications

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		Average point distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

214. There were no focus subjects in this curriculum area but one lesson of GCSE mathematics was sampled. Students were attaining well below national averages but attaining well in relation to their prior attainment. Teaching is good and students are making good progress.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

215. The inspection focus was on AS and A Level design and technology and product design.

Design and technology

The overall provision for design and technology is good.

Strengths:

- Teaching is good and has resulted in above average standards of designing and making.
- Good working relationships enable students to make good progress and achieve well.

Areas for improvement:

- Students' weak knowledge of the theoretical aspects of the course.
- Systems for using assessment data to inform students of their progress and to set target grades.
- Lack of equipment for computer-aided design and manufacture limits students' experience of modern manufacturing processes.

216. Advance (A) Level results in 2001 shows attainment below the national average. This was also below the school average. Examination entry numbers are low which makes comparisons with national data unreliable and trends difficult to discern. Advanced Supplementary (AS) results for the three students entered in 2001 were encouraging although students' performance on the coursework elements was stronger than the written examination.

217. The standard of designing and making for current students is above average. Students produce well-researched and presented case studies that are drawn from real needs, for example, investigations into the problems encountered by disabled people entering public buildings. Higher attaining students have design folders containing thorough research and analysis. The individual research into electronic circuitry carried out by one student showed a remarkable commitment to the course and represented considerable progress on her prior knowledge of the topic. Students use the available information and communication technology (ICT) resources effectively and the content and presentation of their folders is improved accordingly. The range of ICT resources available to students is limited by lack of networked computers and software of an appropriate standard. The lack of computer-aided manufacturing equipment limits opportunities for students to experience these processes at first hand and prevents their use in project work.

218. Good subject knowledge combined with constructive relationships enables teachers to act effectively as consultants and facilitators. Through mature discussion and negotiation

students develop good independent designing skills. In consultation with her teacher one Year 12 student, for example, made good progress in developing and constructing a rig for abrasion testing parts of her project. However, students do not have secure background knowledge of the theoretical aspects of the subject that would support their coursework. A class discussion on man-made boards, for example, revealed that Year 12 students had only an incomplete recollection of previous GCSE work on this topic and, despite the teacher's skilful questioning, they made only limited progress by the end of the lesson. Refinement of teaching methods and materials is needed to improve students' knowledge and understanding.

219. Students enter the course with an average level of attainment and progress throughout the course is good and male and female students achieve equally well. Students have positive views about the course and feel that they were well supported in the transition from GCSE work to the more independent work required for A Level. Whilst all students considered that they were well informed about their progress and the quality of their work, they were unaware of their target grades for the subject. One Year 13 student was very pleased with the support she had received with both academic and personal development. The practical nature of the course and good support from teachers enabled her to participate fully and derive maximum benefit despite her dyslexia. On completion of A Levels, the majority of students intend to enter business and industry rather than higher education and all were positive about the value of the course for future career plans.

220. Teaching is shared amongst three members of staff and good organisation and management ensures that each aspect of the work is taught by the most appropriately qualified and experienced person.

BUSINESS

221. The inspection focus was on business education.

Business Education

Overall the quality of provision is good.

Strengths:

- Teachers have secure subject knowledge, and plan and organise the lessons effectively.
- Departmental leadership and management are effective.
- The results are well above the national average and students' progress is good.
- Relationships between students and staff are very good.
- There is good use of information and communication technology (ICT).

Areas for improvement:

- The number of students on the Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) course is low.
- There are not enough links with local businesses.
- Access to ICT outside the business suite.

222. Standards in the 2001 Advanced GNVQ examination were well above average, with 50 per cent of the six students achieving a distinction. Recruitment over the last four years has remained fairly constant, with more boys than girls on the courses. Since the introduction of the AVCE, more students have taken up business education.

223. The standards of written work and levels of understanding observed are high and consistent with the very good results achieved in recent years. Students make good progress throughout the two years. In Year 12 AS Vocational Certificate of Education (VCE) students are confident in working together to identify the business objectives of the Cadburys case. They are also able to argue their points of view effectively confidently during a group presentation. They are able to listen critically to each other and to analyse the significant aspects of the case study effectively. In another Year 12 class they were able to analyse the marketing strengths of McDonald's, working in pairs. Year 13 students are able to identify different group roles and they can work co-operatively in role-play situations to further their understanding of the role of leadership. They make effective personal presentations to demonstrate business-selling techniques. There is evidence from the lessons observed and the work scrutiny that good development and understanding of business skills is achieved over the course.

224. Teaching is good overall, with consistency amongst the staff, and students learn well as a result. Teachers have good subject knowledge and sound business experience. Planning is effective and teachers' expectations of the students are very high. The students are challenged to identify, research and solve business issues and the initiative for learning rests with them, which they welcome. The pace of learning is considerable and the students enjoy the challenge that is offered to them. The teachers are enthusiastic and authoritative about their subject and share this enthusiasm readily with the students. As a result effective learning takes place and the students make good progress. This positive learning environment produces a high level of enthusiasm amongst the students and they work very effectively together. Relationships with the teachers are also very good and there is a high level of mutual respect.

225. The students have a mature approach to their studies and from early in Year 12 they develop good independent learning skills. The majority of the modules are based on company case studies. The individual research of each student is thorough and comprehensive and underpins the very good results achieved. The availability and provision of computers within the business suite are good. Students are confident with their ICT skills and use them to enhance both the presentation and content of their work. However the students commented on the difficulties they often face in accessing computers outside the suite to process their coursework. Access to the Internet for company research is also restricted for some students and this has an adverse impact on their ability to work effectively in school. The monitoring and assessment of student work are thorough and supportive and most students, particularly those in Year 13, are aware of what they have to do to strengthen their portfolios. Students' interest and commitment in business education are high and many of the students continue their study of business at university.

226. The leadership and management of the department are good. The new AVCE courses have been successfully introduced and members of the department have been on the necessary training. All the staff have been observed in their teaching and support and advice given. There are regular staff meetings. The department works effectively as a team and the students are strongly supported in their learning. This feature was commented on by the students and welcomed as a strong feature of the department. Areas for development include the development of greater links with and visits to local industries and establishing a programme of visiting speakers. Also more students need to be encouraged to join the AVCE course as it provides a very good preparation for work and of progression to higher education. The accommodation is very good with an ample supply of computers in each room. There is a good modern business environment in the specialist rooms that provides an effective and supportive atmosphere for the effective learning that takes place.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

227. The inspection focus was on ICT.

Information and communication technology (ICT)

The overall provision for ICT is satisfactory.

Strengths:

- Teaching is at least satisfactory and sometimes good.
- Students are mainly well motivated.
- The tracking of students' progress is good.

Areas for improvement:

- High number of non-completions for the current courses.
- Access to computer resources limited during private study periods.

228. Standards of attainment in ICT are satisfactory. The school commenced operating vocational courses in ICT in September 2001. There are therefore no examination results for these courses. At the time of the inspection there were seven Year 12 students following programmes leading to the GNVQ Intermediate qualification and two working towards the AVCE award. There has been a relatively high non-completion rate for the courses with five further students commencing the courses but subsequently withdrawing. A number of students have also transferred from the advanced to the intermediate award. Those remaining on the courses are producing work which is at the appropriate level for the programmes that they are now following. The progress of the majority of the students is satisfactory.

229. Teaching is mainly satisfactory and occasionally it is good. One good lesson involved the students in modelling household costs using a spreadsheet. The teacher led the class through the main requirements of the exercise using a digital projector. Students were able to access on-line the partially completed spreadsheet and after the introduction by the teacher they were able to complete the exercise. A detailed and good quality handout provided for the students aided their understanding. All lessons are well planned. Specific learning objectives are set and shared with the students. Good quality computer hardware and software available in the specialist teaching rooms support the teaching and learning well. A student with special educational needs received particularly good support during the lessons. Good records of students' progress are kept by the teachers.

230. The majority of the students have a positive attitude to their ICT work. They are well motivated in lessons and usually respond well to the frequent questions that are asked of them during the group work. Most students are producing well organised and good quality portfolios of evidence containing a range of work of an appropriate standard for the programmes that they are following. A few portfolios are poorly organised, contain a more restricted range of work and overall are of poorer quality. Management of the Sixth Form ICT provision is satisfactory. An acting ICT co-ordinator has overall responsibility and is supported by another teacher. Both have a secure knowledge of the subject requirements. Students have access to good quality computer hardware and software during their timetabled lessons. However they have difficulties in accessing appropriate computer resources during their private study periods.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

231. The inspection focus was on sports studies but one lesson of leisure and tourism was sampled. The one student entered for the leisure and tourism examination in 2001 gained a distinction. In the lesson observed during the inspection, good opportunities were provided for speaking and listening and students made articulate and mature contributions. The lesson was well planned and relationships were very supportive.

Sports Studies

The overall provision for sports studies is very good.

Strengths:

- All teaching is good and teachers have very good specialist knowledge.
- Students have very positive attitudes.
- The marking of assignments is helpful and informative.
- The planning and organisation of the course is very thorough.

Areas for improvement:

- Establish links with other course providers.
- Mentor students regularly in relation to the whole course, review their progress and set challenging targets.

232. The sports studies course was introduced in the Sixth Form as an advanced vocational subject for the first time last year. At the time of the inspection, therefore, there were no examination results. The course has proved very popular and has begun very well. The standards achieved by current students in Years 12 and 13, as seen in their lessons, in their written work and in their completed assignments are average. A few students in both years are working above this level and regularly achieve merits in their course work. Students are making good progress based on their performance in their GCSE examinations.

233. In the physical science unit, Year 13 students were able to combine a practical experiment with mathematical calculations to find evidence about heat loss. Students have very well informed views about the legal and ethical use of drugs to improve performance. A particular strength of the subject is seen in Year 12 students' course work, where very high standards are reached in the presentation and detail shown in their anatomy and physiology assignments. They use the Internet independently and are able to extract information, share it with others and make their own notes, for example, when investigating recruitment and selection processes.

234. Students are mature, hardworking and show a keen interest and enthusiasm for the subject. Their very positive attitudes are illustrated in the amount of time and care which they put into their work and their very good relationships with one another and their teachers. Most students wish to pursue a career related to sports science when they have completed further studies.

235. All teaching is good and two very good lessons were observed during the inspection. Teaching is shared amongst members of the physical education department and a science specialist. The involvement of a scientist in the teaching is a very positive initiative. Because of the very good subject expertise of their teachers, students in both year groups quickly acquire new knowledge and increase their understanding of sports science. Teachers plan for a wide range of activities and it is the variety and practical elements of each lesson that motivate and challenge students. For example when they were learning about carbohydrate loading, students worked in pairs to extract information from a series of

graphs which linked carbohydrate levels to training intensity. There is a strong focus on developing information, communication and technology skills. Students are expected to word process assignments, learn how to handle databases and make effective use of the Internet for independent research purposes. However, their work is hindered by the lack of a Sixth Form study area and computer access. In a few lessons observed students were not fully aware of how to use their knowledge to meet the assessment criteria of each unit because teachers did not place sufficient emphasis on linking the lesson content to the course requirements.

236. The physical education department is very well managed and the good quality of teaching comes about because of the positive relationships within the department and the sharing of responsibilities for this Sixth Form course. Very good links have been developed with two local higher education providers to help students in their future careers. At present the department has not made any links with other providers of the course and an exchange of ideas and confirmation of standards would be very beneficial to the department. Students work in each unit is marked constructively, with perceptive comments that provide helpful advice about how students can improve their work. An overall review with target setting would further improve the monitoring and advice students receive. A growing strength that is very much appreciated by the students is the very good range of learning support material being developed by the head of department in liaison with the librarian.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

237. There were no subjects offered in this curriculum area.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

238. The inspection did not focus on subjects in this curriculum area but one lesson of art was sampled. In art, there are a very small number of students. Their standards are in line with the national average. Teaching and learning are good and students' attitudes and personal development are very good.

HUMANITIES

239. There were no subjects offered in this curriculum area.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

240. The inspection focus was on A Level English literature but a GCSE re-sit lesson was also sampled. Students re-sitting GCSE English literature in Year 12 benefit from a combination of class teaching and individual tutorials. The students are on track to achieve success as a result of very good provision.

English Literature

The overall provision for English literature is very good.

Strengths:

- Standards of attainment are good.
- Planning is exemplary.
- Teaching is very good.
- Students have positive attitudes to learning.

Areas for Improvement:

- Ensuring that marking does not absorb a disproportionate amount of time.

241. Standards of attainment are above average and better than most other subjects in the Sixth Form. Students achieve at least as well as expected, given their prior attainment, and well overall.

242. Year 12 students are making very good progress in their English literature course. They are gaining confidence and are able to tackle the complexities of texts studied at this level. Students discussing William Blake's poetry worked together very well and were able to engage with the poet's use of symbolism to deepen their understanding. Students making presentations on *The Death of a Salesman* drew on their understanding of the social and historical context of the play to make well-informed judgements about character and motive. The most capable students prepared resources to support their talks which were beyond what might be expected at this level. Students at all levels of attainment contributed positively in all lessons.

243. All teaching observed in the Sixth Form was very good or better. Teachers' knowledge and understanding of set texts provide an excellent climate to promote students' learning. Planning is exemplary. A distinctive feature of Sixth Form work is that lessons are planned, as they are in the main school, with starter and plenary activities. Starter activities focus on aspects of language and build very good levels of knowledge and understanding. Teachers support independent learning by encouraging individual research, note taking and presentations to the class. They choose interesting and challenging ways of involving students in their learning. Teachers systematically link work to the requirements of the syllabus so that students are always clear about their progress. Overall, as a result of very good teaching, students are making very good gains in knowledge and understanding. They are developing as confident and largely independent learners.

244. Leadership and management of Sixth Form English are very good. There is a consistency of approach which leads to very high standards and expectations. The team of Sixth Form teachers continually reviews practice in order to present students with a blend of support and challenge. Students respond to this approach with maturity and enthusiasm and show very positive attitudes to their work.