

INSPECTION REPORT

ASHBY GRAMMAR SCHOOL

Ashby-de-la-Zouch

LEA area: Leicestershire

Unique reference number: 120303

Headteacher: Mrs V Keller-Garnett

Reporting inspector : Philip Mason
3691

Dates of inspection: 25 – 29 September 2000

Inspection number: 192882

Inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Voluntary Controlled
Age range of students:	14-19
Gender of students:	Mixed
School address:	Nottingham Road Ashby-de-la-Zouch Leicestershire
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs Alison Bennett
Date of previous inspection:	18 – 22 November 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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Mrs Valerie Cain	Lay inspector		Attitudes, behaviour, discipline and attendance Care for students Partnership with parents
Mr Malcolm Brice	Team inspector	English	
Mrs Julie Copas	Team inspector	Art	Teaching (support) Sixth form
Miss Janice Felce	Team inspector	Business Studies	
Miss Elizabeth Hale	Team inspector	History	Sixth form (support)
Dr Janet Harvey	Team inspector	Music	
Mrs Frances Le Pla	Team inspector	Religious Education	Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Provision
Mr Barry Lewis	Team inspector	Information Technology	
Mr Lynn Lewis	Team inspector	Special educational needs	Boarding
Mr Michael Lewis	Team inspector	French, German, Spanish	
Mr Ian Middleton	Team inspector	Art (support)	
Mr Jonathon Parker	Team inspector	Design and Technology	
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Ashby Grammar School is a voluntary controlled comprehensive school for students aged 14 to 19. In 1998, it was designated a Specialist Technology College. Its large catchment includes old mining towns and villages of the former Leicestershire coalfield, and rural areas. Most students come from two high schools, but fifteen percent come from further afield. The attainment of students when they enter the school is broadly average. 1478 students are on roll, including 468 in the 6th form, making it much larger than average. There are equal numbers of girls and boys. Almost all the students (ninety-eight percent) are of white British heritage and less than one percent have English as an additional language. Just over ten percent have special educational needs, which is much smaller than average, but slightly more students have statements for major learning difficulties than is typical. The school has two main sites. In the grounds of one, School House caters for 32 boarding students. On the other site, Lockton House serves as an adult education centre, run by the school in partnership with Loughborough College of Education.

The proportion of students claiming a free school meal (six percent) is about one third of the national figure. However, many students come from homes where income levels are low. A recent local government survey of wards in the area categorised thirty percent of homes as poor. As an area of mining decline, government and European Commission regeneration grants are assisting the restructuring of local businesses and industries.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is an improving school. The school is very well led and managed. Students' attitudes to learning are good. Just over seventy percent of the teaching is of good quality. The most recent examination results were considerably better than those of 1998 and 1999. The school has many strengths and a positive ethos for learning. It has appropriate priorities for further development and it provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- The headteacher's leadership, which has focused the work of staff and students on raising achievement.
- Results in the most recent GCSE and A-level examinations have improved considerably.
- The high proportion of good teaching challenges students to achieve their best.
- There is an ethos of respect, in which positive relationships between students and staff promote learning.
- Extra-curricular opportunities are very good, especially in drama, music and sport.
- There is a calm, purposeful atmosphere, despite the large number of students and a difficult site.
- Data is used very effectively to monitor students' academic and social development.
- Students with special educational needs make good progress, especially in reading and writing.
- Strong community links, particularly with businesses, benefit students' learning and personal development.

What could be improved

- More monitoring and evaluation of students' learning should be undertaken by subject and year leaders.
- Changes to the organisation of the curriculum should be communicated more clearly to staff.
- Group tutors should use time with students more effectively during morning registrations.
- Aspects of the school's accommodation which are of poor quality.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

There has been a good improvement since the 1996 inspection. In the previous report, the school's leadership was criticised for not monitoring its policies well enough. Monitoring by senior management is now strong. There is considerably more good teaching. Lessons now provide a far more varied range of activities. As a result of becoming a Specialist Technology College, access to information and communication technology (ICT) has increased greatly and the standard of students' work in ICT has improved. In the 6th form, students now have a range of opportunities to complement their specialist courses, but there is insufficient provision for considering important issues in life. 'Thought for the Week', used in assemblies and tutor groups, is a sound framework for students'

spiritual development, but opportunities for personal reflection should be improved. Examination results at ages 16 and 18 improved well in year 2000. They are now much higher than in summer 1996, before the last inspection. The school is on course to meet its performance targets. *(Results for year 2000 are provisional)*

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 16 and 18 year olds based on average point scores in GCSE and A-level/AS-level examinations.

Performance in:	Compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1997	1998	1999	1999
GCSE examinations	C	D	D	**E
A-levels/AS-levels	B	C	B	

Key

Well above average A

Above average B

Average C

Below average D

Well below average E

*** Similar schools are grouped by the proportion of students entitled to free school meals, which is taken as a measure of social background. Local government profiles for north-west Leicestershire show that this criterion disadvantages Ashby Grammar School, as it places its examination performance lower than is reasonable, considering social circumstances in the area it serves.*

GCSE examination results have fluctuated since the last inspection. The proportion of students gaining 5 or more GCSE passes at grades A*-C has been slightly below average in recent years, but at 48%, results in year 2000 are above the provisional average. A larger proportion of students is entered for GCSE examinations than usual (99% in the most recent examinations), which helps to explain why results of all students have been a little below average. In recent years, results have been above average in English literature, design and technology, drama, music and physical education. Results in history and modern foreign languages have been below average, but they improved well in 2000. In other subjects, results have been broadly average. Girls' results have been better than those of boys. Compared with similar schools (see above**), results in 1999 were well below average. The criterion used for national comparisons disadvantages Ashby Grammar School.

In the 6th form, results have been above the national average in A-level, or equivalent, examinations. Provisional results for year 2000 improved further. A smaller proportion of students gain higher grades than typical, but the school allows all to take courses providing they will benefit. In design and technology, German, mathematics and music, results have been consistently above the national average. All other subjects have been broadly average, with the exception of general studies, which has been below. Girls' and boys' results have been broadly equivalent. The numbers taking GNVQs (General National Vocational Qualification) have been rising and the great majority of students gain certification.

Performance targets set by the school in its Four Year Plan for 2001 are appropriate and challenging. They are based on very good assessment information kept by the school. The trend of improvement in academic year 1999-2000 indicates that the school is on course to meet its targets.

Students currently in Year 11 achieve broadly average standards. Standards are above average in German, and a little above in design and technology, drama and physical education. In other subjects standards are average. In the 6th form, standards are above average in computing, English, French, mathematics, physical education, science and theatre studies, and just above in history and music. In all other subjects, standards are average. Those taking vocational courses produce work that is appropriate when compared with their previous GCSE results. Overall, girls' achievement is better than boys' in Year 11, but there is little difference in Year 13. Students with special educational needs make good progress.

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very positive. Most students work hard in lessons and wish to succeed. The rate of participation in extra-curricular activities is good.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very Good. Students are well behaved in lessons. There is calm movement around the school. This is a notable achievement considering the large numbers, different sites and constricted areas for movement in buildings.
Personal development and relationships	Very good relationships are established. Students are co-operative with their teachers and show tolerance towards each other. They accept responsibility well. Students are expected to show increasing levels of independent investigation and enquiry in subjects, and they respond well.
Attendance	Broadly average. Lower than most 11-18 secondary schools, but average when attendance levels of pupils in the two local high schools are taken into account. Punctuality is good considering the dispersed buildings on two main sites.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 years	aged over 16 years
Lessons seen overall	N/A	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.

During the inspection 214 lessons and all teachers present were observed. Teaching was at least good in a little under 70% of lessons in Years 10 and 11, and over 75% in the 6th form. It was very good in 34% of lessons of which 7% were excellent. Teaching was satisfactory in most remaining lessons, but in 4% it was unsatisfactory. These lessons were in Years 10 and 11. Where teaching was of good or better quality, students learn well. Clear planning, suitably high expectations and precise feedback on performance enabled them to make rapid progress in learning. In the small number of unsatisfactory lessons, students did not learn enough and they made slow progress.

In Years 10 and 11, teaching was of good quality in English and mathematics, and in the chemistry and physics aspects of science. In over one half of biology lessons seen the teaching was unsatisfactory. Teaching was good in all of these subjects in the 6th form. Among other subjects, good quality teaching was seen in all years; mainly in business studies/economics, design and technology, drama, French, geography, history, information technology, music, physical education, religious education and Spanish. Teaching was satisfactory overall in the remaining subjects. The teaching of literacy and numeracy skills was satisfactory across subjects, although these aspects of the school's work would benefit from co-ordination.

Good teaching is enabling students with special educational needs to acquire basic literacy skills rapidly. Gifted students benefit from the fast pace of learning when they work in sets with others who are achieving at a similar level, and from the Summer School for able students. Talented students in drama, music and sport receive coaching to develop their skills further.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The subjects offered provide a broad and relevant curriculum, especially in the 6 th form. For a small number of students in Year 10 the balance of subjects can be improved because they are not studying a modern foreign language or religious education. The new course for personal social and health education (PSHE) covers relevant content, but schemes of work are not yet complete. Extra-curricular provision is very strong in drama, music and sport.
Provision for students with special educational needs	Literacy skills are taught effectively through group and individual tuition. There is sound support in subjects. The life skills and traffic education courses in Years 10 and 11 provide well organised programmes that are relevant, and offer alternative forms of accreditation.
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Moral and social development are promoted very well in many aspects of school life, including assemblies. PSHE includes good coverage of careers education and citizenship. Provision for cultural development is good, particularly through art, drama and music. Cultural diversity is tackled soundly. Spiritual development is sound for most in Years 10 and 11, but insufficiently developed in the 6 th form, where most students do not have religious education. 'Thought for the Week' is soundly presented in assemblies and by some tutors, but many do not allow sufficient time for reflection.
How well the school cares for its students	<p>Procedures for monitoring personal development and supporting students' social needs are effective through the work of group tutors and heads of year. Attendance is rigorously checked and absences are followed up rapidly. An effective data-base is being used well to record and monitor students' academic progress. Large numbers of students in Years 10 and 11 are supported in improving their work through 'target-groups', which is an effective strategy. Group tutors could be more active in promoting achievement during their morning contact with students.</p> <p>Communications to parents are regular and informative. The school web-site is a positive new venture. Annual reports on students' work and progress are of good quality overall.</p>

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher is an excellent leader and the senior management team gives very good support, but some curriculum decisions are not communicated clearly enough. Heads of subjects give strong leadership. They ensure students' learning is well planned but monitoring in lessons could be increased. Year leaders have good systems for ensuring students' pastoral needs are met, although they need to ensure greater consistency in the use of group tutor time in the morning. The school manages data on students' performance very effectively to monitor their progress in learning and personal development. This is having a positive impact on standards. Boarding arrangements are managed to high standards.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors are active and knowledgeable. The chair gives able leadership and all have a clear view of the future direction for the school and its priorities. Through committees they review critically the school's work and thereby hold its management and staff to account. Governors work hard on the school's behalf.
The school's evaluation of	Development plans have clear targets focused on raising standards; these

its performance	are rigorously evaluated. Examination results are evaluated in detail against predictions. Subject leaders have become adept at using data to evaluate their work, but need to evaluate the impact of teaching on students' learning in greater depth.
The strategic use of resources	Financial resources are managed very effectively to support the school's aims. The bursar is very effective in enabling school management to gain the best value from contracts, such as catering and grounds maintenance. The school has well qualified teachers and a strong team of support staff. Learning resources are sufficient overall, with good provision of computers. The accommodation has some serious deficiencies.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

A summary of the responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire is set out below.

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students make good progress at school. • Parents feel comfortable about approaching the school if they have a problem. • Students are expected to work hard. • An interesting range of activities is provided. • Students like school. • Behaviour is good. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better information about how well students are getting on at school. • Closer working between the school and parents.

The large majority of parents agreed with the positive comments in the left-hand column of the table above. Relatively few parents expressed negative views, set out in the right-hand column. The inspection team agrees with the positive views expressed. It cannot support the views of a minority of parents because:

- a) reports provide good information about how students are getting on at school; and
- b) using the homework diary, attending school performances, transporting students to events and participating in activities of the Friends of Ashby Grammar School, give parents good opportunities to be involved in the life of the school.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

- 1 At the time of publication, the latest year for which verified national performance data is available for test and examinations is 1999. Where references are made to tests and examinations taken in year 2000, results are provisional.

Standards on entry

- 2 National tests are taken in high schools at age 14 in the term before transfer. Standards from 1996 to 1999 have been broadly average. Performance in mathematics and science has been close to average but in English it has been a little below. Girls' performance has been better than boys' in all three subjects. The gender difference has been slightly greater in English than is typical. Boys have lagged markedly behind girls in mathematics, and to a lesser extent in science. Entry standards have been rising at the same rate as the national trend. However, when compared with schools taking students from similar backgrounds**, entry standards have been below average.

Performance in examinations

- 3 At age 16, the proportion of students gaining 5 or more passes at grades A*-C in the general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) has fluctuated between 42% and 49%. Standards attained have been slightly below the national average. The trend of improvement has been upward but it has been more gradual than the national trend. However, recent results and work in progress indicate that a more rapid improvement is now taking place. Results in year 2000 are slightly above the provisional national figure. When results of all students are taken into account the performance of students achieving A*- G grades has been close to, but marginally below, the national average. The proportion entered (99%) is higher than is usual. The difference between the levels of attainment of girls and boys had been slightly narrower than that recorded nationally, but it widened considerably in 2000, with 19% more girls than boys gaining 5 or more A*- C passes.
- 4 Results have been consistently above average in English literature, design and technology, drama, music, and physical education. In history and modern foreign languages they have been below average, but results in history, French and German improved well in year 2000. Performance in other subjects has been broadly average.
- 5 The progress made by Year 11 students in 1999 was as expected, when GCSE results are compared with national tests taken two years earlier. This year group had entered the school with notably lower than average standards in English. In 2000, students in Year 11 made good progress, compared with the predicted grades of YELLIS ; a major national data-base used by many schools to indicate probable examination results.

*** Schools are grouped by the proportion of students entitled to free school meals, which is taken as a measure of social background. Local government community profiles for north-west Leicestershire show that this criterion disadvantages Ashby Grammar School and its two feeder high schools, as it places its examination performance in a band lower than is reasonable, considering the social circumstances of the area it serves.*

- 6 A small number of students take courses leading to certificates of achievement and

completion rates are good.

Performance in Examinations Post-16

- 7 Students taking 2 or more subjects for the GCE A-level (General Certificate of Education), or equivalent examinations, have performed just above the national average in recent years. Results improved further in 2000, with the average point score per student rising by almost two points. These improved results have occurred when the number of students taking sixth form courses has risen considerably. The performance of girls and boys has varied. In 1997, girls outperformed boys, but by 2000 the position had reversed and boys' results were higher than girls. This is contrary to the national trend. The proportion of students achieving the higher grades A and B has been below average. However, in half of the subjects in year 2000, the percentage of higher grades was above the provisional average. Of the 26 subjects, half recorded 100% success rate at grades A to E. These results are positive, given the school's policy of admitting to advanced courses any student gaining a minimum of 4 or 5 GCSEs at grade C.
- 8 In recent years, results in design and technology, German, mathematics and music were consistently above average. In 2000, these subjects again performed well when compared with provisional, national results, together with art, biology, business studies, English literature and physical education; the latter subject being taken for the first time. Results in general studies have been well below average throughout this period.
- 9 The number of students gaining full or partial certification for the GNVQ (General National Vocational Qualification) has increased from 12 in 1998 to 31 in 2000. During this period the number of subjects studied has increased from one to five. Although the completion rate has fallen from 86% to 72%, in year 2000 six students left to take up employment and two have returned to school to complete their courses.

Performance compared with other schools

- 10 In 1999, achievement at age 16 was well below average when compared to schools taking students from similar backgrounds**. Post-16, performance was above average in comparison with all schools nationally. There was a good improvement in the school's results at age 16 and for post-16 courses in year 2000, but final comparative data is not yet available.

*** See footnote page 12*

Standards in subjects of students who are currently in Years 10 to 13

- 11 Overall, standards are broadly average towards the start of Year 11 and a little above in Year 13.
- 12 In **English**, standards in Year 10 are broadly average. In Year 11, students maintain steady progress and are reaching standards typical for this age. Standards are above average in literature. Girls are performing better than boys, and the difference is slightly more marked than is typically seen. In the 6th form, students are extending their previous skills well and they reach above average standards in the three examination courses.
- 13 By Year 11, students are demonstrating sound knowledge, understanding and skills across all aspects of **mathematics**, but as expected, there are wide variations across the different ability sets. Some gifted students are demonstrating

exceptional performance. In the 6th form, standards in Year 13 are better than those normally seen. Students taking the further mathematics course are achieving very high standards and those who repeat GCSE in Year 12 are achieving well.

- 14 In **science**, students make steady progress to reach standards expected for their age in Year 11. Top ability sets, taking the three separate sciences, are achieving well. Progress is more rapid in the chemistry and physics components of double science courses than in biology. In the 6th form, progress is more rapid than pre-16 and achievement in the separate sciences is above average overall.
- 15 In **business studies** and **economics**, students in Year 11 are reaching average standards. They apply appropriate vocabulary when discussing ideas and have a sound knowledge of issues affecting local industry. In the 6th form, students taking the GNVQ course in business are meeting the course expectation. A-level business studies and economics students are achieving average standards.
- 16 In the arts, design and technology faculty, students studying **art** are achieving average standards in Year 11. They are showing sound capability in drawing and in producing graphic images. In Year 13, standards are typical for this stage in the second year of the A-level course. In **design and technology**, Year 11 students are achieving just above the standard normally seen, when viewed across all the different courses within the subject. Sixth form students are making good progress and are achieving standards that meet course expectations. Students taking **drama** in Years 10 and 11 rapidly develop a good range of performance skills and are achieving above average standards. There is a similar picture in A-level theatre studies. Students taking GNVQ performing arts are working at an appropriate standard at this early point in the course.
- 17 In humanities, standards in **geography** are typical for Year 11 students at this stage in their GCSE course. They are making steady progress in gaining a sound knowledge of human and physical geography. By Year 13, students have deepened their knowledge of geographical ideas using case studies, and are meeting average course expectations. In **history**, Year 11 students have secure skills in identifying sources of historical evidence and presenting balanced arguments. The standards achieved are average. Students in Year 13 have a good knowledge of the periods and topics covered and are making good progress to reach just above average standards. Students are achieving standards that meet the expectation of the short GCSE course in **religious education**. They show a sound knowledge of moral issues and the questions raised for people who hold a religious belief.
- 18 In **information and communication technology (ICT)**, most students in Years 10 and 11 are making good progress to reach average standards in GNVQ key skills, across a range of subjects. Those who choose to take the GCSE option make good progress by Year 11 and are reaching average standards. Post-16, those taking GNVQ and A-level courses make good progress to achieve above average standards.
- 19 In the **modern foreign languages** faculty, students studying **German** in Year 11 achieve above standards typically seen. In **French**, standards are average overall, but in **Spanish** they are below the level expected. In the 6th form, students taking French in Year 13 achieve higher standards than are usually seen. In German and Spanish, standards are average.
- 20 Standards in **music** in Year 11 match those expected nationally. About one third of the students compose and perform with confidence and are already close to good GCSE standards. However, weaker students are inhibited by poor performance skills. Students in their final A-level year are a little above the standards expected at this stage of the course.

- 21 In **physical education**, the planning, performing and evaluation skills of non-examination students in Year 11 are a little above average. Those who take the GCSE course have above average understanding of how to improve physical performance. Standards are high in basketball and football. A-level students in Year 13 are working at standards above the course expectation. They show good acquisition of practical skills, knowledge of anatomy and understanding of contemporary sports issues.
- 22 Students who receive additional support from the **advisory faculty** to improve their basic skills make better than expected progress overall. By the start of Year 11, most girls and boys read with sufficient fluency to make steady progress in the subjects they study. They consolidate their reading, spelling and writing well. Speaking and listening improve considerably. This is having a positive effect in enabling them to work with greater confidence and gain success. In subjects, standards are raised when students work with learning support assistants. By age 16, almost all students gain at least one GCSE pass at grade A*-G.
- 23 Only a very small sample of work was observed in **general studies** during the inspection, as the course had not yet started in Year 12.
- 24 Standards of **literacy** improve as students move through the school. When taken overall, attainment matches the level normally found in schools during Year 11. Levels of speaking and listening are a little above those typically seen. Students listen attentively to teachers and most speak with reasonable expression and confidence. However, some could improve clarity and volume when they are speaking to the whole class. Many students use a good range of specialist subject vocabulary. This often results from the reinforcement of key words by teachers. Reading skills are sound; most students can follow written instructions effectively, but a few require help in understanding the meaning conveyed in narrative text. Writing is sound overall; although for some spelling weaknesses persist, most students write appropriately in a variety of styles. Much written work is well presented; noteworthy features are English books and design and technology portfolios. Students are equipped with appropriate literacy skills to undertaking the wide range of 6th form courses offered.
- 25 Standards of **numeracy** are similar to those typically seen in similar schools. The introduction of a computer software package for individual learning is having a positive impact with those who find number skills difficult. They are improving in adding, subtracting, multiplying and dividing, and are becoming more competent in calculating with fractions and decimals. In mathematics lessons, teachers are beginning to employ National Numeracy Strategies, such as warm-up and simultaneous display of written answers. No teacher is appointed to co-ordinate numeracy across other subjects, but there are some good examples of using and applying number. For example, the collection, representation and interpretation of data is strong in science, where tables, charts and graphs are produced accurately and analysed very well. Students show good skills in manipulating formulae when using spreadsheets in information technology lessons, and they interpret statistical information well in geography.

Progress towards targets

- 26 In 1997-8, the school set challenging targets in its four-year strategic plan, aimed at raising attainment substantially. These were supplemented by more specific targets for design and technology, ICT, mathematics and science, in the successful Specialist Technology College application, in spring 1998. There has been very good progress towards achieving the performance targets set. The trend of improvement in 1999-2000 places the school on course to reach most targets, if the rate of progress is maintained. The targets for GNVQ course certification, and

narrowing the gap in the performance of boys compared with girls post-16, have been achieved one year ahead of schedule. The only aspect where progress is not positive is the increasing gap between standards attained by girls and boys in GCSE.

Parents' comments

- 27 In the parents' questionnaire, the great majority agreed or tended to agree that their child makes good progress in learning. Inspection findings show that students in Years 11 and 13 are making the progress that might be reasonably expected overall and in some subjects, as indicated above, they make good progress.

Progress since the previous inspection

- 28 In 1996, inspectors found that standards in GCSE were close to average and rising marginally. The year following the inspection, there was a good improvement in results but they then declined. In 1998 and 1999, there was no improvement on standards reported at the last inspection, but the intake performance of these year groups had been lower. Improvement is now being accelerated. Most students achieve as well as they should, but some boys can do better.
- 29 In 1996, post-16 standards were reported as being above average. Following an initial rise in examination results in 1997, there was dip in 1998 and 1999. Provisional results have risen in year 2000 and are now a little higher than at the time of the last inspection. This is positive because a larger proportion of students now remains in post-16 education.

Summary

- 30 This inspection finds that the trend for improvement seen in the provisional results for year 2000 is being maintained.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

Attitudes

- 31 Students display very positive attitudes to school. Almost all come to lessons well prepared; settling quickly and participating readily. They respond especially well when teachers make clear the expectations of what will be covered in the lesson, and when different learning activities create variety during the one-hour period. Many participate enthusiastically in the very good opportunities provided for extra-curricular activities at lunch-time and after school. Take-up of drama, music and sporting activities is very good by girls and boys. Weekend workshops and visits are well supported. Very good attitudes towards teachers and support staff are the norm. This is especially noteworthy by the boarders at School House. Students show a good level of respect for classrooms and the outdoor environment. The site is virtually litter free. Students say that they value the reward system and work hard to gain certificates. In the summer term, the annual awards evening is very well attended by students.
- 32 In the pre-inspection questionnaire, a very high proportion of parents stated that their child likes school.

Behaviour

- 33 The standard of behaviour in lessons and around the school sites is very good.

This is especially notable considering the large number of students moving between lessons, often in constricted circulation areas, such as the staircases. Calm routines are evident when students enter and leave assemblies. Movement around the buildings and between the different sites is purposeful, safe and considerate. High standards of behaviour are explicit in the school's rules, rewards and consequences statement, and the great majority of students respond positively. These codes are reinforced in the Home-School Agreement. Students work well with each other in class, and inappropriate behaviour was very rarely observed during the inspection. Routines that promote good behaviour have been well established for the large number of students who arrive and leave school by bus. Queuing is well supervised by staff. Rewards encourage good behaviour and these are recognised in reports, letters home to parents and in references. Students understand the impact of their actions on others. For example, sensitive discussion was observed in religious education when students considered personal beliefs. Exclusions are at an average level and are only given for extreme breaches of discipline. The school aims to keep students whose behaviour falls below an acceptable level working in school.

- 34 A very large majority of parents who responded to the questionnaire stated that behaviour at the school is good. The inspection confirms parents' views.

Relationships

- 35 Relationships are very good. Students form constructive relationships with each other, teachers and with other adults. In lessons, they collaborate well when working in groups, such as for discussion or role play. Good examples were observed in almost all subjects when students listened with interest to each other's answers in response to teachers' questions. They are tolerant of each others' point of view. For example, in English they discuss the meaning in literature and poetry thoughtfully. In physical education, students show consideration for the feelings of their peers when evaluating each other's performance. Respect for others is the norm and staff set good role models.

Personal development

- 36 Personal development is promoted by the range of learning activities students experience in the curriculum. Good opportunities are provided to discuss moral and social issues, as in drama and religious education, and students respond well. They welcome opportunities to work independently and develop individual ideas for examination coursework. Very good examples of creative responses were observed in design and technology, drama, music and A-level art. Students use the library resource centre well for investigations, such as those required for GNVQ studies. There is a developing culture of using of information and communication technology (ICT) for independent investigation and research. Personal development is fostered by using 6th form students as mentors with students in Years 10 and 11. This promotes positive peer relationships. Older boarders

accept responsibility for supporting younger students at School House. In the School Council and 6th form committee, students gain experience of democracy as they express their own views and act as delegates.

- 37 Since the previous inspection, students have become more active in class discussions and more responsive to learning. This is a result of the increased variety and challenge of the teaching, which is promoting personal development. Behaviour and positive relationships remain strong. Students maintain their active participation in extra-curricular activities, the local community and businesses.

Attendance

- 38 The attendance rate in 1998-9 was 89.0% and in 1999-2000, 89.3%. A valid comparison with national attendance figures is not possible, as data provided nationally is for schools taking students aged 11 to 18. However, when attendance rates at the two main contributory high schools are taken into account, attendance is broadly in-line with the national average for 11-18 schools. In 1998-9, unauthorised absence was 1.4%, which is marginally above the national figure for 11-18 schools and it increased fractionally in 1999-2000. A greater percentage of absence occurs for the fifty-five percent of students living in the outlying small towns and villages who come to school by bus, than for those who walk to school. Punctuality in the morning was sound during the week of the inspection, considering the large number of buses serving the school, but a small number of buses arrived late. Students walk rapidly between sites to lessons and, in view of the dispersed nature of the buildings, punctuality to is mostly good.
- 39 Since the previous inspection, the attendance rate has marginally declined due to a small increase in authorised absences. Unauthorised absence is at the same level as that recorded in 1996.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

- 40 There has been a substantial increase in the amount of good teaching since the previous inspection.
- 41 Overall, the quality of teaching is good in Years 10 and 11, and in the 6th form. It is at least good in a little under 70% of lessons in Years 10 and 11, and over 75% in the 6th form. Thirty-four percent of teaching is very good or excellent. Teaching is satisfactory in most of the remaining lessons, but 4% has weaknesses making it unsatisfactory. However, of these latter lessons, only one was judged to be poor. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed in the sixth form. The proportion of good teaching in Years 10 and 11 is almost 10% higher than was reported nationally in the most recent annual report on standards in education, and the unsatisfactory teaching is lower. Teaching in the 6th form is a little better than the national picture. In a few instances during the inspection, classes were taught by non-specialist teachers or supply staff. Most maintained learning at a satisfactory level, and their teaching was well supported by having suitable work provided.
- 42 In all National Curriculum subjects taught in Years 10 and 11 during the inspection, 50% or more of the lessons seen were of good quality. In these lessons students' learning was rapid. Excellent individual lessons were observed in business studies, drama, French, geography, music, science and Spanish, with a number in physical education. In these, the quality of students' learning was very impressive. Most of the very small proportion of unsatisfactory lessons occurred in biology. In the 6th form, the largest proportion of good quality teaching was in design and technology, geography, history, mathematics and theatre studies.

Good teaching

- 43 Where the teaching observed was at least good it exhibited a combination of many of the strengths listed below. This good quality teaching enabled students to make rapid progress in their learning.
- 44 In these lessons teachers:
- have a deep knowledge of their subject and convey enthusiasm.
Most teachers demonstrate a command of their subject, but in good lessons they convey to students their own personal commitment, which engages the imagination of students. This is especially notable in 6th form lessons, where teachers answer students' questions with authoritative responses, amplify important points and

demonstrate to them how their learning can be improved.

- ❑ make connections between the learning that will take place during the lesson, to learning that took place in previous lessons.

In a Year 11 drama lesson, the teacher effectively reflected what had been learnt previously when setting the objectives for a group performance on the interpretation of dreams or nightmares. Students could see how their learning extended what they had already covered. A teacher used probing questions at the start of a Year 12 GNVQ business lesson, to consolidate students' prior knowledge of issues facing small business owners, before they were required to apply and explain their understanding to a shop selling security devices.

- ❑ set clear objectives for lessons that are shared explicitly with students.

In a Year 11 English lesson, the teacher set a clear brief for examining the stanza structure of the poem 'It ain't what you do', writing it on the board as a record of the task set. Precise steps for a learning assignment were set in a Year 12 GNVQ leisure and recreation lesson, on how to present research findings of tourist provision in the locality. This provided a clear structure for students to follow and ensured that their learning was well directed.

- ❑ know the examination syllabus they are using in detail, so that their planning is focused on the important knowledge and learning skills required for students to succeed in their accredited courses.

In a lower Year 11 history class considering the massacre of American Indians at Sand Creek, the teaching emphasised the importance of presenting arguments from both sides in order to gain good marks in examination questions. In a Year 13 design and technology lesson, the teacher reviewed with students how they should tackle research topics. Their learning was focused on how to optimise coursework marks.

- ❑ employ a range of different teaching methods and resources, so that lessons are broken into several related activities that maintain interest and challenge.

A Year 10 religious education lesson exploring relative and absolute morals, provided questioning and pop music to encourage students to think of human dilemmas. Group work was then well used for planning a role play and discussing how they might design an 'agony page' as a homework task. The theme of homelessness was explored at a remorseless pace, in a Year 12 French lesson, through a rapidly evolving set of activities. These included, examining a variety of texts, finding appropriate phrases to express judgements, and using prompt cards to initiate original language. This lesson provided high expectations and students' learning was extended well by the rigorous pace.

- ❑ foster positive relationships, that are warm and encouraging but demand a rigorous response to tasks.

In a Year 10 life skills lesson, very good relationships between the teacher and class resulted in a purposeful learning atmosphere in which students were praised for their efforts when discussing types of accommodation suitable for young, working people. A teacher engendered mature relationships in a Year 11 PSHE (personal, social and health education) lesson linked to citizenship, in which students extended their learning by considering the age at which young people become legally responsible. Very good relationships between the teacher and class, enabled an open discussion and sensitive issues were handled skilfully. In an A-level computing lesson in Year 13, the good rapport enabled students to explore difficult problems associated with a complex program to calculate VAT payments, without feeling embarrassed when they made mistakes.

- ❑ give students feedback, on whether or not they are meeting the lessons' learning objectives.

In a physical education lesson in Year 11, students practising shooting techniques in basketball were given very precise coaching points as the lesson progressed to enable them to hone their skills. Similarly, a peripatetic music teacher demonstrated clearly the fingering necessary for a Year 10 clarinet player to improve

fluency when performing rhythmic patterns in a piece by Eric Clapton. In a Year 12 psychology lesson on memory, students reviewed their own preferred learning techniques when remembering facts. Skilful teacher intervention and feedback enabled the class to continually refocus on the learning objectives and, as a result, they gained a secure grasp of memory models.

- ❑ use case studies and examples, that capture the interest of students, often drawing on their first hand experiences.

In a Year 11 geography lesson, girls used their findings from a traffic survey, conducted in Ashby town centre, to consider environmental issues in a real life learning context. Another Year 11 group taking traffic education, engaged with great enthusiasm, developing riding skills on trial bikes in wet conditions. In a Year 13 art lesson, the teacher extended students' learning as they reflected on paintings they had seen on a visit to the Tate Modern gallery, when interpreting the hidden meanings of still life compositions.

- ❑ set high expectations, that challenge students to extend their learning into new aspects of knowledge and understanding, whilst supporting those in the class who find the next step difficult.

Students in a lower Year 10 mathematics set, who were finding four operation integers difficult, were supported very well in their learning by two learning support assistants using the 'Success Maker' program. In a Year 13 chemistry lesson, A-level students were introduced to the Bronsted Lowery Theory of acidity, and then applied their new understanding to an experiment, testing for 3 chlorinated organic compounds. This learning took place within a one hour period in difficult accommodation.

Excellent teaching

- 45 In a small proportion of lessons, teachers demonstrate many of the characteristics of the good teaching set out above, but they also bring advanced skills which inspire students. In these lessons, students accelerate their learning to reach standards that are well above those that could have been anticipated. Teachers challenge the bounds of students' potential by setting ambitious expectations. Students find the learning hard but enjoyable. In the 6th form, these lessons are characterised by teachers' evident love of their subjects, probing questions and engaging students in critical self-review of their work.

Satisfactory teaching

- 46 In approximately one quarter of lessons in Years 10 and 11 and the 6th form, the teaching is sound. These lessons have neither notable weaknesses nor causes for concern. In many of these satisfactory lessons, students are attentive and follow structured activities well. Relationships between teachers and students are purposeful. Typically there are insufficient imaginative activities, opportunities for students to investigate situations or express their own views. These lessons are adequately planned, taught effectively and enable students to make steady progress in their learning. They lack the intense engagement of students' interest, common in good lessons, that provides strong motivation for learning and rapid progress.

Unsatisfactory teaching

- 47 In a very small proportion of lessons, teaching is unsatisfactory and weaknesses outweigh positive features. In these lessons, the pace of learning is too slow. Some other lessons, which are satisfactory overall, also contain minor weaknesses from the list below, but have a larger proportion of strengths that make learning adequate.
- 48 Aspects of unsatisfactory teaching include:
- ❑ insufficiently clear explanations of what students should understand or do.

In these lessons, students often begin their tasks purposefully, but because they do not have sufficient information on how to proceed, they lose interest in learning and become bored.

- ❑ low expectations, especially in Year 10, where students repeat topics and are taught knowledge covered previously.
These lessons fail to use information received from high schools, held within the department. Learning in these lessons is well below the capability of students.
- ❑ inability to manage the class and control the few students who disrupt the learning of others.
In these lessons teachers usually fail to plan interesting lessons and often give too lengthy introductions. The disruption is usually associated with boredom.
- ❑ failure to challenge poorly disciplined responses, such as calling out and allowing an unacceptable level of noise whilst working individually on tasks.
Failure to apply class management strategies and sanctions, results in the students who wish to learn being denied the opportunity to concentrate.

Teaching of students with special educational needs

- 49 Overall, the teaching of withdrawal groups in which literacy skills are consolidated is good. This is not consistent across all lessons. Where teaching is strong, students are challenged and apply themselves well to the learning tasks set. Self-analysis by teachers of their own performance is much better than is generally found. However, in the one poor lesson, the teacher confused students because the expectation set was unrealistically high. As a result, students were frustrated and made no progress in their learning. Some individual literacy lessons are too long for students who are struggling with basic skills and they cannot sustain their learning. What is a very good experience initially loses pace and direction. Setting by prior attainment in some subjects enables teachers to match work closely to student capability. Generally, teachers cope well with a wide range of learning needs, especially when they work with learning support assistants.

Teaching during tutor group registration sessions

- 50 On four mornings a week, students have a twenty-minute registration period with their group tutors. Most teachers settle their groups well and deal with attendance and daily administration efficiently. The 'Thought for the Week' is read, but it is rarely amplified or time given for reflection. In the few instances where teachers discuss the theme, students willingly offer their own views. Often, the five or more minutes remaining after tutor business is completed are unproductive. Where teachers expect the students to use this time to review work or check homework, it is done readily. Time available is rarely used by tutors to monitor students' progress or discuss their targets. Whilst tutor time is calm and orderly, it is under-used for tutorial activity. However, there are specific periods designated as 'form time' that take place monthly when monitoring is undertaken.

Assessment

- 51 Assessment procedures have been improved since the last inspection and they are now satisfactory. A new policy has been introduced which provides good coverage of important aspects of assessment. This has had a beneficial effect on teachers' approaches but there is still too much variation in its implementation. There is good practice in a few subjects where students are assessed against clear criteria and given a strong indication of how to improve. In English for example, a system of coursework 'cover sheets' is used well to provide written comments on students' achievement and how they can improve their standards. In design and technology, coursework project packs are used very effectively to provide details of assessment objectives and criteria, together with deadlines and comments to inform students'

future work. Regular tests in mathematics are analysed thoroughly to inform students of their performance in different aspects of the topics covered and to set targets for improvement. In some other subjects, such as modern foreign languages, geography and religious education, examination criteria are not shared sufficiently with students. As a result, they are unsure of what they have to do to achieve higher grades. Criteria are used well when teachers assess tests and coursework in most science classes, but in some others there is insufficient feedback to students on their learning. Standardised tests and common mark schemes are used in most subjects and this ensures accurate teacher assessment.

Progress since the last inspection

- 52 The quality of teaching has improved since the 1996 inspection. The proportion of good teaching in Years 10 and 11 has risen from just over 50% to a little under 70% and in the 6th form, from just below 50% to just over 75%. Very good teaching has doubled to one third of all lessons observed. In the previous inspection, it was found that much of the teaching led to compliant students, and that oral discussion and group work was lacking. This is no longer the case. In the great majority of lessons, work is varied and demands student participation. Groupwork to discuss opinions or to solve problems collectively is a common part of the teaching and learning repertoire in all years. Teaching in design and technology and music remains strong, but there are now strengths in other curriculum areas including special educational needs. In 1996, 12% of the teaching was judged to be unsatisfactory. This has fallen to 4%.

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

The curriculum

- 53 The number of different subjects offered gives a greater range of learning opportunities than is typically seen. The curriculum has good relevance to the future needs of students, whether they are continuing in education or seeking work. The revised curriculum for Years 10 and 11, introduced in September 2000, has improved balance for most students. For a small minority, curriculum balance is not fully satisfactory because at the time of the inspection timetable arrangements were still incomplete. The radical revision of 6th form examination courses, in response to national changes, has resulted in students taking a broader range of accredited subjects than previously. Considerably more students returned to Year 12 this September than had planned to do so. Additional teaching groups have had to be timetabled and staffed at short notice. Also, a six-day timetable has been introduced to reduce movement between the two main sites and students have adapted to this change well.

Years 10 and 11

- 54 In Years 10 and 11, students study an appropriate range of compulsory subjects and option choices. Being a Specialist Technology College, all take at least double science, a full course in design and technology and they have wide access to ICT (information and communication technology). Very good curriculum breadth enables some students to take three separate sciences; some take two modern foreign languages, or two design subjects, or two humanities subjects. It is possible to gain accreditation in two arts subjects. A good range of additional GCSE subjects is provided, for example, business studies, child development, drama, and economics. ICT, taught across different subjects, leads to a GNVQ (General National Vocational Qualification) for all. Students for whom a full range of GCSE courses is inappropriate take life skills and traffic education options through which

they gain certificates of achievement. Most students take a half GCSE in RE (religious education) and all have a PE (physical education) experience. A weekly period of PSHE (personal, social and health education) has been added, this academic year to supplement a programme taught in 'form time' by group tutors. This includes, drugs and sex education, as well as citizenship. The latter anticipates well many elements to be taught in all schools from 2002. However, planning was too late and schemes of work for units to be taught later in the year have still to be written. At the time of the inspection, 40 students in Year 10 had no modern foreign language teaching but the official procedures had not been followed. Approximately 10% of Year 10 and 11 students do not receive teaching in RE, with their parents' agreement. Arrangements are being made to overcome these problems, but details have not been finalised. The school states that all will have access to these essential curriculum experiences, in line with its equal opportunities policy.

Post-16

- 55 In the 6th form, the subject range is very broad; many students take additional activities that give a reasonably balanced curriculum. The new AS, A2 and Advanced Certificate of Vocational Education courses have been introduced in Year 12. Subjects new to students post-16 are; psychology, sociology and theatre studies, together with GNVQ courses in business, ICT, performing arts, leisure and recreation and science. One-year consolidation courses are offered in English and mathematics. Because of the wider than average range of courses offered, the match to individual needs is very good. All take key skills in communication, use of number and ICT. A pilot group of about forty AS/A2 students, and all taking GNVQ courses, are working for accreditation. Not all staff who teach in the 6th form are sure how students are to be supported in key skills. Communication has lacked clarity and insufficient training has taken place; with subject and group tutors being unsure about their monitoring and assessment roles. This has resulted in an untidy start, compared with the crisp introduction of new AS courses by subject teams. It is the school's policy that students should broaden their curriculum by participating in additional voluntary activities, such as supporting the learning of Year 10 and 11 students through mentoring, community service, prefect duties, working in primary schools or taking the Community Sports Leader Award. The great majority does so. Parents have agreed that students need not take RE, and although there are opportunities for voluntary lessons at lunch-time, the majority opts out. Careers provision is sound; the annual business conference, held in conjunction with local firms, gives students a valuable opportunity to gain insights into the world of work.

Extra-curricular activities

- 56 The school provides a greater range of extra-curricular activities than is typical. Many staff give their time generously for the benefit of students. Provision in the arts is strong. The orchestra and ensembles give regular concerts. There is a one-week concert tour each summer to a different part of England. The Jazz Band, led by the bursar, gives variety to the range of music offered. Sporting activity thrives and the school has a good record of success in competitive fixtures across a wide range of activities. Drama workshops and performances form regular features of the school calendar. Recently, a group performed at the Edinburgh Festival. Despite the dispersed catchment, participation rates in out of hours activities are good. House staff at School House arrange a very good range of activities and visits for boarders, especially at weekends.

Provision for gifted and talented students

- 57 In many subjects, grouping by prior attainment in sets appropriately enables students to work with others whose standard of work is similar, including sets for students who are gifted. In science, links with the University of Leicester have been

forged to provide lectures and activities for those demonstrating high performance. Gifted students have good opportunities to extend their studies through a residential summer school organised by School House. This has successfully attracted government funding for the past three years. Students with musical talent receive individual tuition and participate in county youth orchestras and ensembles. In drama, students talented in performance work with those from other schools, in conjunction with Leicestershire Youth Arts. Those with sporting talent receive coaching with county teams. Evening and holiday sessions enable students to extend their talents in design and technology by providing access to specialist facilities. Provision for extending the capability of gifted and talented students is good.

Students with special education needs

- 58 Provision and planning to improve students' literacy skills are good. Records are meticulously kept. They are used well for planning future learning and to inform reviews. The literacy teachers and learning support assistants, provide a well-organised programme that results in very positive student gains. However, group tuition and specialist individual support takes place in the time when others have RE, and this restricts their learning opportunities. Many students find the life skills course an interesting and relevant accredited programme that complements their work in subjects. The STEP (Schools Traffic Education Project) course is seen as relevant by boys and girls, who display a high degree of responsibility and commitment when riding motorcycles.

Careers education and guidance

- 59 The revised and improved programme of careers education and guidance, now part of the PSHE programme in Years 10 and 11, is well matched to national examples of good practice. Additional provision for students taking the life skills programme is well targeted. Good links are made to the new careers profile document. There is strong co-operation with the Leicestershire Careers Service, which works well with the school to identify and support those most in need. Work experience is very well organised for the large majority that chooses to participate. Longer more intensive placements are provided for a small number of students. In the 6th form, provision is sound for those who intend to continue in full time education and for job seekers. Many gain practical experience in business simulations through Young Enterprise activities.

Community links to the curriculum

- 60 Community links within the curriculum are strong and in this respect the school meets its aims very well. Most subjects use the community and local environment as a resource for learning. For example, in geography fieldwork takes place in the town by looking at urban traffic flows and environmental issues. Engineers from local firms work with students in science, design and technology, ICT and business studies. On occasions, the local Youth for Christ group make inputs into RE lessons. The community policeman speaks to students in Years 10 and 11 about the danger of drugs and to the 6th form about drink driving. Most work experience placements in Year 11 take place in local firms and businesses. Local companies approach the school to offer challenges to extend the curriculum. Some students have been placed in local companies to work on specific ICT briefs.

Curricular liaison with local schools

- 61 Partnerships with local primary and high schools, through the 'Family of Schools', are strong. This network, linking schools in the area, has in recent years promoted many initiatives to enhance curriculum continuity. The part-time seconded co-ordinator, who is funded by the Technology College recurrent grant, is very active in

seeking opportunities for liaison. Bridging projects that link learning at age 14 have been an important recent initiative. Work started in the summer term in local high schools is continued during the first weeks after transfer to Ashby Grammar School. For example in Year 10 English, work on poetry was being completed during the inspection. There are many more examples of subject based liaison than is usual. The design and technology faculty has purchased a computer graphics package for each high school, so future students have early experience. Teachers from design and technology, mathematics and science provide teaching links in primary schools. In ICT, the department invites primary school classes to use the computer suites, so that they have access to more advanced computer hardware than is possible in their own schools.

Provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

- 62 In addition to PSHE, the school cultivates students' personal development well. Although there is no single policy covering students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, these aspects are embraced in the school's aims, its code of conduct, and multi-cultural, anti-racist and equal opportunities policies.
- 63 Provision for **spiritual** development is sound for most in Years 10 and 11 where drama, English, RE and PSHE provide opportunities for spiritual insight and reflection. The school does not do enough for students in Year 12 to gain spiritual insights as they lack a regular timetabled opportunity for consideration of deeper meanings of life. The 'Thought for the Week' is developed well in assembly and read daily by group tutors. However, not all assembly leaders and few tutors provide time for reflection. **Moral** development is very effective in many aspects of school life. Most subjects consider moral issues, such as in drama where issues of justice are explored, for instance the Derek Bentley case. Students show a moral concern about the needs of others less fortunate than themselves by raising considerable amounts of money for charities annually. Staff set good role models through the relationships they establish with other adults and students. There is a good regard for fair play in sports activities. Provision for developing positive **social** attitudes is strong through the many off-site activities, such as field trips, sports competitions and visits to European countries. Sixth form students act as mentors to support the learning of younger students and some help in primary schools. A criterion for the selection of prefects is service to others. The School Council is a forum for representing different viewpoints. Likewise, there are good opportunities provided for **cultural** development. Students explore aspects of youth culture through texts in English. Arts subjects provide rich cultural experiences in drama, concerts and the visual arts. Visiting musicians and orchestras bring students into contact with professionals. School corridors are enhanced by items of original art and paintings by past students. Major pieces of design and sculpture, such as a bridge across a stream and public seating, have been created by A-level design and technology students. Cultural diversity is approached soundly, through texts in English, music from different traditions, ethnic imagery in art and by examining colonial exploitation in history.

Statutory curriculum requirements

- 64 It is the school's stated intention to meet statutory curricular requirements for the current Year 10 when the timetable uncertainties, associated with the start of a new academic year, have been resolved. In RE, whilst technically meeting regulations, the school is currently using the parental right of withdrawal to allow the teaching of additional literacy classes. This goes beyond the original intention of withdrawal as a conscience clause. Arrangements are being made to rectify this by including RE units within life skills. In the 6th form, because most parents withdraw students from RE and relatively few attend voluntary lunchtime sessions, few are taught Leicestershire's RE syllabus.

Summary

- 65 The school offers a wide subject range that is relevant to students. Plans and decisions made about some of the school's new curricular arrangements for Years 10 and 12 from September, have not been sufficiently well communicated to staff. This can be improved, even though some of the notifications from official bodies arrived late. The school provides good learning experiences for the great majority of students. It needs to address outstanding issues for a small minority in Year 10, who at the time of the inspection did not experience the full curriculum and Year 12, where opportunities for discussion of issues and meanings in life are restricted.

Progress since the previous inspection

- 66 In 1996, the inspection found that provision for ICT was weak. The Specialist Technology College initiative has greatly increased students' opportunities to use ICT, and they now have good access to modern computers to support their studies. Take-up of GNVQ in the 6th form, which was low in 1996, has increased considerably. The subject range has also widened, and business conferences now extend careers education well. General studies is planned as a taught programme, although it is now optional in Year 12. Large numbers of students now participate in voluntary activities to enrich their curriculum.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

- 67 Students are well cared for during their time at the school. Staff know their students' abilities and needs well. Parents and students confirm that they have confidence in the well-established systems that are in place. Students feel safe and secure.

Promoting and monitoring personal development

- 68 The pastoral system, which operates through tutors and heads of years is managed by the deputy head (pastoral). It is well established and much works very effectively. Staff concerns about students are discussed and followed up. Appointments are made when necessary by staff with parents and students: sometimes the education welfare officer attends. At the meeting for parents, they were positive about the way the school supports students and parents are aware of the monitoring procedures. A comprehensive data-base is used to monitor closely a wide range of information about students on an individual basis, including attendance, behaviour, progress and rewards. The code of conduct, printed in the prospectus is clear and is consistently applied across both sites. Students and parents are fully aware of the consequences of inappropriate behaviour. Awards are gained by students who demonstrate good behaviour and high levels of attendance. Instances of bullying are quickly and effectively dealt with. Parents say that they feel able to report any concerns about their child's personal development and these are quickly followed up. The main weakness is that time spent by tutors with their groups is used too inconsistently on a daily basis. Although monthly 'tutor time' sessions are provided for reviewing students' progress files and to set targets, monitoring can be improved as a regular aspect of group tutors' work. Monitoring of the personal and academic development of boarders is undertaken thoroughly by staff at School House.

Promoting and monitoring attendance

- 69 Registers are taken efficiently by group tutors in mornings and subject teachers in the afternoon. The school has deployed an administrative support assistant in each year office to undertake daily attendance checks. The school has a first day of absence follow-up policy for Years 10 and 11. Parents are telephoned at home or work about student absence, unless the school has been previously notified. Currently the rate of attendance is static. The school is determined to improve attendance further and has purchased EARS (Electronic Attendance Registration System) so that there will be an attendance check every lesson.

Promoting and monitoring health, welfare and safety

- 70 The school nurse provides professional support to staff and has regular drop-in sessions for students. Students with special educational needs are appropriately supported by outside agencies, such as the LEA's psychological service.
- 71 Good procedures are in place for handling child protection issues should the need arise. The headteacher is the designated officer. Staff are trained and vigilant in the school and School House. There are sufficient trained first aiders on both sites. Parents are quickly contacted in situations of student illness. There is a comprehensive induction programme to ensure that new parents and students are well informed of the school's welfare procedures. Talks, visits and taster days help new students settle in confidently. They are prepared for the outside world through the structured PSHE programme that includes careers education and guidance.
- 72 The site and buildings are generally clean and well maintained. Regular fire drills and risk assessments take place. The layout of the sites and buildings makes movement difficult in some congested areas. Students with physical disabilities receive sensitive support, but access to rooms up narrow stairs is restrictive. The site provides a safe, pleasantly landscaped environment, but some paving slabs are uneven.

Monitoring students' academic performance

- 73 The monitoring of students' academic performance is better than normally seen. There is extensive analysis of well-chosen assessment data to identify potential under-achievement and enable the school to provide appropriate support. The school has a large number of teachers who volunteer, as mentors, to work closely with 'target-group' students to support their learning. This is largely effective. Students involved say that they are enthusiastic about their participation and can identify improvements, such as better attitudes, increased attendance, and higher marks. Group tutors would benefit from receiving progress reports from mentors. This would assist them in the monthly progress reviews they have with students during 'form time' periods.
- 74 A good monitoring system uses previous assessment information to determine target grades for all students in forthcoming examinations, and to compare targets with current performance. However, there is too much variation from teacher to teacher in using this information to inform students of what they need to do to improve performance. Meticulous recording of reading and spelling achievement by the special educational needs co-ordinator enables future planning to be directed at improving levels of literacy. Monitoring the performance of students withdrawn for literacy lessons, and those who receive support in subjects, is very effective. As reported earlier, group tutors can be more pro-active in monitoring performance during registration time.

Using assessment information to guide planning

- 75 Assessment used to inform planning in subjects is good overall. Teams analyse

outcomes from examination results to identify areas of underachievement and discuss strategies for improving performance. These are reported to the headteacher and the governors' curriculum committee. As a result, teachers have identified reasons and improved provision, such as marking tests and coursework more accurately, with a consequent improvement in results. Examples include English, where some high attaining groups have been identified as underachieving, and history where coursework marks have been judged to be too low. In information technology, the analysis of results has led to a discussion about how to ensure that students follow the most suitable course. There is very sophisticated analysis of data in mathematics where summaries of national test results at age 14 are displayed on classroom walls to encourage high achievement at GCSE. A computer package is used very well to continuously assess the performance of lower attaining students in Years 10 and 11, and provide them with activities that are well matched to their needs. In a few subjects, such as modern foreign languages and religious education, there is good analysis of assessment data, but this does not yet lead to sufficiently clear strategies to help students to do better.

- 76 The school's examinations officer has developed a most impressive data-base that is enabling subject staff to undertake their own analyses of data and come to judgements about the success of teaching in their department.
- 77 Since the previous inspection, the deputy headteacher (pastoral) has worked effectively to ensure school systems are consistently applied across years and the two sites. ICT has been harnessed well to ensure staff have the information needed to monitor students' pastoral and academic progress rigorously. However, more monitoring can take place by group tutors in the daily registration session. The monitoring of the progress of students with special educational needs and the production of targets is now strong.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

The quality of information provided

- 78 The school strives hard to involve parents and to keep them well informed. It is conscious that a significant number of students of the age range it serves, wish to distance their parents from the work that they do at school as they become more independent. The school maintains that the partnership can only occur effectively when both school and parents are pro-active.
- 79 Communications are regular, varied and well produced. The prospectus, received by parents of prospective students, is clear and informative. Through this, they are fully aware of the opportunities offered, the aspiration to achieve high standards and the partnership expected through the home-school agreement. Before students enter, parents are invited to a well-planned induction evening. During the year communications include: reports on student progress; the governors' annual report, which is produced to the highest quality; informative termly newsletters; and details of events and visits. Important information, such as coursework deadlines and Year 10 examination results are posted to parents. The school has initiated a web-site that includes much of the material sent home. It is planning to introduce e-mail communications between the school and home for those parents with on-line facilities. Parents are given good opportunities to state their views on different aspects of the school's work through consultations, such as the change to the school day, organisation of parents' meetings, format of subject reports and the home-school agreement. Annual reports to parents are of good quality. They are more informative than those typically seen as they give good information on students' progress, future targets and areas for improvement.

Involvement of parents

- 80 Parents are encouraged to support students in their work and life at the school. The school involves them well by providing students with a homework diary so parents are aware of timetables and work set. At the pre-inspection meeting, parents stated that it is easy to get appointments with staff if they have concerns, even at short notice. The response of parents to staff requests to attend school for discussions about how to support individual students is good. Annual consultation meetings on students' progress are attended by approximately 75% of parents. Those with children who have special educational needs are invited to attend review meetings, and most do. Prior to the meeting, parents are involved in setting targets for the following year, and indicate their agreement with the proposals. Throughout the year, parents of other students are invited to individual consultation meetings as needed. Year tutors frequently undertake progress checks, sometimes at a parent's request. There is a good level of support by parents to enable students to participate in the excellent range of extra-curricular activities. They arrange transport and lifts from across a very large area, including some locations poorly served by public transport. The Friends of Ashby Grammar School work hard to host social events, but they struggle to gain a reasonable level of support. Former students of the school keep in touch and support the school through a web-site.
- 81 Since the previous inspection, the school has worked hard to increase its involvement with parents. This includes, improving the quality of information sent home, consultations on different aspects of the school and by introducing rapid follow up by telephone of student absence. The initiative to create an information web-site is positive. However, response to the parental questionnaire indicates that, as at the time of the previous inspection, a significant minority feels that the

school could work more closely with them. The inspection finds that school has good strategies for involving parents, similar to those seen in other schools serving this age range.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

Strategic planning

- 82 The school's four-year strategic plan is central to its work and future development. All major decisions are made with reference to its goals and targets. A yearly development plan is produced, following wide consultation. This has explicit targets, including those for raising standards. These are monitored thoroughly and reviewed by the management team and governors termly. The Technology College Plan, Investor in People Plan and Action Plan following the 1996 inspection, inter-relate with the Strategic Plan to form a coherent management agenda for action. There are very good systems for monitoring and evaluating the school's overall effectiveness. School management and governors have a clear view of its strengths and weaknesses. They have developed well-defined strategies to secure improvement.

Leadership

- 83 The leadership of the headteacher is an important strength. She has a clear vision for the ethos of the school and its direction during the next phase of development. This is centred on raising achievement further and ensuring students acquire personal and learning skills to equip them for life in a technological society. Since her appointment in January 1997, she has successfully introduced management systems that promote consultation in order to guide decision making. Senior and middle managers have well-defined responsibilities and accountabilities. Management success is evident in the recent improvement of examination results

and a calm school in which routines run smoothly. At the meeting for parents, it was widely agreed that the headteacher's leadership is an important factor in the school's rising reputation in the community. The inspection confirms the parents' views.

- 84 The two deputy headteachers (pastoral/personnel and curriculum) and four senior teachers (head of main school, director of sixth form, professional tutor and examinations officer), together with the bursar, form a cohesive management team. Each member takes a major responsibility for an aspect of the work of this large and complex school.
- 85 The pastoral life of the school is managed very effectively. The deputy head (pastoral/personnel) works well with senior staff and administrative personnel responsible for monitoring performance, attendance, behaviour and the well-being of students. She is very well supported by the professional tutor, who co-ordinates staff training, professional development reviews and the Investor in People initiative, and by the bursar, who line-manages support staff. The head of main school and director of 6th form give strong leadership to year tutors and their teams, particularly in monitoring and promoting personal achievement.
- 86 Many aspects of the curriculum, implemented by subject teams, are managed very effectively by the deputy headteacher (curriculum). However, the curriculum changes for the autumn term have not been straight-forward, owing to the late publication of details by official bodies. As a consequence, planning for the introduction of key skills was delayed. This has resulted in uncertainty among co-ordinators and teachers. Arrangements for the school's revised curriculum in Years 10 and 11 were provided too late for detailed planning of the new PSHE programme and for the cross-curricular teaching of ICT. Subject co-ordinators have very successfully planned the implementation of the new 6th form subject courses. The examinations officer, has been very effective in developing a sophisticated data-base that enables the interrogation and analysis of performance data. This is a strength of curriculum management.
- 87 Heads of faculties give strong leadership to their teams. They have well-developed planning and evaluation skills. Subject plans are very well matched to the annual school goals. The headteacher and deputy headteachers link effectively with each subject to assist ongoing monitoring of development targets. Detailed annual evaluations are submitted to the headteacher and to the governors' curriculum committee. The special needs co-ordinator (SENCO) is very well organised and makes a significant contribution to the development and progress of students. A similar process supports pastoral management. This is an effective management approach that has resulted in a strong planning culture. Evaluation of performance data is undertaken efficiently. However, classroom observation that leads to a detailed examination of students' learning is not yet a systematic feature of middle management. The current school development plan includes a training programme to enhance skills in this, to promote the raising of standards. It is a timely initiative.

Governing Body

- 88 Governors are well informed and are very active in their roles. The chair of governors gives very effective leadership. She has a weekly meeting with the headteacher and other key staff, and shares with fellow governors a deep understanding of issues. The work of the governing body is well focused on the school aims of raising standards and offering students excellent opportunities for academic and personal development. The committee system works very effectively. Because most governors serve on more than one committee they are well informed of the issues being discussed in different contexts. Each committee is serviced by a member of the school's management team. The full governing body is well briefed by committee chairs and senior school staff. This enables it to

play a full part in providing strategic direction to the school. It has developed a wide range of review procedures in order to hold the school to account, such as analysing performance data, visiting subject departments on focused reviews and receiving written and oral reports. The governing body offers staff an appropriate balance of support and challenge. Overall, they fulfil their statutory responsibilities very well. However, at the time of the inspection, a small number of students were not following the National Curriculum and a lack of suitable accommodation for assemblies makes the daily act of worship problematic. A small number of health and safety issues need to be addressed.

Financial management and deployment of resources

- 89 Financial management is of very high quality. The bursar has made a considerable impact by establishing clear day-to-day systems for financial control. Long term projections of income and expenditure support the school's planning for the future. The school development plan and subject plans are costed, and spending is monitored carefully during the financial year. Principles of 'best value'*, are applied very well, such as to school contracts for catering, cleaning, grounds maintenance and the purchase of educational equipment. The governor's finance committee is effective in monitoring spending.

** The application of principles of 'Best Value' is the securing economic, efficient and effective services. This is a statutory responsibility of Local Education Authorities but does not apply to governing bodies. They are required to provide a good quality service and spend money wisely.*

- 90 There is a good match of well-qualified teachers to meet curriculum needs. Teachers benefit from a strong team of support staff. The appointment of administrative assistants in year bases is a positive development to support staff in promoting good attendance. Professional development is well managed by the professional tutor, who takes careful account of school priorities and personal training needs. The induction programme for staff new to the school is thoroughly planned. Learning resources are soundly matched to curriculum needs overall. Students have access to a higher proportion of modern computers than is typical, in line with the school's priority to prepare students for life in a technological society. Accommodation has a number of serious deficiencies. Whilst most teachers work hard to provide a pleasant learning environment, learning in science and modern foreign languages takes place in poor facilities. As a result of the considerable growth of the sixth form in recent years, provision for class teaching, personal study and social interaction is now far too limited. There are times of the day when students have to hunt for spaces that are suitable for individual study. The library resources centre provides a large, inviting, well-resourced base for individual research. With only one lecture theatre, which can only accommodate half of a year group, the school finds it difficult to meet statutory requirements for collective worship. The school and grounds are maintained well by site staff.

Progress since the last inspection

- 91 Since the 1996 inspection, progress has been generally good, but two key issues identified require some further work. The new management has very appropriately focused its efforts on raising achievement, which was not a key issue of the last inspection. In this, it has made good progress, as is seen in the improved results in year 2000.
- 92 Of the five key issues identified, very good progress has been made in three:
- 1- Teaching now engages students' involvement. Many lessons have a good variety of activities, including investigations, group work, role-play and use of computers. This is having a very positive effect on the quality of students'

learning and the standards they achieve.

- 2- Monitoring the school's work and policies by the school's senior management and governors is now a strength.
 - 3- The school has gained the resources needed to teach ICT effectively, largely as a result of its successful application to become a Specialist Technology College. Students' capability in ICT now meets the national expectation.
- 93 In two key issues, progress has been made but there is further work to be done.
- 1- The school has successfully encouraged 6th form students to take an active role outside their examination subjects, such as community work, thus broadening their curriculum, but a few students do not participate. Key skills are now being taught to all to broaden their learning experiences. However, students have insufficient opportunities to discuss important issues, including those that concern the deeper meaning of life, especially in Year 12. These would help to promote spiritual development.
 - 2- The school has successfully introduced 'Thought for the Week' to fulfil the requirement for daily worship. This is considered in assemblies weekly and tutor groups daily. However, reflection is not well developed by tutors. The continued lack of suitable assembly spaces impedes the schools' ability to provide a daily gathering.

Summary

- 94 Good management is having a positive effect on raising standards, and promoting effective teaching and learning. Improving results and the positive attitudes of students to their learning, are the outcomes of a school that provides good value for money.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

95 To raise standards and the quality of learning further, the school management, governors and staff should:

- (1) Increase the effectiveness of subject and year leaders in monitoring and improving students' learning by:
 - training them in skills of lesson observation, so they are able to determine the impact of teaching on students' learning;
 - observing lessons of teachers for whom they are responsible;
 - ensuring that all students receive clear information, through assessment, on how to improve their standards;
 - giving feedback to staff they observe on the quality of students' learning.(Ref paras.;87,136,139,155,164,166,173,175,182,191,194,220,222,229, 231, 241)
- (2) Improve the introduction of curriculum change by:
 - determining a phased timetable leading to the introduction of specific change;
 - establishing who will co-ordinate the change and to whom they will communicate developments;
 - evaluating the effectiveness of curriculum change, measured against pre-determined criteria.(Ref paragraphs; 53,54,55,64,65,86,103)
- (3) Develop the role of the group tutor in morning registration by:
 - increasing their involvement in monitoring students' progress;
 - providing tutors with students' progress statements resulting from mentoring.
 - promoting discussion and reflection on the 'Thought for the Week';(Ref paragraphs; 50,63,68,73,74,77,93)
- (4) Engage in further discussions with the Local Education Authority to determine strategies to improve accommodation, particularly for:
 - science,
 - modern foreign languages,
 - 6th form study and social interaction,
 - assembly.(Ref paragraphs; 88,90,93,103,146,201)

96 Whilst not key issues, the school should consider how it will respond to the following:

- Providing 6th form students with more opportunities to discuss important issues in life, including religious beliefs.
(Ref paragraphs; 55,63,64,65,93,101,228)
- Resolving health and safety issues raised in sections of the report.
(Ref paragraphs; 72,88,164,166,211,212,213)

OTHER SPECIFIED FEATURES

THE SIXTH FORM

(This section summarises much of what is contained in the different sections of Part A of the report)

Standards

- 97 In most subjects, the standards of students currently taking A-levels and GNVQs in Year 13, compare broadly with syllabus expectations for this early stage of the school year. In English, mathematics, science, French, information technology and physical education standards are above expectation and in history and music, they are a little above.
- 98 Between the last inspection and 1999, the results of students who took two or more subjects in A-level or equivalent examinations have been just above the national average. Results improved further in year 2000, when the average point score per student rose by almost two. Improved results post-16 have occurred when the number of students staying on in the 6th form has been rising. The relative performance of girls and boys has varied. In 1997 girls performed significantly better than boys, but by 2000 the position had reversed and boys' results were over two points higher than girls'. This is contrary to the national trend. The proportion of students achieving the higher A-level grades A and B has been below average. In recent years, results in design and technology, German, mathematics and music were consistently above average. In 2000, these subjects again performed well when compared with provisional, national results, together with art, biology, business studies, English literature and physical education; the latter subject being taken for the first time. Results in general studies have been well below average throughout this period.
- 99 Sixth form students set very good standards in their attitudes and behaviour. They have a positive working rapport with teachers. Students provide good role models to those in Years 10 and 11, working as prefects, leading extra-curricular activities and supporting younger students' learning through mentoring.

Quality of education

- 100 The quality of teaching is good. In over 75% of 6th form lessons seen the teaching was at least good and in 30% it was very good or excellent. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed in the 6th form. Teaching in the 6th form is a little better than the national picture. During the inspection, the largest proportion of good quality teaching was in design and technology, geography, history, and mathematics. Strengths of 6th form teaching are the subject expertise and enthusiasm of teachers, very good knowledge of the examination syllabus, positive relationships, support for students and high expectations.
- 101 The 6th form curriculum has a broad subject range and most students take additional activities to give a reasonable balance. There is a good range of advanced courses, including five vocational subjects in Year 12. GCSE consolidation courses are offered. This wide range caters well for individual needs and different career pathways. All students in Year 12 take key skills in communication, use of number and ICT. Not all staff who teach the 6th form are sure about how students are to be supported in key skills nor of their own role in monitoring and assessment. Parents have given their agreement that students need not take religious education (RE), although opportunities are offered for voluntary attendance at lunch-time lessons. Careers provision is sound, and the annual business conference, held in conjunction with local firms, gives students

valuable opportunities to gain insights into the world of work. Many students participate in extra-curricular activities, especially drama, music and sports. Sound opportunities are offered for cultural development and there is very good provision for moral and social development. Spiritual development is unsatisfactory because most students opt out of religious education. Also, in Year 12 there are insufficient opportunities for considering issues and meanings of life.

- 102 Academic progress is monitored very well and gains are checked regularly against measures of predicted progress. There is good monitoring of pastoral development and career intentions. Involvement in wider activities, such as supporting Year 10 and 11 students learning through mentoring and listening to pupils' reading at primary schools, is entered on records of achievement. Whilst most students do participate and broaden their experiences, a few do not. Attendance is closely monitored. Good information is provided in reports. Students receive very good support when they apply for courses at universities and colleges. Parents of former students speak highly of the surgery held on results day to assist students to gain suitable placements.

Management

- 103 The director of 6th form is a member of the school's senior management team. He works closely with the two deputy headteachers on curricular and pastoral organisation. Management arrangements for monitoring students' academic progress and welfare are very effective. There is good guidance on future opportunities in education or employment. Curriculum planning has been very effective in subjects, particularly for the new range of courses for 2000-1. Some aspects of the introduction of key skills, being taught to all students from the start of this autumn term, have not been communicated to staff clearly enough. Monthly tutor-time periods are a good means of providing personal guidance. The effective management of 6th form students has been a significant factor in creating a positive ethos, with examination results above average and rising.

COMMUNITY LINKS

(This section summarises much of what is contained in the different sections of Part A of the report).

- 104 The school is a focal point for the local community and plays a respected part in local life. Links with other education providers and local businesses are clear strengths.

Educational links

- 105 **'The Family of Schools'** is a thriving group that consists of schools from across the three phases serving pupils and students aged from 4 to 19 in the Ashby district. Meetings occur on a regular basis to exchange information and plan for continuity of pupil experience. The part-time co-ordinator, based at Ashby Grammar School, ensures effective liaison. Joint staff training involves teachers working together across the phases to plan learning experiences. The comprehensive year planner summarises the various joint events involving staff, students and the community. These include regular meetings of senior managers and subject co-ordinators, and yearly meetings for all staff teaching the different subjects. Pupils and students in 'The Family' benefit from co-ordination of reading support, drama events, visits, concerts, the cross phase Young Engineers Club and science workshops. The induction programme and 'bridging' activities, through which work is started in Year 9 at high schools is completed in Year 10 following transfer, ensure that students coming to Ashby Grammar School are well prepared for the transition.

- 106 **Lockton House** is a former derelict property on the Grammar School site that has been fully refurbished. It now provides an adult education centre for the locality. This is managed by the school, which works in collaboration with Ivanhoe Community College, Loughborough College of Further Education and United Biscuits Ltd, to provide adult training. Courses are focused on the needs of the district's reviving commercial sector, such as business courses and an accredited course for computer systems management. Lockton House offers excellent opportunities for students at the school to work with adults in gaining qualifications that are in demand by local employers.
- 107 **School House** provides boarding accommodation for boys aged 11-14 who are taught at Ivanhoe Community College, as well as older boys at Ashby Grammar School. Places on the residential summer schools, run annually at School House for gifted students, are made available for pupils from local primary and high schools. This cements further the work of 'The Family of Schools'.

Business and Industry Links

- 108 Industry links are valued by students, parents and teachers; they provide students with exciting and varied experiences in the world of work. The school has greatly benefited from sponsorship, particularly that which enabled it to become a Specialist Technology College in 1998. Employers actively support projects, such as the new science accommodation and the purchase of additional equipment and resources. Prizes for the annual Awards Evening, celebrating students' achievements, are sponsored. All Year 11 students have the opportunity to broaden their horizons through a range of work experience placements, many with local employers. They are organised in conjunction with Project Trident. Students say that they greatly benefit from the experience. Over fifty industrialists are involved in an annual careers evening. Students benefit from the 'How to Sell Yourself' workshop, when twenty industrialists work with students to improve their interview techniques. Sixth form students participate in a three-day business conference, organised with local and national firms. Several Young Enterprise companies are run annually, with advisers who work at local businesses. The school is very successful in engaging employers from the local community to enhance learning opportunities. The Leicestershire Training and Enterprise Council gives active support to the school's flourishing involvement with the local business community.

Other community activities

- 109 Links with the town and locality are well established. The school's facilities are used by the public and organisations; for example, its swimming pool and lecture theatre. Relationships with the local police are strong. The SPLASH (School Police Liaison Activities Summer Holidays) scheme has been running successfully for seven years and is clearly both enjoyed and appreciated by students. Regular lunchtime concerts are given in the parish church for townspeople. Ensembles and bands play at charity events in the district.
- 110 In its aims, the school sets out to be sensitive to the needs of the community. It meets this aspiration very well.

BOARDING

- 111 The quality of the boarding provision is very good. There is a long tradition of boys boarding at the school, dating from the 16th century. The current provision, School House, is a Victorian red brick building in the grounds of the Leicester Road site. It provides for 32 boys aged 11-19 during term time. Boys aged 11 to 14, attend Ivanhoe Community College. Houseparents place a strong emphasis on providing an environment in keeping with a home rather than an institution. Many of the

boarders speak of the 'family' atmosphere within the house. They are encouraged to make their sleeping areas personal by bringing bed covers from home, displaying favourite posters and arranging furniture to create an atmosphere of belonging to a family. The accommodation is kept in good decorative order for a building of its age. Boarders respect the provision; there is no evidence of graffiti anywhere. Houseparents are very well supported by the clerical assistant whose duties include ordering supplies, checking the whereabouts of students during exeat weekends, and organising transport. She also manages accounts for the matron.

- 112 Current boarders come from a range of backgrounds. Many are the sons of servicemen and some have parents who work in Europe. A small number is from overseas and English is not their first language. Others have experienced difficulties at their previous schools and have transferred to a boarding environment to aid their social and educational development.
- 113 The welfare of students in School House is given the highest priority, with the emphasis on safety in the residential setting. Fire drills are held during the term. Assembly areas and routines are well known to boarders. The school's deputy headteacher (pastoral) extends her daytime responsibilities to School House and is the named person for child protection for the boarders. Procedures are well known to the care staff and they are monitored by the deputy head and the houseparents. The regular communication between the deputy-head and the care staff is a strength of the provision. The matron oversees the medical needs of the boarders and administers all medication from the locked drugs cabinet in her office. She has excellent working relationships with local doctors, the hospital and the nurse at the main school. Excellent contact is maintained between School House and Ivanhoe Community College over health issues. Parents are notified of any medical treatments given and detailed records are kept.
- 114 Very good support is provided for boarders intellectual, social, physical and emotional development. Study facilities enable students to undertake homework in a quiet atmosphere and they have access to computers. A rich and varied programme of activities is available in the evenings and weekends. The school's facilities, such as the swimming pool, sports provision and information technology rooms, are used to promote students' development through well-planned activities. Boys state that there is always an adult available with whom they can discuss personal problems and seek advice. They have direct access to the telephone.
- 115 The dining room and kitchen are hubs of house life, providing an excellent variety of nutritious food. Boarders take all meals at the house, including lunch. Meal times are social occasions with very good opportunities for conversation. With the exception of the light supper, which is taken as students complete their activities, grace is said by a boarder at all meals.
- 116 The houseparents act in a supervisory capacity and have excellent working relationships with care staff. There is no evidence of bullying or oppressive behaviour in the house, and students are quite clear that if there were they would

know what to do. They stated that they were confident that the matter would be resolved quickly by the care staff. The minor recommendations of the last social services report, concerning provision, have been acted upon.

- 117 At the end of the school day boarders are free to wear casual clothing of their own choice. They are encouraged to make choices and regularly make suggestions for trips and out of school activities. Year 13 students 'surf the net' to review degree courses and entry requirements before completing their applications for university entry.

- 118 The boarding provision at School House is quite unique and of the highest quality. Students regard it as home during term time. The parents of two of students with whom inspectors discussed provision, could not speak highly enough about the very positive changes that had occurred in their sons since they had become boarders. School House meets its aims very well in providing an environment in which students can develop their interests and abilities, while developing the social skills to enable them to play a full part in life.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	214
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students	51

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
7	27	38	24	4	0	0

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

Information about the school's students – the information below and on the following pages refers to school year 1999-2000

Students on the school's roll	Y10 – Y13	Sixth form
Number of students on the school's roll	996	385
Number of full-time students eligible for free school meals	Total	66

Special educational needs	Y10 – Y13	Sixth form
Number of students with statements of special educational needs	34	4
Number of students on the school's special educational needs register	137	6

English as an additional language	No of students
Number of students with English as an additional language	11

Student mobility in the last school year	No of students
Students who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	20
Students who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	45

Attendance

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
	%		%
School data	9.6	School data	1.4
National comparative data	*7.9	National comparative data	*1.1

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

* Please note that these figures refer to schools with students aged 11-18, national data is not available for schools with students aged 14-19.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	1999	224	244	468

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of students achieving the standard specified	Boys	89	196	211
	Girls	108	226	231
	Total	197	422	442
Percentage of students achieving the standard specified	School	42% (42.1%)	90% (90.2%)	94% (96%)
	National	46.6% (44.6%)	90.9% (90.9%)	95.8% (95.7%)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per student	School	34.2 (34.0)
	National	38.0 (36.8)

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

Attainment at the end of the sixth form

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
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	1999	139	165	304

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	17.8	16.6	17.2 (18.0)	2.2	1.2	1.6 (1.7)
National	17.7	18.1	17.9 (17.6)	2.7	2.8	2.8 (2.8)

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	12	8.0
	National		10.2

International Baccalaureate		Number	% success rate
Number entered for the International Baccalaureate Diploma and the percentage of those students who achieved all they studied	School	0	-
	National		82.5

Ethnic background of students

	No of students
Black – Caribbean heritage	2
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	10
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	5
White	1362
Any other minority ethnic group	2

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	55	2
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: Y10 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	85.1
Number of students per qualified teacher	17.4

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y10 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	30
Total aggregate hours worked per week	479

Deployment of teachers: Y10 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	77.4%
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Average teaching group size: Y10 – Y11

Key Stage 2	n/a
Key Stage 3	n/a
Key Stage 4	21.3

Financial information

Financial year	1998-99
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	£
Total income	3,798,541
Total expenditure	3,859,711
Expenditure per student	2,828
Balance brought forward from previous year	94,814
Balance carried forward to next year	33,644

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out

1,478

Number of questionnaires returned

207

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	35	55	5	2	2
My child is making good progress in school.	30	56	3	0	10
Behaviour in the school is good.	21	60	6	0	14
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	20	59	12	1	8
The teaching is good.	21	57	6	1	15
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	18	42	18	3	18
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	38	48	8	2	5
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	46	47	3	0	3
The school works closely with parents.	13	45	20	5	16
The school is well led and managed.	23	45	6	1	24
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	28	53	6	1	13
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	26	48	4	1	21

*** Because the school was inspected at an early stage in the academic year, approximately one-third of the students had only been at the school for a few days prior to the circulation of the parents' questionnaire.*

Other issues raised by parents

The parents' meeting was attended by 35 parents. At this, and in letters sent to the registered inspector, the number of positive comments out-weighted negative points.

A number of parents referred to the good support to students given by teachers. Much teaching is regarded as good. There was praise for the extra-curricular activities available, especially music. Parents of students new to the school commented on the smooth start to the term. Parents were very positive about the leadership of the headteacher.

A smaller number raised concerns, mainly specific to their child. General issues of concern were the erratic arrival of some buses in the morning, too much or too little homework and too few text books in some subjects.

PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES

ENGLISH

- 119 In recent years, standards in English have been a little below average on entry. Good teaching and positive relationships have resulted in students reaching average standards in English Language and above average in English Literature by Year 11.
- 120 Virtually all students in Years 10 and 11 listen well and they have a sound understanding of what is taught. Most speak clearly, but a small minority do not speak with sufficient clarity or volume to make themselves fully understood when reading to others or responding to questions. Higher attainers, including gifted students, often make perceptive comments on the texts they are studying. They engage well in discussion, such as when dealing with aspects of persuasive writing in Year 10. Most students read with at least average levels of accuracy and fluency. Many read well, successfully tackling a good range of demanding texts, including poetry and plays by Shakespeare. However, some find difficulty with the more advanced elements, such as interpreting ideas and emotions expressed in poetry, as in work on the poems of Simon Armitage in Year 11. A few students with special educational needs find reading the normal range of words for their age difficult, but most are capable of decoding and reading basic words accurately. These students are helped by the use of the computer program 'Success Maker'. In writing, most students spell with average accuracy but some make errors with everyday vocabulary, either through a lack of knowledge or through careless copying. Many are capable of interesting descriptive and narrative writing and can compose poetry using prescribed forms, such as poems created in the Japanese 'haiku' style in Year 11. Most who take English Literature are capable of responding to the course texts studied at average and above levels of understanding, as in work on 'The Speckled Band'. Girls' results are higher than boys'. The English faculty is tackling this by reviewing its teaching approaches and the materials studied. There are no significant variations in attainment because of the small number of students of different ethnic background.
- 121 In the 6th form, students extend their previous English skills well and standards are above average. Their listening skills are high. Almost all speak well and many make mature observations that are full of insight and ideas concerning the texts they study. For example, this was seen when a Year 12 class was studying the poems of Wilfred Owen. The level of discussions about the meanings of language and literature are often high, aided by important contributions from gifted students, as seen when students were working on the text of 'The Taming of the Shrew' in Year 13. Students meet a wide range of works, and most are able to grasp and understand deeper meanings extending beyond the printed page; for example, when they study 'Brave New World'. Many essays are well written and of suitable length, such as those dealing with women writers.
- 122 In recent years, GCSE results in English Language have been close to national standards. In 1998 they were slightly above, but they dipped in 1999 following the lower level literacy skills of students on entry in 1997. In 2000, they were once again slightly above the provisional average. Many students who study English Literature gain well above average results. At A-level, over the past three years, results have been above average, with a sound proportion of A and B grades.
- 123 Teaching is good overall, with the few sound lessons well exceeded by those that are good or very good. Teachers have a very good knowledge of the English literature. Expectations of students are generally demanding, but in some lessons

in Years 10 and 11 more could be expected of students in middle and lower sets. What can be achieved with these classes was illustrated well in a Year 10 lesson, where good explanations helped students to understand and respond to 'Macbeth'. Lesson planning in schemes of work and individual lessons, is also good. Usually, lessons have sound pace and time is used advantageously. A very positive feature of planning in Year 10 is the use of work started in feeder high schools then extended during the first weeks at the new school, such as the topic on poetry from other cultures. Good listening skills are promoted by the effective management of students, but on a few occasions when students do not speak with sufficient clarity or volume, they are insufficiently challenged. The improvement of students' reading skills is strongly encouraged, with good reading lists and thorough records that are regularly reviewed. A wide range of writing is encouraged, including poetry. Where lessons are most successful there is good management of students, with lively teaching and warm but challenging relationships. In these lessons there are good question and answer techniques and work proceeds at a rapid pace. Where the lessons are sound, they feature many of the positive qualities of the good lessons, such as careful planning and vigour, but the management of students is weaker. Also, questions are less challenging and the rate of progress is lower. In most lessons, task objectives are shared with students, as are the assessment criteria for the different styles of work. A good feature of teaching is the support given to students during lessons and the provision of materials to aid students' understanding. These are enhanced by the use of overhead transparencies, videos, theatre visits and by visiting writers.

- 124 Students are given good oral feedback on their work in lessons. Many of the teachers' comments are challenging yet encouraging. Written work is marked regularly and a positive feature is the use of targets to help students improve their coursework. Homework is used appropriately. The assessment of students' work for examinations is good. It is accurate and well moderated, with records kept in line with course requirements. There are also opportunities for students to review their own work. Reports to parents are better than those typically seen and include detailed teacher comments on skills and progress. The inclusion of current and possible grades is an effective method of providing targets.
- 125 In all years, the response of students to their English lessons is good. Most show good levels of interest in their work. In some lessons they gain an obvious enjoyment, such as when responding to literature in Years 11 and 13. Students often demonstrate accurate recall from previous lessons, as was observed when students worked on 'Of Mice and Men' in Year 11. Many have the confidence to share ideas and opinions, as seen in a Year 13 A-level lesson on the poetry of Seamus Heaney. They work co-operatively in group-work and sustain concentration, as in Year 10 when working on poetry. Relationships between students and those between the students and teachers are almost always good. A few do not offer answers or comments, despite the encouragement of teachers.
- 126 The subject leadership is good. Courses and examination results are evaluated and improvements are planned and implemented. Developments are well charted and achieved. The curriculum is planned effectively, with a good range of well-organised materials used to meet learning needs. There is a good range of different types of reading and writing for stimulus and practice, with poetry being both read and written. Currently, the use of information and communication technology is mainly undertaken by students who have special educational needs. Accommodation is sound, although it could be enhanced by better displays of students' work. Resources are sufficient and well organised. The administrative assistant to the faculty provides valuable support.
- 127 Since the last inspection, progress made in English has been good. Spelling

weaknesses have been improved and standards are now average. GCSE results in English Language have improved a little, and in Literature they are now well above average. In the 6th form, all courses now produce results that are above average. The degree of responsibility shown by the students for their own learning has improved through increased use of group work. Teaching has improved and is now mainly good.

- 128 Action to raise standards further should include:
- ❑ increasing teaching expectations in some middle to lower sets;
 - ❑ encouraging all students to make oral responses in lessons;
 - ❑ providing more opportunities for students to use computers for drafting and improving work.

Literacy across subjects

- 129 Literacy skills are typical of those normally found. Most students listen very attentively to teachers and to each other; for example in drama and religious education. They speak with reasonable expression and confidence, as in assemblies, although a few could improve their clarity and volume and some lack confidence in speaking aloud. Across the curriculum, some students speak very articulately, as in discussions in English classes, geography and modern foreign languages. Many respond well to questions, with good use of technical vocabulary, as in information technology, mathematics and religious education, although a small minority do not volunteer answers. Overall, levels of listening and speaking are a little above average. Reading skills are sound, such as in geography and science, where students check their understanding of instructions. Students in lower ability groups display weaknesses in understanding when they are required to comment on what they have read. In physical education, these students are regularly helped to understand the meanings of words and definitions of movements. Writing is sound, although a small proportion of students have some weakness in spelling, such as in English and history. Most can write in a variety of styles, especially for different audiences. Many students are capable of writing in poetical forms and using extended writing effectively, especially in English literature, and in geography in the sixth form. Much written work is well presented, such as in English coursework and design and technology portfolios.

MATHEMATICS

- 130 Students cover a broad range of mathematical topics and benefit from good teaching. They have very positive attitudes and achieve average standards in Year 11. In the 6th form, standards are above average.
- 131 In Years 10 and 11, students demonstrate sound knowledge, understanding and skills across all aspects of mathematics, but with expected, wide variations. Gifted and talented students often show exceptional performance, such as in Year 10 where they can evaluate complex expressions involving indices. Average attainers demonstrate standards that are in line with those normally seen, such as in Year 10 where they solve linear inequalities with more than one operation. In classes that contain students who find mathematics difficult, including those with special educational needs, the work produced is only just below average. For instance, in Year 11 they can competently rotate a range of shapes about given centres. On rare occasions, students do not achieve as well as they should, such as a few Year 10 low attainers who, because of poor concentration, have only a patchy understanding of factors and multiples. Students enter the school with broadly average attainment and maintain this throughout Years 10 and 11, representing satisfactory achievement.
- 132 In the 6th form, standards observed during the inspection were better than those normally seen, with some variations across teaching groups. Students studying

further mathematics in Year 13 are achieving very high standards. Many of them have already produced results in modules which represent a grade A for A-level mathematics and grades A or B in further mathematics. There is strong evidence of very high attainment in their folders, such as calculating the definite integral of a wide range of functions, including trigonometric, logarithmic and fractional. Students occasionally demonstrate progress which is only broadly typical of most schools, such as when Year 13 are manipulating expressions using sigma notation. However, performance is often better than this, such as when students in Year 12 very competently identify and analyse reasons for the effect of linear transformations on the product moment correlation coefficient. In Year 12, students aiming to re-take GCSEs are achieving very well and are able, for instance, to solve a range of problems with powers and numbers expressed in standard form. Students with special educational needs mostly achieve well and are able to subtract up to four-digit numbers and multiply up to two-digit numbers without using a calculator.

- 133 Results in GCSE examinations have been slightly above the national average and have improved in recent years. Boys performed better than girls in 1999, but girls and boys both performed better than the national picture in relation to other subjects. In year 2000, results were above the provisional average. Results in A-level examinations have been above the national average. There has been an improvement in the most recent results, following a decline in 1999. Girls performed better than boys in 2000, but boys have done better than girls in previous years.
- 134 Students' attitudes and behaviour are generally very good and often excellent in the 6th form. All are keen to learn; almost all listen attentively and most persevere well when experiencing difficulty. Collaboration is a significant strength, with students showing a high level of respect for the views of others. Extensive discussions of approaches and solutions to problems often result in improved understanding. Exceptions are a few students, especially in Year 10, who make poorly disciplined contributions to discussion, with several shouting out simultaneously and wasting too much time on non-mathematical conversations. These rare occasions mar what is, otherwise, a strong working ethos.
- 135 Teaching is of good quality overall, but with variations illustrated below. In almost half of the lessons observed the teaching was very good, and only one lesson was judged to be unsatisfactory. All teachers demonstrate competent subject knowledge, often shown through carefully detailed visual and verbal presentations, such as when setting out the rules of indices in clear steps. Teachers plan well. They identify objectives and choose a good variety of strategies to achieve them. However, in the less successful but satisfactory teaching, the objectives are not sufficiently precise or matched to students' attainment. Summaries at the end of lessons are rushed. Many teachers expect high standards from their groups and adopt appropriate methods to ensure that students respond well to the challenge. This was represented particularly effectively during the inspection week in a Year 12 lesson on standard form. The teacher used questioning exceptionally well to gain ideas from students, and presented them very clearly on the whiteboard. The overall aim of the lesson was divided into several objectives, which provided a strong sense of purpose and structured the use of time. Rapid circulation around the class was used very successfully by the teacher, in order to identify and help overcome any students' misconceptions. This resulted in high levels of understanding, and rapid learning by all students. Classroom management is a strength for almost all teachers. They challenge any inappropriate behaviour quickly and effectively. However, on a few occasions in the lessons observed, the teacher did not make it sufficiently clear that poor behaviour would not be tolerated. Learning support staff are used well. They use questioning to encourage students' thinking better than is normally seen. There are many examples of constructive teacher comments in marking which recognise what has been achieved and

indicate how work can be improved, but there are also long sections of unmarked work in some students' books.

- 136 The mathematics department is led very well. This has resulted in a cohesive team in which all teachers are keen to move forward together. There is a good development plan containing well balanced measures for improving learning and raising achievement. Schemes of work have been improved, but still need to include teaching approaches and suitable resources. There is very good analysis of data to measure the department's effectiveness, but there is too little monitoring of the impact of teaching on learning overall. Very sophisticated methods of assessment are used to compare student achievement with expectations based on previous performance. However, there is inconsistent use of assessment to inform students of strengths and weaknesses, and how to improve. Reports to parents are better than typically seen.
- 137 Although most mathematics rooms are close together and furnished well, many are cramped, restricting furniture layouts that encourage group activity. Good use is made of commercial and home-produced posters to create a mathematical environment, but there is too little display of students' work. Relationships with contributory schools are very strong, enabling good continuity of learning on transfer. The mathematics department makes a satisfactory contribution to the teaching of literacy skills by encouraging students to articulate their own ideas and use technical vocabulary, promoted by the display of key words in classrooms. There is a good contribution to information and communication technology skills with widespread, and still increasing, use of computers.
- 138 Since the last inspection, results in external examinations initially declined and then improved in recent years to reach a similar position. Improved teaching has enabled low attaining students to improve their competence in performing simple numerical calculations. There is now a much better range of software to support learning on modern computers.
- 139 Action to raise standards further should include:
- ❑ extending lesson observation to providing teachers with information on how they can improve practice further;
 - ❑ achieving a more consistent use of assessment to inform students of their strengths and weaknesses and how to improve;
 - ❑ identifying within schemes of work the range of resources and strategies to achieve the objectives.

Standards of numeracy across subjects

- 140 Standards of numeracy are similar to those typically seen. The introduction of a computer software package for individualised learning in mathematics is having a positive effect on the use of number with lower attainers and students with special educational needs. They are improving their skills in adding, subtracting, multiplying and dividing, and are becoming more competent in calculating with fractions and decimals. Teachers are beginning to employ national numeracy strategies in lessons, such as mental warm-up and the simultaneous display of students' written answers, but these are not yet widespread. There is no co-ordination of numeracy across other subjects, but there are good examples of the use and application of number in some areas. The collection, representation and interpretation of data is a strength, for example in science, where tables, charts and graphs are produced accurately and analysed very well. Students show good skills in manipulating formulae when using spreadsheets in information technology lessons, and they interpret statistical information well in geography.

SCIENCE

- 141 Most students receive a thorough science education and enjoy the subject but the quality of teaching and learning is not sufficiently consistent across the faculty.
- 142 Students entering Year 10 have achieved close to the national standard in science tests in the last term at their high school. Most achieve well, quickly overcoming any dip in performance following transfer. They make slower progress in biology lessons in Year 10 because there is too much repetition of earlier work and a consequent lack of challenge. By Year 11, students achieve at the levels expected for their age, with top sets progressing particularly well. Gifted and talented students do well through the wide opportunities open to them. Achievement is usually higher in chemistry and physics aspects where able students can explain radioactive decay, have well developed ideas of atomic structure, use chemical formulae and can calculate the masses of chemicals involved in reactions. Students with special educational need make at least satisfactory progress. Practical skills are well developed in the top sets, but students in lower sets achieve less well and require more rigorous teaching of investigative skills rather than the current focus on experimental skills.
- 143 Achievement is above average overall in the sixth form. Students make more rapid progress in Year 12 than they do in GCSE classes. Progress is slower in Year 12 physics because of the very large class sizes preventing students getting the individual and small group attention required. Standards in Year 13 lessons are high. Students have good factual knowledge and can recall information with confidence. They have a sufficiently deep understanding to be able to interpret and explain phenomena. For example, physics students use the idea of duality of electron behaviour well. Practical skills are well developed, allowing students to carry out experiments with independence and accuracy.
- 144 GCSE results in science have been rising over the last three years and are close to the national average. In 1999, 40% of those entered for double science obtained grades A* to C compared with the national figure of 48%. However, the school enters a much larger proportion of 16 year olds than is common and a high proportion of these students gain success. Additionally, a further 6% of students were entered for separate biology, chemistry and physics examinations and nearly all gained higher grades. Overall, in 1999 students gained slightly more points in GCSE science examinations than average. Girls achieved slightly higher results than boys. In 2000, 43% of those entered for double science and all those taking the three separate sciences achieved higher grades, demonstrating a further improvement. Girls did particularly well, widening the gap between their performance and the boys'. In the 6th form, A-level results have been more variable, dropping in 1999, but rising again in year 2000. Overall the 1999 results were below the national averages. Those gaining grades A and B were above average in biology but below in chemistry and physics. In year 2000, results improved well in all three sciences. Chemistry has been most successful in raising both the number of students and the standard of results in recent years.
- 145 Teaching in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory overall. However, whilst there is a significant proportion of good and very good lessons, one in five lessons is unsatisfactory. These unsatisfactory lessons occur in biology and lack sufficient pace or challenge. For instance, Year 10 students spend too long covering work on cells, tissues and organs that they have covered previously in high schools. At its weakest this teaching lacks the variety and dynamism to engage the interest of lower attaining students and the teacher finds it difficult to control the resultant inattention or disruptive behaviour. In contrast, a lesson introducing rates of chemical reactions to a very low ability set was very successful because of the way

the teacher injected enthusiasm into the topic. The content was adjusted and tasks involved everyday reactions familiar to the students, providing a variety of activities to keep them all engaged. Apart from in the small minority of unsatisfactory lessons, students' behaviour is mature and many show a strong interest in science. In 6th form lessons, students' response to the teaching is very positive, with good levels of interest and motivation. Students benefit from the depth of subject expertise in the faculty. Overall, teaching in the sixth form is good.

- 146 The science curriculum is of good quality, with added breadth from the availability of biology, chemistry and physics as additional subjects at GCSE. There is a wider choice at advanced level than usual, as well as intermediate and advanced GNVQ science. The subject also has a good range of extra curricular provision. The interests of talented science students are well catered for. This large and complex department is well managed and its routines run smoothly. It is well staffed by subject specialists who are deployed well. There is a shortage of science accommodation and the quality is often poor with restricted access. Laboratories and preparation rooms are unhelpfully scattered, which makes management and servicing difficult and impedes development of a whole faculty ethos. Effective use is made of this limited accommodation but it often limits teaching opportunities in lessons; this affects the quality of learning.
- 147 Management to improve teaching and learning in the science faculty is largely good but not equally effective in all aspects. Results of assessments are increasingly used to group students, to identify areas of under-performance and to target extra tuition. However, routine use of assessment and target setting in lessons is too variable between staff to be fully effective. The planning for, and achievement of, the Technology College targets has been good. Plans to improve the consistency of teaching have not been sufficiently successful in eliminating unsatisfactory lessons. Improvement within the biology department has been too slow.
- 148 Since the last inspection there has been good progress in achieving the Technology College targets. More students now achieve examination success. Faculty management is now more focused on raising achievement, but this has not yet removed all the unsatisfactory teaching, particularly in biology. There has been little improvement in the accommodation, but the first phase of improvements is imminent.
- 149 Action to raise standards further should include:
- ❑ remedying unsatisfactory lessons, by improving challenge, pace and stimulation in teaching;
 - ❑ ensuring greater consistency in teaching and management across the three sciences;
 - ❑ using formal and informal assessments more effectively in lessons, to identify what students know, to reduce repetition and to focus teaching.

ART

- 150 Many students taking art speak with enthusiasm about their work. Younger students undertake an interesting range of mainly two-dimensional activities. Some talented A-level students achieve high standards and show considerable depth of personal expression.
- 151 By Year 11, students are working at broadly average standards overall, but with wide variations. They make steady progress. Gifted students, mainly girls, are producing drawings and paintings that show a strong application of line, tone, shape and pattern. When studying the human face in Year 10, the drawing skills of about

one third of students are of good quality. These higher attaining students are able to explore ideas and investigate images with confidence and imagination, such as studies of hands leading to printing in Year 11. About one third of students demonstrate average skills in application using pencil, oil pastels and paints, but a similar proportion, mainly boys, are working below this level. Students know the work of a sound range of artists and gain appropriate insights into the way themes have been expressed in different times. For example, most in Year 10 can compare and contrast the way a classical artist such as Leonardo da Vinci depicted a face with the approach of a pop artist like Andy Warhol. They broaden their understanding by researching how people from a different cultural background depict the topic they are studying, such as Mehendi hand painting patterns studied in Year 11.

- 152 In the 6th form, students achieve standards that are typical at an early point in Year 13. They create artworks of different sizes, and use a good variety of media with increasing confidence in their drawings and paintings. This is seen for example in still life studies of different fruits and in portraiture. Steady progress in the visual investigation of a theme is clearly evident in students' sketchbooks, which at their best are creatively frenetic. Abstraction is developed strongly. Students make very good progress in the imaginative exploration of media they have not used before, from card assemblages to carved and welded forms, such as for the body adornment project in Year 12. Good levels of personal organisation are seen in strong planning, good use of time and reflection of developing visual ideas. There is relatively little written appraisal, but appropriate personal evaluation is seen through the way ideas progress to a final two or three-dimensional outcome.
- 153 Students' attitudes do vary in Years 10 and 11. The great majority are interested and work with concentration but a small proportion of boys, who find the skills and ideas difficult, chatter and lack the self-motivation to succeed. Recording visual ideas as they evolve helps to enhance students' personal development, and is a strength of the highly individual work seen in the 6th form.
- 154 Teaching is at least satisfactory in Years 10 and 11 and good in the 6th form. Confident lesson introductions engage most students. Basic skills in drawing, painting, composition and graphics are taught well. Individual lessons are planned in appropriate detail and the teachers' expectations of students are demanding, especially in the use of line, tone and pattern. Sometimes insufficient time is left at the end of the lesson to reinforce what has been learnt. Artists' work is used well to illustrate different techniques, such as when teaching mark making in Year 11 using an impasto application of paint, following the study of paintings by Van Gogh. A deep knowledge of art movements is used very well in the 6th form to explain how paintings can convey deep symbolism as well as visual images; for example, in the study of Spanish still life painting. Student management is good. Helpful verbal feedback to students in lessons enables them to understand how they can improve their work. Assessments, which are based on examination criteria, help students to focus their efforts on how to gain maximum success. Display is used well in teaching to illustrate techniques and demonstrate outcomes that students are expected to aspire towards. Teaching uses information and communication technology (ICT) increasingly for scanning and manipulating images, as well as for on-line research.
- 155 Art is led with enthusiasm and topics are well organised, but there is no overall plan of how the different units within the art curriculum relate or progression is to be achieved. The subject is managed as part of the arts and design faculty, located a considerable distance from the art annex. Currently there is no monitoring of teaching and art does not contribute to the priorities listed in the faculty development plan. Unusual accommodation is used well and the semi-detached house in which Year 13 works provides each student with a personal studio space.

- 156 Since the 1996 inspection, the range of three-dimensional work has reduced as ceramics is no longer offered. However, the introduction of ICT has broadened two-dimension activity. Progress in Years 10 and 11 was described as slow in the previous report, but this is now steady. A-level groups remain well nurtured by good teaching.
- 157 Action to raise standards further should include:
- ❑ charting progression through the topics covered in Years 10 and 11;
 - ❑ broadening two-dimensional work still further by reintroducing printmaking;
 - ❑ recording priorities for art within the faculty development plan.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

- 158 In design and technology, students are able to choose from a broad range of GCSE and A-level courses. Most enjoy their work in the subject and put considerable effort into their coursework. Many attend voluntary evening and weekend sessions to complete a variety of well made products.
- 159 In the current Year 11, students are achieving just above the standard normally seen at this age. Both girls and boys, including those of differing prior attainment, are making good progress. In Year 10, they learn a broad range of designing and making skills. For example, students in engineering are able to cast, turn and forge using aluminium and steel to make well constructed candle holders. In graphics, students use computer aided design software confidently to design sweets and wrappers. In resistant materials, students use a wide range of hand and machine tools to manufacture carefully constructed picture frames. In Year 11, students embark upon a good range of coursework projects, matched closely to the requirements of the GCSE examinations. For example, students in textiles experiment with a wide range of decorative ideas, using both hand and computerised sewing machine techniques. Students in food technology develop their own design specifications; for example, designing products for those who require special diets. Students in graphics undertake a wide range of research to inform their designs of mobile phones and surfing shops, working in the library resource centre with video, computer and textbook resources. Students have some opportunities to handle and evaluate a range of well-designed products made by others to inform their own designing and making, but these can be extended. This aspect of the curriculum was observed being taught successfully in food technology, where students in Year 10 prepare and investigate 'cook chill' products, before developing their own ideas. Students with special educational needs make good progress developing their designing and making skills, for example in Year 11, learning how to construct accurate working drawings of their projects in resistant materials. Good opportunities are provided for gifted students to achieve well.
- 160 In the sixth form, students are making good progress and are achieving standards well up to course expectations in the AS and A-levels being studied. In resistant materials, students traditionally participate in a group project each year and have successfully completed a number of well-constructed and visually interesting sculptures to enhance the school environment. Students choose suitable contexts for their major coursework projects and engage in a wide range of detailed research and investigations to inform their designing. For example in textiles in Year 13, students use historical and cultural research to generate ideas for individual fashion items. In electronics in Year 13, students confidently demonstrate the use of computers to design printed circuit boards and a computerised engraving machine in order to manufacture them.
- 161 Students' results in the GCSE examinations in the design and technology subjects over the last three years have been consistently just above the national average. The most recent results have been most successful and above average in food

technology, graphics and resistant materials, although less successful and below average in electronics and engineering. Results at A-level in design and technology have been consistently good, with a high pass rate across a range of grades.

- 162 Overall, the quality of teaching is good. Teachers demonstrate a secure knowledge and understanding of the subject. Coursework booklets are used effectively by the majority of teachers to familiarise students with the requirements of the GCSE examinations; for example detailing the work to be undertaken on a week-by-week basis and how the project will be marked. Further booklets are being usefully developed in areas such as resistant materials, to ensure that students develop the knowledge and understanding of materials required in the terminal examination. Teachers generally give clear introductions to lessons, describing the work to be undertaken. These provide students with a clear picture of what they are expected to achieve within the session. Often, these teachers take the opportunity at the end of lessons to summarise the learning that has taken place and the progress made. In a minority of lessons, the tasks set were unclear and the teacher did not engage students sufficiently in dialogue to confirm their knowledge and understanding of the work being undertaken. The management of practical activities is good. Technicians are used effectively to support learning; for example to demonstrate casting in engineering, and the use of a computerised engraving machine in electronics. Teachers across the department are beginning to make considerable use of computers to enhance practical projects and the quality of students' coursework folders.
- 163 Students respond well and show a very good level of interest in the subject. They settle down quickly and sustain concentration throughout lessons. Students work well together in groups, for example in Year 11 graphics, working sensibly and efficiently through a wide variety of research tasks in the library resource centre. Relationships between students and their teachers and technicians are very good.
- 164 The head of faculty is providing very good leadership to the design and technology team. The department sets detailed targets as part of the Specialist Technology College initiative, and these are comprehensively reviewed on an annual basis. The department undertakes a detailed analysis of examination results across subject areas in order to guide its planning and practice. The monitoring and evaluation of teaching and its impact on learning requires strengthening to ensure that best practice is fully shared across the department. The studio and workshop areas are organised and managed well by the individual heads of subject. The investment in computers and computer aided manufacturing equipment is being used well in all subject areas. However, the older machinery used in resistant materials does not fully meet the standard required by current legislation. A number of very positive links have been established with the local 'Family of Schools'. Software has been provided for the high schools to facilitate continuity of learning. Teachers and Year 12 students have worked in a good number of primary schools, building racing cars with Year 6 pupils. An annual 'Technology in the Community' exhibition has been firmly established to celebrate work across ages 5 to 18.
- 165 Since the previous report, overall levels of attainment at age 16 have remained just above average.
- 166 Action to raise standards further should include:
- ❑ strengthening the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and its impact on learning across the department;
 - ❑ broadening opportunities for students to undertake product analysis activities;
 - ❑ addressing health and safety issues identified to the school, relating to machines in the resistant materials areas.

GEOGRAPHY

- 167 In geography, students benefit from a well-organised course, which includes interesting fieldwork visits, and consistently good teaching.
- 168 By Year 11, students reach average standards for this stage in their course. They gain a sound knowledge of physical geography from their work on the weather, rivers, earthquakes and volcanoes, and of human geography from their settlement studies in the local area and further afield. For example, the work they were doing during the inspection in Year 10, on the Mount St Helens eruption, helped them to gain a clear understanding of the effects of a volcano on the natural environment and people living and working in that locality. In the same way, the work seen in Year 11 on rain forests gave them a valuable understanding of the way the world is changing. They have a sound grasp of map and graph skills, and benefit from opportunities to develop their literacy skills, for example in their examination studies based on fieldwork in the local area.
- 169 In Years 12 and 13, students continue to make good progress and meet course expectations. They build on their knowledge, understanding and skills, through further studies of natural and man made landscapes. They increase their understanding of the world from case studies of the economic and social changes occurring both in the United Kingdom and globally. For example, the work seen during the inspection in Year 12 gave the students a good understanding of the effects of government policy on population changes in China. Case studies, such as the one seen in Year 13 on dune formation, give the students a sympathetic understanding of the processes responsible for changes in a natural ecosystem.
- 170 Students who choose the subject make good progress, and achieve grades in GCSE and 'A' level examinations which are in line with national subject standards. The number of students gaining higher grades is gradually improving. In the 1999 GCSE examinations, over half the students gained grades A*-C; this year almost a third of those taking A-level gained grades A and B. There remains, however, a significant difference between the boys and girls, with a higher proportion of girls gaining higher grades at GCSE.
- 171 The attitude of the students to their work is very good, and their behaviour is exemplary. They show a lot of interest in geography topics, and try hard at all times to do their best. This is evident both in lessons, and from their neat and well-organised exercise books and folders. They work hard when doing individual and group work, such as in completing coursework assignments based on fieldwork visits.
- 172 The main reason students gain so much from their geography is because of the overall high standard of teaching, which includes some very good and excellent lessons. Teachers work very well together to provide interesting and stimulating courses, and they teach their individual classes well. Lessons are meticulously planned to provide worthwhile and challenging activities. For example, in a Year 10 lesson, the teacher discussed the features of volcanoes, then challenged the students to apply their understanding to predict the effects of an eruption in South America. In a Year 12 lesson, the teacher provided some very well organised resources, including a video, to give students some background information on China. He then asked them to work in groups to discuss some of the social and economic effects of government policies on population control. This gave the students a very good understanding of significant changes taking place in the world. All teachers establish excellent relationships with their classes. There is an atmosphere of calm, order and purpose in lessons. For example, in a Year 13 lesson, the teacher created an atmosphere of warmth and trust in which the

students were not afraid to ask for help. This meant they were able to understand some complex ideas about the coastal environment and the way in which it is changing. A further strength of the teaching is the way in which students are given help to organise their written work. For example, in a Year 13 lesson, the teacher provided a well thought out assignment sheet which enabled the students to show simply and in a well ordered way, their understanding of the stages in the formation of sand dunes. Students with special educational needs are well supported. In a Year 10 lesson, the geography teacher and the special needs teacher worked together well, so that a student was able to complete work successfully and to gain a good understanding of the effects of the eruption of Mount St Helens.

- 173 Geography is very well organised and soundly managed by the head of department who uses his subject knowledge and educational experience effectively to give clear guidance to the other teachers. There is a well-planned curriculum, which provides good coverage of the GCSE, A/S and A-level syllabuses. It also provides a course which is worthwhile and relevant. The geography team works well together; there is a capacity to continue to improve the work of the geography department. However, there is a need to monitor teaching and learning further, particularly in the single gender classes, in order to identify specific ways of continuing to make improvements.
- 174 Good progress has been made since the last inspection; the department is maintaining a rising trend in the achievements of students. There is now a significant focus upon providing work that challenges all the class, without any students feeling insecure in what is expected of them. A regular programme of assessment means that teachers are aware of their students' strengths.
- 175 Action to raise standards further should include:
- ☐ using knowledge of the strengths of students to set objectives for future learning;
 - ☐ monitoring systematically teaching and its impact on students' learning;
 - ☐ introducing more opportunities for students to use computers to assist them with their geography.

HISTORY

- 176 Most students work hard and enjoy history lessons. They make good progress and are reaching average standards by the end of Year 11 and good standards in the 6th form. As a result of staff absence, only two of the three teachers in the department were observed during the inspection week.
- 177 In Year 11 lessons, students make good progress in acquiring knowledge and understanding of the units being studied. They are working at levels which would be expected for their age. They can identify different sources of evidence and, from Year 10, are looking at the appropriateness of this evidence, as seen in work on medicine through the ages. This work also shows a good understanding of chronology. Students can use source material to develop different points of view supported by evidence, as in a Year 11 lesson in which they viewed events from the point of view of the settlers and native Americans. Independent research is shown in the coursework required for the examination. Students have a good understanding of the grades they are predicted to achieve and standard of their current work. They are less clear about the action needed to improve their work further. Gifted students make good progress. Those with special educational needs make satisfactory progress. They gain knowledge and understanding of the topics covered but their writing is often brief and not always accurate.
- 178 In the 6th form, students make good progress and standards are just above average. For example, in Year 13 they are able to discuss the strengths and

weaknesses of Calvin's organisation of the church in Geneva. They have good understanding of the work they have completed and are able to extract relevant information from source material. Students use this to put forward a particular point of view, such as how lenient or reasonable was the discipline exerted by the church in Calvin's time. Students are also making good progress in the development of study skills, including essay writing; in a Year 12 lesson there was an emphasis on making accurate and succinct notes. Key skills are being developed in the subject, but there is lack of clarity about how these are to be supported and assessed.

- 179 GCSE results have been improving in recent years, with the exception of 1999. Overall, they are now just at the national average for the percentage of students gaining A* to C grades. Significantly more girls than boys follow GCSE courses and in recent years girls have improved their results, including a higher proportion of top grades. The percentage gaining A* to G grades has been consistently high and above the national average. In the 6th form, results have continued to be above the national average for those gaining the higher grades although this percentage is falling. There has been a 100% pass rate over the past three years.
- 180 Teaching is good overall, and is sometimes very good. Where teaching is very good, as in a Year 11 lesson on the Sand Creek Massacre, the teacher settled the class very quickly and explained the objectives for the lesson. Students were encouraged to listen carefully and to take an active part in the lesson, so that they developed their knowledge and understanding of the issues. Throughout the period, various timed tasks were set which retained the interest of the students and they maintained high levels of concentration. The tasks were challenging for all, leading students to view the events from differing points of view. Teachers have a very good command of the subject and there are very good relationships between teachers and students. However, when activities are not sufficiently challenging, or given a specific allocation of time, students lose concentration and do not complete the work set. This occurred in a Year 10 lesson on medicine in ancient Egypt. Marking for GCSE and A-level is effective and relates well to the examination criteria. Teachers have comprehensive data relating to all students, but this is not yet used as effectively as it could be to set precise and detailed targets for them, or to inform planning for the teacher.
- 181 In Years 10 and 11, students are interested and concentrate well in most history lessons, with many having the confidence to try and answer questions. In Years 12 and 13, sixth formers are also well focused on their work, although not all of them take an active part in discussions or volunteer answers to questions. In almost all lessons behaviour is good and students respond positively when they are brought back on task. They work well together when they are asked to work in pairs or small groups.
- 182 The head of the humanities faculty is also in charge of history. He is an enthusiastic and effective manager of the subject. There is a clear focus on improving teaching and learning, with planning for the department being closely linked to the school development plan. Although informal monitoring of teaching and learning takes place, this is not yet sufficiently rigorous. Accommodation is an issue in the department as some classes are too large for the size of classroom and this restricts the kind of activities that can be undertaken.
- 183 Good progress has been made since the last inspection in improving standards and developing students' skills, particularly in understanding why individual historical events have been interpreted in different ways.
- 184 Action to raise standards further should include:
- ❑ identifying and sharing good practice in the use of a range of teaching and learning activities within lessons and the impact of these on achievement;
 - ❑ increasing students' use of computers for researching and presenting

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

- 185 The school is now well equipped with computer facilities and modern, high quality software, largely as a result of becoming a Specialist Technology College. In addition to specialist examination courses, a number of subjects, including business studies, English, mathematics, science, design and technology and humanities have good access to computers. They are using them with increasing effectiveness.
- 186 Standards of attainment in Year 11 are average in examination courses and the GNVQ key skills programme. All students use word processing effectively, with a high level of retrieval and editing skill. They are able to combine text with graphics into a newsletter or report layout. This is seen in geography with reports on hurricane 'Murray' and in English through students' GCSE projects. Students acquire good skills when producing spreadsheets and using databases, but these are seen mainly within the information technology examination courses rather than in applications in different subjects. Those students who choose to study the subject for GCSE make good progress, often from variable levels of skill and knowledge that may be well below average to above when they start the course. By the end of Year 11, students show a good awareness of viewers when designing an animated slide-show using text and graphics. Their ability to search and sort information stored on a spreadsheet becomes more sophisticated as they create, analyse and evaluate tables and graphs, for instance when presenting information about activities at a scuba diving club. In Years 10 and 11, students make good progress in their learning because they consolidate then build on their existing knowledge to develop further skills in the use of computers. There is no difference in the rate of progress of girls and boys. Students with special educational needs, and those who are gifted, make good progress.
- 187 Standards of students in Year 13 are good. Girls and boys taking A-level computer studies and GNVQ courses make good progress and are attaining standards higher than expected at this point of their courses. Students integrate the use of computers firmly into their learning programmes, demonstrating the use of e-mail or web sites to gain information for their studies. They analyse and review computer-programming methods and draw conclusions about their usefulness. Their knowledge and understanding is clearly expressed through essays and presentations.
- 188 GCSE results have been average for the very small numbers taking examinations in recent years. A/S and A-level results in 1999 and 2000 have matched those nationally.
- 189 Attitudes and behaviour were very good in all lessons seen. Students are voracious in their appetite for computer based learning. Their skill level is often very high, and most know the capabilities and limitations of the computers they use at school. Equipment is looked after very well and students take pride in their growing competence. Motivation is high and students show very good concentration. Relationships between students and teachers are very good in all lessons.
- 190 Teaching in the computer suites is consistently good. Teachers create a calm, orderly atmosphere and share clearly with students the learning that is to be covered in each lesson. Their knowledge and understanding of the subject is very good. For example, teachers used the correct terminology to describe tasks and the features of software used. During all lessons observed students were well managed. When required, support for individuals was sensitive and effective. Planning within the subject is very good. The scheme of work is effective in ensuring progression in learning experiences across year groups, and this helps to

raise students' standards. Students are given many opportunities to gain qualifications when using computers. These include one directly linked to industry for network managers, in which students and adults from firms learn together. Homework is used too inconsistently across the department and some lessons fail to review what students have learnt.

- 191 Leadership of the subject is very good. The faculty documentation provides a clear vision for the use of ICT in students' learning. Development planning is thorough. There is a calm ethos in the faculty and a shared commitment, here and across the school, to the improvement of students' computer skills. There is good provision at lunchtime and after school, to enable students to access information from the world-wide web, work on projects and undertake on-line learning. Monitoring the quality of teaching and its impact on learning within the subject is informal and is in need of further development, together with ensuring that other subjects contribute fully to students' key skills when they use computers. Assessment procedures are thorough and detailed, but there is insufficient monitoring of the progress made by students. As a result, reports to parents do not provide sufficient detail describing how students can improve.
- 192 Provision for ICT is very good, with a ratio of computers to students that is slightly better than the national average. The quality of technical support is exceptional, and ensures that the whole school network is fully effective at all times. Many subjects manage their own computer networks and this gives these curriculum areas excellent access. Booking systems for these rooms are not always managed effectively. Computer use by subjects that do not have their own ICT facilities is therefore sometimes restricted.
- 193 Since the previous report, the subject has addressed all of the issues raised. There has been a dramatic improvement in the quantity and quality of computers throughout the school. A full time co-ordinator has been appointed; there is now a clear strategy and action plan for managing and delivering the subject. Provision now meets the needs of all students and the progress of students is good.
- 194 Action to raise standards further should include:
- ❑ monitoring the work of the subject representatives, to ensure all faculties are delivering those elements of ICT that they have agreed;
 - ❑ evaluating the impact of teaching and learning within the examination course programme;
 - ❑ increasing students' knowledge of their progress by keeping their own records of their use of ICT.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

French, German and Spanish

- 195 Students may study French, German or Spanish. In Years 10 and 11, standards are very variable from class to class and year to year. In the 6th form, students make good progress.
- 196 By Year 11, students who study German, and about half of students studying French, achieve standards above the expectation for their age. Typically, these students produce accurate and original, written course work. They have a much better knowledge of grammar than is usual. They can speak with confidence and at length, and can use different tenses of verbs. Students can pick out information from complex and lengthy printed and recorded texts. In Spanish lessons, and in about half of French lessons, students' attainment falls below the expectation for a grade C in the GCSE course. These students accumulate grammatical knowledge, but have difficulty putting it to use when speaking or writing. Their spoken work is

hesitant, and usually consists of very short responses. Often, they need support in order to complete simple tasks. Students can understand simple messages and facts within familiar contexts. Most are currently making progress which matches their capabilities, but unsatisfactory progress in previous Year 10 classes has had a clear downward effect on the attitudes and attainment of some current Year 11 students. Boys tend not to achieve as well as they should, but students who have special educational needs make steady progress.

- 197 In the 6th form, students studying French achieve higher standards than those usually seen. They have made good progress in acquiring and using complex grammar. Students are able to express and develop arguments around serious topics, such as the environment and pollution. They can understand complex printed and recorded texts. Their written work is accurate, and shows intelligent application of what has been learned during lessons. When speaking, they can present a point of view. For example, in one good Year 13 lesson, they demonstrated that they can respond spontaneously to provocative and unexpected questions. Students who study German and Spanish reach standards broadly in line with expectations for an A-level course. They make good progress as in French, but their work is less sophisticated and less confident, because they have had a much shorter experience of the language.
- 198 At GCSE, a high proportion of students enters the French examination. Results over recent years have been consistently below the national average, but show an upward trend. German results have been consistently above the national average. Spanish results have been consistently well below, and falling. At A-level, French results show a steady upward trend, to a good standard. In German, about two thirds of students usually achieve the higher grades. Spanish has a low number of candidates and a poor record of achieving higher grades.
- 199 Teaching is good; in French and Spanish lessons it is often very good or excellent. The teachers are excellent linguists, using their language for most operations during lessons. In Years 10 and 11, teachers' expectations of students are high. In German, because many students have little or no previous experience of the language, the level of challenge is particularly demanding. In one Year 11 French lesson, the teacher expected and got a lot from students who were actively using the conditional tense within the hour. In the best lessons, a good pace of work keeps students alert and active, with rapid movement from activity to activity, timed challenges, brisk questioning and crisp, classroom routines. Lessons are carefully and skilfully planned and executed. This was particularly the case in a Year 10 lesson about expressing what people must or must not do. The lesson had clear, simple objectives which were explained to the class, and were reflected in each individual lesson activity. Students knew exactly what was expected of them, and they had a clear sense of progress and success, step-by-step through the lesson. When lessons are less effective, it is usually because there are unnecessary pauses in work, or because faster workers have not enough work to keep them busy. In these lessons, learning loses its urgency and some higher attaining students do not achieve as much as they could. In the 6th form, teaching in French and Spanish lessons is consistently good or better, whereas in German lessons it is consistently satisfactory. In the former, teachers have high expectations, which are driven by clear knowledge of what students need to do in order to improve examination performance and to address the A-level criteria. The best lessons, for example a Year 12 lesson on the theme of homelessness, have a fast succession of short, linked activities. There is a climate of urgency that encourages students to be alert and responsive, and essential language is practised in a variety of ways. In the same lesson, cards, games and visual stimuli were used effectively to support students' understanding and self-expression. In less effective lessons, the purpose and desired outcomes are not clarified to students. Sometimes, the slow pace of work leads to a loss of concentration, urgency and interest. In some lessons, students do not have enough opportunity to develop their use of language

independently, beyond the teacher's direct control. In Years 10 and 11, marking of work does not convey enough information to students about their performance, or enough advice on how to improve. In lessons, students do not hear enough reference to measurements, criteria or scores in order to be able to target appropriate standards and to know how well they have performed.

- 200 In Years 10 and 11, students' attitudes and behaviour are mostly good or very good. Most students grasp every opportunity to do as much as possible, and are keen to promote their own learning. Students in lower sets are very positive, especially when given clear targets and achievable goals. There are some negative attitudes to work from some students who have had a poor prior experience of French or Spanish. In the 6th form, students are highly motivated, and display a very positive approach to their work. By Year 13, independence of mind and maturity of judgement are well developed.
- 201 The leadership and management provided by the head of faculty are very good. Her work is mirrored in the dramatic improvements which have taken place. However, some features of curriculum provision for modern foreign languages are unsatisfactory. Gifted students profit from the opportunity to take a second language but their current attainment is constrained by limited time. There is a higher than usual proportion of students in Years 10 and 11 who do not receive their statutory entitlement to study a foreign language. At the time of the inspection the necessary formal procedures for disapplication had not been made. The lack of less academic routes which could include these students is a weakness. Assessment procedures are effective. Analysis of students' examination performance has highlighted important weaknesses in attainment, but practical strategies for addressing them are not yet actively pursued. Accommodation for the subject is poor.
- 202 Since the previous inspection, new, good quality schemes of work have been introduced. Cohesion, consistency and team-work have been rebuilt. Students' attitudes to the subject are now much more positive. Poor teaching has been eliminated. Cultural contacts have been established. An under-performing department has been restored to credibility and effectiveness.
- 203 Action to raise standards further should include:
- ❑ promoting access to modern foreign languages in Years 10 and 11 to students who currently do not participate, by offering suitable courses and accreditation;
 - ❑ ensuring that all lessons have clear objectives, and desired outcomes are communicated to students;
 - ❑ using marking to inform students about their performance and advise them how they can improve further.

MUSIC

- 204 The music department makes a significant contribution to the life of the school. Recent examination results have been very good, current students are working hard and the extra-curricular provision is a strength. During the inspection classes were taught by a teacher new to the school, owing to the music co-ordinator taking maternity leave.
- 205 About a third of the students in Year 11 are confident composers and performers and are already close to the required standard for GCSE. Of the remaining students, a further third are approximately at expectation, but the rest are well below required standards in composing because they cannot confidently play the melodies they are trying to compose. Self-appraisal is generally well developed. Most students can identify how their compositions or performances can be improved. Girls and boys make equally good progress.

- 206 Students in their final year of A-level studies in Year 13 are slightly above, the standards expected of them at this stage of their course. Students have a good historical understanding and use appropriate vocabulary. For example, they recognise features of Romantic style and harmony and can apply their knowledge to new pieces that they hear. They are developing appropriate conducting and directing ability, and are confident performers.
- 207 In recent years, GCSE results have been consistently well above the national average. In year 2000, there was a 100% pass-rate at grades A*-C. It appears that the standard of the present Year 11 falls below this high level. Two circumstances during the inspection cloud the picture. Firstly, the inspection took place immediately after the long summer break; secondly, students were getting to know a new teacher. It is not possible to estimate the effect of these circumstances on students' work observed during the inspection. The numbers of students taking A-level are too small to compare with national figures. Their grades have had a wide spread, but recent candidates have consistently out-performed the grade predictions made on the basis of their GCSE results.
- 208 Students' response to music is very good. Most students listen thoughtfully to each others' performances, and pay close attention to the teacher. Instruments are treated with care. Students' personal development is enriched by staff who share their love of music.
- 209 Teaching is good, with some very good features. Secure subject knowledge enables the teacher to use a variety of activities, such as questioning, quick testing to check understanding, and longer group and individual composing or performing tasks. Students are therefore offered plenty of different stimuli, to which they respond well. Occasionally the choice of material is a little weak, such as an aural task which did not really stretch the Year 13 A-level class. However, this was quickly recognised and more appropriate work set. The pace for the Year 11 GCSE class was sometimes a little slow, but this was partly due to shortage of space and to the large number of students. Students have to work in overcrowded rooms, which makes it very hard for some of them to concentrate. It is very difficult for the teacher to listen to and help every member of such a large group in a single lesson. Despite this, students behave well and most continue to do their best to improve their compositions by following the helpful instruction sheets which they are given. Music for listening is well chosen as, for example, the wide range of Renaissance music which Year 12 students had covered since the start of term. This leads to good progress. These students are already making well-justified judgements about the music they hear. Homework is appropriate such as the essay questions and follow-up reading set for Year 13 following their study of a Tchaikovsky symphony. Detailed record-keeping and consistent assessment procedures assist teachers to set helpful, long-term targets for every student. All know their predicted and target grades and what they must do to meet them.
- 210 Extra-curricular activities are excellent, contributing valuably to students' acquisition of performing and social skills. There is a wide variety of choice: orchestra, wind band, jazz band, choir, plus many chamber ensembles led by post-16 students to give them practice in the conducting/directing element of the A-level course. Regular concerts include monthly lunchtime concerts in St Helen's Church, and summer tours that provide social as well as musical opportunities. Concerts are given at local primary schools and high school combined music days. The involvement of staff from other departments, and the bursar, set splendid examples to students of the value of music as a lifelong pleasure. The strengths of talented students' performing skills is greatly enhanced by opportunities to take solo and conducting parts.

- 211 The department has been led with vision and flair. The temporary leadership is enthusiastic and reflects strongly the expressed aims and values of the school. The department's achievements are the more impressive because of the poor accommodation in which it is housed. The main classroom is too small for the large GCSE groups. So many desks are needed on the stage area it is dangerous for students to walk along the edge and they are at risk of falling off. Another health and safety issue is the cluttered floor area around keyboards. Orchestral instruments, brought into school for extra-curricular lessons, are placed there because there is nowhere else to put them. Resources are also lacking. There are not enough electronic keyboards for all students to have access to one during composing sessions, and there is only one computer with very limited composing software. Students themselves complain that they cannot get access to the resources they need. The weakest students are held back in composing because they cannot use the recording and repeat functions of keyboards to overcome their shortcomings in performing. The pianos are all in a fairly advanced stage of decay; the poor intonation of one affected adversely an otherwise very successful performance of the Schumann piano concerto; not an easy choice for a school orchestra, but a challenge to which students rose magnificently.
- 212 Since the last inspection, standards have risen and opportunities for singing have been extended. There has also been some improvement in resources, notably electronic keyboards, a 4-track recorder and a computer.
- 213 Action to raise standards further should include:
- ❑ providing sufficient keyboards and computers, together with suitable software to improve confidence in composing and performing;
 - ❑ addressing safety issues within the current crowded accommodation.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION (PE)

- 214 In this department the ethos for learning is excellent, teaching is good and all students, regardless of ability, are valued and encouraged to give of their best.
- 215 In Year 11, standards are above those normally seen in planning, performing and evaluating. GCSE and non-examination students achieve particularly high standards in all football skills. They have good tactical knowledge and use it to create and move into space well, both on and off the ball. Several girls in Year 11 show very high levels of skill in netball. In rounders, all students understand the principles of long barrier fielding. In basketball, most students' dribbling, passing, receiving and shooting skills, together with their knowledge, understanding and application of the rules, are better than those normally seen, with several students achieving very high standards. In badminton, hockey and table tennis, students' performance skills are in line with their limited experience of the games. In badminton, most know when to use a drop shot or high clear. In table tennis, some students are able to apply spin to the ball. In hockey, all know and understand the principles of tackling. Girls and boys make good progress in Years 10 and 11. Those taking the GCSE course know and understand the classification of different drugs and how they affect performance. Most know the names of large muscle groups and can locate them accurately.
- 216 Students on the AS course in Year 12 and those taking A-level in Year 13, have a very good understanding of the principles of skill acquisition and the effects of intrinsic and extrinsic factors on sports performance. They show a sound understanding of anatomy and physiology. They all give effective feedback to their peers on others' performance. Students make very good progress to achieve above average standards in both years.
- 217 GCSE results for year 2000 are above the provisional national figures and continue an upward trend seen over the last three years. This was the first year that

students were entered for the A-level examination; results were very good, with fifteen of the sixteen students entered gaining grades A to C. All students entered for the Junior Sports Leaders' Award gained passes. Students achieve some very good results in extra-curricular sports activities. The under-15 cricket XI won the county cup for the second time in three years and the under-15 rugby team reached the county cup final. The under-15 and under-16 basketball teams were county champions in 1999, and the under-19 team won the league. Students won the 400 and 800 metres at the county schools' athletics meeting and a student represented Leicestershire in cross-country running. Several students are in county squads for girls' football, boys' football, netball and rugby.

- 218 Students enjoy their physical education lessons and usually expend a great deal of energy when taking part. They listen attentively to instructions and when feedback is given. Constructive criticism is accepted well from the teacher and from each other. Students are very courteous and behave well. Many are very supportive of each other, making encouraging comments to fellow team members. Most are willing to take responsibility by officiating in team games.
- 219 The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. In almost half of lessons, teaching is very good or excellent. All teachers have excellent working relationships with their classes. They provide a secure, positive learning environment in which students feel that their contributions are valued. Teachers' subject knowledge is very good, especially in games and the theoretical aspects of the examination courses. In most lessons, teachers' expectations of what students know, understand and can do are appropriate and all are set challenging tasks, with the most able suitably challenged. For example, in a table tennis lesson in which the serve was being taught, the more experienced and skilful students were expected to put spin on the ball. However, in one volleyball lesson, the tasks were too difficult for several students because of their lack of previous experience. Tasks are very clearly and quickly set, and built up in logical, manageable stages to bring about the desired learning. Very specific and appropriate coaching points are given for most skills and students are given good feedback. This was done particularly well in a rounders lesson in Year 10, when students were practising their fielding skills and in a hockey lesson in Year 11, when the emphasis was on tackling skills. A range of appropriate teaching strategies is used in practical lessons, including teacher and student demonstration to clarify tasks or show correct techniques. In two theory lessons, however, strategies were limited. A great deal of information was given to students, but they were not always shown how to use this information to deepen their understanding of the issues being covered. The quality of teachers' questioning skills is very good and used very successfully to test and extend students' knowledge and understanding. Students are given suitable opportunities to evaluate each others' work, with the accuracy of the evaluation checked by the teacher.
- 220 The department benefits from excellent leadership. Staff are committed to high achievement for all students, not only the most able. They provide a very positive working environment ensuring that the subject contributes well to students' moral and social development. Good opportunities exist for students to take examinations in the subject. The curriculum for non-examination students in Years 10 and 11 is appropriately based on an options system, but does not offer gymnastics or dance. No timetabled provision is made for 6th form students to take PE, apart from those studying examinations. There is a very good extra-curricular programme available to all regardless of their ability. Schemes of work are written, but would benefit by objectives being made more explicit. Reports show activities undertaken and give a clear indication of response to the subject, but they do not give a sufficiently clear statement on progress made since the last report. The department development plan matches the school development plan well. Informal monitoring of teaching and learning takes place as classes often share working spaces, but no time has yet been allocated for formal departmental monitoring. All staff give unstintingly of

their time to support and coach students.

- 221 Good progress has been made since the last report. The quality of teaching has improved and this has had a positive impact on standards achieved, especially at GCSE. Examination courses are now provided post-16, but there are no timetabled opportunities for others in the 6th form to take part in physical education.
- 222 Action to raise standards further should include:
- ❑ monitoring teaching and learning to extend even further the good practice in learning that already exists in the subject;
 - ❑ widening the range of teaching strategies in examination theory lessons;
 - ❑ providing a timetabled opportunity for 6th form students who wish to participate in PE.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (RE)

- 223 Students who are studying the short course GCSE in religious education experience a broad curriculum and good quality teaching.
- 224 The majority of students achieve standards that meet the expectations of the Leicestershire Agreed Syllabus in Year 11 and they make steady progress. They study a series of topics, such as death and dying, and religion, conflict and reconciliation, as part of their short course GCSE. Students show that they have sound knowledge of a range of moral issues and the questions that these raise for believers. In Year 10, students know the difference between absolute and relative morality. Through role-play and discussion they show that they recognise how factors, such as friends, family and religious beliefs can influence the way that a person responds to a moral dilemma. In Year 11, during their work on death and dying, students showed a good understanding of why a topic such as death could be considered as 'taboo' by many people. They are able to identify important Christian beliefs about death and understand how these are exemplified in important texts, such as Psalm 23. In their written work, students are able to express a personal response to a question such as, 'Should you live every day as if it were your last?' and give reasons for their answer. Overall, students with special educational needs achieve satisfactory standards. However, those who are gifted and talented do not achieve the very high standards of which they are capable because their written work lacks depth and development, particularly in answering evaluation questions.
- 225 Year 2000 was the first year that the majority of Year 11 sat the short course GCSE. The proportion of students gaining grades A*-C and A*-G was close to the national average. However, the proportion of students achieving the highest grades of A* and A was much smaller than that normally expected. Girls' results were much better than the boys' with almost twice as many girls as boys gaining grades A*-C. This difference is much greater than occurs nationally.
- 226 Teaching and learning are both good and, in some lessons, there are examples of very good features in teaching. Teachers of the subject are specialists. They use their subject knowledge effectively to help students gain a greater understanding of specific faiths. For example, in a lesson on beliefs about death, the teacher used her subject knowledge well to help students distinguish between the beliefs held by most Christians and those held by some Christians. Lessons are well planned and the aims are made clear to students. This helps them to learn because they know what they are expected to do by the end of the lesson. The teachers are enthusiastic about their subject and this, along with their high expectations, helps create a positive working atmosphere. A strength of the teaching lies in the good working relationships with students. Teachers successfully create an atmosphere

of mutual respect so that students feel confident to share their ideas and experiences with the rest of the class. They use students' own experiences as the starting point for many topics; this helps them make progress in reflecting on their own beliefs and values. For example, in a lesson introducing moral issues, the teacher successfully used a contemporary pop song as a stimulus for discussion about personal moral dilemmas. Lessons are well managed so students are able to work on a variety of activities individually, in pairs or groups with the minimum of disruption. In one good lesson, students made gains in their understanding of Christian teaching about death through a whole class discussion, the analysis of two hymns and a group activity sorting true and false statements. Teachers make good use of information and communication technology to support learning. In Year 10, a whole class activity using a CD-ROM was used very effectively to help students research the key features of world faiths. Although the teaching is good overall, there are some aspects that are in need of improvement. In a few lessons, there is a slower pace and insufficient matching of the work to the needs of all. For example, in a lesson introducing moral issues, too much time was spent on teacher exposition and completing basic written tasks from a class textbook so that gifted students were not challenged. Although the teaching gives appropriate emphasis on the use of religious vocabulary, there is insufficient attention paid to the development of other language and literacy skills. Students' work is marked regularly and comments usually give encouragement, but there are too few comments about how work might be improved.

- 227 Students show interest in the subject and have positive attitudes to their work. They work well together and are willing to share their ideas with the rest of the class. A good sense of mutual respect for others' beliefs and feelings is shown and they listen well to each other. Behaviour and relationships in lessons are good.
- 228 The curriculum offered, through the GCSE short course, meets requirements in the minimal amount of time allocated. Through regular opportunities to consider moral issues and think about a personal response to topics such as 'Is war ever justified?', good opportunities are provided for spiritual and moral development. At the time of the inspection, a significant number of students in Years 10 and 11 were not receiving their entitlement to RE, with the approval of parents, because they are withdrawn for extra literacy teaching. The school intends to remedy this situation by provide suitable teaching later in the academic year. In the 6th form, large numbers are withdrawn from the subject. Once weekly voluntary lessons are provided for a small number of students during lunchtime sessions.
- 229 RE is well managed by an enthusiastic subject leader who has a clear view of priorities for future development. Good documentation and schemes of work underpin the curriculum. Although students' work is assessed regularly through tasks and tests, insufficient use is made of results to help students set targets for improvement. Teachers have regular informal meetings but there are no procedures for monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and learning.
- 230 There has been good progress since the last inspection in many respects. Attainment in Years 10 and 11, and students' attitudes to RE have improved. Specialists now teach the subject. However, the most able students are still not being sufficiently challenged.
- 231 Action to raise standards further should include:
- ☐ raising the standards achieved by boys;
 - ☐ making better use of assessment information so that students, including those who are gifted, know what they need to do to improve;
 - ☐ introducing procedures to monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching and learning.

BUSINESS STUDIES AND ECONOMICS

- 232 Students show a high level of interest in the topics studied in business studies and economics. There is a good range of accreditation in Years 10 and 11 and in the 6th form. These subjects form part of the business and vocational studies faculty.
- 233 In Years 10 and 11, students develop key subject skills and understanding to reach average standards in business studies. Students respond well in lessons, such as in Year 10 when working on a past examination paper. They concentrate on the work in hand, paying attention to detail, and they have the ability to see the task through to the end of the lesson. In Year 11, information and communication technology skills are well developed and these are reinforced through the business studies project work undertaken. Standards are at the course expectation in Year 12. Students make oral presentations and show a good understanding of the processes of research. They recognise the strengths and weaknesses in their own assignments, and amend work as necessary. Their personal studies involve the collection of a variety of data on local firms. Standards in intermediate and advanced GNVQ business groups are at the course expectation. Students understand the framework and are reaching satisfactory levels of attainment in their vocational units. They are making good progress in acquiring and consolidating a range of business terms; for example, in the simulated case study of Lockett's Security Store. GNVQ students are making satisfactory progress in the way they research and evaluate their work. Where progress is slower the pace of work is not challenging students to make as much progress as they might.
- 234 In GCSE economics groups, students are making steady progress in acquiring and understanding new vocabulary and concepts to reach average standards, such as in a Year 10 lesson when learning about production possibility curves. In Year 11, students can give reasons for their views for economic growth in developing countries. In the 6th form, students have a good technical vocabulary and their work shows a sound understanding of concepts; as in Year 12, when studying business organisations. Standards are in line with the course expectation.
- 235 In recent years, the numbers attaining GCSE at grades A*-C in business studies have been close to the national average. Students achieved higher than their predicted grades in year 2000. In economics, results have declined since 1998 to below average. Students achieved lower than their predicted grades in 2000. In the 6th form, results in business studies have been above average overall and there was a good improvement in those gaining higher grades in 2000. Economics A-level results had been below average, but improved well in year 2000. In intermediate GNVQ business, almost all gain a full or partial award and in the advanced all gained a qualification. The department has worked hard in encouraging boys to see academic success as important and this has led to an improvement in their results.
- 236 Both business studies and economics contribute positively to the development of students' literacy and numeracy skills. A wide range of texts is used including newspaper articles. Numeracy skills including statistical analysis, graphs and tables, are used appropriately. Information technology is used across the subjects but particularly in GNVQ courses. Students are increasing their progress in terms of understanding what is required for success in examinations and are developing the skills needed for coursework and for data response questions.
- 237 Students' commitment to learning, and their perseverance, helps them to reach sound standards. All students are well motivated and show an interest in, and enjoyment of, the subjects. They listen well and respond when given the opportunity to take responsibility by organising themselves quickly and sensibly. They work well individually and in groups.

- 238 Teaching in both subjects was satisfactory or better in all lessons observed during the inspection, and was very good in half the lessons seen. All teachers in the department have a good level of subject knowledge and use excellent examples which relate to their own experiences. Where teaching is very good, as in a Year 10 business lesson looking at a past examination paper, the lesson was well planned and very well organised, with the appropriate resources being available. The teacher used the time well and had a strong focus on helping students make progress and in extending their thinking. During the lesson students were able to work individually to identify the nature of a data response question and use a past model answer. They were encouraged to raise specific learning points. The nature of the tasks and the expected outcomes led to a brisk pace and positive learning. Where teaching is satisfactory, lessons are planned well, but teachers miss opportunities to sum up precisely what students have learned during the lesson. Students have the skills to review what they have achieved and teachers need to structure their lessons to include this aspect more often. Teachers' helpful written comments when they mark homework, and the merit award system encourage students to improve.
- 239 Management of the department is good. The head of department has a clear view of the future. The development plan sets out clear targets and there has been a regular review. Revisions to the organisation of the department have been implemented effectively. Communication and co-ordination are good. Lessons are planned in the context of sound schemes of work, and teamwork between staff ensures good practice is shared. Extra curricular activities, off-site visits and links with industry make positive contributions to learning. Young Enterprise companies have gained awards at regional level. The department is relatively well resourced with some recent texts. Accommodation is cramped; this has a detrimental effect upon the quality of teaching and learning.
- 240 Since the last inspection, GCSE results have improved at a faster rate than nationally and the numbers of students entered for examinations at GCSE, AS/A level and GNVQ, have increased. There is much improvement in the GNVQ course and student completion rates. Assessment data is used effectively to monitor students' progress over time
- 241 Action to raise standards further should include:
- ❑ strengthening the way teaching, and its effects on learning, is monitored;
 - ❑ improving opportunities for teachers to use rooms that give scope for more active styles of learning.

DRAMA

- 242 In drama, students enter the school with a variety of previous experiences and levels of attainment, but very good teaching enables them to perform at above average standards in both GCSE drama and A-level theatre studies.
- 243 In Years 10 and 11, students rapidly develop skills of response to a wide range of stimuli through improvisation and scripted work. They display a good grasp of the conventions of drama, and incorporate these well into their presentations. Most work well together and group responsibility is strongly emphasised to ensure all students share thoughts and materials upon which the group's success may depend. Good attention is paid to the maintenance of notebooks in which they record their drama activities. Students from the 6th form are used to help organise students on GCSE courses and act as role models in class and in the well attended Youth Theatre sessions that take place after school. Technical skills are taught well and students perform capably in presentations.
- 244 In the 6th form, the good technical and interpretative skills gained from GCSE

success are applied and extended at A-level. In Year 12, students respond very well to different styles of drama. In Year 13, they demonstrate high level skills in understanding and in identifying with roles, such as in work on Stanislavski. In the advanced GNVQ performing arts course, students perform well and study the business side of theatre management effectively.

- 245 In GCSE drama, results are well above average, and have been so for the past three years. In the 6th form, A-level theatre studies results have risen in recent years from average to above average. The approach taken to drama ensures that girls and boys do well and students with special educational needs are helped to gain good experiences. Gifted students do well through being able to take part in Youth Theatre activities as well as their work in school, and by being able to specialise in aspects of drama, including lighting and stage management.
- 246 All the teaching of drama is at least sound, much is very good and some is excellent. In the most successful lessons, work is very well prepared. Vigorous teaching, which includes the impressive use of the teacher in role and very skilled management of students, ensures a good pace. Students work purposefully and are well redirected by the teacher so that outcomes exhibit enthusiasm and enjoyment, as seen in a realisation lesson in Year 11 and role play in Year 13. In the sound lessons, teaching skills are not at the same high level, and some students lack sufficient motivation to ensure rapid progress. Overall, most students respond very well to drama lessons and behaviour is good. Their commitment to work is often high and they display confidence in their performance abilities.
- 247 The courses in drama are very well planned and presented. Some topics being designed to deal with social themes, including consideration for others. In this way the subject makes a positive contribution to the ethos of the school. It contributes well to school and community life through presentations and productions. This year students were involved in the Edinburgh Fringe Festival.
- 248 Very good use is made of facilities for drama, which comprises a well equipped main drama studio and a second studio. The latter is in mobile accommodation which, although well adapted, has yet to be equipped with blackout and working lights. The school's lecture hall is used for presentations and is now well equipped with lighting. Displays of students' work are featured, although the emphasis is on the large sheets of paper that students use to record the outcomes of their group work. The key words used in drama are displayed, but these could be more prominent.
- 249 Little drama was observed in the last inspection, but it was noted that students were well motivated, and developed skills through lively and well structured teaching. This remains the case. There has been a positive response to the criticism about planning for examination courses. Planning is now very good and this contributes to results that are well above average.
- 250 Action to raise standards further should include:
- increasing the impact made by the display of students' work and the prominence given to key words.

