

INSPECTION REPORT

FURZE PLATT SENIOR SCHOOL

Maidenhead

LEA area: The Royal Borough of Windsor and
Maidenhead

Unique reference number: 110066

Headteacher: Mr A C Hill

Reporting inspector: Paul Cosway
2734

Dates of inspection: 5 – 8 November 2001

Inspection number: 193059

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 to 18 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
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Date of previous inspection:	November 1996

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Furze Platt Senior School is a comprehensive school, educating girls and boys from the age of 11 to 18. The school serves the town of Maidenhead, but a significant minority of pupils come from further afield. It is a relatively advantaged area and the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below the national average, at 5.9 per cent.

The school is popular and over-subscribed. It is larger than average in size. There are 1098 pupils, including many more boys (676) than girls (422). Almost all the pupils are white, which reflects the ethnic composition of the local area, although there is a small number of pupils who represent the rich variety of cultural backgrounds in the United Kingdom, including pupils whose family origin is black African or from the Indian sub-continent. In the case of 40 pupils, English is not their first language and three of these are at an early stage of acquiring English. These figures are slightly higher than average. Just under 10 per cent are on the school's register of special educational need. This proportion is well below the national average. Of these, 17 have full statements – a relatively low proportion. Most pupils on the higher stages of the special educational needs register have moderate learning difficulties. The rest have emotional/behavioural problems, or hearing impairment, or are autistic or dyslexic. The attainment of pupils on entry is close to average, overall.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a very effective school, with many good and very good aspects to its work. Pupils are expected to work hard and most respond well. As a result of this, and the good teaching, pupils achieve very well. By the end of Year 9, they are well above national averages in English, science and mathematics. By the end of Year 11, their attainment in GCSE examinations is well above the national average. Pupils are also taught to be well behaved, and to work collaboratively with others. Their good personal development is supported by the good examples set by all adults who work in the school. There is a good ethos for learning in the school – almost all lessons are brisk and purposeful. The school prides itself on its inclusiveness. It seeks to get the best from all of its pupils and generally succeeds. Very good leadership has ensured that the school has continued to improve its academic performance year on year. The school gives good value for money.

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

- Attainment is well above the national average and pupils make very good progress.
- Teaching is good.
- Pupils develop very positive attitudes to school and to their work. Their behaviour is good across the school.
- The provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is good.
- There are many examples of very good leadership, focused both on raising the attainment of pupils and on providing opportunities for all to succeed.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

- Although both boys and girls attain results in external tests and examinations above the national average, the boys achieve less well than the girls in some subjects.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in November 1996. Results in GCSE examinations have improved consistently over the last five years, above the rate nationally. Attainment at the end of Year 9 has risen broadly in line with the rise nationally. Attendance figures have improved and the rate of permanent exclusion is low. The quality of teaching has improved significantly. The leadership from senior managers is very good and the school has the systems in place to continue to improve. It analyses its performance data well and is using this information to help it to refine its work. Overall, there has been good improvement.

Good progress has been made on addressing the key issues from the last report. The areas that were criticised were science, the use of assessment, development planning, governors' policies, the provision for religious education and design and technology, and the coverage of information technology. Information and communication technology (ICT) is now taught well across the school and there has been very good improvement. The provision for design and technology is now satisfactory. The governing body now has effective systems for reviewing the success of whole-school policies. The use of assessment has improved significantly in Years 7 to 11. Attainment in science has also risen significantly since the last report. However, religious education is still not taught in sufficient quantity in the Sixth Form to meet the statutory requirement.

STANDARDS

The table below shows the standards achieved by pupils at the age of 16 and 18, based on average point scores in GCSE examinations.

Performance in:	Compared with				Key
	all schools			Similar schools	
	1998	1999	2000	2000	
GCSE examinations	B	A	A	A	<i>Well above average</i> A <i>above average</i> B <i>average</i> C <i>below average</i> D <i>well below average</i> E
A Level	C	A	B	A	

The school has sustained high performance in external tests and examinations. For the last four years results have been above or well above the national average at the end of Year 9 and at GCSE. When results are compared with those of similar schools, they are well above average. The GCSE examination results for 2001 showed a slight improvement on those for 2000. Levels of literacy and numeracy are good.

In 2000, English, mathematics and science all produced results well above the national average in the national tests for 14 year olds. Results in mathematics and science were above those in similar schools, and in English well above. In 2001, a weaker cohort in Year 9 attained less well in English and mathematics than their peers in 2000, although results are still likely to be well above average in English and above average in mathematics. Results in science were very similar to those for 2000.

In GCSE examinations, attainment has been high. The proportion of pupils who attained five or more GCSE passes at the higher grades, A* to C, was 59.8 per cent in 2000 and 61 per cent in 2001. In 2000 this was well above the national average and in line with the proportion in similar schools, and this performance was sustained in 2001. The proportion of pupils who attain at least one GCSE pass is below the national average and well below that in similar schools. This proportion did not improve in 2001. For the last two years the school has exceeded its targets for pupils attaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C.

There have been examples of high achievement by subject departments. In 2001, high proportions of entrants in history, music and the separate sciences gained A* or A passes at GCSE. However, compared with their other subjects, pupils tend to attain less well in design and technology and art, even though overall results in the GCSE examinations for these subjects have been above or close to the national average.

In the GCE A Level examinations, attainment was well above average overall in 2000, and this was sustained in 2001.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good: the pupils like their school and are proud of it. They value the opportunities it gives them to learn and to attain good results in examinations.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	The behaviour of pupils in and out of class is good overall. They listen and concentrate in lessons. They are well behaved and considerate around the school.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships are very good. Pupils generally respect their teachers and are respected in return. Pupils' personal development is very good. They develop the skills they need to work together as members of a group, show initiative, and take responsibility for their learning.
Attendance	Good: attendance is above average compared with other secondary schools, reflecting the pupils' and parents' very positive attitudes toward schooling. Pupils learn better because they attend regularly.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

The teaching of English is good overall, with much that is very good. Science is taught satisfactorily. The teaching in mathematics is good overall. Teaching is good across the school. In a third of lessons observed, it was very good or excellent. Across all subjects, out of 78 lessons observed, teaching was less than satisfactory in just one. In most lessons, teachers have high expectations, support learning well and have good relationships with their pupils. As a result, pupils work hard, because they respect their teachers and realise the importance of study. In the best lessons, they understand what they have to do in order to succeed. Very good use of assessment information, shared with the pupils, helps to motivate them and gives them realistic short-term goals. This good practice needs to be shared more widely.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good: the curriculum is good for Years 7 to 9, and is broad and balanced. For the rest of the school, there is a broad range of options, though very few of these are vocational subjects.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	The provision for pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory. Good leadership is raising the quality of provision. Support assistants work hard to meet individual learning needs.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	The pupils for whom English is an additional language receive satisfactory support.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good overall: the provision for social and moral development is very good. The provision for cultural development is good overall, but there is too little emphasis on the multi-cultural aspects of our society. The provision for spiritual development is satisfactory, with many good aspects.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The provision for child protection and the provision for ensuring pupils' welfare are both good.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher, supported by two extremely able deputies, has provided excellent leadership over a number of years and this has brought about sustained improvement. The senior managers provide clear direction for the work of the school. They know the school well and know where to concentrate their efforts to improve it still further. Middle managers are giving effective leadership to their departments or pastoral areas and they monitor work well.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governors fulfil their responsibilities well, helping senior managers to plan for the strategic development of the school as well as monitoring its effectiveness.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Monitoring and assessment data is used effectively to evaluate the school's performance and to plan future development.
The strategic use of resources	Resources are good, and the school makes good use of them for the educational benefit of its pupils. Financial planning is good, and the school applies the principles of best value well.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Almost all agree that the teaching is good; recognise that the school expects children to work hard, and believe that their child is making good progress. • Almost 90 per cent agree that the school is helping their children to grow into responsible adults; recognise that their children like coming to school and that behaviour in school is good overall. • Around 87 per cent believe that the school is well managed and feel comfortable approaching it with problems or concerns. • 80 per cent consider that there is an interesting range of activities outside of lessons. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 16 per cent do not agree that the school works closely enough with them. • 21 per cent do not agree that they are well informed about their child's progress. • 22 per cent are not satisfied with the provision for homework.

The inspection team's findings support the positive views of parents. The homework tasks that are set are appropriate and extend pupils' learning. However, the need for the school to review and monitor its homework policy is recognised in the current school improvement plan. There are some inconsistencies in the setting of homework. The school seeks to work closely with parents and, in general, provides them with good information. However, although the amount of detail about the pupils' progress towards meeting their targets is satisfactory, this could be shared more effectively with parents. The proportions of parents who are pleased with the school are high. The school engenders positive attitudes in parents, and these contribute to the school's success. Some send their children from the neighbouring county to Furze Platt Senior School and consider themselves fortunate to have gained a place. Parents are impressed with the range of extra-curricular activities.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The Sixth Form has grown steadily in recent years and now has 149 students. The level of ability of students on entry to the Sixth Form is above average overall. Students are expected to have gained at least C grades in their GCSE examinations to go on to GCE AS Level study, but there is some flexibility in deserving cases. This is in line with the inclusive education policy of the school, extending learning opportunities as widely as possible within the confines of an academic Sixth Form. The school offers a good range of A Level GCE courses, but only one vocational course.

The students are mainly white, with around three per cent from other ethnic groups, including Indian and Iranian. One student in the Sixth Form has a statement of special educational needs. Small numbers of students transfer into the Sixth Form from other schools each year. Approximately 50 per cent of the pupils in Year 11 stay on to take Post 16 courses, and the retention rate is high. Almost 90 per cent stay on to complete their courses.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

This is an effective Sixth Form, with several very good aspects. Students achieve well. Attainment on entry is above average, and the students make good progress. Attainment in the GCE A and A/S Level examinations was well above the national average in 2000. In 2001, results were equally good. In view of the promising results in the 2001 AS Level examinations and the quality of work seen in lessons, the finding of the inspection is that attainment is likely to be well above average when the next examinations are taken, in 2002. The quality of teaching is good, overall, meeting the needs of students. As a result, they learn well. The leadership and management are good, ensuring that the work of teachers and students is monitored effectively and that students are set appropriate, challenging targets. The Sixth Form is successful, cost effective and gives satisfactory value for money.

WHAT THE SIXTH FORM DOES WELL

- Students achieve well and attain well above average results.
- Students develop good attitudes to study. Their behaviour is good and they work hard.
- Teaching is good overall. Teachers are well qualified and well trained.
- Pupils' personal development is good. They relate well to each other and are mature and responsible.
- There is a good range of enrichment opportunities to extend study beyond the classroom.
- The leadership and management are good and ensure that Sixth Form teachers are supported well.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

- Some Sixth Form teaching is less successful than others at engaging and motivating students to develop their independent learning and research skills.
- Assessment is not used consistently to help students to make progress in their learning.
- The range of courses is very appropriate for the more academic students, but the school does not offer vocational courses for those of its students who would benefit from them.
- The school is not meeting the statutory requirement to teach religious education for sufficient time in the Sixth Form.

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS IN THE SIXTH FORM

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

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
English	Very good: Standards are above average, and teaching is very good because it involves students in responsibility for their learning. The leadership and management of English are very good.
Mathematics	Good: Well above average attainment at A Level in mathematics, as a result of the teachers' very good subject knowledge and confident explanations. An area for improvement is the need to ensure that students are encouraged to think more for themselves.
Chemistry	Good: The results are above average and have shown an improvement over the last three years. The students answer questions well and are willing to take part in discussions. The teaching is good. Marking is not as thorough as it could be.
Physics	Good: good teaching and the thoughtful use of a well structured, thoroughly developed course leads to students achieving well. There is insufficient use of assessment to focus and improve the students' learning, however.
Computer Studies	Very good: there is very good teaching with good practical demonstrations to develop conceptual understanding. Links with industry could be stronger.
Art	Satisfactory, but under new leadership and with a completely new teaching team, standards are improving dramatically.
Music	Very good: Examination results in the summer of 2000 were well above average, and those for 2001 continued the trend with more students taking the examination. Students grasp new concepts well, quickly apply them to new challenges, and achieve very well. Teaching is very good.
History	Very good: In 2001, exam results were much improved and standards seen during the inspection reflected this. The subject is well led. Particular strengths stem from the subject expertise and enthusiasm of all the departmental staff.
Business education	Good: Course planning is good and teachers are very helpful to students, who in turn are confident that their learning is well supported. However, retention rates are low - some students drop out of the course.

Almost all other Sixth Form courses were sampled. Very good and sometimes excellent teaching was observed in general studies, drama and media studies. These subjects are strong in the school. The teaching of biology is satisfactory.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	The educational and personal support and guidance for students is satisfactory. There are good procedures for assessing students' attainment and progress, and the information from assessment is used very well to guide and support individual students in some subjects, such as drama, English, ICT and music. It is not used consistently well in all subjects. Small numbers of teachers do not take the individual learning needs of students into account when they plan their lessons, and sometimes the assessment of students' work, in some science subjects, for example, does not help students to improve their work.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the Sixth Form	The senior staff with responsibility for the Sixth Form carry out their roles well, giving a clear direction to the work of teachers, especially in their pastoral roles. Financial planning is good and there is a good match of teachers to groups and courses. The school's aims are reflected in the planning and work of the Sixth Form.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the Sixth Form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The choice of courses. • Clear accurate information about subjects. • Helpful and constructive advice on choosing subjects. • Help given to settle in to Sixth Form work. • The quality of the teaching. • Teachers' willingness to help if they are having difficulties with their work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The assessment of their work. • The information they get about their progress. • Treatment of them as adults.

The students spoken to during the inspection week praised the school and the quality of education they are receiving. The questionnaire showed that almost all the students enjoy being in the Sixth Form and would advise others to join them. The inspection team agreed with the positive comments made by the large majority of students. More than a third were not satisfied with the information they receive about their progress. The questionnaire was completed early in the autumn term before the monitoring procedures for helping them to understand how well they are progressing had begun. However, the information they get about how to improve their work is too variable between subjects. Teachers do treat them with respect, as young adults, and more than 80 per cent of students believe that the school listens and responds to their views. Overall, this is an effective Sixth Form and the students value their teachers and the opportunities the Sixth Form offers them.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Attainment is well above the national average and pupils make good progress

1. Attainment on entry, for the cohorts that have taken the national tests for 14 year olds and GCSE examinations in recent years, is close to average. Standardised tests at the age of 11 show that the proportion of pupils who are graded as average is higher than would normally be found, but relatively few have scores above average. This reflects the local situation, with selective schools nearby. By the time these pupils have reached Year 9, their attainment in the national tests for 14 year olds is well above average, indicating that they have achieved very well and made good progress. At the age of 16, attainment overall in external examinations is well above average, again indicating good achievement. The performance in GCE A Level examinations has improved steadily in recent years and was well above average in 2000. Generally, girls attain more highly than boys, although this is not true of all subjects. However, both boys and girls have, over recent years, attained better than girls or boys nationally.

2. Over time, English results in the tests for 14 year olds have been better than those in mathematics or science. English results were well above the national average in 1998, 1999 and 2000. Compared with those of similar schools, the 2000 results in English were well above average. Over the last four years, the average point score for all pupils in English has been 3.6 above the national average, indicating that pupils in this school are more than a year head of their peers across the country as a whole. The other two subjects have been slightly more variable, but overall have still have been above national averages. In 2000, both science and mathematics were in fact well above the national average and above those in similar schools. In 2001, although comparative figures were not available at the time of writing, all three subjects are likely to be above the national average, with a weaker cohort of pupils.

3. Attainment in GCSE examinations has shown a rising trend. It has been well above average for the past four years and is likely to be so again when the national comparative figures for 2001 are published. The proportion of pupils who gain five or more GCSE passes at the higher grades (A* to C) has been consistently well above that national average. Between 1996 and 2000, this proportion rose from 50 per cent to 59.8 per cent, rising again, to 61 per cent in 2001. In 1996, the figure of 50 per cent was 7.4 percentage points above the national average. By 2000, the school had risen to be 12.4 percentage points above the national average. This demonstrates very good attainment, improving more rapidly than is the case for the country as a whole.

4. Those who are capable of attaining the highest grades also achieve well. The proportions of pupils who attain A* or A grades at GCSE are high in many subjects and this is true of both boys and girls. In history, for example, 31 per cent of candidates, out of 79 entered, gained these high grades in 2001. Biology is another subject which succeeded in bringing the best out of the higher attaining pupils; 13 of the 29 candidates gained A* or A grades and a further 13 B grades, with the rest all gaining a C grade. There were similar successes in physics and chemistry. In music, for which 21 candidates were entered, two thirds gained A* or A grades. The comparable figures for ICT was a third, and for German and child development it was a quarter. These proportions are significantly higher than those for schools across the country as a whole. The average point score, which measures the overall performance of all the school's candidates, is also significantly above the national average. The overall GCSE performance is well above that of similar schools – for this school these similar schools are in the group with a low proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals. This is a particularly highly attaining group of schools.

5. The lowest attainers seem to do slightly less well than their peers nationally, however. In 2000 and 2001, the proportion of pupils who left at the age of 16 with no GCSE passes was below the national average. This is explained by the inclusive nature of the school; its desire to give a chance of success to all. A small number of pupils who are school refusers are still on the school's roll throughout their time as Year 11 pupils, because the school is still working with them and their families. They do not take GCSE examinations, but are still part of the cohort for the purpose of analysis.

6. The inspection findings indicate that attainment levels in the school are as high currently as the analysis of past test and examination results would indicate. Of all the lessons observed, in only four was attainment judged to be below average. In more than two thirds, it was above average and in over a third well above average. Across the school as a whole, as seen in lessons and in the scrutiny of pupils' work, pupils are achieving well. Numeracy and literacy skills are good. The pupils are confident and articulate speakers and good listeners. Almost all can read accurately and with good understanding for their age by the end of Year 11. Their writing is accurate, after redrafting, and they are competent at adapting their writing style to a range of purposes – such as report writing or expressive writing. In some subjects attainment is particularly strong. Attainment in all aspects of English is well above average. They excel in all aspects of science, especially in the classes studying the separate science subjects, and their understanding and facility in mathematics are well above average. They demonstrate high levels of skill in information and communication technology, art, music and drama, amongst other subjects. There are no subjects in which attainment is below average, and the performing arts are particularly strong in the school.

Teaching is good overall, across the school.

7. Teaching is good overall and this leads to pupils achieving well, because they make good progress, are interested in their studies and develop good learning skills. Across all the lessons seen, teaching was satisfactory or better in almost all. One unsatisfactory lesson was observed out of a total of 78. A third of the teaching observed in the school was very good or excellent, with good teaching in almost two fifths of the lessons seen. The good quality of teaching is a significant factor in the good progress that pupils make. Teaching has improved significantly since the last report, when it was reported that 15 per cent of teaching was unsatisfactory.

8. The teaching of English, mathematics and science is good, with much that is very good, in Years 7 to 11. The teaching of literacy is very good, and numeracy teaching is satisfactory across the school. Information and communication technology is used well in many subjects as an aid to teaching. Work is marked constructively and in enough detail in Years 7 to 11 to give pupils a clear guide to what they can do to improve.

9. Teachers' good subject knowledge, and their knowledge of the pupils and what they need to learn in order to succeed, is a key strength. They care for their pupils and give them good advice and support. The better lessons are purposeful and characterised by high expectations. Pupils have good learning skills, because of the good teaching, and make good progress. In this inclusive school, the teaching meets the needs of all pupils well, including boys and girls alike, the gifted and talented, those with special educational needs, and those for whom English is an additional language. This is generally true, although in some subjects, design and technology for example, groups of lower attaining boys are not motivated as successfully by the teaching as are their counterparts amongst the girls.

10. In the many examples of very good teaching, lessons are very well prepared, so that the resources are to hand and of very good quality, and the teaching strategies interesting. The result is that pupils are motivated and enthusiastic. The teachers' high expectations, very good relationships and management of pupils means that that no time is wasted and

that pupils respond very well to the work the teacher sets. In a Year 11 mathematics lesson on statistics, for example, the lesson got off to a prompt start because the teacher was well prepared. The work sheets were personalised to make them individual to the pupils, catering for their own strengths and weaknesses. The teacher's very good subject knowledge was apparent in the quality and clarity of his explanations, leading to good understanding on the part of the pupils. Crucially, the teacher demonstrated that he had a very good knowledge of examination requirements and his pupils. He was able to use his understanding of how to teach the examination syllabus successfully, covering the aspects of the work where it is likely that pupils will make errors if they are not forewarned to good effect to raise their attainment. This was an important characteristic of teaching in other successful subjects, such as history.

11. The school has worked hard on developing an effective teaching style across all subjects, with a consistent lesson structure, in which aims are shared with the pupils and work reviewed towards the end of the lesson to consolidate learning. In a good design and technology lesson with Year 10 pupils, for example, the teacher's expectations of their behaviour and attitudes were high and the pupils responded well, listening and concentrating. The teacher explained the aim and the purpose of the lesson, as well as reminding them of the resources and tools they were to use. As a result, the pupils set about their tasks quickly, achieving much in the time available. The pupils were drawn together again at specific times in the lesson, so that the teacher could use his very good subject knowledge and expertise to demonstrate skills to them, and their quality of their work improved as a result. There was a good end to the lesson, with a recap of what they had accomplished to consolidate their learning, and the safe storage of tools and equipment.

12. In some lessons that were satisfactory rather than good the pace of learning was slower. In a Year 9 mathematics lesson on the theory of Pythagoras, the teacher had good subject knowledge but was not able to explain clearly enough for all the pupils to understand what they had to do and why. As a result, time was spent answering questions and repeating explanations to those who had not understood the introduction. This slowed down the pace of learning and small numbers of pupils wasted part of the lesson, because they lost concentration. In the one unsatisfactory lesson, the teacher's control and management of a difficult and challenging class was not sufficiently strong to keep them all working, and significant numbers of pupils achieved relatively little. They were not sufficiently motivated to work hard.

Pupils develop very positive attitudes to school and their work. Their behaviour is generally good across the school.

13. Attitudes are very good and the ethos is one that encourages and enables pupils to succeed. Almost all pupils have very positive attitudes to the school. Most have a real desire to succeed, working hard and listening carefully to the advice their teachers offer in order to raise their attainment. Almost all pupils like coming to school, are enthusiastic learners and have a real interest in their education. They are proud of the school and realise that they are fortunate to be part of it. Their parents, through questionnaire responses, indicate that just over 90 per cent of children enjoy coming to school – a high proportion for a secondary school.

14. It is further evidence of the very positive ways in which the pupils view their school that attendance is well above the national average. The great majority of pupils arrive at school punctually. This allows the school day and lessons to begin on time in a calm atmosphere that prepares pupils well for the busy day ahead. The high rates of attendance help pupils to achieve well, because they are not missing lessons.

15. Behaviour is good in lessons. There is a purposeful ethos in almost all classrooms and this helps pupils to learn well. Around the school, pupils are sensible and well behaved.

When pupils are on work experience, representing the school or working as tour guides in school, the people they meet appreciate their good behaviour, good manners and positive attitudes. There was only one permanent exclusion in the year previous to the inspection. This is a low number for a comprehensive school.

16. Relationships between teachers and pupils, and between pupils themselves, are very good and create a supportive and caring atmosphere in which pupils feel secure and comfortable. There was evidence of this in very many lessons. Pupils respect one another's feelings and are supportive of each other in lessons. There was good evidence of this in a physical education lesson in which Year 9 pupils were working on netball skills. The pupils were well behaved and relationships were very good. They listened carefully to the aims of the lesson and then both the teacher and groups of pupils demonstrated catching and throwing techniques. The pupils respected the efforts of their peers, and through sensible and sensitive discussion learned from them in order to improve their own skills. In this very good lesson, pupils of all abilities achieved well. They were all able to refine their own skills because they had learned to be critical but constructive in reviewing each other's performance, helping and supporting one another.

17. Parents are very pleased with the attitudes and behaviour that the school promotes. Almost all of those who responded to the questionnaire said that the behaviour of pupils is good.

The provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is good.

18. The provision which the school makes for pupils' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development is good overall. The provision for the spiritual and cultural development of pupils is good, and very good for their moral and social development. Assemblies are often strongly moving spiritual experiences, as in the Remembrance Assembly, which took place during the inspection. There are good spiritual moments in many lessons, where pupils are encouraged to reflect and lift their perceptions above the material level, but these are not planned. They arise as an outcome of good teaching. For example, in a very good history lesson with a low attaining set, the teacher was helping the pupils to understand the feelings of different groups of people during the Second World War. They struggled at first to understand what was meant, but by the end of the lesson had learnt to reflect on the emotions experienced by people widely different from themselves and to empathise with them. The school promotes pupils' moral development strongly through its very positive approach to behaviour and its emphasis on achievements. Pupils with special educational needs and particular problems are included in all opportunities provided by the school and are well cared for by all members of the school community.

19. Pupils' social development is very well promoted through the School Council, the elected prefect system, support given by older pupils to younger ones in reading, and in form tutor periods. Teachers provide good role models for pupils. There is a good range of educational visits that contributes very effectively to both the social and cultural development of pupils, including many opportunities to visit London theatres. Citizenship forms part of the personal, social and health education programme. Through the subjects of the curriculum like art, music, drama and English, the school provides well for pupils' cultural development. There is a plan for a combined focus on Africa in a co-operative creative arts programme for Year 7 later in the year. However, there is insufficient emphasis, in this largely monocultural school, upon the multicultural aspects of today's world. Religious education is part of the curriculum in Years 7 to 11 and the course includes significant amounts of information and the opportunities for sensitive discussions about world faiths. Art and music provide some further insights into the richness of the major cultures of the world, but there is little coverage outside these subject disciplines. Prayers are offered in assemblies, but the requirement for

a daily collective act of worship is not consistently met on days when tutor groups do not have assemblies.

There are many examples of very good leadership, focused both on raising the attainment of pupils and on providing opportunities for all to succeed.

20. The leadership and management of the school by the headteacher are excellent, and he is ably supported by the deputy headteachers and the senior and middle managers. The governing body fulfils its responsibilities well. Governors have a strategic role in the development of the school and monitor its work and its finances effectively. The senior management team and heads of department monitor the school's performance very well and this is an area of strength. As a result of this analysis, effective action is taken to improve the work of the school. This has led to good progress since the time of the last report and the school is well placed to improve in future. Resources are deployed well to improve the quality of education, and the school succeeds well in getting the best value from its use of its funds and resources. Levels of staffing are good. The teaching staff is well qualified and all teach their specialist subjects. The learning support assistants are very well deployed, are sufficient in number to meet the needs of pupils, and are supporting pupils' learning very effectively. Leadership and management are very good across the school as a whole.

21. The headteacher, along with the other senior managers, provides very clear direction for the work of the school. The senior managers have a clear vision of a high attaining school that is inclusive and seeks to develop every aspect of the child. Leadership is honest, open and clear. Its success can be judged by the sustained high standards of care and personal development since the last report, alongside continually improving examination performance. The senior managers do not want to see any child suffer because he or she did not pass a selection examination at the age of eleven to go to a selective school. They seek to raise the self-esteem of their pupils so that they believe that they can succeed and will. The result is strong leadership in those areas that matter, including the personal development of pupils. The evidence of success of this can be seen in two areas. The first is the very good and positive attitudes to the school shown by all pupils and witnessed by their parents. The second is the overall achievement of pupils. The entry profile shows few pupils with attainment well above average. At the end of Year 11, pupils' attainment overall is well above average, with a high proportion gaining A* and A grades in a significant number of subjects.

22. Performance management is securely in place. The most recent review by an external assessor gave it the highest possible grade for implementation and effectiveness. The effective monitoring systems include senior managers being linked to heads of department to support them in the monitoring of work in subject areas, and these systems are coupled to very good procedures for professional development. The headteacher is aware that the process of monitoring teachers' work can seem to be threatening; he is sensitive to this problem and works hard to minimise it. The process is open and helpful. Staff meetings include regular professional development opportunities. There is evidence that members of staff are kept up to date with what is going on in the school and that information is exchanged between teachers quickly and efficiently. Almost all heads of department are providing very good leadership for their departments and carry out effectively the process of monitoring the staff in their charge.

23. The improvement in the work of the science department since the last inspection is a good example of initiatives that have emanated from senior managers. This department has improved its results significantly year on year. From being a serious concern, results are now well above average in science and high in the separate sciences for those pupils who choose to take chemistry, physics and biology as separate subjects. The quality of teaching and the leadership has improved very significantly since the last report, as a result of hard work from the science staff and the help and guidance of senior managers. This is clear evidence that the headteacher, deputies and assistant headteachers have vision, understand where improvements are needed, and have the leadership and management skills to implement development successfully.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Although both boys and girls attain results in external tests and examinations above the national average, the boys achieve less well than the girls in some subjects.

24. In general, girls achieve well in all their subjects. Almost all the girls in the school are motivated and hard working. Analysis of the girls' results in GCSE examinations in recent years shows that they do equally well across all subjects. Their motivation, hard work and responsible attitudes are generally typical of girls in this school, and ensure that they achieve well. Their final results are less dependent on the quality of provision than are those of boys. In the national tests at the end of Year 9, in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, their levels of attainment have been consistently above the national average. In the three years from 1998 to 2000, for example, across all three core subjects, girls have always been around three points above the average for girls across the country as a whole. This represents attainment about a year ahead of the average nationally. Boys' attainment has varied much more widely. In 1998, they were 4 points above the national average for boys. In 1999, they dropped to be almost equal with boys across the country as a whole. In 2000, they rose to be 2.6 points above the national average for boys. Over the whole of this period, although their attainment is above that of boys nationally overall, they have under-performed compared with girls.

25. In GCSE examinations, boys' performance overall is lower than that of girls, following the national trend. It is also more uneven. Girls' attainment has risen steadily in recent years. In 1998, their average point score in GCSE examinations was 3.3 points above that for girls nationally. In 2000, it was 8.5 points above and it is likely to be 12 points above in 2001. Boys were 6.6 points above the national average for boys in 1998. In 1999 they were 10.5 points above. Their point score has dropped steadily since then. Their attainment is more uneven across subjects than that of girls. They achieve much better in some subjects than others, doing well in information and communication technology, business studies and the sciences, for example, and relatively poorly in design and technology and art.

26. Lesson observations showed that when the quality of teaching was good or very good, boys and girls achieved equally well. In these lessons, the teacher presented the work in an interesting way that made it relevant and exciting both to boys and to girls. Boys were motivated and they worked hard. The aims of the lesson were made clear to the pupils and they were short-term aims that could be met in a single lesson or a short period of time. This gave boys a clear, short-term goal which they felt that they could achieve, and they responded well to this. In a history lesson with a low attaining set, for example, the teacher was very sensitive to the needs of the boys in her class. Although the work was challenging and the text she was using was difficult, the pupils, boys and girls alike, rose to the challenge well and met her high expectations for their work and behaviour. They used a range of sources to explore the reactions of the general public to government restrictions in wartime Britain. They had a single objective, which was achievable within the time available and was clearly understood. The teacher stopped the class when it was clear that further guidance

was required, and supported individuals who needed additional help. At the end of this very good lesson, all had made good progress and come to grips with challenging abstract concepts. In a design and technology lesson that was satisfactory but less successful, pupils responded in very different ways. The girls began to plan and prepare their work carefully for an assignment that was beginning that lesson. The boys went straight to the equipment and began the practical work, without giving sufficient thought or care to the presentation and the planning. The girls were making good progress across the whole range of the skills required by the subject: the boys were not. This was partly because, given a number of teaching objectives, they had immediately begun to tackle the one that motivated them most, the most practical one, and partly because the teacher had not made the earlier objectives clear or interesting enough.

27. There are many more boys and girls in the school. If the school is to sustain and improve on its good performance at GCSE, especially with the lower attaining boys who are more difficult to motivate than the girls, then it needs to review carefully the teaching strategies that are used in those subjects where boys achieve well, and adopt them in the less successful subjects.

28. The following areas for further development were identified by the inspection team. In some otherwise satisfactory lessons, the match of task to the attainment of pupils is inaccurate, which results in higher attaining pupils underachieving as they finished early or found the work too easy. Where there was no support, lower attaining pupils sometimes found the work difficult and so struggled. In a few examples, their frustration led to them losing interest and becoming disruptive. This was especially a problem with boys. Teachers mark work regularly, but not all make comments about how work can be improved. In some lessons, across a number of subjects, there is predominantly one style of teaching, that of working as a whole class. Although this can be successful for a short time, it gives little opportunity for pupils to engage in sustained dialogue or discussion. Boys often respond well to the opportunity to discuss in class and using this technique can help to motivate them.

29. Some teachers made the aim of the lesson clear to pupils so that they knew what was expected of them. Where this was happening, pupils' learning was good. It did not happen in all lessons. Sometimes there were too many aims and some boys found this confusing. If the aim were attainable in a short time and concrete, as in the earlier example, they tended to respond well. In Years 10 and 11, many teachers use the GCSE syllabus as guidance and so do not plan lessons in detail. This works well for experienced teachers, who understand the best way to teach examination skills to their pupils, but it is less successful for newer teachers, who need to plan more thoroughly.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

30. This is a successful school. In order to continue to improve and to raise levels of attainment even further, the governors, headteacher and teaching staff, with the support of the local education authority, should:

- Continue to seek ways of raising the attainment of boys in subjects which, at GCSE, are relatively less successful than others, by ensuring that boys make the best possible progress in their learning. In order to do this, they should:
 - * continue to focus the monitoring of teaching and learning on the recognition and sharing of the most successful practice, including clear, shared lesson aims and thoroughly planned lessons, appropriate for all pupils in the classes;
 - * ensure that the expectations of pupils and teachers are equally high across all subjects.

THE SIXTH FORM

- Key Issues:
 - * There is a variation in attainment between courses. The school needs to identify and share best practice in order to ensure that all students are fully involved in their lessons and able to work independently.
 - * Assessment is not always used consistently to help students to make progress in their learning.
 - * The range of courses is very appropriate for the more academic students, but the school does not offer vocational courses for those of its students who would benefit from them.
 - * The school is not meeting the statutory requirement to teach religious education for sufficient time in the Sixth Form.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	29
	Years 12 - 13	49
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		22

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

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

Number	0	9	10	9	1	0	0
Percentage	0	31	35	31	3	0	0

The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching. Care should be taken when interpreting the percentages for Years 7 – 11 as each lesson represents more than three percentage points.

Years 12 - 13

Number	1	17	17	14	0	0	0
Percentage	2	35	35	28	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. Care should be taken when interpreting the percentages for Years 7 – 11 as each lesson represents more than two percentage points.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth Form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	949	149
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	47	0

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth Form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	17	1
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	98	1

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	40

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	24
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	34

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	7.9
National comparative data	7.7

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.9
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year:	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
		2000	125	65

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	105	98	92
	Girls	62	56	62
	Total	167	154	154
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	School	88	81	75
	National	63 (63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 6 or above	School	24	32	23
	National	28 (28)	42 (38)	30 (23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	91	91	77
	Girls	58	56	54
	Total	149	147	131
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	School	78	77	69
	National	64 (64)	66 (64)	62 (60)
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 6 or above	School	26	26	23
	National	31 (31)	39 (37)	29 (28)

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
	2000	114	70	184

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	46.4 (46)
	National	38.4 (38.0)

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

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	61	100	106
	Girls	49	67	69
	Total	110	167	175
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	59.8(53.8)	90.8(98.9)	95.1(98.9)
	National	47.4 (46.6)	90.6 (90.9)	95.6 (95.8)

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

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

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-Level or AS-Level examinations:	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	30	23	53

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-Levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-Levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	23.3(18.0) c	21.1(20.2)	22.4 (18.8)	1.7(1.8)	5(1.8)	3.6 (1.8)
National	17.8	18.6	18.2 (17.9)	2.6	2.9	2.7 (2.8)

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

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	1
Black – African heritage	1
Black – other	3
Indian	11
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	1032
Any other minority ethnic group	13

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	6	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	91	1
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)	67.02
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.3

Education support staff:

Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	19
Total aggregate hours worked per week	367

Deployment of teachers:

Y7 – Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	72.3
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Average teaching group size:

Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	24.2
Key Stage 4	23.3

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000/2001
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	£
Total income	2864448.00
Total expenditure	2828562.00
Expenditure per pupil	2612.00
Balance brought forward from previous year	35886.00
Balance carried forward to next year	0.00

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	26.2
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	26.2

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

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out
Number of questionnaires returned

1098
422

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	35	54	9	1	0
My child is making good progress in school.	32	57	4	0	6
Behaviour in the school is good.	20	58	8	2	12
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	19	55	19	3	4
The teaching is good.	25	60	3	0	11
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	21	50	17	4	8
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	52	40	5	1	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	46	49	3	0	2
The school works closely with parents.	25	53	14	2	6
The school is well led and managed.	43	48	2	0	7
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	32	57	4	0	6
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	30	50	5	2	13

THE SIXTH FORM'S RESULTS AND STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

31. This is an academic Sixth Form, providing GCE AS and A2 Level courses. There is a minimum requirement of five GCSE passes at grades A* to C, although some students are accepted with lower qualifications if there are good indications that they would benefit from A Level study. Small numbers of students enter the Sixth Form from other schools. Some subjects, such as mathematics, look for a minimum grade of B at GCSE from those intending to pursue their subject at A Level. Overall, attainment on entry to the Sixth Form is above average. A Level and AS Level GCE results are well above average and have been so for the past two years. Analysis of students' final grades, in comparison with their predicted grades based on their performance in their GCSE examinations, indicates that they achieve well. Almost half exceed their predicted grades. The school is meeting its targets for Sixth Form performance, and the targets it sets are appropriate.

32. Almost all students achieve well in the Sixth Form, including those with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language, and levels of retention are good.

33. The attainment of students in the Sixth Form who were entered for two or more GCE A and A/S Level courses, or the equivalent vocational courses, was well above the national average in 2000. Their average point score, the measure of overall attainment, was 22.4 compared with 18.2 nationally. It has risen steadily from 1996 (when it was 14.9) onwards. Achievement was maintained against national averages in 2001 at 20 points per student, despite the lower attainment on entry of this cohort of students. The students achieved well when results are analysed by comparing them against their performance at GCSE.

34. In 2000, chemistry, communication studies, computer studies, English literature, general studies, mathematics and history were the most successful of the courses run in the Sixth Form. The average point score in these subjects was above or well above the national average. Results were low in art and biology, where the pass rates were low. Numbers were too small in most AS Level examinations for meaningful comparison with national figures, but students achieved particularly well in mathematics and business.

35. In 2001, results in GCE A Level examinations showed a similar pattern to that in 2000, except that theatre studies and design and technology were above average. Entry levels for most AS Level examinations were much higher than in 2000, but national comparative information was not available at the time of the inspection. Students achieved well, overall. Of 225 entries, 37 A grades were awarded and a total of 121 grades in the A to C range. There was good performance in 2001 at AS Level in chemistry, physics, computing, English, history, music and mathematics. Of the 225 subject entries, almost 200 resulted in at least pass grades. Results in biology, business studies and drama were relatively weak.

36. The finding of the inspection is that students are attaining above the national average levels in most subjects now, achieving well and making good progress. There are no significant differences in achievement between male and female students. Standards of students' oral and written skills are good. In English, media studies and history – amongst other subjects - they debate and discuss well, helping them to a better understanding of the texts they are studying.

37. Particularly good work was seen in English, for example, where very good teaching, along with a very good understanding of the individual needs of students and how to move them forward in their learning, is helping students to make very good progress. There is a detailed commentary on the subjects of the Sixth Form curriculum in Part E of the report. Standards attained in mathematics at the end of Year 13 are well above national averages. Students can solve quadratic and simultaneous equations. In statistics, they have a good understanding of permutations and combinations. The students' attainment in physics is always at least satisfactory and the Year 13 students are above average overall. The AS

students are already starting to grasp the physical and optical properties of materials. Chemistry students in Year 12 are achieving well. They show good knowledge and understanding. The standard of work at Year 13 is above average. These students achieved well in their AS examinations. In the lesson seen, a group of students were tackling calculations well.

38. Standards of work seen in history were high. In English, standards in GCE AS and A-Level examinations are above average. The standard of work of the current students is also above average in music in both years, due to dedicated teaching of the music staff and the students' very good attitude towards the subject.

39. In art, Year 12 students are currently achieving standards that are above average. They have very good observational and analytical skills. Year 13, however, retain many of the shortcomings reported in the previous inspection. Their work is tentative.

40. In computer studies, high standards are reflected in the lessons seen, the work in the students' files, and discussions with students about their work. They have the ability to talk with knowledge and confidence about the subject. In business, standards of work, particularly from those students in Year 13, are very good. Most students show high levels of achievement. They are able to apply business concepts to a wide range of contexts and show a sophisticated grasp of contemporary business issues.

41. In drama, attainment is close to the national average, even though attainment on entry to the courses is relatively low, and this signifies that students achieve well. Attainment in A Level biology is slightly below average.

Sixth Form students' attitudes, values and personal development

42. Sixth Form students are keen to come to school and have positive attitudes to learning. They are interested in their work, concentrate well and are involved in their lessons. They are keen to learn, well motivated and respond well to the good teaching and interesting work. Students listen attentively and are eager to answer questions. They participate in discussion and contribute their ideas. Students show that they can take responsibility for some aspects of their own learning, carefully making notes in many of their lessons, for example. Most show independence in their studies, though some need help in taking responsibility for planning their work and undertaking additional research.

43. Relationships are good. They are based on a mutual respect between students and staff. Students work well together, supporting each other and sharing ideas. During their time in the Sixth Form, students mature and grow in confidence in response to the positive and supportive atmosphere in the school. Attendance is good. There is little absence and most students complete the courses they start, developing positive attitudes to continued education beyond school.

44. In the questionnaire that students completed for the inspection, most students recognised the care that the school takes in preparing students for entry into the Sixth Form. The induction arrangements for students are good and this helps them to adapt quickly to the demands of life and work Post 16. The programme of guidance is well structured. The questionnaire also revealed that almost all of the students are happy in the Sixth Form and would recommend it to others. This shows the positive attitudes and the pride in the school that are features of Sixth Form life.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT IN THE SIXTH FORM?

45. In the Sixth Form, teaching was good, very good or excellent in more than two thirds of the lessons observed. Of these, more than half were very good or excellent. It was satisfactory in a third: no unsatisfactory teaching was seen in the Sixth Form. The students are mature and responsible learners, as a result of the generally very good provision. The best teaching is helping students to develop independent learning and research skills.

46. Teachers have good subject knowledge and plan lessons well, progressively building students' knowledge, skills and confidence. All lessons have clear learning objectives, shared with the students so that they know what is expected of them. Expectations are generally high. In the better lessons, students are challenged and expected to make significant gains in learning. Most teachers structure the work and offer individual support and guidance to ensure that students make progress in their learning. The good pace of learning is a feature of the better lessons. Teaching is brisk and considerable amounts are covered in each session. Students are regularly reminded of how much time is left and what they still have to cover. All teachers are enthusiastic about the subjects they are teaching and most plan interesting lessons, so that this enthusiasm motivates and interests their students. This increases their commitment, ensures their concentration and encourages them to work hard. An A Level geography lesson with Year 13 students was an example of very good teaching. After the students had carried out a practice examination task, the teacher shared the mark scheme with them so that they could assess their own work. They found this fascinating and it gave them a very good insight into how they should present their knowledge in order to gain high grades. The teacher was prepared to step back at critical moments throughout the lesson and to let the students find things out for themselves. Very good planning and resourcing were also keys to success. Two drama lessons were observed. In one, teaching was very good; in the other it was excellent. The teacher's very good subject knowledge and expertise were evident in both. She too had prepared very thoroughly, written excellent lesson plans, taken into account the individual strengths and weaknesses of her students, and allowed them the space to develop their own ideas and to learn from their successes and failures.

47. Where teaching is satisfactory, the students make satisfactory progress in the lesson, but the level of challenge is lower than in the better lessons and the students are more passive. There is a narrower range of teaching styles. The students are not as interested or motivated. They are doing less for themselves, and their independent learning and research skills are not being developed as fully. In a biology lesson with Year 13 students, the teacher was returning and reviewing test papers. The mark scheme was not shared with the students to enable them to see how to improve their grades. There was very little involvement of students in the lesson. It was dominated too much by the teacher, and when questions were asked, it was only to a few of the students. The lesson started late and finished early, reducing the opportunities for learning. It was satisfactory because the teacher had good subject knowledge and the students made progress, but more could have been achieved. No unsatisfactory lessons were observed in the Sixth Form, but the quality of teaching is too variable. The school needs to review the quality of provision and teaching across Sixth Form courses. The use of resources and of assessment by teachers, along with the range of teaching strategies employed to develop research skills and independence, needs to be extended in those areas where provision is satisfactory rather than good or very good. Teachers should build on the experience and expertise available in those subject areas where students' achievement is high.

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

48. The Sixth Form curriculum is dedicated primarily to academic studies and to students who wish to follow a course of study based on GCE A Level subjects. Within this context, the quality and range of subjects offered is good. The curriculum meets the needs of these students well. The school researches into the needs of students through consultation meetings with students and their parents towards the end of Year 11. As a result, the courses available match the needs and aspirations of the students well and build effectively on their levels of attainment at GCSE. In most cases their Sixth Form teachers are aware of these and take them into account when assessing progress and planning lessons. The school gives a high priority to preparing pupils for the Sixth Form. Good attention is given to the transition period. The Year 12 students, whilst describing the move from Year 11 to the Sixth Form as a big step, appreciated the support they were given.

49. Overall, the Sixth Form curriculum is satisfactory, reflecting a balance of current strengths and areas yet to be developed. Forty five percent of Year 11 students enter the Sixth Form. They normally have a minimum of five A* - C GCSE grades and the school provides very well for their needs. The wide range of A Level subjects enables them to select a balanced curriculum that builds on previous learning and offers the opportunity to study new subjects. However, there is only one course which is vocationally based, namely business studies A Level. Although Year 11 students who have opted not to stay on are given advice about non-A Level courses, the local provision is fragmented. Senior managers are aware of this issue, and they are involved in a local initiative led by headteachers to extend these opportunities through the introduction of a consortium arrangement with other schools.

50. Statutory requirements for the teaching of religious education are not met. There is not a consistent pattern of provision. However, students who take general studies study religion as part of the course. In addition, elements related to religious education are taught through the personal, social and health education course that is followed by all students. A successful general studies programme enriches the curriculum, as does access to a very good range of extra-curricular activities, including Young Enterprise. A range of sports is offered, and both female and male students are able to play representative sport for the school. Sport can also be followed as a leisure activity. Music and drama are available as Sixth Form extra-curricular activities. Students are also active in fund-raising for charity. Many subjects, such as maths, history and science, offer good opportunities to broaden the students' experiences beyond the work in class. Provision for students with special education needs is satisfactory. Study facilities and access to computers for independent study are only just satisfactory. An imminent rebuilding programme will provide a new library and resource centre with more computers, solving the problems over access. Students are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning, but the extent to which this is done varies from subject to subject.

51. The governors make valuable contributions to the development of the Sixth Form curriculum, taking a strategic role in the planning of the curriculum. The tutorial programme is good. Provision for the personal and social education of students is of good quality and was recognised and valued in the response that students made in their questionnaire.

52. Satisfactory provision is made for students to develop their key skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT, but this is not done through a planned programme. Skills are taught within subject areas as they are needed. Provision is therefore uneven and the school needs to review the present arrangements. Provision for students with special educational needs is satisfactory and there are no students with English as an additional language who are at an early stage of acquiring English.

Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Education in the Sixth Form

53. The school provides a number of activities which further enrich the curriculum beyond basic subject requirements, and which contribute towards their continuing spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The spiritual and cultural provision is judged as satisfactory, and the moral and social as very good. The overall judgement of this aspect is that provision is good.

54. There is an element of religious education in the Sixth Form general studies programme, but this is neither systematic nor sufficient. Assemblies are of good quality and include spiritual moments, but they take place only twice a week. In addition, however, some students are provided with spiritual experiences in their subject studies, as, for example, when they encounter great music or literature. The very good activities that promote moral and social understanding in school include a well developed and effective prefect system, the Sixth Form Council, and the support which these older students provide for younger pupils. There is strong moral awareness, and support for such world initiatives as Amnesty, together with committed fundraising. All students offer community service inside and outside school, for example helping in a charity shop. Cultural development is good in the strong teaching of such subjects as music and English, but in the school's overall provision there is insufficient understanding of the need to compensate for students' lack of experience of the world as a multi-cultural society.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS SIXTH FORM STUDENTS?

Assessment

55. Overall, the procedures for assessing students' attainment and progress are satisfactory, with many very good features which provide support and guidance for students. The school has a useful database on individual students, based on results of national tests at the end of Year 9 and on GCSE results. Performance is also analysed by means of externally produced formulae and national information to predict attainment grades in the Sixth Form. The school organises regular reviews of students' progress. These include the setting of minimum target grades based on GCSE performance and the half-termly formal assessment, which together form the basis for the academic monitoring of students. The school is continually developing and refining its arrangements for assessment and monitoring in the Sixth Form and has recently decided to adopt the twice yearly 'academic review tutorials' which are currently running successfully in the main school. At these, students, tutors and parents meet to agree general learning targets and specific individual learning programmes are decided, especially to help students who are likely to fall short of their targets to get back on course.

56. Students respond positively to the setting of targets, with many exceeding their minimum target grades: in 58 per cent of cases, students' final grades in their GCE A Level examination subjects exceeded their minimum target grade in 2001. In addition, under-achieving students are identified by subject teachers at any time during the year and appropriate additional study activities are agreed with students and tutors. Information on pupils' progress is used particularly effectively in drama, English, information and communication technology, mathematics and music. However, it is not used well in all subjects. This is shown in the results of the students' questionnaire, where most students stated that they feel well informed and motivated by the assessment process, but around 30 per cent did not.

57. Marking of students' work is generally both informative and thorough. In English, for example, technical errors are almost all corrected and there is a commentary on students' work in the text and at the end. In information and communication technology, marking is

also thorough and assessment is used to inform curriculum planning. In business, which has a large weighting of coursework, effective assessment systems are in place, giving students a clear idea of progress. Occasionally, work is not marked promptly by teachers and errors are not indicated. Not enough information is given in the form of comments to help students improve. A few teachers do not take the individual learning needs of students into account when they plan their lessons. In some science subjects, for example, the assessment of students' work is infrequent and does not help students to make progress.

Advice, support and guidance

58. The induction arrangements for students are good: the programme, with many good features, begins in Year 11. The school provides a satisfactory level of support and guidance for its Sixth Form students, which meets their wide variety of personal and educational needs. Their personal development is carefully monitored. The head of Sixth Form, form tutors and subject staff all know the students well and are willing to give as much help as they can to ensure that the students, including any who have special needs, achieve well. Students have confidence in their tutors and find them approachable and accessible. In the questionnaire returns, the students were particularly complimentary about the help given to them by their teachers: around 90 per cent of students think that their teachers give them good help and advice with their studies. Procedures for the health and safety of students are managed well, with experienced staff taking a lead in this area. A full assessment of the site and premises is carried out annually. Issues for action are recorded and any action required is appropriately carried out. Equipment is subject to annual checks. The school has good procedures to record and monitor attendance in the Sixth Form. Subject teachers monitor students' attendance in lessons and this is a good method for checking that they remain in school during the day. Students are expected to sign out when they leave the premises.

59. Careers education is satisfactory. Students have access to guidance from experienced advisers and there are up-to-date reference materials in the school, including access to the Internet and other computer-based information, such as CD ROMS. There are suitably resourced areas within the library, but these are barely adequate and they are due to be re-organised. Students are given good guidance on further and higher education courses.

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

60. Parents are very supportive and believe that their children enjoy coming to school. Those who returned the questionnaires and attended the parents' meeting were happy with the school and what it achieves. In contrast, about 30 per cent of the students who completed their questionnaire expressed concerns about some aspects of their life as Sixth Formers. They feel the school offers too little advice about future careers and college courses. Some students do not feel they are kept sufficiently well informed about their progress.

61. In the course of discussions with students, however, a different picture emerges. They talk very positively about the support and care given by staff. They feel they are being treated as adults and that the support given to them is good. Because of the timing of the inspection, in the autumn term, the questionnaires were completed before the Year 12

students had had their first academic review, and prior to the commencement of advice on careers and further education courses. Their questionnaire responses show that a very high proportion, around 90 per cent, enjoy their time in the Sixth Form and would recommend this school's Sixth Form provision to potential students.

HOW WELL IS THE SIXTH FORM LED AND MANAGED?

Leadership and management

62. The head of Sixth Form and the school's senior management team provide a clear direction for the work and development of the Sixth Form. The school's aims are fully reflected in the planning and work of the Sixth Form – partnership, challenge, the enjoyment of learning and the development of intellectual potential. The members of staff with responsibility for the Sixth Form carry out their roles well, providing good guidance to teachers and students. The monitoring of results in external examination and internal tests is done well; the monitoring of teaching is at an earlier stage of development and needs to be increased. The head of Sixth Form works well with the school's senior management team and governors in the strategic planning of Sixth Form development. All Sixth Form tutors are effective in mentoring students. The quality of this, based on the system of target setting and tracking of pupils' progress, is a growing area of strength in the provision for Sixth Formers, but it is not yet consistently good across the school.

63. The quality of teaching accommodation for Sixth Form students is at least satisfactory and, in some subjects, such as drama and music, it is good. The students have their own common room. This facility, though sometimes cramped because of the number of users, is much appreciated. Overall, the school has sufficient accommodation and specialist facilities to meet the requirements of the National Curriculum and the Sixth Form curriculum on offer. School accommodation is in good decorative order and complemented by students' framed art work. Recent work has seen the provision of new tennis courts and the refurbishment of toilets and a science laboratory. Within the school, students have barely adequate access to computers in the library, and a satisfactory number of machines is available for use in classrooms. The library is quiet and comfortable, is well cared for, and provides a good place for students to study quietly, but the learning resources available for Sixth Formers in the library could usefully be extended: there are barely sufficient books for any subject. Plans have been agreed for an extension. Resources in the school library are presently insufficient, though background texts and appropriate journals are usefully supplied in some curriculum areas such as history and mathematics. Overall, the provision of learning resources in the Sixth Form is adequate, with suitable textbooks and resources provided for in departmental areas.

64. All members of staff are teaching subjects for which they have suitable qualifications: the match between the qualifications and experience of the staff to the demands of the Sixth Form curriculum is good. The procedures for the professional development of staff in the Sixth Form are very good, as they are in the whole school, with a firm focus on teaching and learning supported by the school's advanced skills teacher. Professional development is linked well to the school's priorities and external initiatives such as the introduction of new curriculum in the Sixth Form. Induction of newly qualified teachers and the school's strong involvement in teacher training confirm that training and professional development remain thorough and well managed, as reported in the last inspection. Teachers are well qualified and teach to their specialisms, especially in the Sixth Form. Procedures for performance management are firmly embedded in the school's practice. The process is well documented and rigorous, with targets linked to continuing professional development.

65. Financial planning is very good. Costs in the Sixth Form are carefully balanced with those of the rest of the school. The school monitors carefully the expenditure allocated to the Sixth Form and there is a very close match between the Sixth Form expenditure and that for the main school

66. The school is meeting the challenge of resourcing the new arrangements for Post 16 courses in a positive way. Each year, the headteacher and the member of staff with responsibility for the timetable collaborate early over projected numbers in Years 12 and 13, and governors are involved in strategic decisions over levels of funding and staffing to provide a breadth of courses and choice for the students.

67. The principles of best value are firmly in place and support every major budget decision, as well as the day-to-day management of the school. Through careful awarding of contracts, the school has been able to return money to the education of its pupils. Students achieve well, the quality of education the sixth form provides is good, and the cost per pupil is close to the national average. Overall, the Sixth Form gives good value for money.

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

68. In the inspection, nine subjects and courses were inspected and are reported on in detail. Work in other subjects and courses was sampled and contributed to the overall picture of teaching and learning in the school.

69. The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2000.

GCE A-Level courses 2000

Subject	Number entered	per cent gaining grades A-E		per cent gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	12	100	89	67	45	7.00	5.99
Physics	6	83	88	50	41	5.00	5.72
Chemistry	7	100	89	71	30	8.29	5.87
Biology	4	50	88	50	34	5.00	5.28
Communication studies	7	100	93	71	30	8.57	5.42
Computer studies	5	100	85	40	23	6.40	4.57
Economics	14	93	88	36	36	5.71	5.41
Art and design	2	50	96	0	45	1.00	6.42
Music	1	100	93	100	35	10.00	5.72
Geography	5	100	92	40	37	6.40	5.73
History	13	77	89	25	41	4.46	5.43
Sociology	14	100	88	43	35	6.86	5.34
English	19	100	96	42	36	6.84	5.90
French	6	100	91	17	39	6.00	5.74
Other languages	8	88	92	25	41	4.75	5.88

GCE AS-Level courses 2000

Subject	Number entered	per cent gaining grades A-E		per cent gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
General Studies	1	100	72	0	18	1.00	1.87
Mathematics	6	100	63	17	17	2.00	1.56
Physics	2	50	53	50	8	2.50	1.08
Social Studies	1	100	70	0	18	1.00	1.72
Business	8	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	12.00	10.78

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES IN THE SIXTH FORM

There was a focus on mathematics, physics and chemistry, but lessons of biology were also sampled.

MATHEMATICS

70. Overall the quality of provision in mathematics is good.

Strengths:

- Well above average attainment at A Level in mathematics.
- The teachers' very good subject knowledge and confident explanations.
- The positive and supportive relationships between teachers and students.

Areas for improvement:

- The need to ensure that students are more actively engaged in mathematical thinking.
- The development of a school numeracy policy to support mathematics across the curriculum in the Sixth Form.

71. Students' results in the mathematics A and AS Level examinations in 2000 were well above national averages. In the A Level examination, 100 per cent of the students achieved a pass grade and 67 per cent achieved the higher A and B grades. In the AS Level examination, 63 per cent of the students achieved a pass grade and 17 per cent achieved the higher A and B grades. The results in 2001 showed a drop in the A Level results. However, there was an improvement in the AS Level results, because of the department's decision to enter all Year 12 students for the examination. In 2000, boys and girls performed equally well, and the students achieved as well in mathematics as in their other subjects. At the start of the course, students' attainment, on the basis of their GCSE examination results, was above national average. At the end, it was well above, so progress in the Sixth Form is good.

72. On the basis of the students' work and the lessons observed, standards attained at the end of Year 13 are well above national averages. The work covers modules in pure mathematics, statistics, mechanics and decision mathematics. Students can solve quadratic and simultaneous equations as well as use the remainder theorem to find the roots of a polynomial. In statistics, they have a good understanding of permutations and combinations. In mechanics they can identify frictional forces on bodies. In a Year 13 lesson, for example, students considered what would happen to a book on a table if the table were tilted, and subsequently challenged to think what would happen to a pile of books. The work in the Sixth Form is also complemented by a series of coursework tasks, such as a statistical task which made good use of a school atlas to look at the relationship between life expectancy and food intake in countries with a GNP per capita of less than \$1500.

73. Teaching and learning in the Sixth Form are good. Lessons get off to a quick start and teachers demonstrate very good subject knowledge, confident exposition and clear explanation of key facts, making useful links with previous work. Teachers enjoy positive and supportive relationships with their classes. The most able students are challenged with extension material, although the less able are often left behind and required to catch up outside of the lesson. Too often, teacher talk dominates lessons so that students are not sufficiently engaged in mathematical thinking.

74. In the Sixth Form, teachers have a good awareness of the individual strengths and weaknesses of their students and reporting gives a clear picture of students' performance. Homework is set regularly and marking, where carried out, is diagnostic and supports

students' better understanding of their errors. There are some examples of work that has not been marked by a teacher and this is not helpful to students. In most classes, marking is also supplemented by useful model answers. The department is developing a central recording system to monitor and track students' progress in mathematics but, to date, assessment is over-reliant on the teachers' very good knowledge of individual students.

75. In the Sixth Form, students enjoy positive and supportive relationships with their teachers and with one another. They involve themselves enthusiastically in the lesson and listen carefully and attentively to the teacher. In a small number of classes students are quiet and not so responsive or involved in the lesson.

76. The curriculum in the Sixth Form includes provision for A and AS Level examinations covering modules in pure mathematics, statistics, mechanics and decision mathematics. The curriculum is flexible, to accommodate students wishing to take different combinations of modules, or AS and A Level further mathematics. The school offers a GCSE retake course, though attendance at this is rather erratic because many of the lessons clash with other subject choices. Departmental staff also teach mathematics and statistics modules for the general studies course, although these are not sufficiently co-ordinated with other provision to ensure that all students benefit from what is offered.

77. The provision for literacy in the Sixth Form is satisfactory, and the mathematics department makes appropriate use of technical vocabulary, though reading around the subject is not sufficiently encouraged. The department makes some use of graphical calculators in the Sixth Form and the provision for ICT is satisfactory.

78. The provision for numeracy across the curriculum in the Sixth Form is satisfactory. Number skills are rehearsed in business education to work out cash flow and produce profit and loss accounts. Students interpret exponential curves and manipulate formulae in science, as well as developing formulae for spreadsheets in ICT. Spatial skills are practised in science for measuring, weighing and calculating volumes and surface areas, although much of the work seen was rather low level. At present there is no whole school numeracy policy to provide a co-ordinated and coherent framework to support students' numeracy skills.

79. The leadership and management of the subject in the Sixth Form is good. The leadership of the department ensures a clear vision and direction for mathematics Post 16. The head of department has a good idea of the department's strengths and weaknesses, but there is not enough monitoring and evaluation to identify and act upon areas of weaknesses. The department does make use of available data but analysis is insufficient to set challenging targets for students and the department. Schemes of work for the Sixth Form are still at the developmental stage.

80. Improvement since the last report has been good. Results at A Level have improved considerably and teaching is good, with some very good features. Positive attitudes and good behaviour remain a notable feature of lessons, and students respond well to mathematical challenges when these are presented. Too often, teacher talk dominates lessons and the department needs to improve students' independent learning skills, as highlighted in the last report. The department is well placed to continue to improve and to raise standards.

Science

81. During inspection week the focus in the science curriculum area was on chemistry and physics. The school also teaches biology in the Sixth Form. In this course, attainment in recent years has averaged somewhat below national levels. The inspection found that there has been some improvement in attainment; partly because numbers have increased significantly of late and rather more girls than boys study this subject now. Three Sixth Form biology lessons were observed, samples of the students' work were inspected, and informal discussions took place with the teachers and some of the students. The quality of provision in this subject is just satisfactory, the main strength being the hard work put in by the teachers to make lessons interesting and accessible. The main areas for improvement in biology in the Sixth Form are the assessment of learning, the reinforcement of knowledge, and the need to extend the students more and improve how much they retain over the length of the course.

Physics

82. The quality of provision in physics is good.

Strengths:

- the team of lively, knowledgeable teachers, with good teaching in most lessons.
- the thoughtful use of a well-structured, thoroughly developed course.
- the integration of physics within a purposeful – though noisy - science suite.

Areas for improvement:

- the over-dependence on the teacher in lessons.
- insufficient matching of lesson objectives to the needs of the individual students in the classes.
- insufficient use of assessment to focus and improve the students' learning.

83. 2001 was the first year in which the school has entered a full group for AS Level Physics. Of the 21 students concerned, 19 (about 90 per cent) passed and nearly half of those reached the top grades of A or B. While the national data for this year are not yet available, these results are far better than the national results for 2000; the national pass-rate then was just over 50 per cent, with barely 10 per cent reaching the top grades. In the A Level GCE examination at the end of Year 13, of the 18 students entered, almost three-quarters passed and a third of those achieved the top grades. These results are somewhat below those of the previous years and likely to be below the national figures. The trend in recent years has been for the A Level results to improve steadily, and they were close to the national level in 2000.

84. The students' attainment in physics, as assessed through their work and in lessons observed during inspection week, was always at least satisfactory, and the Year 13 students are above average overall. The AS students are already starting to grasp the physical and optical properties of materials, and some can identify the relevant behaviour and structure of glasses and metals and state how the processes of scattering and reflection of light waves differ. Some have minor but significant difficulties with specialist vocabulary, and many find it hard to discuss their work fluently. During inspection week the AL students were developing work on electromagnetism. Almost all have clear, correct ideas of electric circuits, sources and current; most are becoming at ease with the concept of force fields; and a few are able to understand the induction of eddy currents well enough to explain their effects in the context of Lenz's law. Vocabulary problems are rarer with these students, and many of them are able to produce clear presentations about their work to the whole class. In some lessons, some members of this group show insufficient familiarity with the appropriate use of calculators. Few are able effectively to estimate the answers to numerical questions, and

few have an adequate understanding of the nature of exponential curves. In both years there is some evidence that the lower attaining students are being challenged very well by the work – but too little is planned by teachers to extend the higher attainers.

85. In the Sixth Form physics lessons observed, the quality of the teaching was always satisfactory; mostly, it was good or very good. The strengths of the teaching are in the variety of activities that the teachers plan for their students, which helps keep them attentive and motivated, and the high demands on them to work and think for themselves, which helps them to focus on what they are expected to learn. Another feature of teaching in the department is the high pace that teachers generate, which ensures that the students concentrate and work hard. Teachers make use of a wide range of information and practical work, making good use of ICT and audio-visual resources. This helps to motivate students and makes the learning objectives clear.

86. There are aspects of teaching practice that are still to be developed, however. In advanced physics it is sometimes necessary to have quite lengthy sessions of teacher-centred presentation. In order to prevent the students becoming passive and inattentive, it is then important to teach in a lively way, which the three physics teachers generally do, and to use plenty of examples from 'real life' and students' experience. Again, most do this, but they are less adept at making good use of questioning, both of the whole class and of individuals, to keep everyone on their toes and thinking. More fundamentally, the teachers do not base each lesson on carefully thought out objectives that relate to each individual learner's needs. Because of this, it is hard to assess how well each student is learning against his or her target. Indeed, infrequent assessment is an associated weakness of the Sixth Form physics teaching in the school.

87. For these reasons, the quality of the students' learning in lessons, while always satisfactory, is rarely good. They learn facts and skills at a reasonable rate, but are much less successful at gaining an appropriate understanding of fundamental concepts (such as energy, matter, electric current, centripetal force, absorption). For the same reasons, they do not retain concepts well.

88. In both years there are too few girls in the classes for it to be clear how well they are learning in comparison with the boys. However, there are certainly contexts in which they are gaining in knowledge and understanding proportionately better. Students who find learning difficult for one reason or another also make better progress, and there are none for whom weaknesses in spoken or written English form significant barriers to learning.

89. Physics is well resourced at this school. The three teachers are appropriately qualified, knowledgeable and enthusiastic, and form a good team that works well together. Technician support is satisfactory. Staff training and development are good. Each teacher has a pleasant room in a science suite which includes a very good central technical area, a common room, an office and ICT room.

90. The head of science, an engineer by background, also leads physics, effectively but gently. All the work of the subject in the Sixth Form is based thoughtfully on a single, good, new course. This provides a great range of valuable learning resources. It is the intention that current experience with this course will influence future schemes of work and future use.

Chemistry

91. Two lessons were observed. One lesson was good, and one was very good, where students gained from a clear explanation, took part in discussion and planned and carried out their practical work. This led to students gaining a secure understanding of the reactivity of halides.

92. Overall, the quality of the provision is good.

Strengths:

- The results are above average and have shown an improvement over the last three years.
- The students can apply prior knowledge to problems at A Level. They answer questions well and are willing to take part in discussions.
- Students who are struggling are supported well by their teachers.
- The teaching in lessons is good.
- Staff and student relationships are good. There is a positive working atmosphere.
- Leadership of the subject is being developed well by a new head of department. Learning resources are being built up, and are serviced ably by a team of technicians.

Areas for improvement:

- Marking is not as thorough as it could be. Opportunities are lost to indicate to students their errors and how they can improve their work.
- Target setting for students has only just begun, and the monitoring of student performance is not focused sufficiently sharply.
- Students' self-supported study is not fully developed.

93. The GCE A Level examination results in 2000 showed a significant improvement compared to those of previous years and were well above the national average. Results for 2001 were above average. All students completed the course. The AS examination results show all but one candidate gaining grades A to C. There were six boys and five girls, and the boys attained slightly better than the girls. Since 2000, the proportion gaining the highest grades, A and B, is above the national average. In relation to their GCSE results at the age of 16, students achieved well, attaining better than predicted.

94. Students in Year 12 are achieving well. They show good knowledge and understanding of the periodic table and the position of the halides in it. Students are successfully moving on from their GCSE work as a result of teaching styles that focus the learning. They are able to transfer knowledge, related to the reactivity series in metals at GCSE, to reactivity and displacement of halides, devising their own investigation. Students who studied dual award GCSE find greater difficulty than those who have studied GCSE Chemistry. Specific texts are available to assist students to catch up.

95. The standard of work at Year 13 is above average. These students achieved well in their AS examinations. In the lesson seen, a group of students were tackling calculations as a revision topic. The lesson structure and activities underlined the students' difficulties with mathematics. The teacher was aware of these and had planned well so that he could focus on the skills they needed and help them to improve. Although students set out their calculations systematically and were able to substitute data to calculate the answer, both they and the teacher were aware of the need to hone their mathematical skills.

96. Teaching is good overall, resulting in good learning. The teaching is well planned, with good pace. The variety of activities and discussion encourages thinking skills, enhancing learning and independent thought. The teacher shows a good knowledge of the subject in the questions asked and the breadth of response demanded. For example, the lesson on halides began with establishing what the students already knew and built upon this to create

a wider knowledge base. This was then used to formulate an hypothesis which was tested practically, leading to the sharing of data and drawing a conclusion. The teacher moved the concept on in a graphical and imaginative way, developing equations for the reactions.

97. Written work takes the form of experimental planning and accounts, structured questions and accounts of concepts. Although the classes are small and students are tutored individually, there is little evidence of day-to-day marking. It is not made clear to students, in their work, what they should do to improve. This is an area which, if improved, would underpin the strong features of the teaching seen. Students who are struggling are given help and extra resources, however, and make good progress.

98. Overall, students learn well. There is a positive and productive working atmosphere. Students share ideas when planning their practical work, which helps them to work and learn independently. Students respond well to the variety of teaching. They support each other in discussion, developing ideas and concepts. They rose to the challenge of investigating halides through predicting the possible products of displacement reactions.

99. Students show an ability to engage in independent study. Written work is clearly set out. The limited sample of work submitted from students in Years 12 and 13 showed a good grasp of ionic bonding and polymerisation. One piece of coursework was notable in its use of titration/calculation from formulae to solve a problem concerning the content of an iron tablet. At the end of lessons, however, students were not set follow-up work or preparation for the next lesson, and thus missed opportunities for consolidation and extra reading.

100. The head of department has been in post for eight months, and she is already making a very positive contribution to the work of the department and developing good leadership skills. There is a commitment to an active teaching style to improve standards further. The department is collecting together a good range of practical and support materials. Target setting has recently begun but is not yet firmly established in the department.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY IN THE SIXTH FORM

The focus was on computer studies.

Computer Studies

101. The overall quality of provision in computer studies is very good.

Strengths:

- Results which are normally well above average.
- Very good teaching with good practical demonstrations to develop conceptual understanding
- The committed and well organised leadership of the department.
- A specialist team of teachers in place
- Very good relationships between teachers and students.

Areas for improvement:

- Too little detailed information is given to students about progress in relation to their prior achievement and future targets, especially in Year 12.
- Links with industry, such as work placements, are insufficient.
- Students are insufficiently involved in activities that increase their awareness of the social, moral and economic implications of the use of computers.
- Too few female students take the subject.

102. There has been a consistent trend of very good results. The 1999 and 2000 GCE A Level examination results were well above average. In 2000, 40 per cent of the students

gained the highest grades, A and B. Although lower, the 2001 results were still better than the national figures. Students also did very well in the 2001 Year 12 AS examinations, with 45 per cent obtaining the higher grades in the newly introduced computer studies course. All but a few students did better than an analysis of their GCSE grades had predicted, with a third making good progress. No girls took the examination.

103. These high standards are reflected in the lessons seen, in the work in the students' files, and in discussions with students about their work. They have the ability to talk with knowledge and confidence about the subject. For example, a range of Year 13 students could explain about subject-orientated and event-driven programming and discuss diagrams. They benefited from the teacher's simple, but highly effective, concrete demonstrations of difficult concepts. Consequently, they had a very good understanding of the importance of stacks and queues in processing and programming. Students are aware of the importance of a good understanding of theory in systems development work, and of the focus on rigour in project writing, reflecting the teachers' emphasis on this. Students with special educational needs frequently make very good progress, aided by the teacher's skilled knowledge of their strengths and weaknesses.

104. Year 12 students show a good level of understanding at this early stage of the course. They are making good progress, despite finding it difficult to adapt to the demands of the computer studies course. Teachers and students work hard together to overcome hurdles during this transition period. In one lesson, their combined efforts resulted in good learning, with all but one or two of the class able to write a simple programme. The teacher had reviewed the main points in a variety of ways and produced very good structured guidelines and examples. Students respond positively to the high level of support they receive and to teachers' belief in their potential to achieve.

105. Teaching in two thirds of the lessons seen was very good, and this is a major factor in the students' academic success. Many features of the teaching are instances of exemplary practice, and therefore learning is very good. Lessons begin with the revision of previous work and end with sessions that confirm and extend the new learning. Students lead these with considerable confidence and competence. Teachers' very good knowledge of the subject is effectively communicated, as in the example of a Year 12 class which quickly gained an understanding of different network environments. Key words are emphasised and work is organised to meet the needs of the whole class. Frequent tests and skilled on-going assessment help to develop students' ability concentration, as well as enabling staff to revisit areas that have not been well understood. Resources are well used, for example with the use of textbook chapters linked into specific software programmes. Where teaching was satisfactory rather than good, teaching would have been better if complicated detail had been delivered more slowly, so that all students could follow and understand.

106. The students on the computer studies course are mature and attentive. Many, especially the higher attaining students, have a background of considerable interest and involvement in the subject. Very good teaching helps all to understand difficult concepts and solve problems, thereby motivating them further. The expertise and commitment of the staff is appreciated and is another factor in the very good relationships that exist between staff and students. Students acknowledge the willingness of the teachers to help them overcome hurdles.

107. There is a definite sense of a purposeful and caring partnership. Students react positively to an insistence that they think for themselves and take responsibility for their own learning. They make effective use of the open access to the computer suite during lunch times and after school to extend their independent learning.

108. The very good teaching and learning is a result of very good leadership. Commitment is combined with vision and a high level of administrative skill. The departmental handbook is excellent, comprising detailed schemes of work, careful evaluation of examination results and

a regard for recent initiatives such as literacy and numeracy. Each unit of work finishes with self-review by the student, and this forms the basis of the approach to the next learning task. However, Year 12 students are not informed formally of the progress they are making against attainment at the age of 16 and their future targets. A team of specialist teachers has only recently been established and the monitoring strategy of the department has not yet been fully adjusted to take account of this. Industry links are under-developed and students are not encouraged to increase their detailed and up-to-date awareness of the social, moral, and economic implications of computers.

BUSINESS IN THE SIXTH FORM

The focus was on business education.

Business Education

109. The focus was on advanced vocational business, with sampling from economics. In economics, standards are broadly in line with national expectations, although a smaller proportion of students achieve higher grades. Two lessons were observed. Teaching was satisfactory, though too few opportunities were given for students to participate.

AVCE Business

110. The provision in the AVCE business single award course, a new course replacing Advanced GNVQ, is good.

Strengths:

- Vocational business results have been in line with national expectations, and the new course is likely to result in improvements.
- Course planning is good, building on GNVQ experience.
- Teachers are very helpful to students, who in turn are confident that their learning is well supported.
- Teachers are developing and using a wide range of teaching strategies.
- The vocational nature of the course makes a significant contribution to the breadth and appropriateness of the Sixth Form curriculum

Areas for improvement:

- Retention rates for the first year of the course are low
- Teachers need to be more precise in determining learning objectives for individual lessons
- Expectations of the pace of student learning within lessons are not high enough
- Responsibilities for leadership and management in raising standards further are unclear

111. AVCE business was introduced in September 2000 to replace Advanced GNVQ. Although these courses are different, their vocational aspects are similar. Results since the last inspection have shown variations from year to year, but have been broadly in line with national expectations. Boys and girls have achieved equally well. Although numbers taking business courses have been relatively low, attainment in Year 13 is currently above average.

112. Whereas 11 students started the new AVCE course in September 2000, only four boys are in the current Year 13. The group size for those starting the course this year is much bigger, and the school needs to carefully monitor and evaluate future retention rates.

113. Standards of work, particularly from those students in Year 13, are very good. A majority of students show high levels of achievement. They are able to apply business

concepts to a wide range of contexts, and show a sophisticated grasp of contemporary business issues. For example, students are able to recognise and evaluate the impact of different reward systems used by Shell to encourage productivity increases. They show a good understanding of the need for financial record keeping. Students in Year 12 are confidently building on the knowledge and understanding gained from GCSE courses to carry out independent investigations of local businesses. Students in both years are confident and respond well to group work challenges. They work well together and this helps the progress of those students new to business courses.

114. Year 12 students are still at an early stage in adapting to the intellectual challenges of business. Some are showing an emerging confidence in using an appropriate technical vocabulary and using analytical tools to develop their evaluative skills.

115. The course is very well planned. There is good sequencing of activities to build students' competence to undertake independent research. Course objectives are thoughtfully translated into practical advice on how students might improve on their grades. The students are well prepared for external tests, where results are good as a consequence. Subject expertise is very good and there is constant reference to current business practice.

116. Students were very positive in response to questions about both the vocational relevance of business and the support offered by teachers. They were very clear in their support for more independent learning and the opportunities to work with real businesses. They see clear advantages in these aspects of their course in preparation for both further study and employment. They praised the help given to them by their teachers, who are 'always ready to find the time to help'.

117. Teaching is always enthusiastic, but learning objectives within individual lessons are not framed with sufficient clarity. More consideration needs to be given to the choice of teaching strategies to promote greater pace and higher expectations of students' progress. Some lesson plans are over-ambitious, leading to tasks not being completed, or to lack of time for students to develop more extended responses. Students should know from the outset of each lesson what is expected of them. Opportunities to incorporate different cultural perspectives are not developed.

118. Although marking is thorough and students are well informed of what they need to do to improve grades, the progress of groups of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is not monitored. Nonetheless, teachers are aware of the need to constantly review and refine assessment practice and teaching strategies. They are very keen to build on the excellent rapport they have with their students.

119. Leadership and management of the department are characterised by a high level of teamwork and good collaborative working relationships between teachers. Lesson observations, however, are not regularly used to review and refine the effectiveness of teaching. The head of department does not teach on the AVCE course, which is managed by an assistant head teacher. Economics provision, with which there are considerable overlaps, is separately led and managed. It was not clear how this organisational structure makes the best use of different teacher expertise to further improve standards and enhance the contribution of the vocational curriculum.

HUMANITIES

120. The focus was on history, but geography was also sampled. One Year 13 lesson was observed in which teaching was very good and the students analysed recently published articles that related to their individual study choices. This led them to a greater understanding of the structure of successful writing and provided them with valuable additional research material. Confident contributions to discussion indicated their secure grasp of their subject knowledge and of the assessment criteria operating at A Level.

HISTORY IN THE SIXTH FORM

121. The overall quality of provision in history is good.

Strengths:

- The profound and up-to-date subject knowledge of teachers enriches teaching and encourages academic rigour from students.
- There is very effective use of wide ranging and demanding resource materials that are linked to challenging assignments both in class and for homework.
- Teaching styles, particularly those seen in Year 13, successfully encourage independence of learning and high quality discourse.
- Careful analysis of performance, very supportive marking and effective tutorial support contribute to the effectiveness of teaching and to the enthusiasm and diligence of the students.
- The effective deployment of specialist staff produces a rich learning environment.

Areas for improvement:

- The department should continue to review and extend the range of source texts. This needs to include developing more use of the Internet by students to access specialist literature.
- The existing breadth of teaching would be enhanced by more systematic monitoring and sharing of teaching styles, focusing on encouraging greater independence of learning for a wider range of students.

122. Between 1998 and 2000, standards achieved in history were just below the national average but were above the average for similar schools. The results for 2001 showed a significant improvement at A Level. The points score, which indicates the average results for the whole group, was 5.6, half a grade higher than in each of the previous three years. Performance in the new AS Level exams was better still, with all students gaining A to E grades. Although no comparative information was available at the time of the inspection, the average points score of 7.3 was particularly encouraging and is likely to be well above average.

123. Standards of work seen were high. In Year 12, students were developing the new academic skills required for successful work at AS Level. The more confident of these students were already drawing on their knowledge of the history of pre-revolutionary France in order to analyse documents produced by Louis XIV, Marie-Antoinette and the Parlement. They commented on the insights these sources gave them into the imperiousness of Louis, the perspective of Marie-Antoinette, and the views of the Estates General. Lower attaining students found it more difficult to structure their analyses effectively. Their commentaries tended to focus upon the correct explanation of specific terms rather than on an appraisal of contexts and implications.

124. By Year 13, students are able to draw confidently on their wider reading, as in a challenging lesson that considered varying interpretations of the rôle and influence of Lenin. Students constructed deliberately biased appraisals, citing appropriate supportive evidence. Having shared these with the group, their next task was to produce an evidenced and balanced revisionist analysis.

125. In all lessons seen, students were able to discuss issues with confidence and to respond to stimulating questioning by the teacher, as in a Year 13 discussion of the challengers to the throne of Henry VII. Appreciation of Henry's sensitivity to the uncertainty of battlefield outcomes, together with detailed knowledge of the conflicting vested interests, resulted in a clear evaluation of the threats posed by the pretenders Perkin Warbeck and Lambert Simnel. Higher attaining students are given opportunities to develop skills and independent thought appropriate for future undergraduates.

126. Students make good progress in both years. They find the change from GCSE to A Level challenging but state that they enjoy this. They welcome the way the department offers Year 12 units that build on knowledge gained at GCSE, as well as providing completely new areas of study. Work seen from students only a few weeks into the course already demonstrated an ability to fashion well-constructed cases. By Year 13, higher attainers could present and review a range of interpretations in well-structured answers. These built on broadly-based reading of high quality and often demanding texts. The highest attaining students had already developed skills of discussion and evaluation that will stand them in good stead when they go to university.

127. The balance between boys and girls varies between groups but, in the lessons seen, there was no significant variation in the quality of their written work or oral contributions. Some students in Year 12 were lacking in confidence but teaching was sensitive to this and they were successfully drawn into lessons.

128. All the teaching seen was good or very good. Teachers have up-to-date specialist knowledge which they use to provide students with detailed guidance, directing them to particularly appropriate resources. Coursework assessment is carefully undertaken and contributes to the overall effectiveness of teaching. Much marked work is carefully annotated, so that students receive very helpful guidance. They are told what makes the good elements effective and are given detailed advice about how weaker aspects might be improved. Work is clearly graded and students understand the assessment process and know what progress they are making. Carefully designed homework provides challenges for the students and further extends their subject knowledge.

129. The choice of source materials in lessons is particularly appropriate and they are put to challenging use. Open-ended questions explore students' understanding and extend the depth and range of their responses. By Year 13, students are confidently discussing complex issues with their peers and with their teachers. The higher attaining students achieve this with fluency, academic rigour and a high degree of linguistic elegance. An integral part of the teaching is the use of specialist texts, which students are encouraged to borrow from the department.

130. Students work with a range of well-qualified teachers and appreciate the variety of teaching styles and subject expertise that this produces. They praise the willingness of teachers to help them and value the high quality of support and advice they receive. Generally, the range and quality of resources is good. However, the use of ICT by students, especially for more demanding academic research purposes, is still too limited.

131. The department is very well managed. Great care has been taken to provide a balanced range of course content and to involve as many members of the department as possible in higher-level teaching. Under new leadership, and with a completely new teaching team, standards are improving dramatically. A shared philosophy leads to all students being

encouraged to have high aspirations and to meet them. Lower attaining pupils have their progress closely monitored and are well supported in their learning. Past performance data is carefully analysed and the information is used, where appropriate, to further develop teaching materials and approaches.

132. The work of this effective department would be further strengthened by continuing the existing systematic review and extension of text based resources. This now needs to be extended to include more frequent Internet access to academic literature by students. The existing breadth of teaching would benefit from a more systematic approach to the monitoring and sharing of teaching styles, particularly those which encourage independence of learning.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION IN THE SIXTH FORM

The focus was on English.

133. Overall, the quality of provision is very good.

Strengths:

- Above average results maintained in AS and A Level courses.
- Students achieve well because they have ownership of their own learning.
- Teaching is very good because teachers share objectives with students.
- Students learn very well: they co-operate well with each other and collaborate well with their teachers.
- The subject is led and managed very well.

Areas for improvement:

- Some students need to extend their background reading, and to widen their range of reading for pleasure.

134. The provision in English caters for some 60 students on A and AS Level courses in English literature and in English language and literature. A very small number of students retake GCSE English but there is no timetabled provision for them, although there is support in preparing for the examination.

Standards and achievement

135. Standards in GCE AS and A Level examinations are above average, and this has been consistently maintained over the last three years. There is good achievement, with students improving significantly on their GCSE grades.

136. The observation of work during the inspection confirms these standards. In English literature, the attainment of students who will take their examination in 2002 is already often well above average. This is supported by good textual knowledge and by the conscientious application of the methods they have been taught. Particularly noteworthy is students' confidence, and the clear ownership of their own learning that has been conferred by the very good teaching. By Year 13, students have a well established, mature sensitivity to the subtleties of literature, and a good understanding of the various genres they meet, i.e. different kinds of poetry, the structure of the novel, and dramatic techniques. Among the students following the combined English language and literature course, there is good knowledge of the technicalities of language use, and well-developed skills in analysis, though on a more technical level. There is, however, less independence in their approaches, and a greater reliance on the provision of the right answers rather than a

willingness to seek them through thought, discussion and research. Writing on both courses is competent, and the best is poised and sophisticated. The work of less successful students is characterised particularly by inappropriate expression, such as the use of informal and conversational language.

137. Students achieve well because they enjoy the subject, and because they respond well to the high quality of the teaching. There is very good collaboration between students, and this was observed in a number of lively and well considered exchanges in pairs, in groups, or in whole class discussions. These strongly promote their learning, and the same is true of students' awareness of their own progress and their knowledge of what they need to do improve, as they participate with teachers in tackling each task in the course. Achievement is good, and likely to be very good as the impact of the teaching takes full effect in both English Literature and English Language and Literature.

Quality of education

138. Teaching is very good. Teachers have very good knowledge of the subject and of their students, with whom they share it, in a process which often takes the form of highly contagious enthusiasm and results in very enjoyable learning. Planning is meticulous, providing a structure to each lesson based upon clear and appropriate objectives that are routinely shared with students. Teachers' styles are sympathetic and collaborative. Questioning is open ended, placing the responsibility upon the students while providing them with the tools for the task, an example of which is the very good handbook for students. Language lessons provide a solid foundation to an understanding of how expression works, giving students the skills to understand their own reading. Marking is very good, with detailed correction of technicalities, an analysis of strengths and areas for development, and objectives for the future. However, in observation and in conversation with students, there was evidence of a need further to promote background reading and to widen reading for pleasure.

139. Outside lessons, there is good support for students' learning in the variety of visits organised to theatres. There is a satisfactory collection of background reading material in the school library, which will shortly be improved by extension and some restocking.

140. Teachers are well-qualified specialists. The accommodation - in a separate block - is good, but it could be developed further, to support wider reading, for example.

Leadership and management

141. The leadership and management of English are very good. The head of department has been in post for only a matter of weeks, but she has already produced a highly effective subject handbook as well as the guidance for students mentioned above. The handbook provides good leadership for teachers, and the head of department also gives very effective examples of good practice in her own teaching. There is a sensitive awareness of the needs of the school and of students, and a clear vision of what needs to be done to maintain continued improvement.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA IN THE SIXTH FORM

There was a focus on art and design and on music. Lessons of theatre studies were also sampled.

THEATRE STUDIES

142. Overall, the quality of provision is very good.

Strengths:

- High standards of attainment.
- Students achieve well because they enjoy their work and understand their objectives.
- Teaching is very good, with teachers knowing their subject well and understanding how best their students can learn.
- Students work together effectively and productively.
- Management and leadership are very good.

Areas for improvement:

- The stock of simple subject resources, such as masks, needs extension.

Scope of provision

143. There are AS and A Level courses in Theatre Studies, which currently cater for two students in Year 13, and for about 10 students in Year 12.

Standards of achievement

144. In the 2001 examinations, all four candidates entered at A Level gained passes at grades A-B, and both candidates entered at AS Level gained passes at grade C. No national comparisons are available.

145. The observation of one Year 12 and one Year 13 lesson during the inspection confirms that standards are high. Performance skills are well developed, and students have a good understanding of the conventions of drama and the variety of skills associated with it. They are well informed about the theatre, film and television, and their associated history. The students have a good analytical approach to dramatic texts, and are very sensitive to the way in which layers of meaning may be built up in productions.

Quality of education

146. The teaching of drama was very good in one lesson and excellent in the other. Subject knowledge is very good, and detailed planning offers a highly effective framework for each lesson. Expectations are high, and in every lesson they are combined with evaluations of progress, in which students share. Teaching is well designed to promote learning by providing starting points, motivation, skills and structure, all of which enable students to achieve as well as they can. Relationships between teachers and students are very good, resulting in a highly effective partnership.

147. Students work very effectively together in pairs and in small groups. They get on quickly with their tasks, and their approach to improvisations could be described as professional, showing very good training. There is clearly a high degree of enjoyment of the subject.

148. The provision is enriched by direct experiences of the theatre on video and in outside visits, as well as in high profile school productions.

149. There are two well-qualified teachers of theatre studies. The drama studio is a useful space, carpeted and well supplied with lights and audio-visual equipment. The stock of simple subject resources, such as masks, needs extension.

Leadership and management

150. The leadership and management of theatre studies are very good. Both teachers are new to the school, and the head of department has made an excellent start with her subject handbook, which sets out the teaching programme and establishes very clear and useful routines for the assessment of progress.

MUSIC IN THE SIXTH FORM

151. The quality of provision for music is very good.

Strengths:

- Examination results in the summer of 2000 were well above average, and those for 2001 continued the trend, with more students taking the examination.
- Students grasp new concepts well, quickly apply them to new challenges, and achieve very well.
- Teaching is very good. The students are provided with a firm foundation not only for A Level work but also for study at a higher level.
- Students have a very good attitude to the subject and good relationships with the teachers.
- There is a good range of extra-curricular activities, which result in concerts and productions of a high standard.
- There is an excellent match of teaching staff to the needs of the subject and of students.
- Students enjoy their studies and music making.

Areas for improvement:

- Information communications technology (ICT) is currently being used only for printing compositions prior to their being sent to the moderator. The use of ICT as a fundamental composing tool should be introduced to ensure that students' compositions are not limited by their keyboard technique. ICT also offers the students the possibility of adding new material whilst listening to that which they have already composed.

152. The GCE A Level examination results for the summer of 2000 were well above national average. Results for the summer of 2001 show a continuation of this trend, with more students taking the examination. Only one student did not complete the course, and this was because a combination of four A Level subjects was proving too much work. In both years, students improved on their predicted grades based on their GCSE results. In the summer of 2001, Year 12 students were also entered for the new A/S examination. The results for this examination show all students achieving between A and C grades.

153. The standard of work of the current students is also above average in both years, as a result of the dedicated teaching of the music staff and the students' very good attitude towards the subject. Students in Year 12 feel sufficiently confident to play sections of their compositions to the remainder of the class and the teacher, and to discuss their work with the listeners. They are also beginning to master the basic elements of harmony and the demands of the listening paper. Students in Year 13 explore the development of song in the baroque era, with particular reference to four well-known examples.

154. Students in Year 12 are half way through the first term of the A Level course and are achieving very well. Their compositions already show an improvement on the standard required for GCSE. Some of the harmonies used show the influence of listening to and playing a wide range of music. The students are persevering well with the rigours of basic four part harmony and are using their growing knowledge to tackle the more demanding questions of the listening paper. Students in Year 13 confidently use knowledge acquired in Year 12 to identify the basic stylistic attributes of the baroque era, through listening, performing and discussion.

155. Teaching is very good in both year groups. Both members of staff not only have a very good knowledge of the subject, but also have a variety of strategies to enable the students to discover the learning for themselves. These strategies enable the students to acquire knowledge initially through musical experiences, thereby giving it more meaning. There are good relationships between the teachers and students, and these, combined with the students' very good attitude to the subject, create a productive learning environment. Lessons are well planned and teachers' expectations of the students are high. In one lesson, students with minimal keyboard skills were encouraged to play cadences either individually or in pairs so that they could play and hear the musical effect of the cadences for themselves. The teachers also take care to ensure that the students fully understood new concepts and are able to use them confidently on future occasions. Homework is regularly set to reinforce the learning that has taken place and to maintain motivation for developing their compositions, which are an essential requirement of the examination syllabus. The students also benefit from the good quality assessment of their work in lessons and the detailed marking of homework.

156. Students learn very well. They have a very good attitude to the subject and enjoy their lessons. They concentrate well when listening to music and persevere when tasks appear taxing. Behaviour in class and in rehearsals is very good, with the students appreciating but respecting the informal but professional atmosphere, which is present in all activities. In music lessons students respond well to the teachers' questions, answering confidently without fear of ridicule should the answer should prove incorrect. They are also willing to perform their compositions to the remainder of the class on instruments that are not their main study.

157. The high standard of examination results and musical performance, the very good learning and teaching, and the very positive atmosphere, which permeates the music area, can be attributed to the excellent management of the music department, and the complementary musical expertise of the two music teachers. The head of department has been in post for some years and has organised the department to deliver first-class musical experiences to all pupils and students, through high quality lessons, instrumental lessons and extra-curricular activities. The curriculum has been recently revised to cover the new A Level and A/S Level syllabuses, based on the philosophy of learning through the experience of the music itself, rather than the collecting of facts. There is a strong commitment to preparing the students not only for their A Level examinations but also for study at a higher level. The use of ICT in the initial stages of composition, rather than a means of presenting the final product, would present an opportunity to develop these independent learning skills further.

158. Some Sixth Form students still receive instrumental tuition at school, but the majority attend the local music centre run by the Young Musicians' Trust, where there is sufficient time to cater for the longer lessons needed by the more advanced players. Extra-curricular activities include rehearsals of various groups of differing nature and ability. These are held every day of the week and prepare not only for numerous internal events, but also for appearances at the Windsor Festival, Maidenhead Carnival and a full production of 'Joseph'. Sixth Form musicians also benefit from the well-organised network of music-making organised by the Berkshire Young Musicians Trust.

ART AND DESIGN IN THE SIXTH FORM

159. The overall quality of provision is satisfactory.

Strengths:

- Teaching for Year 12 is good, and students are achieving above average standards.
- There has been considerable recent improvement in the quality of provision; leadership is strong and a very good ethos is evident.
- Year 12 students have good attitudes and a positive view of the course.
- Visits to art galleries and museums enrich teaching and learning.

Areas for improvement:

- Standards in Year 13 are below average
- Students do not receive sufficient introduction to careers in art and design.
- Not enough emphasis is placed on non-Western art.
- Timetabling arrangements for Year 12 are unsatisfactory.

160. The school offers an A1 course in Year 12, and A2 in Year 13. Approximately 15 students are embarked on the former and six on the latter.

161. The number of students taking GCE A Level has been low since the previous inspection. Predominantly low grades have been achieved, and comparisons with students' own prior GCSE attainment and school value-added data show that standards have been significantly lower than expected both for male and female candidates. Standards have not changed since the previous inspection, when A Level results were reported to be below average.

162. Under new leadership and with a completely new teaching team, standards are improving dramatically. Year 12 students are currently achieving standards that are above average, as a result of focused, rigorous teaching. They have very good observational and analytical skills and handle media confidently, and composition is strong and brushwork vigorous. They have a good knowledge of the art movements they are studying. For example, in a lesson on developing a cubist interpretation of a portrait, students disassembled two of their previous pieces and rearranged and intermingled the images to create an image in the manner of analytical cubism. Students had visited the Tate Modern and, in art history lessons, studied portraits throughout history. Year 13, however, retain many of the shortcomings reported in the previous inspection. Their work is tentative and displays weak drawing skills and an unfamiliarity with the range of media available to them. Links with the work of artists, designers or craftspeople is not sufficiently in evidence.

163. Teaching is good overall and always at least good in Year 12; it is generally satisfactory in Year 13. Teaching in Year 13 provides a good programme of tightly structured tasks, which enable students to incrementally develop their skills, knowledge and understanding very effectively. This is particularly so for the boys, whose confidence and, subsequently their competence, grows significantly as a result. Lessons progress briskly, with feedback given to the whole class and individuals as they work. As a result, students make rapid and assured progress. Though the quality of teaching for Year 13 is generally satisfactory, much remains to be done to extend students' visual vocabulary and repertoire. For example, in a lesson where students were planning work based on their inner world, most relied on their imaginations for the images, which revealed significant weaknesses in their drawing. Teaching appropriately sought to extend their use of media, but not their drawing. The teaching provided for both years is inclusive; all students receive close individual attention, and there is sufficient scope for them to interpret projects in ways that

reflect their own interests. Students receive good spoken feedback and are clear about what they need to do to improve. They are given opportunities to develop their literacy and, to a lesser extent, application of number, particularly through art history, but more needs to be done to build students' confidence in speaking about art, design and craft.

164. Because of the strengths in teaching, Year 12 students are very well motivated. They show all the characteristics of good learners. They are enthusiastic, show commitment to the work and respond thoughtfully to questions and issues posed by teachers. Concentration is good, for the most part, and students' work shows they have taken considerable responsibility for developing their work. Year 13 students, however, are less dynamic in their approach, and an element of social chatter in lessons shows some pupils are not fully engaged. All students said they found the courses enjoyable and challenging.

165. The department is under new leadership and, with the exception of the head of department; the other three teachers are all newly qualified. Much has been achieved to overcome the legacy of underachievement which prior examination results show, but much still remains to be done. Morale is high and the ethos is very positive. In all staff and students there is a will to succeed. Departmental documentation and schemes of work are being developed along appropriate lines, but the department does not yet benefit from a development plan to guide its work. The need to support three newly qualified teachers presents a significant challenge to the leadership of the department and little scope exists for delegation, particularly for aspects of Post 16 provision. The accommodation and resources available are adequate but students are rightly concerned that their work is not stored securely. All Year 12 teaching, and some in Year 13, takes place in single lessons. This is not appropriate, because it does not give enough time for the extended practical work that is needed at this level. Students have not yet been introduced to the range of career opportunities open to them in art and design. The range of art and design studied is currently confined to Western art.