

INSPECTION REPORT

ETONE COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Nuneaton

LEA area: Warwickshire

Unique reference number: 125731

Headteacher: Mr Peter Kingham

Reporting inspector: Mr George Knights
3268

Dates of inspection: 13th to 16th May 2002

Inspection number: 193049

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Etone Community School

School category: Community

Age range of pupils: 11 to 16

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Leicester Road
Nuneaton
Warwickshire

Postcode: CV11 6AA

Telephone number: 024 76382008

Fax number: 024 76353320

Appropriate authority: The governing body

Name of chair of governors: Mr J Vale

Date of previous inspection: November 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
3268	George Knights	Registered inspector		What sort of school is it? Attainment & achievement How well are pupils and students taught? How good are curricular and other opportunities? How well is the school led and managed? What sort of school is it?
19743	Ann Taylor	Lay inspector		Attitudes, behaviour, personal development and attendance How well does the school care for its pupils and students? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
11969	John Hardy	Team inspector	Information and communication technology	
31441	Margaret King	Team inspector	Mathematics	
24118	Robert Vincent	Team inspector	English English as an additional language	
10561	Angela Fraser	Team inspector	Science	
19026	Brian Downes	Team inspector	Geography Special educational needs	
17556	Michael Miller	Team inspector	History Religious education	
18854	Malcolm McGregor	Team inspector	Design and technology	
29806	Jose Marshall	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	
18888	Jan Boulton	Team inspector	Physical education Equal opportunities	
18670	Peter Tidmarsh	Team inspector	Music	
16038	Jill Bavin	Team inspector	SEN Unit	
8204	John Sheffield	Team inspector	Art & Design	

The inspection contractor was:

TWA Inspections Ltd, 5 Lakeside
Werrington, Peterborough
Cambridgeshire PE4 6QZ

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London WC2B 6SE

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Etone Community School is a mixed comprehensive school for students aged 11 to 16 years of age. It is situated close to the centre of Nuneaton in Warwickshire. Almost all students live within three miles and the majority walk to school. The school has 746 students on roll, making it smaller than average. The school is significantly over-subscribed. Around four fifths of students transfer from three main partner primary schools. The attainment of students on entry to the school is below average. Students come from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds. Unemployment in the area is close to the national average, but high when compared with other areas of Warwickshire, and many parents work in service industries. The number of students eligible for free school meals is below the national average. Around one in 20 students comes from a minority ethnic background and most of these have English as an additional language. The school hosts a facility for 20 students with specific learning difficulties (dyslexia) and it currently has 17 students on roll. The number on the school's register of special educational needs is above average and the number with statements of special educational needs is well above average. Around three quarters of students transfer, at the end of Year 11, to further education or training, with most of the remainder entering employment. The school will, from September 2002, have Technology College status.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Etone Community School is a very good school. It has many fundamental strengths, which far outweigh those areas where further improvement is needed. Outstanding leadership and strong management have ensured that students make good progress and attain standards that are close to the national average. Teaching is consistently good, as a result of which students are enthusiastic and successful learners. The commitment to further improvement in the school is excellent and the capacity to succeed is very good. The school offers very good value for money.

What the school does well

- Outstanding leadership and strong management create a vibrant learning community.
- In all its work, the school is rigorous in improving standards and quality.
- It places great emphasis on consistently good teaching, which secures powerful learning.
- It inspires and supports students as committed and enthusiastic learners.
- It provides a curriculum that is well matched to students needs and aspirations.

What could be improved

- The use of information and communication technology as an integral part of learning in all subjects.
- The spiritual and multi-cultural aspects of students' personal development.
- The links between curriculum leaders in the school and its main partner primary schools.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made very good improvement since the previous inspection. Standards have risen quickly, mainly as a result of strong school leadership and significant improvement in the overall quality of teaching and learning. Very good progress has been made on most of the key issues identified in the previous inspection report. Work on developing a rigorous programme to audit teaching and to share good practice has been very successful. Behaviour has improved enormously because of improvements in teachers' expectations. Very successful work has been undertaken to improve the attainment of boys. Assessment practice is now very effective in guiding teachers' planning and curriculum development. The teaching of religious education now fully meets requirements. The school has dealt well with the need to attend to a range of health and safety issues. It has not been successful in ensuring that all students can take part in a daily act of collective worship.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 14 and 16 year olds, based on average point scores in national tests and GCSE examinations.

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1999	2000	2001	2001
Key Stage 3 tests	C	D	C	D
GCSE examinations	D	D	C	D

Key	
well above average	A
above average	B
average	C
below average	D
well below average	E

Standards in national tests at the end of Year 9 and in GCSE examinations have improved rapidly in recent years and are now broadly average. This represents good progress, given that students join the school with below average attainment. The achievement of students currently in the school suggests that the improvement in standards will be maintained. In 2001, results at the end of Year 9 in English, mathematics and science were all average, though below average when compared with similar schools. Results in GCSE examinations in 2001 were also broadly average. Almost all students who left the school last year did so with at least one GCSE grade or better. Students are achieving well because teachers work hard to attend to the needs of each individual. The school has been successful in improving the attainment of boys, as well as maintaining the performance of girls, and this has been a big factor in the improvement in overall results. The school achieved its targets for GCSE examinations in 2001. It has set challenging, but achievable, targets for national tests and GCSE examinations for the coming two years.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Students enjoy school. They come wanting to learn and are pleased that the school environment allows them to make good progress.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour, both in class and around the school, is very good. Students are polite and friendly.
Personal development and relationships	Students are very well supported and this helps them to achieve their full potential, both academically and personally. They form very constructive relationships, both with other students and with adults in the school.
Attendance	Very good, being well above the national average. There is very little unauthorised absence.

A major strength of the school is the good relationships, both among students and with all members of staff. Students trust their teachers and are confident that they are seeking to help them achieve their best. They are keen to play a role in helping the school improve, both through the work of an active school council and their own efforts. The fact that most students attend well is a major reason why so many leave the school having achieved some success in their work.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Years 7 – 9	Years 10 – 11
Quality of teaching	Good	Good

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

Teaching is good overall, with very good or excellent teaching in over two fifths of lessons. This good teaching helps students learn successfully and is a major factor in helping improve levels of achievement. The teaching of English, mathematics and science is good throughout the school. In no subject is overall teaching less than good and it is very good in physical education and modern foreign languages. The main strength of teaching is the effectiveness of the way that teachers manage students. Very good relationships, based on mutual trust, give teachers confidence to take risks and stimulates students to strive to improve because they know that teachers are working in their best interests. The teaching of literacy is very good, with strong contributions from teachers of other subjects supporting the good work of their English colleagues. The teaching of numeracy is good in mathematics lessons and steps are being taken to support this in other subjects. The use of information and communication technology in the teaching of all subjects is unsatisfactory in Years 10 and 11 and is not well developed in Years 7 to 9.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	This is good. The choice of courses for students in Years 10 and 11 is extensive and is well focused on meeting the needs of all.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	This is good overall. Careful attention is paid to the needs of individuals, whether working in mainstream classes or in small groups.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	This is good because the needs of each individual are known. Whilst the school monitors the progress of these students on an individual basis, it currently does not review its provision for these students as a group.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good. The contribution to moral development is good and to social development is very good. Spiritual and cultural provision are satisfactory. Teachers' awareness of spirituality and the contribution of ethnic minorities to contemporary British society require improvement. Requirements for a daily act of collective worship are not met.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school provides a strong focus for improving students' academic performance within a supportive framework. The arrangements for tutorials and progress checks are helping students to improve the quality of their work and enhancing their personal development.

A major strength of the curriculum is a vocationally oriented course, provided by a local college of further education, which is followed by around a third of Year 10 and 11 students. This caters well for their needs and plays a strong part in maintaining the interest of these students in their overall education. The school does not adequately provide for all students in Years 10 and 11 to develop and apply their skills in information and communication technology.

Parents are very supportive of the school and this is borne out by the fact that the school is heavily over-subscribed. The school has a very good relationship with the parent body and there are several opportunities for parents to visit to find out how their child is progressing.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The overall leadership and management of the school are very good. Excellent leadership by the headteacher has been the most significant factor in bringing about rapid improvement in the school.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors fulfil their roles and responsibilities very well. They are interested and committed and they are progressively becoming more effective in helping shape the strategic direction of the school.
The school's evaluation of its performance	This is very good. The school has excellent arrangements for evaluating the work of teachers and this has led to big improvements in teaching and learning.
The strategic use of resources	The school makes very good use of the resources available.

This is a reflective and self-challenging school in which all with management responsibilities work very effectively to maintain improvement. Delegation of responsibilities is strong because staff are held accountable whilst at the same time being well supported in fulfilling their tasks. Overall, the school has sufficient staff to meet the needs of the curriculum. Accommodation is not satisfactory in science, design and technology and information and communication technology. Currently, a science laboratory is being built and others refurbished, however, and the school has detailed plans for ensuring that other deficiencies in accommodation will be dealt with during the coming year. The school has adequate learning resources overall, but currently there is a shortage of computers. This, too, is being dealt with in the coming year. The school very effectively applies the principles of best value.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Before the inspection, 28 parents attended a meeting with the Registered Inspector. Questionnaires were received from 97 parents (13 per cent) and additional comments were appended to four of these.

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children like school. • The school expects students to work hard and achieve their best. • Teaching is good. • Students make good progress in school. • Behaviour in the school is good. • The school helps students become mature and responsible. • The school is well led and managed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The amount of work students are given to undertake at home. • Some parents would like to see the school working closer with them.

Inspectors agree with parents about those things they find most pleasing. The school is very well led and managed. Teaching is good throughout the school. This encourages students to work hard and, thus, they make good progress and achieve their best. Students behave well and clearly enjoy coming to school. They are becoming mature and responsible as a result of what the school provides. Inspectors do not agree with parents' concerns about homework. Teachers set an appropriate amount of work for students to do beyond lessons. Inspectors do, however, believe that tutors could offer students more guidance in how best to organise their time for undertaking this work. Inspectors feel that the school does all that could reasonably be expected regarding working closely with parents.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

- 1 When students arrive at the school their overall attainment is below average. As a result of good teaching, students learn well during their first three years in school and so, by the end of Year 9, they are attaining standards that are average overall. Good consolidation of their learning in Years 10 and 11 helps students, by the time they are 16, to gain results in GCSE examinations, which are close to the national average. This level of attainment is very much better than when the school was last inspected.
- 2 Results in national tests in 2001 for students at the end of Year 9 were close to the national average overall, though below the average for similar schools¹. Table 1 sets out in full the details for the three subjects in which students are tested nationally. Results have been improving at a faster rate than nationally over the past four years. The main cause of this fast improvement has been the way in which the school has concentrated on improving the overall quality of teaching. A comprehensive programme of review of teachers' work, accompanied by good levels of staff training, has led to this improvement. As teaching has improved, so students' learning has become much more effective. Students are keen to learn and this has further helped improve standards.

Table 1: Key Stage 3 (Year 9) results 2001

Subject	Boys	Girls	Total	Standards compared to similar schools 2001 are	Recent school trends
English	Average	Average	Average	Average	Improving
Mathematics	Average	Average	Average	Well below average	Improving
Science	Average	Average	Average	Below average	Improving
All core subjects	Average	Average	Average	Below average	Improving

- 3 Standards of work in English are improving rapidly, with students gaining average levels of understanding in their study of the English language. The school has successfully begun to adopt the methodology of the English strand of the national Key Stage 3 strategy. Students are developing their speaking and listening skills and many of their contributions to classroom discussion are now thoughtful and careful. Reading standards are improving quickly, with many students able to demonstrate good levels of understanding of text. This attention to detail in other aspects of English is helping improve writing standards, with many students writing well in standard English.
- 4 In mathematics, students in Years 7 to 9 are working at the levels expected for their age. The highest standards of work in lessons occur in Year 7 and this reflects the impact the National Numeracy Strategy methodology has had on students before they arrive in the school. Teachers at Etone are beginning to adopt the methodology advocated by the mathematics strand of the national Key Stage 3 strategy and this is helping the continuity of learning for younger students in the school. Students are developing the confidence to explain and describe their work, but this is being slowed because students are rarely required to undertake investigative and extended problem-solving tasks, which focus attention on methods and strategies being used.

¹ Similar school comparisons are made with schools having a similar proportion of students eligible for free school meals.

- 5 Students are achieving above average standards in science in Years 7 to 9. A key factor in this is teachers' attention to discussion work, which helps students to concentrate on their understanding of the scientific principles being learned. As in English and mathematics, careful attention has been paid to the needs of boys, who were, at the time of the previous inspection, performing relatively poorly. As a result, there is now no significant difference in the relative attainment of boys and girls in any of these three subjects.
- 6 In other subjects, teacher assessments indicate that students are achieving levels of work that are above average in history, geography, music, physical education, information and communication technology (ICT) and modern languages and average in art and design, religious education and design and technology. This represents a very positive picture, given that these students entered the school with attainment that was below average in most subjects. In physical education, achievement is very good during the first three years at the school. In other subjects, students are achieving well. In work seen during the inspection, standards in lessons indicate that students approaching the end of Year 9 are working at, or above, the national average standard in all subjects. In religious education, standards are as expected in the Locally Agreed Syllabus for the subject. In the case of design and technology, standards are higher in food and textiles than they are in resistant materials and electronics. Although the standards of work in ICT lessons are good, too few subjects are using modern technology to support learning and so students' ability to apply their ICT are not developed across the curriculum.
- 7 During Years 10 and 11, students build well on their work during their first three years in the school. In GCSE examinations in 2001, overall results were very close to the national average. This represents a considerable improvement since the previous inspection, when results were well below average. The main reasons for this big improvement are the work done in the school to improve teaching and the attention paid to the attainment of boys. At the time of the previous inspection, boys' results were well below those of girls. The gap between the attainment of boys and girls has been narrowed considerably and is now close to the difference nationally. Overall, results in 2001 were below average for similar schools. Although the number of students gaining five or more GCSE grades G or better was below average, this does not take account of the success of the large number of students following a NOVA² course at a local college. These students do two fewer GCSE subjects than other students, but are successful in gaining NVQ³ accreditation. Full details of 2001 results are given in Table 2.

Table 2: Year 2001 GCSE / GNVQ (Year 11) results overall

	2001			Standards compared to all schools 2001 are	Standards compared to similar schools 2001 are	Recent school trends
	Boys	Girls	Total			
Percentage 5+ A*-C grades or GNVQ equivalent	41.3	50.0	45.5	Average	Below average	Improving rapidly
Percentage 5+ A*-G grades or GNVQ equivalent	90.7	87.1	89.0	Below average	Below average	Steady
Percentage 1+ A*-G grades or GNVQ equivalent	100	97.1	99.0	Well above average	Above average	Improving
Average total GCSE points score per pupil	35.3	38.0	36.6	Average	Below average	Improving rapidly

² NOVA, which stands for New Opportunities for Vocational Achievement, is a day release course undertaken at a local college of further education. Roughly 50 students in each of Years 10 and 11 (about one third of the year in each case) follow this course.

³ Outcomes of NVQ accreditation are not taken into account when making national comparisons.

- 8 Results in English language were below average overall in 2001, though those for girls were close to the national average. Those students who took English literature gained average results. Students' results in mathematics were just above the national average, mainly because boys did much better than boys nationally. In science, results were above average for the single award and well above average for the double award. Elsewhere, results were above average in design and technology, especially for girls, and in geography, drama and physical education. Results were close to the average in most other subjects. Details are given in Table 3.

Table 3: Year 2001 GCSE / GNVQ (Year 11) results by subject (percent A* to C grades)

Subject	School			National			Recent school trends
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	
English Language	30.7	66.7	47.5	52.4	68.6	60.8	Improving
English Literature	40.0	79.4	58.9	47.9	64.3	56.1	Improving
Mathematics	56.0	48.5	52.4	47.5	48.6	48.1	Improving
Science (Single)	29.6	15.4	22.6	13.9	18.6	16.2	Improving
Science (Combined)	78.3	81.0	79.5	48.9	51.0	50.0	Improving
Information Technology	27.0	11.0	20.0			55.1	
Art & Design	27.0	48.6	42.3	52.1	73.3	63.9	Improving
Design and Technology	39.3	92.7	71.0	42.1	59.4	50.6	Improving
Geography	59.1	63.3	61.5	53.1	59.9	56.1	Improving
History			55.2	54.0	60.8	57.5	Steady
MFL French	37.8	59.5	48.3	38.4	54.8	47.0	Improving
Music	80.0	100.0	90.0				Improving
PE or Sports Studies	86.4		84.4	51.2		52.3	Improving
Religious Education (short course)	44.0	64.0	55.0				
Drama	73.0	93.0	84.0	59.5	75.0	69.1	Improving

N.B. Gaps in tables indicate that there were too few candidates to make reliable comparisons.

- 9 The work of students currently in Years 10 and 11 is broadly average, suggesting that the improving pattern of results will be maintained. In English, students display confidence in their oral work and reading standards are improving. Some students still lack confidence in their writing skills, though these too are improving. In mathematics, students generally make steady progress in the development of a range of mathematical skills, though a lack of investigative and extended problem-solving work slows the pace of development of mathematical reasoning.
- 10 The good results in science in recent years are reflected in the work of students approaching the end of Year 11, who are, overall, attaining above average standards. In most other subjects, standards of work seen during the inspection are close to national averages. They are above average in physical education and music. Within the design and technology area, standards of work are above average in food and textiles, but average in resistant materials and electronics. The school is aware of this discrepancy and has taken the steps necessary to strengthen the teaching of the less successful aspects of the subject.
- 11 Those students following a GCSE course in ICT are working at national average standards, but relatively few students follow this course. The school's intention is that other students will build on their experiences from Years 7 to 9 by using and applying their ICT skills in other subject contexts. A range of reasons, including difficulties of access to computers, contribute to this intention not, currently, being borne out in practice. Once again, the school is aware of this. Within the school's plans for Technology College status⁴, there is an intention to enable students to develop the application of their ICT skills in all subjects. Because this is not yet in

⁴ Etone Community School will have Technology College status from September 2002.

place, students' abilities to use ICT skills are lower than they should be, particularly at the end of Year 11.

- 12 The school is taking seriously the national Key Stage 3 strategy and has made good progress in developing a strategy for literacy across the curriculum. In many subjects, teachers are taking the language needs of students seriously and this is contributing to an overall improvement in standards. As a result, standards of reading, writing, speaking and listening in other subjects are satisfactory. Progress on developing a coherent strategy for the development and application of students' numeracy skills is less advanced, but students are able to apply what they have learned about measurement, calculation and the use of graphs in a number of subjects.
- 13 Throughout the school, teachers are aware of the needs of students with special educational needs, including those who have statements of special educational need. Consequently, they modify work accordingly in order that these students make good progress toward their individual targets. This progress is often helped by the intervention of teachers and learning-support assistants, who provide good-quality support, either through short-term withdrawal or in-class help. Similarly, staff know those students who come from minority ethnic groups and those for whom English is an additional language and, thus, are able to cater successfully for their needs. As a result, they attain standards in line with those of other students in the school. Most teaching is suitably modified to take account of the range of abilities reflected in all teaching groups and this helps students, including the most able⁵, to make good progress.
- 14 The school achieved most of its targets in 2001. At the end of Year 9, targets were achieved in science, but narrowly missed in English and mathematics. At the end of Year 11, targets were exceeded for the numbers of students gaining five or more GCSE A* to C grades and one or more A* to G grades. The targets set for the next two years, which are based on what the school knows about students' prior attainment, are attainable, but represent a challenge to all staff to strive for further improvement.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

- 15 Behaviour and relationships in the school are very good and students have very positive attitudes to their education. These important school strengths are helping students to learn well. There has been significant improvement in their attitudes and behaviour since the previous inspection. At that time, they were described as variable, with some students, especially boys, lacking in motivation. This is clearly no longer the case.
- 16 Students come to school prepared to learn and parents agree that their children like attending. They enjoy lessons and are fully involved in answering questions, offering opinions and generally immersing themselves in their learning. A key factor in the significant improvement in students' attitudes is the considerable improvement in the quality of lessons. They are now well planned, move at a fast pace, involve students in lots of different activities and are tailored to meet students' individual learning needs.
- 17 Very positive attitudes to learning were clearly displayed, for instance in a personal, social, and health education (PSHE) lesson on bodily changes. Here, very good

⁵ Sometimes referred to as gifted and talented students

relationships between the teacher and students meant the subject was discussed without embarrassment or giggles. The number of different activities planned meant that students had no sooner finished one thing than they were onto the next. This gave no time for behaviour to slip or concentration to wane. Tactics, like the teacher explaining the details of the group activity before they started moving tables and chairs, meant he had their full concentration so that they were well briefed. Students used the short time very productively, sharing out different tasks and appointing a spokesperson each. They listened to each other and came to an agreement about how to proceed. They successfully produced good-quality posters on the theme of foot hygiene, carrying slogans such as 'support your feet and they'll support you' and 'sock the smell'. The combination of the very positive attitudes and very good teaching meant that key messages were clearly conveyed and understood.

- 18 Relationships in the school are very good and the atmosphere is such that students are comfortable in asking for help, knowing it will be given willingly. In this positive atmosphere, students are happy to take risks with their learning and to have a go. Teachers become more adventurous when planning lessons because they know that students will behave and rise to the challenge. During the inspection, there was a higher number of very good and excellent lessons than is usually seen, coupled with very good and often excellent responses from students.
- 19 Behaviour is very good, both in lessons and around the school during breaks and lunchtimes. Parents are pleased with the standard of behaviour in the school. Students are polite and friendly and enjoy telling visitors about their school. They are excited about the plans ahead for Technology College status and talk with pride about the new buildings and new equipment arriving. In several of the conversations with inspectors, they showed respect, admiration and a real liking for their teachers.
- 20 The number of exclusions is low and represents a considerable reduction since the previous inspection. This is more clear evidence of the improvement in students' approach to learning. There is a small amount of bullying in the school, but this is generally of a low level and is dealt with quickly and effectively by staff. Students regard the school as a safe environment and indicate that they do not find it in any way intimidating.
- 21 The inspection took place during Year 11's last week at school before their examinations. A notable feature of the inspection week was the impeccable way these students conducted themselves, despite the significance of the timing and the build-up to their last day. Up until the very last moment in lessons, they continued to work hard and to concentrate and, thus, were excellent role-models for younger students to aspire to. During their final assembly, many students were genuinely moved by the headteacher's words and good wishes.
- 22 Students play an important role in influencing policies and decisions made in the school. They are part of the selection process for teaching appointments and contribute by compiling their own questions and conducting their own interviews. Prefects, who apply for positions with letters of application, play an important role in ensuring the school is a very orderly place during break and lunchtimes. The school council is an active group that influences change, such as the introduction of polo shirts and the provision of outdoor tables and chairs. They have recently met to express their views about the school's new race equality policy. This has brought suggestions to involve different religions in assemblies and to encourage more mixed-race work in groups. Before that, they were involved in reviewing the anti-bullying policy. Students from different races get on well together and there is racial harmony in the school. Students and staff agree this is the case.

- 23 Students are in tune with the needs of others and raise a good amount of money for charity. Recent events such as the sponsored sleep, for their chosen charity 'Link Up', saw 30 students and staff sleeping outdoors one cold night. Non-uniform day last year was very successful and raised a good amount of money for Children in Need. Students are not afraid to ask questions of those in authority. Younger students explained with pride how they wrote to the headteacher, asking to be allowed to use the all-weather pitch at lunchtimes. As a result, they now have two agreed days each week. One Year 7 student, on being told that he was too young to be a computer prefect and on finding one of his peers had been appointed to this position, was determined to seek justice and fair play.
- 24 Students known to have English as an additional language or who belong to minority ethnic groups have positive attitudes to school and they attend regularly. They mix freely with others, both inside and outside lessons, and there are plenty of mixed-race friendships. During a drama lesson, an Asian student was most vociferous in wanting inspectors to watch his performance. He was very proud of his contribution, performing an incredibly vigorous ritualised combat sequence with another boy. Students with special educational needs also have positive attitudes to school and behave well, mainly because teachers and support staff pay good attention to their individual needs.
- 25 Overall, students' attendance is well above the national average and is another school strength. It has improved since the previous inspection and unauthorised absence remains at a very low level. Students' very good attendance and their love of learning are major factors accounting for the good progress they are making. Lateness to school in the mornings is not a problem and punctuality to lessons is good.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

- 26 Students now learn far better than they did at the time of the previous inspection, largely because of a very big improvement in the overall quality of teaching in the school. Teaching is now good overall, with many examples of teaching that are very good or excellent. There is no significant difference in the quality of teaching and learning between lessons for older and younger students. During the inspection, teaching was good or better in four fifths of lessons observed and was very good or excellent in over two fifths. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen.
- 27 The school took very seriously the criticisms of the previous inspection report and set about bringing about improvements. Central to this improvement has been a very well-developed programme of classroom observation, leading to a critical review of teachers' work. This has helped teachers to concentrate on how they could improve students' learning. As needs have arisen, staff have been provided with the training necessary to improve their range of teaching strategies. One successful example of this relates to how to help boys learn more successfully. At the time of the previous inspection, boys were learning less successfully than girls and this was reflected in overall results in examinations. Changes in teaching approaches, designed to help boys, have now virtually eliminated the overall difference in attainment between boys and girls.
- 28 The teaching of English is good. Teachers plan their lessons well, providing stimulating activities, which hold students' concentration. Levels of challenge are generally good, with work matched well to the levels at which students are working. This is particularly true for those students with special educational needs or who

have English as an additional language. There is some scope for the most able students to be extended further. A key feature in encouraging all students, and especially boys, to learn well in English is the careful attention paid to the selection of material that students will find interesting. Good attention is paid by teachers to the development of students' literacy skills in other subjects and this helps students consolidate their learning in English.

- 29 The teaching of mathematics has improved considerably and is now good overall. Many lessons move at a good pace and hold students' interest because teachers provide short, well-focused explanations before letting students get to grips with the mathematics. Occasionally, however, teachers talk too much and rely too heavily on text exercises. Students do not develop their investigative and problem-solving skills well, partly because teachers do not have sufficient understanding of how students attempt complex tasks and partly because insufficient time is devoted to developing these skills. The school's strategy for enhancing students' mathematical skills in other subjects is less advanced than for English. Students are, however, able to apply their calculation, measurement and graphical skills successfully in several subjects.
- 30 Science teaching is good throughout the school. Students are becoming increasingly independent learners because of the way science teachers set up experimental and investigative activities for them. Teachers take very good note of the abilities and needs of individual students and have high expectations of all. This, coupled with consequent well-focused planning, is key to successful learning in science. Occasionally, science teachers do not manage time well and this means that conclusions to lessons are rushed. As a result, students are not always able to review what they have learned.
- 31 Elsewhere, teaching is very good throughout the school in modern foreign languages, physical education and in design and technology for students in Years 10 and 11. In all other subjects, teaching is good overall. A real strength of teaching is the very effective way teachers manage students. This stems from a high level of mutual respect and very good relationships that are a characteristic of the school. Because students trust teachers to have their interests at heart they are willing to work hard with them and this contributes greatly to so many successful lessons. Students are confident to question teachers about their work and this helps improve their understanding. The school has, through its programme of classroom observation, developed a very good understanding amongst all teachers of what constitutes good teaching. As a result, teachers pay close attention to the development of the skills necessary to help students learn successfully. Teachers are willing to take some risks in order to make lessons more stimulating and challenging and students respond well when this happens. They enjoy being provoked to improve their work. The one area of significant weakness in teaching is in the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in all subjects. The teaching of skills in ICT lessons is good, but teachers of other subjects are not building the use of computers, calculators and other technology into their teaching sufficiently. Thus, students' abilities to apply these skills are not well developed.
- 32 Teachers mark work conscientiously and provide clear guidance to students on what to do next. This helps students to take responsibility for planning their own work. The day-to-day assessment of students' work is increasingly helping teachers to plan future lessons successfully because they know what students need. Students are generally given very clear targets for further improvement and these targets are also communicated to the students' tutors, who maintain an overview of their progress. In some subjects, including science and physical education, the link between

assessment and National Curriculum levels is not made with enough detail and this limits the effectiveness of the target-setting programme.

- 33 The fact that teachers have good student assessment procedures is one of the reasons why, in many lessons, the needs of individuals are well catered for. This applies to students with special educational needs. The particular needs of these students are communicated well to teachers, who plan accordingly. Sometimes, these students are taught in small groups and the overall teaching here is good. When they are taught in full classes their needs are generally well catered for, but there is some inconsistency. Occasionally, class teachers do not plan properly to make effective use of the learning-support assistants provided and this reduces their effectiveness. When their use is well planned for, they are very effective in helping students with special educational needs to make good progress. Teachers are also aware of those students who have English as an additional language and they ensure that these students play a full part in each lesson and, thus, are able to make good progress.
- 34 Teachers make good use of homework tasks to extend and consolidate learning in lessons. Occasionally, however, teachers and tutors do not give students sufficient guidance on how or when to complete their homework tasks and some students, in their confusion, do not pay enough attention to managing this aspect of their work.

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

- 35 The school provides all students with a range of curriculum experiences, which are much more balanced than at the time of the previous inspection. This is an outcome of a regular programme of review of what the school offers, taking careful account of the needs and views of students and their parents. Curriculum review is one of many instances of a school seeking for continual improvement.
- 36 For students in their first three years in the school, the curriculum covers all subjects of the National Curriculum and includes a course in religious education. A good example of the benefits of regular curriculum review is the position of modern foreign language teaching in Years 7 to 9. Until recently, the school had given students a choice of language to study in these three years, but has recognised that this was not effective. A knock-on effect, which still persists in Years 8 and 9, is an imbalance in numbers in groups in other subjects, such as design and technology, which makes some aspects of teaching difficult. The school is now planning to introduce one language for all in Year 7 and to offer a second language for linguistically able students from Year 8. Curriculum quality is inconsistent in design and technology at Key Stage 3. Whereas it is good in food and textiles, it is only satisfactory in the resistant materials and electronics components of the course. Mindful of this inconsistency, the school has taken the necessary action to remedy it in the coming year.
- 37 The school has undertaken good work relating to the introduction of the national Key Stage 3 strategy. In both English and mathematics, teachers are using much of the methodology advocated by the strategy and this is helping students to build successfully on what they have gained from following the National Numeracy and Literacy Strategies in their primary schools. Good progress has been made in enabling students to develop their literacy skills in other subjects and plans are about to be implemented to help students apply their mathematical skills more effectively across the curriculum. The school successfully provides a course in information and

communication technology (ICT) for all students in Years 7 to 9, but arrangements for students to apply these skills in other subjects are inadequate.

- 38 For students in Years 10 and 11, there is a wide range of courses from which they can choose. All students continue to follow courses in mathematics, English, science, religious education and physical education, which can lead to GCSE qualifications. The majority of students follow a programme of additional GCSE courses, selected from a wide range on offer, and some Year 11 students are studying a GNVQ course in Leisure and Tourism. Around a third of students in each of Years 10 and 11 select a course of study that includes a day release course at a local college of further education. This programme, called NOVA⁶, is part-funded by a grant from the European Union and is offered to all students. Those students who successfully follow the course gain NVQ accreditation.
- 39 A small number of the most able students in the school are able to complete GCSE examinations a year early. This enables them to follow AS courses in Year 11. So far, AS courses are offered in fashion and textiles and music, but more subjects will be available from September 2002 so that around one fifth of all students will have the opportunity to take one subject at this level in Year 11.
- 40 The GCSE courses on offer enable students to build on their learning from previous years. As in Years 7 to 9, there is still some imbalance in design and technology, which will be corrected in the coming year. Some students follow a course in ICT and, by doing so, meet requirements. The school's intention is that other students should gain the necessary experience in the use of ICT by focusing on applications of skills in other subjects. Currently, this is not working successfully, partly because of incomplete staff training and partly because of inadequate access to computers. The school has, as part of its Technology College strategy, a means of ensuring that all students receive their entitlement in the near future.
- 41 Throughout the school, the curriculum is enriched by a programme of personal, social and health education (PSHE). This includes sex and drugs awareness education and, from Year 9, careers education and guidance. Currently, students have one hour per fortnight for this course, which is inadequate. As part of its most recent curriculum review, the school has decided to double the time given to the subject in Years 7 to 9. Coupled with this increase in time, the course will be expanded to include citizenship education. In Years 10 and 11, there will be no time increase, but careful steps have been taken to review the content of the religious education course so that the requirements of citizenship are included in the overall curriculum without overlap. One of the major reasons why the PSHE programme is successful is that it is taught by a small team of staff, all of whom are very well briefed in what needs to be achieved. This is a further improvement resulting from curriculum review, the course having previously been taught by a large team of tutors.
- 42 From next year, the PSHE programme will be extended by the inclusion of twice yearly 'stop the timetable' days, when all students in the school will be able to undertake some thematic study related to their personal development. A successful element of the PSHE course is the school's award-winning careers education and guidance programme. This commences in Year 9 and, in Year 11, includes a successful work experience programme for all students, well supported by the local Education Business Partnership.

⁶ New Opportunities for Vocational Achievement

- 43 All that is provided in the curriculum is underpinned by the principles of equality of opportunity and equality of access to what the school offers for students. This principle is clearly articulated in the school aims and is supported by a clear and helpful policy. The school is mindful of the need for race equality and has a policy to help ensure this is in place. When students make choices for courses, they are given helpful guidance and their individual programmes are reviewed with them. The school also successfully monitors the take-up of subjects by gender, but it does not, currently, monitor group composition according to other criteria, such as ethnic background.
- 44 The curriculum provides well for those students who have special educational needs, including those in the facility for students with specific learning difficulties⁷. For most of their lessons, all these students work alongside others in their year groups. Good classroom support helps these students play a full part in lessons, though this support is not always used as effectively as it should be by teachers. When students are withdrawn, the work they undertake during these sessions enriches their overall curriculum experience.
- 45 The curriculum is enhanced by the provision of a wide-ranging programme of extra-curricular activities. Many sporting, drama and music activities are offered, with good take-up. The programme of additional activities is comprehensive, with many being linked to subject study. The school regularly puts on major drama and music productions and the high level of participation, both in performance and behind the scenes, means that many students' personal development is enhanced. The school successfully runs a Duke of Edinburgh Award group and has plans for the further extension of this. The commitment to further extending the range of activities for students beyond the classroom is evident from the appointment of a member of staff to co-ordinate this aspect of the school's work.
- 46 Many effective links with local industry, commerce and members of the community help enrich the curriculum. In addition to the provision of the NOVA course, the school has established very good links with the two major local providers of sixth form education. Careful guidance is given to students in order to help them continue their studies successfully when they leave Etone Community School. Both colleges providing sixth form education in the area are represented on the governing body of the school, further enhancing their partnership. Whilst good links have been established for general transfer arrangements from primary to secondary education, curriculum links are underdeveloped. This is recognised in the school and plans have been drawn up, as part of the Technology College proposal, to strengthen links with subject leaders in the main partner primary schools.
- 47 The overall quality of the experiences provided by the school for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects of the students' personal development is good. The contribution made to their moral development is good and to their social development is very good. Through the curriculum, the school makes a satisfactory contribution to students' spiritual and cultural development. Statutory requirements for daily acts of collective worship are not met.
- 48 The school has recently undertaken a close examination of how it helps students' personal development through subject teaching and curriculum enrichment activities. This covered the personal, social, cultural, moral and citizenship elements, but not aspects of spiritual development. Work remains to be done to raise teachers' awareness of the spiritual dimension in their everyday work and, thus, to help them

⁷ The school hosts a facility for up to 20 students with specific learning difficulties (dyslexia).

plan for students to reflect and explore spiritual matters in lessons. This is essential in order to raise students' appreciation of spirituality as an essential part of learning and a motivator for students to reach for knowledge and explanations. This is accepted and the school is planning additional staff training to enable the completion of the school's audit for the students' personal development.

- 49 There are strengths in the school's provision for spiritual development through its involvement with 'Youth 180', a Christian organisation that serves local schools. This has a central office base at Etone. The youth leaders involved not only play an important role in the pastoral support of the students, but also work, at times, as learning-support assistants. An example of their good contribution to the students' spiritual understanding comes through the group's 'Eternity Discussion Group'. Here, students, regardless of race, creed or religion, are welcome to explore issues such as 'What is Love?', 'Where did God come from?', environmental issues, the occult and false religion. The Youth 180 office is a popular place at breaks and lunchtimes. The group's activities enable students to explore and develop their appreciation of the principles, beliefs, attitudes and values that guide them in life.
- 50 The school does not provide for daily acts of collective worship for its students, although these take place weekly, on a rota basis, during assemblies. Those year group assemblies seen during the inspection were of very good quality and fully met statutory requirements in themselves. For example, the main theme for the week was 'Prayer' with a focus on the meaning of the 'Lord's Prayer'. During this, the teacher had a 'conversation' with God, played by a hidden Year 10 student, whose voice was heard through the sound system. This not only effectively captured the imagination of the students, but also enabled them to reflect on the concept of prayer, its implications and effects. Another assembly, for Year 11 students shortly to leave the school, helped them to reflect on their time at Etone. This illustrated the value placed on students' contributions through an understanding of their hopes, fears, concerns, successes and achievements. The school provides training for visitors taking assemblies, which helps to maintain its high standards and has been involved in training ministers from the local Christians Together organisation to support their work in other schools.
- 51 There is a clear moral code for students through many aspects of the school's work. There are many very good examples of discussion work in lessons on issues concerning human rights, responsibilities and systems of justice. These were seen, for instance, in history lessons concerning war and conflict, and when discussing moral dilemmas in religious education. The school's programme for PSHE also makes a positive contribution in this respect. Discussions with staff and students show that the school deals well with the implications of national and international issues, such as disasters. The school is successful in its aims of fostering an understanding of the principles of fairness and individual respect.
- 52 The school's approach to students' social development is one of its major strengths. Students respond very well to each other and relationships between staff and students are very secure. This is because of the mutual value and trust that exists within the school community as a whole. Consequently, there are some very good opportunities for students to take responsibility. For example, the school council is consulted on potential change and development and school improvement is a standing item on its agenda. Students are invited to interview new staff and the school council has held governors to account, for example in debates on school uniform. Because of this, students have a good sense of natural justice and an appreciation of the democratic process. The school's approach enables the secure establishment of a sense of community and shared values. Staff provide good role

models and are open to relevant discussion and debate on social issues. The school has worked hard to ensure that social responsibility and accountability are naturally integrated, appreciated and accepted facets of its everyday life and work.

- 53 The school successfully enables students to explore their local cultural heritage and more general Western European cultural traditions. Their study of literature and the arts is enhanced, for example, by theatre visits. There are regular cultural exchanges with France and Germany. Many students take part in school productions, such as 'Oliver', a 'Star for a Night' event and annual fashion shows. Many students are involved in sports or participate in music-making. The school has developed a strong tradition of involvement in local competitions and arts festivals. However, provision is satisfactory overall because it has yet to fully develop its approach to raising students' awareness of the richness and diversity of contemporary British society. Improvements are required in raising teachers' understanding of their responsibility to prepare all students to live and work with people of different cultures, religions, languages and ethnic origins.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

- 54 The school provides a caring learning environment, with strengths in the very good ways the Student Progress Team⁸ monitors and supports students' personal development. The pastoral system has recently been revised, sharpening form tutor and student-progress managers' roles in supporting pupils' academic progress.
- 55 The appointment of a student mentor⁹ to help monitor and advise students concerning their pastoral needs has made this shift in emphasis more possible. She provides good support for individuals, who are finding it difficult to cope with school life, perhaps where their attendance is starting to slip or where they are having a problem with their behaviour in class. There is also good support from the Youth 180 development team, who provide another avenue of help and advice for students.
- 56 The monitoring of students' personal development has improved from the good position described in the previous inspection. It is now very good and the systems in place for tutorials are key to helping realise students' personal, social and academic potential. Tutors have scheduled meetings with individual students at least twice per year, to which parents are invited. These meetings are for reviewing progress, encouraging involvement in school activities and setting targets for improvement, both academically and socially. Guidelines for form tutors are helpful in ensuring issues pertinent to each particular year group are covered. For example, settling in for Year 7 students, being responsible for their own learning for Year 8 and planning for Key Stage 4¹⁰ courses. Examples of personal development targets have included 'asking for help in French extension tasks' and 'learning how to play the piano'. Parents at the pre-inspection meeting spoke positively about the benefits of tutorial meetings. The learning support department and the staff responsible for students with specific learning difficulties have very good contact with the local education authority services and this helps ensure that these students are also supported well.
- 57 Another strand to the very good system for supporting students' personal development is the thorough twice-yearly progress checks. Using assessment data from each subject area, student-progress managers grade students according to

⁸ The team of form tutors, led by a student progress manager (head of year)

⁹ Student mentor is the name given to a person employed by the school to help students to overcome any problems they may have, either school or home related.

¹⁰ Years 10 and 11 make up Key Stage 4.

their effort and achievements. Some students are congratulated, whilst others are encouraged to aim higher next time. Students highlighted as underachieving are all seen individually. For one boy, his forgetfulness in bringing homework back on time (although he had completed it) meant his marks for homework were low. After discussions with his student-progress manager, he is bringing in his homework as soon as it is finished and keeping it in a drawer at school. This example clearly illustrates one way the progress check system is helping students to improve the quality of, and attitude to, their work.

- 58 Child Protection procedures are good. Three people are trained to 'named person' status and there has been recent whole-school training for staff. Health and safety procedures are satisfactory and staff, governors and the local education authority make regular checks of the premises. The school has attended to the health and safety issues raised in the previous inspection report. There is a good number of staff trained to administer First Aid. The medical room is in desperate need of redecoration and refurbishment, but the school has already recognised this.
- 59 The school is active in encouraging, as best it can, a healthy-eating regime in school. The chef is a well-known figure and is a regular visitor to food technology lessons. Healthy breakfasts are available and meals provided at lunchtimes are of good quality. Menus on offer have been tailored to provide choices suggested by students. The chef reports a rise in the number of hot meals served compared to the numbers of fast-food options. The school has very good procedures for ensuring students behave well. Parents are pleased with the standard of behaviour in the school. The Code of Conduct is clearly displayed and the over-riding school rule, 'at no time should anyone do anything that would cause offence, inconvenience or unnecessary work for any other member of the school community' sets the tone for the high standard of behaviour all staff expect. The considerable reduction in the number of students temporarily excluded from school for poor behaviour illustrates how effective the systems are.
- 60 Staff present a united approach, in which the giving and receiving of respect is paramount. Inconsistencies in handling poor behaviour, a criticism in the previous inspection report, are no longer in evidence. The main strategy for eliminating inappropriate behaviour has been through teachers improving the quality of lessons, which they have achieved very successfully. The policy for 'Effective Behaviour Management', revised last year, is a clear document emphasising the successful principle of good-quality lessons leading to good-quality behaviour. Monitoring of any kind of poor behaviour is thorough and the progress check system helps form tutors and student-progress managers to form an accurate overview of students' behaviour patterns.
- 61 The school has recently spent time reviewing the way it handles any cases of bullying. Procedures are comprehensive and of very good quality. The review has involved all students through a school survey, as well as governors and parents. There are helpful new leaflets clearly explaining the school's approach to students and their parents, as well as a *bullying box*¹¹ in the library. Advice about how to cope with bullying is explained in assemblies, through the good quality personal, social and health education programme and by using visiting drama groups to convey messages. When interviewed by inspectors about different aspects of their welfare, students were unanimous that bullying is taken seriously by staff and dealt with to their satisfaction.

¹¹ The bullying box is a way of allowing students to notify staff that they are being bullied, by placing a message in a box.

- 62 The school is proactive in ensuring that students' very good attendance remains that way. Procedures for monitoring and promoting attendance are very good. There is a productive two-way relationship with the educational social worker, who supports the school well, in partnership with the student progress team. There is a constantly changing number of different rewards and incentives for students, recognising improvement or sustained good attendance. The provision of college courses for older students, particularly the NOVA course, is having a positive effect on their attendance. They attend regularly because they enjoy the variety in the curriculum. A governors' attendance panel, which includes a senior educational social worker and a deputy headteacher, provides another means of encouraging those families whose children have very low attendance. Signs are positive and there has been some improvement in the attendance of students involved.
- 63 High-quality leadership for assessment has led to very good improvement since the last inspection. Assessment arrangements are underpinned by a very good policy framework. The approach is now very well co-ordinated, with clear accountabilities for each curriculum-learning manager. The focus is clear: assessment must lead to raising the achievement of students, with good strategic links between recording, reporting and target setting. As a result, whole-school systems are now very good. Arrangements are very well documented, ensuring all staff have clear guidance on how to follow coherent procedures. The extent to which departments have implemented the school's policy are good, with very good procedures in science, geography, modern foreign languages and music. Procedures in art and religious education are satisfactory. In physical education and science, teacher assessments are not yet sufficiently accurately matched with National Curriculum criteria.
- 64 The school makes very good use of assessment to help students in their personal development. Information is communicated very effectively between those with different management responsibilities. Curriculum-learning managers¹² use the school's data effectively in setting, whilst providing flexible arrangements for individual students, who can be moved if such needs arise. Marking is now much more consistent and is of good quality overall. Students agree they are informed regularly about their standards and progress. However, variations between and within some subjects affect the usefulness of targets set for the next module of work. In music and modern foreign languages, targets for students are very clear. However, most subject targets lack sufficient clarity to show students exactly how to reach the next stage of learning because teachers do not make good use of the National Curriculum descriptions in explaining to them precisely how to improve their work. This aspect of formative assessment is an area for further development.
- 65 Whole-school procedures for monitoring academic progress are very good. The form tutor has overall responsibility for maintaining an understanding of the academic performance, with very good accountability to student-progress managers. Curriculum-learning managers are well informed about their responsibilities for monitoring the academic progress of all students. They use information well to check the progress of boys and girls, gifted and talented students, those with special educational needs and those from minority ethnic backgrounds.
- 66 Assessment arrangements for students with special educational needs are good. The data provided allows review to take place and new targets to be set where necessary. Individuals, who have additional language needs, are monitored and supported well and, thus, make progress in line with their peers. A member of the

¹² The name given to heads of subject department to reflect their responsibility for students' learning.

Inter-cultural Curriculum Support Service works closely with the school and home in order to assess needs accurately.

- 67 The school is very aware of the needs of individual students and agrees it would be helpful to have large scale local and national data against which to analyse the performance of those from minority ethnic backgrounds. The school's own data gives very good information about the progress of every student during the year, each key stage and over their time at school, from which it could easily report on the progress of different groups.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

- 68 Parents are very supportive of the school. This is confirmed by the results of the OFSTED parents' questionnaire and views from the meeting with the Registered Inspector. Etone is heavily oversubscribed this year, which is testimony to the high esteem in which parents hold the school.
- 69 The good partnership with parents seen at the time of the previous inspection is still very much in evidence. Although a small number of parents responding to the inspection questionnaire felt that the school does not work closely with them, there is no evidence to support this view. Parents, especially those who are members of the governing body, are now much more involved in the daily life of the school. This addresses a criticism from the previous report. For example, during inspection week, a governor came in every day to support a student who was finding lunchtimes difficult to cope with.
- 70 Parents' views reveal they are very supportive of all aspects of school life, presenting a much more positive picture than is often seen. Nearly everyone who replied agrees their child is making good progress, that the school has high expectations and the teaching is good. They also agree that the school is well led and managed, students' behaviour is very good and that staff are helping their child to become mature and responsible. Parents are pleased that staff are approachable if they have a concern. Inspectors fully agree with all of the parents' positive views.
- 71 Some parents, who replied to the questionnaire, are not happy with arrangements for homework. A few parents at the meeting expressed concerns about the difficulties for students in managing homework using the two-week timetable. The quality of homework provided is good. When speaking to inspectors about homework, Year 7 students explained the difficulties they face in matching the timetable to the set pattern of homework. However, students interviewed from other years did not find it such a problem. Parents at the meeting appreciated the opportunities for students to complete homework in school at the end of the day.
- 72 The school has an effective relationship with parents, who are able to visit the school frequently to talk with teachers. Opportunities include invitations to two tutorials held with form tutors and students and a parents' evening. Parents also receive two progress check reports during each year. The format of annual reports is currently being revised, as the school is not yet completely happy with them. Whilst the quality of information about progress in each subject is satisfactory, reports lack individual touches that make them personal to each student. Targets for improvement are not written in either parent or student-friendly language and, thus, have little value in their present form. For example, 'increase awareness of moral issues raised in discussions' in a religious education report means very little.

- 73 Staff at the school are good at letting parents know how their child is progressing throughout the year by using the results of the progress check system in October and April. They send congratulations for those who are achieving well and letters of concern, where these are appropriate. The school is pleased that parents will often reply, asking for more information and ways they can help. Both informal and formal contacts with parents of students with special educational needs are very good. These parents nearly always attend reviews of their child's progress.
- 74 The good quality newsletters are regular and the format, as a small booklet, is enticing. These help to celebrate students' achievements as well as successfully conveying the exciting developments taking place with the school, especially associated with the gaining of Technology College status. There are good relationships with parents for whom English is an additional language, through the Inter-cultural Curriculum Support Service, who support parents well. They make home visits and telephone parents to remind them of parents' evenings and other school events.
- 75 Parents make a very good contribution to school life. Those who are governors play an active role in the overall management and are fully involved. Parents provide several business placements for students each year and this is valuable in enabling students to taste work for themselves. Parents responded magnificently to the school's need to raise money to support the Technology College status bid. They raised a significant amount, both through the hard work of the Etone Friend's Association and individual donations from parents.
- 76 As well as being successful fundraisers, the Friends act as a group to influence change. When the school council requested polo shorts for school uniform, the Friends canvassed everyone and, as a result, the change was agreed. Parents provide good levels of support and encouragement for the work students do at home and most value the importance of a good education. Attendance at parents' evenings is good and a growing number are choosing to attend their child's tutorials. Parents show their interest by signing students' planners each week, buying revision guides and ensuring homework is completed.
- 77 The school has a very open approach to consulting parents and results are used well to improve practice. Nearly half of parents replied to the school's own recent questionnaire and the majority of them were happy. Many of the school's documents and practices, such as the recent review of anti-bullying measures, are discussed with parents to ensure they reflect their views and are seen to be 'parent and student friendly'.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

- 78 A major factor in the improvement of the school in recent years has been the outstanding leadership of the headteacher. Aply supported by senior colleagues and governors, he has ensured that all members of the school community are working together to bring about further development in this rapidly improving school.
- 79 Central to all its work are the school's vision and aims, clearly documented after having been produced by staff, governors and parents of students at the school. These aims cover all aspects of students' development and are now reflected strongly in the work taking place. They provide a framework for all development and are significant in helping secure a situation where the commitment to further improvement is excellent and the capacity to succeed is very good.

- 80 The most striking feature of the success of leadership and management has been in the rapid improvement in standards in recent years. In tests and examinations at the end of Years 9 and 11, students' results have been improving at a faster rate than nationally for several years. This is no accident. Improvement has firstly come about because teachers believe in their students and their abilities and, in turn, students trust their teachers. Secondly, there has been a very strong focus on helping all teachers to become more effective. This has been achieved through a combination of rigorous evaluation of teachers' work and a detailed programme of training, well focused on identified needs. Thirdly, close attention has been paid to the needs of all students, and particularly boys, who had been under-achieving for a number of years and whose attainment is now what would be expected.
- 81 The key framework for the improvement of the school has been a plan for development and improvement, which is clearly documented. The plan, drawn up after consultation with staff, governors and parents, sets out a three-year programme. It successfully shows how all the work of the school fits into a coherent strategy for moving the school ever closer to its overall aims. The plan is carefully costed and educational and financial decisions have become increasingly more closely connected. As a result, the school has managed to improve whilst remaining within its budget. The plan shows a strong commitment to setting targets and agreeing priorities and it details the actions necessary. It provides an effective framework for linking together a range of initiatives, including the performance management of staff and the application for Technology College status¹³.
- 82 Governors are very committed to school improvement and are successfully playing their full part in bringing this about. They were fully involved in drawing up the action plan following the previous inspection and have been very active in producing subsequent development plans. Through a good committee structure, governors engage in detailed review of the work of the school, holding the headteacher and his colleagues to account. Equally, governors are taking a close interest in all aspects of school life and are functioning well as critical friends as the schools seeks to build on the improvements so far. Governors are fulfilling most of their responsibilities very well, though they do not yet ensure that the school meets its requirements for information and communication technology teaching or for ensuring that all students have a daily act of collective worship.
- 83 In recent years, staff have been given much more responsibility for helping shape the direction of the school. Involvement of all staff in drawing up policies and plans for improvement has been supported by very good delegation. The commitment to improving work in classrooms is evident from the fact that the two deputies have responsibilities, respectively, for teaching and learning. These staff have played an increasingly influential role in empowering and enabling teachers with subject and year group responsibilities¹⁴ to fulfil their roles more effectively. Good training and support programmes have helped these middle-managers become increasingly more effective, especially in evaluation.
- 84 Evaluation has become a central feature of the school's strategy for bringing about improvement. At a whole-school level, staff and governors regularly review the impact of the work they have been doing in order to guide future developments. Perhaps more significantly, however, the school has a very sophisticated strategy for the evaluation of teachers' work and particularly of their teaching and its impact on students' learning. This process, now well established, is based on very detailed

¹³ This application has been successful and the school becomes a technology college from September 2002.

¹⁴ These are, respectively, called curriculum learning managers and student progress managers to reflect the focus placed by the school on learning and progress.

criteria and has been a very important feature in helping bring about the very large improvement in the quality of teaching in the school. Governors are also committed to review and evaluation and, through committee and full governing body meetings, are progressively becoming more successful in evaluating the cost-effectiveness of their decisions.

- 85 Good steps have been taken toward the management of the introduction of the national Key Stage 3 strategy into the school. The importance that the school places on this initiative is evident in the fact that a deputy headteacher has been given the responsibility as Key Stage 3 Strategy Manager. Curriculum-learning managers for English and mathematics have given a strong lead to their departments in implementing the English and mathematics strands of the strategy and are helping develop a focus on the application of students' literacy and numeracy skills in all areas of the curriculum. The English department has been identified in the local education authority as a lead department for national strategy developments.
- 86 The management of provision for students with special educational needs and for students with specific learning difficulties is good. The two teams work very well together and they are supported well by senior managers and by a governor, who is linked to this aspect of the school's provision. There is recognition of the need for work to be undertaken in the school related to the new Code of Practice¹⁵ for work with students with special educational needs. There is a need for thorough planning for the substantial changes that will be necessary and the school is building this into its plans for future development. All statutory requirements for its provision for these students are met and resources allocated for the education of these students are used effectively.
- 87 The school makes very good overall use of the resources available to it. Financial management is very good, with all major budget decisions being closely linked to educational priorities. The school sets a balanced budget and its arrangements for regular review of expenditure are secure. Similarly, arrangements for financial administration are very efficient. Careful decisions have been made to bring about efficiency in the school. The appointment of a finance director has been successful in enabling the headteacher to give more attention to the educational and leadership aspects of his role. Very good steps have been taken to seek ways of reducing teachers' administrative workloads. One consequence of this has been an increase in administrative staff levels, particularly to support the management of the increasingly large amount of data being processed on student performance. This administrative team works very efficiently and, as a consequence, the school runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis. Although the school is making very good use of new technology in administrative aspects of the school, it is not yet making sufficient use of computers and other equipment to support learning in classrooms.
- 88 The school has a good match of well-qualified teachers to meet the needs of the curriculum. Their professional development is attended to well, through a regular programme of appraisal and performance management. There are good programmes for the induction of staff new to the school or to the profession. The school also successfully provides placements for students undertaking initial teacher training. Teachers are well supported by dedicated teams of technicians, learning support assistants, administrative and care-taking staff, all of whom are committed to the needs of students. Careful management has seen an overall improvement in the

¹⁵ The work undertaken in schools to support students with special educational needs is guided by a national code of practice. This has been recently revised and schools will need to make some adjustments to their arrangements to meet the new requirements, which come into force from September 2002.

provision of learning resources. The library, considered a weakness at the time of the previous inspection, is now adequate, as are general resources in departments. Difficulties remain in enabling subject teachers to gain the necessary access to computers to meet the requirements of their courses. Aware of this, the school has drawn up a plan, as part of its Technology College proposals, to improve this situation. Similarly, it has plans for improving the accommodation as part of the Technology College plan. This will see the inadequacies in design and technology and ICT dealt with within the next year. Building work on a new science laboratory, and refurbishment of others, is currently at an advanced stage. There remains a shortage of accommodation to support the teams of staff working with students with special educational needs and specific learning difficulties.

- 89 Attention to the needs of staff is just one feature of the way in which the school very successfully applies the principles of best value. Through its review and evaluation processes, the school constantly checks on how well it is doing and how things could be improved. It takes careful note of national and local trends, not just in academic achievement, but also in, for instance, patterns of expenditure. The headteacher and governors are keen that all members of the community, including teachers, support staff, students, parents and governors, are regularly consulted. The outcomes of these consultations are used to bring about further improvements. As a reflective and self-challenging organisation, the school offers very good value for money.

Provision for Students with Specific Learning Difficulties

- 90 Provision for students with specific learning difficulties is good. Good leadership and management ensure that the specialist team work efficiently together and with colleagues in all subject departments to the benefit of students. Specialist teaching is consistently good. This means that students learn well in individual sessions and at a similar rate to their peers in mainstream classes. They achieve well academically and very well in social skills.
- 91 The school makes special provision for up to 20 students and during the inspection there were 17 students with specific learning difficulties in the school. This group of students all have statements of special educational needs and so contribute to the overall number of students with statements that is well above the national average. Fourteen of these students are boys, reflecting the national picture of a far higher proportion of boys than girls who have specific learning difficulties. This makes the improvement in boys' attainment over recent years at Etone all the more significant for the school. The staff team specifically attached to these students comprises of a specialist teacher, who co-ordinates the provision, a special education assistant and a special needs assistant. This team, supported by the school leadership group, has a clear and strong commitment to enabling these students to learn effectively alongside their peers. They are successful in this and, consequently, students achieve well over their time in the school.
- 92 Provision for students' personal development is very good. Students' participation in devising their individual learning targets and reviewing their progress contributes well to their personal development. This strength means that the school is already implementing the new Special Educational Needs (SEN) Code of Practice 2001 well in this respect. Members of staff are very aware of the need to balance any specialised support with developing students' independence. Therefore, they provide more specialised and individual support when students are younger and seek to reduce this as students mature. It is to the credit of members of staff that they achieve this very successfully and it is very much appreciated by students. As a student from Year 11 expressed it when explaining what the school does well, 'they

build you up to depend by yourself.' This means that students are well prepared for leaving school. Older students look forward to college and future employment with commendable confidence. Another Year 11 student summarised the contribution the school makes to their development by saying, 'they've made us really open up. Yes we can do it, if we just put our mind to it'.

- 93 Members of staff have sustained the strengths in their teaching found at the time of the last inspection. Individual specialist teaching for these students in literacy and numeracy is consistently good. Very good assessment procedures help the specialist teacher and special education assistant to plan sessions that meet each student's individual needs effectively. This close and detailed assessment also helps support staff to provide just the right amount of help in terms that students understand when working with them in mainstream classes. The specialist team know their students very well and have strong relationships with them. Their understanding of each student and his or her needs helps them to plan successfully for a series of short activities that keep students interested and working hard. Students appreciate the extra help they receive in organising their time and developing study skills.
- 94 Over the last four years, the co-ordinator of this provision has successfully helped teachers in all departments to develop their understanding of students with specific learning difficulties. Consequently, students are treated sensitively throughout the school. For example, teachers understand that students may feel self-conscious about reading aloud in class. Students of all ages told inspectors during the inspection that in all departments 'they respect you if you say no'. This is impressive. This positive and supportive ethos reduces students' anxiety and enables them to learn effectively throughout their working day. The co-ordinator's commitment to working in partnership with colleagues also helps foster teamwork with the special educational needs co-ordinator and other support staff. All students benefit from this, but in particular there is a direct benefit for older students, who receive sensible and sensitive intervention from adults other than the specialist team. However, the co-ordinator of this provision has correctly identified that subject teachers do not take sufficient responsibility for determining strategies to help students reach learning targets. This is a requirement of the new SEN Code of Practice.
- 95 Students with specific learning difficulties benefit from the school's recent curriculum developments, as do their peers. For example, they may elect to follow the NOVA vocational course. Additionally, they benefit from access to the designated facility during lunch times when they can catch up on work and use computers. However, the accommodation available for this work is very limited. Staff and students alike recognise quite rightly that the one specialist teaching room is too small for comfortable small group work and there is nowhere for students needing private space. There are sufficient suitable resources for members of staff to meet students' needs, including most of those stipulated in students' statements of educational need. Nevertheless, in spite of the school's best efforts, they are not able to meet the requirement for a language programme devised by a speech and language therapist because of the lack of availability of such a specialist. The school's co-ordinator has a good understanding of the weaknesses in resources and has rightly identified the need for a wider range of reading material that suits students' abilities and interests. The existing considerable strengths in provision for students with specific learning difficulties mean that the school is in a good position to improve the provision even further.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

96 In order to build on the very good improvement that has taken place in the school in recent years, governors and staff should give attention to the following issues.

- Develop the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in all subjects, by:
 - introducing a fully co-ordinated approach to the use of ICT in all subjects, which is supported and monitored by the ICT co-ordinator;
 - ensuring that all students in Years 10 and 11 follow a course in ICT that meets statutory requirements;
 - reporting on progress in ICT for all students in Years 10 and 11.
(paragraphs 6, 11, 31, 37, 40, 82, 87, 115, 128, 132, 144, 154 and 156-163)

- Strengthen provision for students' personal development, by:
 - planning for students to be able to reflect and explore spiritual matters in lessons;
 - developing students' insights into the principles, beliefs, attitudes and values that guide them in life;
 - developing the understanding of all staff of their responsibilities to prepare students to live and work with peoples of different cultures, religions, languages and ethnic origins.
(paragraphs 47-53, 100 and 192)

- Strengthen curriculum links between the school and its main partner primary schools, by:
 - developing strong links between subject leaders in the secondary and primary schools;
 - ensuring that students are able to build effectively in Year 7 on their learning in primary schools.
(paragraphs 46 and 113)

In addition, the school should include the following issues in its action plan:

- Improve the clarity of target setting in students' annual reports to ensure students and their parents understand how students can improve their work. *(Paragraphs 64 and 72)*
- Sustain efforts to extend and enhance accommodation. *(Paragraphs 88, 95, 121, 129 and 137)*
- Ensure that all students are able to participate in a daily act of collective worship. *(Paragraphs 50 and 82)*

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 - 11	125
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		59

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 7 - 11							
Number	13	40	48	24	0	0	0
Percentage	10	32	39	19	0	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11
Number of pupils on the school's roll	746
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	54

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	40
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	212

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	34

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	20
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	13

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	6.6
National comparative data	8.1

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.5
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2001	69	76	145

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	43	43	50
	Girls	56	50	50
	Total	99	93	100
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	68 (54)	64 (61)	69 (55)
	National	64 (63)	60 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	26 (25)	41 (34)	36 (22)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	44	46	51
	Girls	59	53	57
	Total	103	99	108
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	73 (49)	68 (59)	75 (56)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	25 (20)	41 (34)	38 (23)
	National	31 (31)	42 (39)	33 (29)

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	75	70	145

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	31	68	75
	Girls	36	61	68
	Total	67	129	143
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	46 (40)	89 (92)	99 (96)
	National	48 (47)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	36.7
	National	39.0

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

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	1
Black – other	2
Indian	33
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	1
White	709
Any other minority ethnic group	0

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	22	0
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	40.3
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	18.5

Education support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	14
Total aggregate hours worked per week	345

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	75.0
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	23.7
Key Stage 4	21.9

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2001-2002
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	£
Total income	2 199 376
Total expenditure	2 260 625
Expenditure per pupil	3 015
Balance brought forward from previous year	118 677
Balance carried forward to next year	57 428

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	13
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	13

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	1.0
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	750
Number of questionnaires returned	97

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	50	41	5	2	2
My child is making good progress in school.	60	38	1	1	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	41	54	3	1	1
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	33	46	18	2	1
The teaching is good.	48	48	2	0	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	44	44	11	0	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	53	42	2	0	3
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	70	28	1	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	40	42	15	1	2
The school is well led and managed.	62	35	1	0	2
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	54	43	3	0	0
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	41	42	10	0	7

Other issues raised by parents

A small number of parents expressed concern that, during the past two years, there had been some difficulty in recruiting specialist teachers in mathematics, but acknowledged that this was no longer a problem. Many parents commended the school's rewards system, which, they believed, helped motivate students and, thus, was a significant factor in helping raise standards.

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

ENGLISH

Provision for English is **good**.

Strengths

- There has been good improvement since the previous inspection.
- The attainment of girls in English Literature is good.
- There is very good planning of lessons and the curriculum.
- Teachers choose materials that will interest students.
- Work in English is characterised by excellent relationships and very good student attitudes.
- The quality of monitoring and evaluation by the curriculum-learning manager is good.

Areas for improvement

- Use of National Curriculum criteria in assessment, especially in Years 7 to 9.
- Cultural diversity in the curriculum.

- 97 By the end of Year 9, the standards attained by students in the Key Stage 3 tests match national averages. This is a great improvement on the poor results at the time of the previous inspection. In particular, boys now achieve at least as well as those in schools nationally. A lower than average number of both boys and girls attain the higher levels in national tests. Results in 2001 tests were average when compared with similar schools. The standards of work of students currently in Years 7 to 9 are average.
- 98 The number of students entered for both English and English Literature GCSE has been increasing steadily, so that more are now entered than the average in schools nationally. Attainment matches the national averages in English literature, with girls' results being significantly higher overall than in most other schools. Attainment in English language is below average overall, though results for girls are average. The attainment of boys has been improving in both GCSE subjects, though not at the higher grades. Considerable efforts have gone into achieving these improvements since the previous inspection, particularly in English Literature. Standards of work of students currently in Years 10 and 11 are average.
- 99 The teaching of English has undergone a radical improvement in the past five years. Whereas the previous inspection identified serious weaknesses in the organisation of lessons, this is no longer the case. Students now experience a tightly focused, coherent curriculum that ensures that good-quality teaching and learning take place in each lesson. Scarcely a minute is wasted and the level of student concentration is remarkable. The use of problem-solving activities, often prompted by the national Key Stage 3 strategy, enables all students, and particularly those with special educational needs, to develop their language skills. The positive quality of students' response is evident in their keenness to respond to teachers' questioning and in their noticeable enjoyment of learning. For example, in a lesson on similes and metaphors, a Year 7 class gasped with appreciative delight and recognition that the comparison of the moon with a 'ghostly galleon' was from the poem 'The Highwayman'. Students' understanding is explicitly developed by teaching that challenges students with the question 'why?', although this is insufficiently developed to stretch the most able. Students' oral responses are generally thoughtful and

careful, employing the structures of standard English as a result of clear expectations on the part of their teachers.

- 100 The skilful use of well-chosen materials and resources successfully leads students to understand what reading can mean for them. A Year 9 class of average ability was inspired by Carol Ann Duffy's poem *Havisham* to produce their own examples of highly vivid writing. This was achieved by re-imagining the character as a teenager and through a session of excellent teacher-led shared writing. In a lower-attaining Year 9 class reading 'Stone Cold', several students overflowed with ideas when asked to write a letter, in character, to the mother of a homeless person. The sensitivity of students to the experiences described in both literary and non-fiction texts reflects the sensitive way in which teachers listen to them, giving due encouragement and praise. A wide variety of reading is presented to students, with teaching that seeks constantly for mature responses from them; a challenge in which they take considerable pleasure. Nevertheless, the cultural diversity of texts and materials used is limited and does not adequately reflect how the study of literature can help develop an understanding of life in a multi-cultural society. This has been acknowledged and the situation is improving.
- 101 The development of students' writing is benefiting greatly from careful grounding in reading and the teaching of different text types. The judicious choice of topics is also a factor in enthusing the students. For example, Year 8 students have responded well to the adult theme of discussing the presentation of rich and poor in *A Tale of Two Cities*. A considerable strength in students' writing is that it reflects the use of standard English, even where students are struggling for a basic level of accuracy. Work is marked seriously and conscientiously by teachers, who provide good written feedback to students. As yet, however, this has not been linked sufficiently to the level criteria in the National Curriculum, in order that students know precisely what they need to do to improve. This inevitably weakens the target-setting process. Furthermore, there is too little use of drafting as a crucial means of teaching students how to craft their writing. On the other hand, the use of homework by some teachers to develop students' writing is very good, since it is integrated within the central part of lessons in order to accord it quality time. This practice is not as yet consistent with all teachers, however.
- 102 Good steps have been taken to adopt many aspects of the English strand of the national Key Stage 3 strategy. This has led to significant improvement in students' confidence and has built well on their work in primary schools, where they have been following the National Literacy Strategy. The school has embarked successfully on a programme of work to encourage the development of good literacy skills in other subjects. Teachers across the curriculum are working well to encourage students to improve their speaking, listening, reading and writing.
- 103 In Key Stage 4, great care is taken to ensure that students know what is expected of them. They are very good at identifying the strengths and weaknesses in the writing of others, which helps to develop their understanding of how to improve their own. Orally in class, students demonstrate considerable confidence and competence, although, apart from higher-attaining students, they often have little confidence in their own writing skills. Teachers are very good at including a wide range of students when asking for responses in class, ensuring that students for whom English is an additional language contribute and checking that they understand instructions.
- 104 The quality of behaviour is outstanding and this is a tribute to the excellent ethos cultivated by teachers and the mutual respect between them and their students. Boys participate as maturely as girls, with a quality of attention that would be the

envy of most schools. A Year 11 class of lower-attaining boys, in their penultimate English lesson, focused intently for a whole hour on the different conventions of persuasive and argumentative writing. In a Year 10 lesson on *The Crucible*, it was a boy who provided the brilliant summary comment that Parris personifies everything against which the girls are rebelling. The opportunity that such contributions provide for students to learn from each other and to extend their own thinking is too little realised, however.

- 105 The curriculum-learning manager provides very good leadership. Her own commitment to good relationships has had an outstanding impact on both staff and students. Teaching in English is now of good quality overall. A regular programme of lesson observations provides a highly professional process for improving teaching and learning, with feedback of a high order. Her evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses in the department's performance, including her own, is not only rigorous, but unusually honest. This establishes a model for others in the department to follow, exemplified in the courageous identification of weaknesses in the school's recent review of its Key Stage 3 literacy provision.

Drama

- 106 Drama is offered as part of the creative arts curriculum area. The enthusiastic response of students to this subject is evident in both key stages and is a product of very good teaching. The numbers taking GCSE drama are now above the national average and the level of attainment is well above average. In 2001, the percentage of students achieving the highest grades was twice the national average. The quality of work being produced in drama is reflected in the final presentations of the current Year 11 students. One pair of boys developed a sequence of ritual combat that combined remarkable athleticism with the intense discipline and focus needed not to hurt the other person. Through simple, but clever, touches of characterisation, they also succeeded in creating a narrative thread amidst their fast-flowing movement of limbs. Another group of students devised a series of episodes that gave prominence to each of them at different moments, skilfully deploying a wide range of drama strategies, including movement, gesture, voice and sound. It climaxed in a scene of mourning for the death of a student, in which the poise, tact and tone of the performance were sustained in a quite remarkable way. All this is achieved in accommodation of a basic nature and is developed from a very small amount of curriculum time in Key Stage 3.

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths

- Standards have improved greatly, especially in GCSE examinations.
- Teaching has improved significantly and is now good.
- There is very good leadership and management of the curriculum learning area.

Areas for development

- Curriculum provision for investigating and exploring mathematics, using information and communication technology (ICT) and supporting students' personal development.
- Curricular liaison with feeder primary schools.
- Consistency in use of assessment and marking to plan teaching and improve students' knowledge of their learning.

- 107 Levels of attainment in mathematics on entry to the school have steadily risen from below average to average in the last five years. In national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2001, results were in line with national averages. The grade distribution is very similar to that nationally and there is no significant difference between the results for girls and boys. Results in mathematics are below those in similar schools and are below those in English and science. The discrepancy between mathematics and English and science is, however, less than when these students entered the school. The most recent results represent good achievement for those students.
- 108 Results at GCSE in mathematics have improved enormously since the last inspection and, in 2001, were above the national average. The proportion attaining higher grades has more than doubled in three years and the average point score for each student in Year 11 has increased by 50 per cent. Boys' results were well above average, while girls attained average standards. Some boys and girls were taught separately before the GCSE examinations and the teaching of the girls' groups was disrupted by staff absence. Given average standards at the end of Year 9 in 1999, these results represent very good achievement for boys and satisfactory achievement for girls.
- 109 Standards of work seen during the inspection are above average in all years and reflect the rising standard of attainment on entry. All students are working within the range of attainment expected for their age, with a higher than average proportion working at higher levels. By the end of Year 9, the most able students can, for example, use simple trigonometry, while middle-attaining students use angle facts to solve simple problems. The lowest-attaining students can calculate the mean of discrete data and work out equivalent fractions with numerators and denominators less than ten. The most able Year 11 students confidently use sine and cosine rules to solve complex problems. Middle-attaining students solve simultaneous equations and use cumulative frequency graphs. The least able identify simple number patterns. There are no significant overall differences between the standards of work of boys and girls. Students from all attainment backgrounds, including those with special educational needs, achieve well.
- 110 Teaching is good overall, with almost one third being very good. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed during the inspection. This is a substantial improvement since the last inspection when almost half the teaching observed was unsatisfactory. Lessons are now well planned, with good preparation of resources. Teachers use a range of strategies to manage classrooms effectively, securing very good attention and good behaviour. For example, in a lesson with more able Year 7 students, good interactive teaching ensured that no activity lasted very long and students were constantly challenged to move on. Strategies, such as these, lead to very good pace, concentration and motivation. In the very best lessons, explanations are short and well focused, supported by practical or visual stimuli, and students can explain their ideas. In the satisfactory lessons, teachers spend too much time talking and are over-dependent on textbook exercises. Occasionally, the teachers' limited understanding of how students learn mathematics leads to them presenting tasks that are too complex. Year 10 students of average ability were, for example, asked to plot a graph from a linear equation without explanation of the necessary intervening steps.
- 111 When students are given the opportunity to investigate and explore their mathematics, they respond positively, as when middle-attaining Year 7 students were asked to plan how to accommodate all Tom's furniture in his bedroom, using scale diagrams. They were highly motivated and made interesting suggestions. All teachers pay good attention to the particular needs of individuals, including those

with special educational needs and those whose first language is not English. In a revision lesson with Year 11 students, a student with visual impairment was seated close to the front, one with hearing impairment was given instruction face to face and a student who spoke English as an additional language was given a simplified sheet. All students were given the choice of using the computer or their workbooks for revision of the topic they had chosen. Very good use is made of additional adults to support individuals or to provide different work for groups of students in response to their needs. For a Year 9 lesson with a class of a very wide range of ability, an additional teacher took those having most difficulty for a separate tutorial while a support assistant helped the main group to learn effectively. Some lessons are also built on knowledge of students' prior attainment, as in a Year 8 lesson when a pre-test had shown poor understanding of perimeter and area. The teaching was designed to overcome this. However, both this good practice and routine marking are not consistent across the department and some teachers pay insufficient attention to giving clear advice to guide students' future learning. This was criticised in the last inspection report and not enough work has been done to remedy the situation.

- 112 Curriculum provision is satisfactory overall. The department is successfully implementing the mathematics strand of the national Key Stage 3 Strategy in Year 7. Some of the methodology from the strategy is being adopted in other years, including clear lesson structures. Although initial work has been done to prepare teachers in other subjects, insufficient work has been undertaken to ensure that all subjects are making a full contribution to developing students' mathematical abilities in other subject contexts. Strategy initiatives, together with individualised computer programmes, are used to support the learning of the lowest-ability students and these are improving the achievement of students with special educational needs. The UK Mathematics Challenge and other extension activities are used in lessons to help the most able and these have resulted in some students gaining the highest grade at GCSE for the first time in 2001.
- 113 Insufficient attention is given to students exploring and investigating their mathematics or to using information and communication technology as a means of learning mathematical skills. The banding arrangements in Year 9 lead to groups of different size and attainment background in the two halves of the year. Students get different experiences due to these anomalies, which are, however, being phased out. Curricular liaison with the main partner primary schools is currently inadequate. Thus, there is insufficient knowledge of students' mathematical skills or experiences before they come to the school.
- 114 Leadership and management of mathematics are very good and are major factors in bringing about the very good improvement since the previous inspection. There is a clear sense of direction instilled by the curriculum-learning manager, who has an excellent understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the department. The subject plan for improvement is well linked to the school plan and has very clear priorities, with expected outcomes, timescales and resources. It includes plans for developing schemes of work in Years 7 to 9 in line with the mathematics strand of the national Key Stage 3 strategy.
- 115 The challenging targets for student outcomes have mostly been met. The quality of teaching is rigorously monitored through lesson observation. Work sampling is also used to evaluate the effectiveness of the teaching, which has improved enormously. Good progress has been made in developing systems to review students' attainment and progress. Very good teamwork enables all staff in the department to feel supported and there is a shared commitment and good capacity to improve

standards further. Generally, accommodation and resource provision is adequate for the needs of the department, but limited access to computers restricts the use of these in mathematics learning.

SCIENCE

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

Strengths

- Standards in knowledge and understanding and in practical investigations are good.
- Teachers set high expectations for students to engage in first-hand scientific enquiry.
- Good teaching challenges and extends students.
- Relationships between teachers and students are good.
- Strong leadership of a highly-committed team.

Areas for improvement

- A closer match of subject targets to National Curriculum criteria.
- The provision that science learning can make to students' personal development.
- Links with primary schools.

116 Results in national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2001 were average. The performance of the most able students was above average. This represents a significant improvement since the previous inspection. GCSE results in 2001 also show a considerable improvement on those previously reported. Particularly of note were results in the double award course, where students' results were well above the national average. Results in the single award course were also above average. A major factor in overall improvement in science has been the attention given to the attainment of boys, which was low at the time of the previous inspection. Both in national tests and examinations, boys are performing better than boys nationally, whilst girls' standards are similar to those of girls nationally.

117 The attainment of students currently in the school is above average at the end of both key stages. Teachers' high expectations, coupled with effective teaching strategies, help students understand scientific concepts, including a good focus on language. Very good relationships result in very good attitudes to learning.

118 In lessons, Year 9 students engage in good discussions because teachers have very good skills in encouraging them to talk about their ideas. The most able students have an excellent capacity to argue their case, as seen when they were planning an investigation on forces. They learn how to be more independent in expressing views because teachers encourage them to explore new ideas. By Year 11, students of all abilities consolidate and refine their learning by speaking and listening during good revision sessions.

119 Achievement is good because the programme of work is tightly structured to ensure students of different abilities build on earlier learning. Teachers have good strategies for encouraging equal involvement by boys and girls. Students are grouped in ways that foster good discussion, as seen when higher-ability students in Year 7 really enjoy talking about variation in the structure of animals, leading them to a very good understanding of adaptation to different environments. Similarly, lower-attaining students in Year 7 were able to think about the abstract idea of inverse proportionality, drawing on very good subject expertise of the teacher, who had good skills in helping them to explore relationships between numbers. Students in Year 8 spoke convincingly about the process of photosynthesis. Highly motivated by the

teacher to use correct terminology, they quickly appreciated how simple molecules combine to make sugars for plants. Students with special educational needs in Year 10 worked very productively in order to win the competition for the best work on light and sound waves, making good progress in line with their peers. Those who speak English as an additional language similarly make good progress because teachers use good visual resources to illustrate scientific concepts.

120 Teaching and learning are good. Students experience good language development because teachers explain technical terms clearly, asking searching questions to probe their understanding. Students use and apply mathematics skills successfully in Years 10 and 11, but work in lower years indicates that students are not encouraged sufficiently to become more analytical through interpretation of information from graphs. Students become more independent learners as they develop good skills in information and communication technology, as seen when lower-attaining students in Year 10 became more knowledgeable by seeking information on radio and microwaves from the computer. Teachers match work well to students' needs, enabling most to reach expected standards or better with good support and plenty of praise. Very good relationships result in impressive motivation by almost all students. They work with enthusiasm, generating a buzz of excitement as soon as they begin to work. Teachers use assessment well, asking good questions, but do not always closely link them to the detail of the National Curriculum. Consequently, assessment information is not always detailed enough for setting precise targets for the next stage of learning. Similarly, the review of students' learning at the end of the lessons sometimes loses its impact because teachers have not left sufficient time to review student successes and difficulties fully. In Years 10 and 11, students have clear guidance about test and examination criteria.

121 Leadership is very good. A cohesive team reflects the aims of the school in its work to raise standards and do the very best for students of all abilities. Highly committed teachers work hard to fulfil school policies, as is evident in consistent teaching. Management of the subject is good. Plans for Year 7 are detailed, reflecting the changes in the revised National Curriculum. Attention to equal opportunities is effective. Strategies for motivating higher and lower-attaining students, as well as girls and boys, have been successful in reducing differences in performance. Good awareness of the needs of students with special educational needs, and of those who speak English as an additional language, ensures they make good progress. The Technology College plans show good intentions to make more effective links with the main partner primary schools as a means of raising standards further. Similarly, the school has raised funds to improve inadequate and outdated accommodation. The quality of work provided by technicians is very good.

ART AND DESIGN

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

Strengths

- The consistently good-quality teaching of art and design.
- Good achievement and progress at both key stages.
- Very good relationships and attitudes.
- Teachers give the needs of individual students a high priority.

Areas for Improvement

- The accuracy of the use of National Curriculum levels in assessments at the end of Year 9.
- The number of students gaining A* to C grades.
- The development of information communication technology as an integral element of the art and design curriculum.

122 Standards in art and design have improved since the previous inspection. By the end of Year 9, the majority of students are achieving broadly average standards and some are achieving above this. GCSE results in 2001 were below the national average, though all students entered gained at least a grade G. The number of students entered for art and design was well above the national average for the size of the school. The work of students currently in Year 11 indicates a considerable improvement to average in the number of students gaining A* to C grades in forthcoming examinations. There is now no significant difference in standards between boys and girls.

123 On entry to the school, many students have a low skills and knowledge base in many aspects of art and design. To deal with this, art teachers have developed a scheme of work that places a strong emphasis on skills development at the beginning of Year 7. This also includes the use of colour and balance between two and three-dimensional activities in order to build on prior learning and deal with the needs of each individual.

124 Students' knowledge and understanding of art and design, and their use of a wide range of media and materials, is developed well during their first three years in the school. They work with imagination developing techniques within topics. For example, in the Year 7 topic involving composition and signs and symbols in Aboriginal art, students were learning about, and producing, mono prints. Students now have a much-improved knowledge of a wide range of artists and designers from different cultures, including Escher, Cézanne, Picasso and Van Gogh. Students use styles, colours and quality of line as a starting point in many of their projects. One such example is the Year 8 topic on structures and decoration where students are using the works of the architect Gaudi and his use of line, texture, colour, shape and pattern as a stimulus for producing two and three-dimensional pictures and models. The discussion and study of artists' works is adding a strong cultural dimension to the curriculum. During Year 9, students bring together ideas and skills learnt. The majority are able to work with increasing independence and develop ideas in more depth and produce many quality personal responses.

125 In Years 10 and 11, students are able to build upon the rich and varied experiences gained in their earlier course. The majority make good progress and achieve well. A minority of students still have to practise and develop skills in the first year of their GCSE course that should have been firmly established by the end of Year 9. The

majority of students are adapting well to a different way of working in producing their GCSE coursework. They are able to sustain themes, develop ideas and make visual decisions with confidence and reasoning. Students are able to combine elements of artists work from different cultures in their projects. For example, Year 10 students, in a cultural interest topic, were using examples of African, Aboriginal and Japanese art as a stimulus. Students show considerable involvement and commitment. They have much improved their use of sketchbooks to research artists' works, practise skills and develop ideas.

- 126 The quality of teaching is consistently good. This has a positive effect on students' learning, attitudes and achievement and is much improved since the previous inspection. Teaching is conducted with confidence and imagination and with sensitivity to the needs of individuals, including those from different cultural backgrounds and those with learning difficulties. Teachers have a depth of specialist knowledge and expertise and their demonstrations of techniques and skills are well organised. There is a strong emphasis on quality and high expectations. Lessons are well planned to cater for the wide range of students' abilities. Learning is supported by discussions and directed questioning and a good use of visual material. For example, in a Year 8 lesson on structures and facades, students were asked for their views on the choice of colours and textures used and other students' interpretation of these in their projects. Students' learning is well supported and enhanced by high-quality individual help at all levels. This is encouraging students to experiment and use media with confidence and imagination. Students respond well, working with pace and creative effort in the friendly supportive atmosphere where they feel valued.
- 127 Students' attitudes and behaviour are good throughout. Relationships are good. Students work well together and are prepared to help each other. They are able to discuss their work with interest and confidence and older students show initiative and the ability to organise themselves and take a pride in their work.
- 128 The course in Years 7 to 9 meets statutory requirements. There is a good balance between two and three-dimensional activities. The department offers the opportunity for all to follow a GCSE course in art and design. The use of assessment has developed well since the last inspection and is now well used as part of learning. Levelling at the end of Year 9 is not yet accurate and GCSE grading is lower in terms of grades than evidence of coursework and test pieces suggest. The use of information and communication technology needs further development.
- 129 The management of art and design is good. Staff are experienced and well qualified, with an extensive range of expertise in all aspects of the art and design curriculum. The curriculum learning manager has a clear view of the subject's direction and its contribution to the arts and other curriculum areas. Staff meet regularly and work well together. Documentation is informative and well presented. The developing scheme of work meets National Curriculum and GCSE syllabus requirements. Staff value their subject and have the enthusiasm and energy to take the subject forward and continue to improve standards. Although the accommodation for art and design is small and barely adequate, it is well used and provides a stimulating environment that supports visual investigation. Very good displays of students work in the art room and around the school celebrate students' achievements at all levels.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

Provision in design and technology is **satisfactory** overall, with very good provision in food and textiles.

Strengths

- The good standards achieved by girls at GCSE.
- The leadership and management of the department are very good.
- Teaching is good at both key stages.
- Students have very positive attitudes to their work.

Areas for improvement

- Boys' standards at GCSE.
- The use of information and communication technology.
- Resources for computer-aided design and manufacture.
- Accommodation.

130 Standards overall by the age of 14 are average and have improved since the previous inspection. Students enter the school with below average attainment and very mixed experiences of design and technology from their primary schools. They make good progress in improving their knowledge and skills across a range of materials that include food and textiles. Teacher assessments indicate that attainment has been close to the national average for the past three years, with the number of students achieving the higher levels increasing from year to year.

131 By the age of 16, standards are above average. Results in the 2001 GCSE examinations were well above the national average overall. The proportion of girls achieving the A* to C grades was high in comparison with the national average. In contrast, the overall results for boys were broadly at the national average. The numbers of both boys and girls gaining at least a G grade were above the national average.

132 Standards of current work in food and textiles are above average by the age of 14. Students have sound knowledge and good practical skills as a result of consistently good teaching. Recent difficulties in staff recruitment and retention in the resistant materials and electronics aspects of the subject have slowed students' progress. As a result, students' knowledge, understanding and practical skills in these aspects are less well developed. However, as a result of good specialist teaching that is now in place, students currently in school are achieving at expected levels in this area. Overall, achievement is good as students develop their knowledge and skills through a range of design and make activities. Students respond to design briefs in a range of contexts and work to a specification, making modifications to realise their ideas. They can successfully work independently, or in groups, to solve problems and develop good social skills. In Year 9, students use wood and acrylic to develop a range of solutions for storing playing cards, shaping and fitting materials to a high standard and demonstrating good control of tools and equipment. Presentation and illustration skills are satisfactory overall, but, due to the limitations of facilities and resources, students make insufficient regular use of computers to support their designing and making.

133 Standards seen in lessons are above average in food and textiles by the age of 16 as a result of very good teaching. Current work in graphics is broadly average, though students' presentation skills are not developed at the higher levels. The knowledge and understanding of systems and control and practical skills within resistant

materials are not developed to the same standard as those in food and textiles. Although students are now making very good progress as a result of the specialist teaching in place since January, standards are below average in Year 11. A much smaller proportion of students study design and technology than do so nationally. The school has, in conjunction with the local college, provided, within the NOVA course, an imaginative range of vocational courses for students who are disapplied from design and technology. The curriculum is broadened to meet the needs of more able students through the provision of AS level textiles and the three Year 11 students following this course have achieved very well. The use of visits and links with local industry further broaden students' experiences.

- 134 Teaching is good overall with a high proportion of very good and excellent teaching in textiles and food lessons. Here, the pace of learning is very good, with a wide variety of methods used to challenge students and check understanding. Expectations for quality and pace of working are high. Through questioning and class discussion, students develop their specialist vocabulary and are involved very effectively in their learning. Teaching and lesson planning have improved overall since the previous inspection and in the majority of lessons pay due attention to the development of literacy and numeracy skills. Students demonstrate competence and confidence, expressing ideas and recording and evaluating their work because there is now a strong focus on the design process. Design work of more able students in Years 10 and 11 is particularly imaginative and of high quality in textile sketchbooks. Teaching in graphics places insufficient emphasis upon the development of practical illustration and presentation skills and leads to poorly finished artefacts. Designs for a CD cover and a party invitation by Year 9 students, for example, lacked quality because word processing contained many spelling errors and basic drawing equipment had not been used accurately to mark and cut out designs.
- 135 Students are currently making good progress in resistant materials lessons because of the very good supply teaching now in place. In a very well-planned Year 9 lesson, the teacher used group work effectively to develop knowledge and understanding of natural and manufactured materials. Students were encouraged to compare, discuss and measure materials and a very clear explanation of how to calculate costs encouraged students to use their numeracy skills. Specialist knowledge was clearly communicated and explained and students made very good progress with their practical work and understanding as a result. Lower-attaining students and those with special educational needs make similar progress to other students at both key stages as a result of good help from learning support assistants and the good individual attention provided by class teachers. The small number of students who have English as an additional language are well supported in lessons and this enables them to be involved and contribute fully to class discussions. As a result, they make good progress.
- 136 Relationships are very good. Students show respect for teachers and have very positive attitudes to their learning, which helps them make good progress. Students are encouraged to use a range of methods for their research, including the use of the Internet. Regular use of evaluation sheets encourages students to reflect upon their work and consider ways in which they can improve. Assessment sometimes lacks a sharp enough focus to give students greater insight into what they must do to improve. It is better in Years 10 and 11 because it is closely related to the examination criteria.
- 137 Leadership and management of design and technology are very good and have been effective in securing improvements through regular evaluation of teaching and learning. In a consistent approach to raising standards, strengths and areas for

development are identified and rigorously pursued. Good systems for assessment have improved the ability to track students' progress as they move through the school. Currently, there is insufficient emphasis upon the use of computer-aided design and manufacture in the subject. The quality of accommodation and resources for teaching electronics, resistant materials and computer-aided design and manufacture are poor. Plans within the successful Technology College bid will deal with these inadequacies. Specialist staff appointments made for the coming year will broaden the overall expertise in the department. These factors have the potential to further raise standards across all the areas of design and technology.

GEOGRAPHY

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

Strengths

- The quality of teaching is good.
- Standards are improving.
- The leadership and management of the subject are very good.

Areas for improvement

- The use of information and communication technology (ICT).
- The use of extension work for students who work quickly.
- The use of whole-class sessions at the end of lessons.

138 In the 2001 GCSE examinations, the number of students gaining A* to C grades in geography was above the national average. The number of students gaining at least a grade G was also above average. There were no significant differences in results between boys and girls or for students from minority ethnic backgrounds. Results in 2001 were below those for most other subjects in the school. There has been a level of instability of staffing over the past years that has adversely affected results. Nevertheless, there has been a considerable rise in results since the previous inspection.

139 In general, students' attainment in geography is below average when they come to the school. In work seen during the inspection, standards are above average, both at the end of Year 9 and at the end of Year 11. Students achieve well overall. There are no wide differences in achievement between boys and girls, between the different ethnic groups found in the school, or across different levels of attainment. Students with special educational needs achieve good standards in relation to their prior attainment and their overall achievement is good. There have been significant changes to the curriculum and in teaching methods with the result that attainment has risen strongly since the previous inspection.

140 By the end of Year 9, students have acquired a good working geographical vocabulary. Students in Year 8, for example, understand terms such as pyroclast, magma, epicentre and plate tectonics when they do their work on volcanoes and earthquakes. A majority of students can explain geographical patterns that occur throughout the world. Students in Year 9, for instance, establish the links between pollution, climate, the formation of acid rain and the destruction of forests in Sweden. Students develop the skills of map work, analysis, interpretation and exploration through good use of fieldwork and case studies. This provides a good base for development in Years 10 and 11.

- 141 By the end of Year 11, the basic skills learned in previous years have been refined in preparation for GCSE. The good base of research and interpretation skills is evident in some sophisticated work done by Year 11 students on how ice erosion has affected the type of human activity in those areas and on the development of tourism as a result. Students have a wide geographical knowledge at this stage. Students in Year 10, for example, can discuss population distribution and why it varies, the development of eco-systems, types of river valley and the conflicting pressures on tropical rainforests.
- 142 Geography makes a good contribution to students' literacy development. The previous inspection reported that "students respond well orally, but lack fluency." This has been addressed and discussion is a frequent part of lessons. Students are able to discuss their views confidently and can assemble their arguments well. This is clearly seen in Year 9, where students are involved in a theoretical scheme to build a local bypass and are required to take the part of interested parties such as local councillors, residents of the area and conservationists. Students' work is regularly marked and corrected and displays of key vocabulary are provided in classrooms. This emphasis on basic vocabulary development and on grammar and spelling has a positive impact on literacy standards. This is clearly seen in the high quality of extended writing done by Year 11 students about multi-national companies and their influence on world trade. Students routinely draw and use graphs and tables to present information and to interpret data and the subject makes a good contribution to numeracy in the school. In general, students develop good drawing and mapping skills. Students' use of ICT to edit and refine their work for research and to create graphs and diagrams is unsatisfactory.
- 143 The quality of teaching, and the learning it promotes, is good overall. Teaching is good or very good in nearly two-thirds of the lessons. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed during the inspection. At the time of the previous inspection, teaching for Years 10 and 11 was reported as satisfactory. It was reported as more variable in Years 7 to 9. There has clearly been a very considerable improvement since that time. Very good control of classes is a strong feature of all the teaching and this is achieved with quiet authority and with good humour. As a result, students behave very well in lessons and show good attitudes to work so that no time is wasted. Relationships between students and with their teachers are very good. Relevant homework is regularly set. Teachers have good subject knowledge, not only of the factual content, but also of the techniques necessary to maximise marks at GCSE level and this has contributed to the rise in results since the previous inspection.
- 144 Where teaching is at its best, the lessons are carefully planned to provide challenging activities tailored to suit the range of abilities found in most classes and to provide extension work for students who finish quickly. Extension work is not always provided and a minority of lessons lack a little in pace because of this. Where teachers choose to have whole-class sessions at the end of the lesson, this is an opportunity for students to discuss their work and raise any problems that they may have had. In a small number of lessons, the time allowed for this is too short and the value of these plenary sessions is less as a result. Teachers provide interest for students by setting work that makes students think for themselves and examine evidence. This was clearly demonstrated in a Year 8 lesson where students were studying the effects of pollution. The teacher provided not only good local knowledge, but also used questions cleverly to encourage students to think about types of pollution and its effects locally and universally. The use of ICT to enhance and improve students' work is unsatisfactory. The staff are aware of this and steps are being taken to improve this provision. An element of staff development is needed to improve this.

- 145 The subject makes a good contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. In lessons, students are able to reflect on their environment and to appreciate the wonders and power of natural forces. This is clear, for example, in work done on volcanoes and earthquakes and in the number of environmental issues that are covered in lessons. Good work was seen where students in Year 9 wrote accounts of the hardships they would face if they were children in one of the poorest parts of the world. A strong moral dimension is found in lessons and students are taught right from wrong. They are also taught to respect the views of others. There are good opportunities for social development through working together. The in-built element about people from other countries provides good cultural development. Social and cultural development is enhanced by a number of trips and field studies out of school.
- 146 The scheme of work has been extensively revised and now provides a progressive and appropriate course that is designed to raise attainment. There are very good procedures in place for assessing students' attainment and progress, which include elements of self-assessment. These provide good data for tracking the progress of the various groups in the school and for ensuring that the curriculum provision is consistent. There are very good procedures for monitoring and supporting teaching. It is this strong emphasis on teaching and learning that is one of the main contributory factors in the rise in standards since the previous inspection. The Curriculum Learning Manager has shown very good management of the subject in revising the scheme of work and in setting up procedures for assessment that have had a positive effect on standards. She has shown good leadership in supporting less experienced colleagues and in ensuring that the issues raised in the previous report have been addressed. The subject has made very good progress since that time.

HISTORY

The overall quality of provision for history is **good**.

Strengths

- The quality of teaching and learning in all year groups is good.
- The development of key skills is leading to improving standards, particularly in Years 7 to 9.
- The department makes a good contribution to the students' personal development.
- The way in which students of all abilities are encouraged to fully participate in history work.
- The department's effective strategies for the teaching of literacy.
- The leadership and management of history are good and well focused on improvement.

Areas for Improvement

- Standards achieved in GCSE examinations.
- The department's contribution to numeracy across the curriculum.
- Resources to enable the implementation of the information and communication technology strand of the National Key Stage 3 Strategy.

- 147 Standards of work seen during the inspection are average overall. They are above average for students in Years 7 to 9 and average in Years 10 and 11. These standards are achieved because the teaching of history is good, overall, throughout the school. Consequently, students' achievements in relation to standards on entry to the school in Year 7 are good in all year groups. Students' attitudes towards the

subject, their behaviour and level of involvement in lessons are good. This makes a significant contribution to the good quality of students' learning in the subject. Because of this, students of all abilities make good progress. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good overall.

- 148 The 2001 teacher assessments of students in Year 9 indicate a significant trend of improvement over the past three years, particularly for those gaining the expected Level 5 or above. The number of students attaining this standard was well above average for both girls and boys, with boys achieving particularly well. The inspection evidence shows that these improved standards are gradually feeding through to GCSE level as increased numbers of students are now opting to take the subject in Year 10.
- 149 GCSE results in 2001, for students in Year 11, were just below the national average for grades A* to C. This is broadly in line with the results at the time of the previous inspection in 1996. However, following that inspection, there was a significant decline in standards and a drop in the number of students following the course. Evidence provided by the school confirms that staff recruitment and management issues were a main factor in this decline. Nevertheless, over the past three years, there has been a gradual trend of improvement. All students taking the subject in 2001 gained an A* to G pass. The numbers gaining A* or A grades have been consistently below average, but improving. Results analysis shows a mixed, inconsistent pattern in the performance of girls and boys, from year to year, compared with national trends. Overall, the students' points score rose to the average in 2001.
- 150 Standards in work and lessons seen during the inspection confirm the improvements being made by the younger students. There is a firm emphasis, through the teaching, on key history skills. This was an area for improvement at the previous inspection. For example, students are now well practised at analysing, interpreting and evaluating evidence. Learning is enhanced because students are being encouraged to think historically. In Year 9 lessons about the First World War, students were, for instance, using their informed imagination to good effect when considering trench warfare. When asked to define conditions in the trenches. one student volunteered "They are holes in the ground where you get killed". This well illustrated the students' general understanding of the horrendous nature of the experience for the soldiers concerned. Class discussion work shows good awareness and use of source material and of issues such as censorship and propaganda. Consequently, students' written work and notes reflect good levels of analysis. Students write with confidence and support their conclusions well.
- 151 Year 11 students were revising for imminent GCSE examinations during the inspection. Whilst their achievement was good in relation to their ability levels, overall attainment was broadly average. More able students have a good general knowledge base and retain factual information well from across the units of work studied. However, less able students often have difficulty with the initial recall of detail and key dates. Such students often require prompting from the teacher, for example, when revising work on the Treaty of Versailles and the Dawes Plan. However, once reminded, they are able to make good use of shared information and discussion to support their revision work. In such lessons, learning was well supported through the teachers' emphasis on examination techniques and the skills being acquired by the students. This was seen when, for example, they considered primary and secondary source material concerning the Weimar Republic. In a Year 10 lesson, students showed a sound understanding of the work of the League of Nations and why it eventually failed. This well illustrates the way in which teachers'

strategies, through questioning and discussion, help sharpen students' understanding of consequences, changes and attitudes. This then helps inform their analysis of the past.

- 152 Teaching and learning have both improved since the previous inspection and are now good overall. Teachers' personal subject knowledge and the teaching of key skills are particularly good aspects of teaching. Marking of work is another important strength, with students being given good-quality guidance on how to improve. Lessons are well sustained with students being offered good levels of challenge, for example, in considering different viewpoints and weighing their value. Such approaches further make a good contribution to students' personal development when considering moral, social and cultural issues in an historical context. These elements not only encourage the good approaches and response to the subject shown by students, but also support the creation of a positive teaching and learning partnership. Teachers are often prepared to take risks, such as in one Year 9 lesson when the teacher played the role of various objectors to military service whilst being interrogated by the class taking the part of a military tribunal. Such work, which enhances students' learning, is made possible because they are expected to work together in groups and pairs as a matter of course in history lessons.
- 153 Learning is further supported through the department's strategies for the teaching of literacy. Oral and discussion work is given good emphasis and students are encouraged to explore the meaning of terms such as 'sanctions', 'veto' and 'pacifist'. Key terms and vocabulary are prominently displayed in classrooms and frequently referred to. Writing and essay work is often of above average quality because teachers provide guides to help less able students, or those with language difficulties, to complete their writing tasks. The most able students are encouraged to develop more free and creative styles in their approach to essay writing. For example, a Year 9 student, in an imaginary letter to a national newspaper, argued against the reasoning of the historian A.J.P. Taylor on the causes of the First World War. Thorough preparation enabled well-reasoned arguments supporting alternative views. Overall, such approaches enable students with special educational needs, including those particularly gifted and talented, to achieve well and make good progress because all are encouraged to fully participate in lessons.
- 154 However, the department has yet to develop a similarly effective contribution to developing students' numeracy skills. The subject makes little contribution to the development and application of information and communication technology skills as it lacks computer hardware and software or regular access to such facilities. It has yet to include planned opportunities as a fully integral part of its schemes of work. These are required improvements to, and developments of, the history curriculum.
- 155 The new curriculum learning manager for history has made a very positive impact on the department since appointment at the start of the academic year. Leadership and management of the department are good and focused well on ensuring further improvement. Shared commitment and the potential to succeed are also good within the department. Standards at GCSE require some improvement and multicultural reference material for history in the library requires development. The language used in reporting to parents requires sharpening to give clearer judgements on standards. However, the overall strengths of the department far outweigh its areas for improvement.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Overall, the quality of provision in information and communication technology (ICT) is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- The good teaching in ICT lessons.
- Students' attitudes to their learning in this subject.
- The good level of teachers' subject knowledge.

Areas for development

- Provision for ICT across all subjects in order to meet fully statutory requirements.
- Equipment levels.
- Accommodation.

- 156 Standards of work produced by students at the end of Year 9 are good. Students come into the school with an average level of skills and understanding of ICT. By the time they reach the end of Year 9, the majority have made gains in their knowledge and understanding of the subject that exceeds the national average. Standards in ICT lessons were satisfactory at the time of the last inspection. However, students now achieve good standards. Teacher assessments indicate that seven out of 10 students achieve at, or above, the national average. There is no difference between the achievement of boys and girls in the school. This good progress is matched by students who have special educational needs or English as an additional language.
- 157 The work of students taking GCSE information technology is of an average standard. Although GCSE results in 2001 were well below national figures, current work is equivalent to national standards, indicating a full range of grades, including some at the higher end. These GCSE students make satisfactory progress over the two years.
- 158 For the majority of students in Years 10 and 11, responsibility for teaching the National Curriculum programmes of study in ICT rests with teachers in other subject areas. This was also the situation at the time of the last inspection. Now, as then, the programmes are not well developed, which means that four fifths of students in Years 10 and 11 do not receive their entitlement. The school is, therefore, not meeting the statutory requirements. Students are not being given the opportunities to develop their ICT skills adequately in their final two years in school.
- 159 The standard of work produced by students currently in Years 7, 8 and 9 is good. Year 7 students make good progress in the use of a range of software applications. In making presentations, they show an awareness of audience and use the main features of the relevant software confidently. In each of Years 7 to 9, students complete a number of assessed assignments, which involves them in making their own assessment of the work. This increases their understanding of ICT use. Year 8 students have a good understanding of web page design, although lower-attaining students are limited in their use of language. As students move through their first three years, they are able to increase their knowledge of control technology by working with sensors and model traffic lights. The more able students not only have a sound understanding of data capture forms, but also recognise the value of well-framed questions. Year 9 students working on financial modelling using spreadsheets are encouraged to make use of the 'what if' opportunities and to consider some of the moral issues surrounding profit-making ventures. Practical skills are developed well and supported by opportunities to consider the impact of

technology on the lives of others as well as themselves. In addition, students consider the moral aspects of information available through the use of the Internet. They are all required to subscribe to the school's policy for responsible use of the Internet.

- 160 Only a small number of students in Year 11 and around one fifth of students in Year 10 follow the GCSE course in ICT. Those taking the course show a good understanding of the varied use of ICT, with more able students demonstrating skills at an advanced level, for example in web page design. All GCSE students understand the requirements of the course and have been instructed well in the criteria used to assess their performance. Year 10 students work well together on control technology activities, making good progress despite the lack of access to an appropriate quantity of relevant equipment. Year 11 students, approaching the final lessons in their two-year course, showed great industry in preparing revision guides for Year 10 students. This well-planned activity enabled them to identify their own strengths and research those topics on which they were less secure.
- 161 For the majority of upper school students in Years 10 and 11, ICT provision is through other subjects. Cross-curricular provision has improved in some ways since the last inspection, but is still inadequate. In some subjects, such as physical education, music and modern foreign languages, planned activities support the subject within the bounds of very limited access to computers. Other subjects, such as history, religious education, mathematics, geography and art and design, make little use of ICT to support teaching and learning. The overall co-ordination of ICT in other subjects is currently unsatisfactory. Recognising this, the school has appointed a well-qualified member of staff, who, from September 2002, will take sole responsibility for co-ordinating and developing the cross-curricular provision.
- 162 Teaching is good overall. Under the guidance of a very capable curriculum leader, teaching is well planned. Student management is aided by very positive student attitudes towards the subject and staff. Relationships between students are good and they appreciate the competent way in which they are taught. In some lessons, students are not encouraged to make significant oral contributions that would help their teachers gauge how much they understand. Better use could be made, by teachers, of review activities toward the end of lessons that would help consolidate students' learning.
- 163 Overall, there has been good improvement since the previous inspection. The subject benefits from having a well-qualified, knowledgeable and well-respected leader. Student progress is monitored and tracked well with target setting used to support learning. There is a very good plan for further development of the subject in the school. The acquisition of Technology College status from the next academic year will increase the number of computers available and will improve the accommodation, which is currently unsatisfactory. The curriculum area is fortunate to have good technical support and this will increase with the planned introduction of further equipment, enabling the school to maintain appropriate levels of technician cover.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Provision for modern languages is **very good**.

Strengths

- Teaching is very good.
- Teachers have a very good command of the languages taught.
- Thorough marking of work is helpful to students.
- Teachers have a detailed knowledge of students' strengths and weaknesses.

Area for improvement

- The number and range of extra books for wider reading.

- 164 At the end of Year 9, standards in French and German are close to the national average, with girls performing slightly better than boys. Most students enter the school with little or no knowledge of French or German. The great majority make good progress during their first three years in school. Those who continue with the study of a foreign language to the end of Year 11 make good progress throughout their five years in the school.
- 165 By the end of Year 9, students of all abilities understand clearly what they hear or read in the classroom. In a Year 7 French lesson where all had special educational needs, the students remembered what they had learned in previous lessons and could use the correct form of the verbs that they were practising. These students concentrated well, tried hard and were determined to do their best. Through their enjoyment and hard work, they achieved better than might have been expected of them. Year 9 students in a German lesson worked well in pairs, discussing where they would like to go on holiday. As well as having a good knowledge of vocabulary, they could use German grammar correctly, changing verb endings or word order when necessary.
- 166 In the GCSE examinations, results have improved greatly since the last inspection. Of those students taking the full French GCSE course in 2001, almost half gained A* to C grades, which is above the national average, with more students gaining the top grades than in previous years. Students taking the shorter GCSE course did less well. Certificates of Achievement were awarded to all those students who took the tests. In 2001, there were no candidates for German.
- 167 In Year 11, students of both languages prepare thoroughly for their examinations, giving close attention to practising all aspects on which they will be tested. Students nearing the end of their course still attend regularly and work hard in class at improving the skills they will need to get the best results. In Years 10 and 11, the written work in students' books shows that they are keen to improve and to develop their written skills as far as they can. They present their work with care and take pride in its quality.
- 168 Throughout the school, students work to the best of their ability. The most able achieve very high standards while those with less natural flair for languages make rapid gains in understanding and speaking. By the end of Year 11, students are, overall, achieving average standards. Some students achieve higher academic standards than others, but all can use their languages for communicating with other people. Standards have improved greatly since the last inspection.

- 169 Very good teaching and the students' purposeful and positive attitudes have brought about this improvement. The teachers speak French or German, and often both, fluently and with confidence. They use the language they are teaching as the normal way of communicating in lessons, although they will stop and explain in English if something is not clear. They make efficient use of tapes, videos, games, computer software and books to ensure that lessons move fast and remain interesting. Teachers insist on good behaviour so that no time is wasted. They set and mark useful homework tasks, they prepare their lessons thoroughly and expect the students to work with the same commitment as they do.
- 170 Teachers know their students very well. They take care to note in homework books exactly what needs to improve so that each individual can work on his or her own particular difficulties. Students' results in their assignments are carefully noted and discussed so that an accurate check is kept on their progress. Teachers with examination classes ensure that each student knows exactly what to expect in the examination and exactly where improvements need to be made. At all age levels, marking is clear, detailed and helpful to the students. Careful records ensure that teachers know straight away if work is getting worse or better.
- 171 The teaching of modern foreign languages in the school is very good. During the inspection, some of the teaching observed was outstanding. In the best lessons, the students were challenged by the work, stimulated by the fast pace and reassured by the obvious expertise of their teachers. Students enjoy the lessons. The younger students join in games eagerly or sing enthusiastically whilst older students prepare for their examinations with their teachers' help and encouragement. Teaching is one of the main strengths of the department and is another area where there has been great improvement since the last inspection.
- 172 Students of all abilities learn well as a direct result of the way in which they are taught. No student feels a failure because all are treated with respect. In a Year 9 lesson where the work was not easy for all the students, one suggested a different way of organising a test. The teacher listened to the suggestion, agreed that it would be an improvement and the change was made. The efforts of all the students are recognised and praised, with the result that they want to do well and have the confidence to achieve more than they expect. Students with special educational needs and those for whom English is not the first language make good progress in relation to their individual needs. Students work harmoniously together in all lessons. While girls continue to do slightly better than boys in tests and examinations, all join in equally enthusiastically in class and make equally good progress in speaking and listening.
- 173 Information and communication technology (ICT) is used to support the students' work. Students use ICT to refine their writing skills and to produce assignments using graphics and word processing. This work is then used in displays to inform and encourage others. Access to the Internet enables students to look up news items or other information from French or German speaking countries or to correspond with students at other schools in Europe. There are not enough extra books to encourage enthusiastic linguists to read for pleasure, although there is no shortage of textbooks and dictionaries.
- 174 Students of all abilities can take part in a programme of visits and exchanges to increase their knowledge and enjoyment of languages. Whilst French is to become the main language taught in Years 7 to 9, able linguists will continue to have the chance to learn German in Years 10 and 11 and to take French early so that they can move on to an AS level course in Year 11.

175 The department is very well led and managed. During the inspection, the curriculum learning manager was absent, but the organisation of the team was such that teaching was able to continue without disadvantage to the students. Leadership has greatly improved since the last inspection. The last inspection report drew attention to a range of weaknesses. These have now been dealt with and this has become a very strong department with a commitment to ensuring that all students are enabled to do their best and to enjoy their languages to the full.

MUSIC

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

Strengths

- The strong leadership and very good management of the subject.
- There is good teaching and learning of music.
- Very good GCSE results are achieved.
- The increasing popularity of examination courses and extra instrumental lessons.
- Very good assessment procedures that support students' progress well.

Areas for improvement

- More facilities for the use of information and communication technology (ICT).
- Accommodation and staff-time to cope with curricular expansion.
- Further consolidation of extra musical activities.

176 Music is a popular and successful subject in the school. This is substantially due to visionary leadership and good teaching that is helping students to achieve well. Very good assessment procedures are used to monitor students' progress and ensure that they develop individual musical skills to their full potential. GCSE results are among the best in the school and in the county and the provision for extra instrumental tuition has increased dramatically over the last two years. At the time of the inspection, over 100 students have extra instrumental lessons with visiting teachers each week. With the appointment of a new curriculum learning manager two years ago, enthusiasm for music is escalating and the number of GCSE courses is increasing.

177 Standards by the end of Year 9 are close to those expected nationally. In relation to their starting points, students are, by this stage, achieving well. They all learn the basic elements of music as a language and most of them can describe what they hear in the correct technical terms. There is no significant difference in the achievements of boys and girls. Whilst all students learn to play keyboards, a significant number also use the instruments they learn elsewhere in their class lessons. This broadens the scope of their music-making and enables them to improvise and compose in a style appropriate for their instrument. In one lesson, for example, Year 9 students were improvising instrumental introductions to songs they were composing. The variety of instruments in use included guitars, a drum kit and computers as well as keyboards. Students with special educational needs do well. They develop musical skills commensurate with those of others and benefit from playing frequently in ensembles. The progress made by musically talented students is good. The steel band, for example, was heard confidently performing selections of popular tunes like *Little Brown Jug* and *The Saints*. A group of woodwind players was also heard playing together for the first time as an ensemble with considerable musical assurance, enthusiastically preparing pieces for their next concert. The department makes good use of its facilities for information and communication

technology, but more are still needed, in particular, to help younger students to develop their skills in composing. At present, only two of the keyboards in the music room are computer linked, so that relatively few students in Years 7 to 9 can retain and store their work from week to week.

- 178 Standards by the end of Year 11 are above average. Students at this stage achieve particularly well. The school is justifiably proud of its GCSE results in music in 2001. The vast majority of students entered achieved A* to C grades and over half of these were A* and A grades. This proportion of high grades is a significant feature that has been maintained since the previous inspection. The popularity of music as a GCSE subject is increasing and the most able students can now take the subject at the end of Years 9 or 10 and then go on to an AS level music course in Year 11. A wide range of performing skills on a variety of instruments and voices is evident, with a few students achieving the upper grades in Associated Board examinations. Composing skills are above average and reflect students' good understanding of their individually chosen styles. Students make good use of computers to enliven this aspect of their work. Their listening skills are above average. Most can distinguish musical features capably and can justify their opinions in the correct musical terms.
- 179 The quality of teaching is good. Most of it is undertaken by an enthusiastic and experienced music specialist and supplemented by a team of seven visiting instrumental teachers. It was not possible during the inspection to sample the few lessons taught each fortnight by a non-specialist teacher. All the lessons observed were meticulously well organised and students understand what is expected of them. All students work to targets and the teaching is now strongly and successfully related to the new National Curriculum levels of expectation. The quality of students' learning, at GCSE level in particular, is enhanced by the very effective way in which their work is monitored and assessed. Teachers know their students' abilities well and expectations match their individual musical needs. The trust, moreover, that they have in students is a significant factor in the good behaviour and very good relationships observed in lessons. Discipline is firm, friendly and allows sufficient freedom for students to be creative. Students are encouraged to practise independently and take full responsibility for their performing. They are keen to work on their own, and collaboratively in pairs, and, subsequently, to share what they have practised with each other. The music chosen for students to study and explore covers a good variety of cultural styles. Examples were heard during the inspection of groups in Year 9 performing arrangements of a theme from a Baroque concerto and playing their own group compositions of short pieces in Indian style.
- 180 The department is exceptionally well led and efficiently managed. Musically talented students are quickly identified and given opportunities to develop and use their skills. An on-going programme of concerts and musical events is promoted. About 20 students, for example, take part in the Nuneaton Festival of Arts each year. The department is endeavouring to extend the number and quality of extra musical activities still further. The wider consequences of the current explosion of interest in music, however, are that accommodation and staff-time are now being squeezed to cope with the expansion. There is already a small number of classes being taught by a non-specialist teacher and a few lessons are taught in rooms that are not suitable for the teaching of music. Whilst the space available in the music area includes two practice rooms, there are times in the week when these are being used by visiting instrumental teachers. Students having class lessons, thus, have to practise in corridors. This is a very busy department with a visionary leader, who is enthusiastically developing the subject in line with the school's expectations for its students to achieve well. An exciting link has just been established with the Yamaha Music School Project to provide further keyboards and lessons to start later this year.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- Excellent leadership and management of the department.
- Very good teaching that challenges students of all abilities.
- Very good relationships and very positive attitudes of students.
- Well above average GCSE results and above average attainment in Years 8 -11 in core physical education.

Areas for improvement

- Refinement of assessment criteria to guide teaching and learning.
- Build on existing schemes of work and complete those for outdoor education.

- 181 In 2001, results in GCSE examinations in physical education were well above the national average. Girls' and boys' results were very similar. Students' results were better than those attained in their other subjects. Results in GCSE examinations have been improving for several years.
- 182 GCSE students currently in Years 10 and 11 are working to a standard above the national average. The presentation of the majority of students' written work is very good and there is evidence that students undertake much independent research. They draw detailed diagrams and show a good understanding of information processing and how it relates to skill acquisition. Students' attainment is higher in the practical aspects of the course and several boys attain very high levels of personal performance in rugby, football and athletics. Students in a Year 11 lesson used information and communication technology (ICT) to present a revision topic. Their ICT skills and their knowledge of the body systems were good, but they lacked confidence in their presentation skills.
- 183 The majority of students in Years 10 and 11 in the non-examination classes attain standards above those expected nationally. Students' analytical and evaluative skills are well developed because teachers place much emphasis on this strand of the National Curriculum. All students participate in the junior sports leaders award (JSLA). This gives them confidence and self-esteem and helps develop their leadership qualities. Boys in Year 10 have a good knowledge of fitness components and are able to match the most influential component to a specific activity. Several boys have very good technique when putting the shot and throw distances well above the national average.
- 184 In lessons observed, students of all abilities, in all years, made at least good progress. Boys and girls are mostly divided into gender and ability groups for their lessons and those with co-ordination difficulties are also helped by the use of suitable equipment. Students with special educational needs have individual education plans that are adapted to suit the tasks undertaken in physical education. These positive strategies motivate students and illustrate the department's commitment to the inclusion of all students. On entry to the school, students have below average levels of attainment in several activities and by the time they reach the end of Year 9, their attainment is above the national average. This represents very good achievement during their first three years in the school. By the end of Year 7, boys and girls are mostly fit, active and energetic, but are only just beginning to develop secure throwing and catching skills. The majority of students in Year 9 are able to warm up

and stretch independently and effectively. Girls have a good understanding of long jump technique. Many boys in Year 9 are able to triple jump with good technique and achieve above average distances. These above average standards are an improvement on those reported at the previous inspection and have much to do with the better organisation of the programmes of study at both key stages. Students are now given the time and opportunity to study activities in more depth in a group of the same gender and similar ability.

- 185 A few individual students and teams achieve high standards in district and county competitions in athletics, rugby, netball, cricket, hockey, badminton and football. The attainment of these talented students is well above the national average and they benefit considerably from the opportunities offered by the hard work and dedication of their teachers. The numbers of students, who attend extra-curricular activities, and the increased numbers taking the examinations, demonstrate the positive attitudes and involvement of students in the subject. Students look smart and well equipped for their lessons and take part on a regular basis.
- 186 The quality of teaching is very good overall and this promotes very good learning in the majority of lessons. In the best lessons, students benefit in their learning because a wide variety of challenging tasks are set and very good relationships have been established with students. Teachers effectively link practical and theory work and this helps students to understand through their own experiences. Questioning is rigorous and students are challenged, both physically and intellectually. Teachers recap previous work and share the purposes of the lesson with students at the beginning of the lesson. Teachers have a good knowledge of the subject and their demonstrations give students a clear visual image of the activity and show them how to improve their skills. All lessons begin with a health and fitness section and this promotes students' knowledge of this strand of the National Curriculum. However, the emphasis placed on developing students' literacy and numeracy skills is not consistent across the department, though some very good practice was seen during the inspection. Key words, measurements and web sites are displayed in the sports areas and displays are well presented and informative. Marking is consistent and clearly helps GCSE students reach a deeper understanding of the theory of sport. Assessment in Years 7 to 9 is developing and teachers are assessing all four strands of the National Curriculum. However, the level criteria are not matched to specific activities and do not give enough clear information about expected standards at each level.
- 187 The curriculum learning manager provides clear educational direction and excellent leadership for the subject. He leads by very good example with his teaching, supports the newest members of staff well and monitors teaching and marking very regularly. The department's development planning and evaluation is excellent and this has caused extensive improvements to be made to standards and administration since the previous inspection. The school has also gained the Sportsmark award this year. Resources are good. The new ICT equipment is excellent, but the library stock needs further updating. The technician for physical education is an asset to the department. His organisation of equipment allows maximum time to be spent on learning and his use of the digital camera gives students an immediate visual image of their performance. Overall, the facilities for physical education are good with a large sports hall and good quality all-weather pitch, but the sports fields are some distance away and the courts are in poor condition.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The overall quality of provision for religious education is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- The good quality of teaching and learning in the subject.
- The successful establishment of the GCSE short course.
- The improved attitudes and response of students towards the subject.
- The implementation of the department's strategies for supporting literacy development.
- The good contribution religious education makes to the students' personal development.

Areas for Improvement

- Standards in the short course GCSE examination.
- Additional classroom support for students with special educational needs.
- Raising teachers' and students' awareness of the connections between the common elements of the major world religions.
- Provision for and the use of information and communication technology.
- The use of performance data to improve analysis of students' performance and marking that is more focused on subject related targets for individual student improvement.
- Better opportunities for the subject to display student work around the school.

188 Standards of work seen during the inspection are average overall. Those in Years 7 to 9 are in line with the expectations of the Locally Agreed Syllabus. Standards in Years 10 and 11 are broadly average. This is an improvement on the previous inspection when standards throughout the school were below those normally expected. These standards are achieved because the teaching is now good. Teaching was good or better in four fifths of lessons seen. This too is an improvement when compared with the unsatisfactory teaching at the time of the previous inspection. Students' achievements are now satisfactory overall and, by Year 9, are good when compared with their attainment on entry to the school in Year 7. Satisfactory progress during Years 10 and 11 enables students to attain average standards by the end of their time in school. Students' attitudes and behaviour are good in all year groups and these contribute to the quality of students' learning in religious education. As a result, students of all abilities, including those with special educational needs, make sound progress as they move through the school. For these reasons, the overall level of improvement in religious education has been good.

189 In 1999, the school introduced a short course GCSE examination for all students in Years 10 and 11. Results in the first two years were just below the national average. These fell a little in 2001. The school's reason for this related to an unsettled staffing situation, which has now been satisfactorily resolved. Inspection evidence shows that this is a popular course with the students, who gain a great deal from it. Although standards require some improvement, the course makes a good contribution to students' personal development. Teachers plan particularly well for discussion and debate on the spiritual, moral and social issues covered by the examination syllabus.

190 In Year 7, there is a sound emphasis on the building up of students' basic factual knowledge. For example, in one lesson concerning the events of Holy Week, students were satisfactorily able to use their knowledge of the Passover meal, gained in a previous unit, when considering the symbolism of the Last Supper. In Year 8 work on 'What it means to be a Christian', students show a sound understanding of the concepts of death and resurrection and their symbolism through baptism. They

develop their ideas concerning Christian 'praise' and make relevant parallels with 'worship' using contemporary secular examples of football matches and pop concerts. By Year 9, they understand the importance of 'Rites of Passage', such as the Bar Mitzvah ceremony within Judaism, to members of various faiths. In Year 10, students hold informed discussions concerning moral and social dilemmas, such as abortion and euthanasia. In examination revision work in Year 11, students make sound presentations on broader issues of marriage and family life.

- 191 Teachers' marking is always supportive, but is often aimed more at encouragement and recognition of effort than at improving knowledge and understanding. Overall, the teaching places secure emphasis on the development of students' literacy skills. This is well illustrated in students' willingness to read in class in spite of fluency problems for many. Teachers help students to an understanding of more difficult vocabulary, such as defining 'proclaim' in terms of religious praise. However, there are no additional learning support assistants available to help religious education teachers, particularly where there are high numbers of students with special educational needs. Although teachers work diligently to support these students, they are often hard pressed in such circumstances to meet the learning needs of all, especially in relation to recording and written work elements.
- 192 Teaching and learning are good overall because there is an increasing emphasis on the development of the key skills and processes used in religious education. Skills of investigation are encouraged through the asking and posing of relevant questions. Interpretation is developed through enabling the drawing of meaning from symbolism and in the discussion of religious language. Students' spiritual development is encouraged through reflection on peoples' feelings and the personal values of others. However, other key skills, such as analysis of the distinguishing of features of different religions, and synthesis, in the linking of significant features of religions into a meaningful pattern, are less well developed. The teaching tends to concentrate on the particular religion being studied rather than making connections between common elements of the major world religions. In one Year 10 lesson, for example, when studying 'Belief in God', the emphasis was entirely Christian and did not take account of the presence of the Sikh and Muslim students in the class. The overall quality of this lesson was good, but the opportunity to broaden the students' multi-faith understanding was overlooked.
- 193 The leadership and management of religious education are satisfactory overall. The religious education teachers all show a good commitment and capacity to succeed in further improving the school's provision for the subject. However, there are some important additional areas for development. The subject lacks the computer hardware and software to make any effective contribution to the students' information and communication technology education. Data on the students' attainment and progress is now being collected and collated by the curriculum area leader, but this has yet to be fully analysed in a way that helps teacher planning and targeting for individual student improvement. Reporting to parents requires improvement to give a clearer indication as to the standards being achieved by their children. Whilst display work in religious education classrooms is good overall, the subject lacks the display space around the school to further raise the profile of an increasingly successful department.