

INSPECTION REPORT

TOWNLEY GRAMMAR SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

Bexleyheath

LEA area: London Borough of Bexley

Unique reference number: 101463

Headteacher: Mrs L Hutchinson

Reporting inspector: David M Bain
3258

Dates of inspection: 11 - 14 February 2002

Inspection number: 194158

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Grammar
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 to 18 years
Gender of pupils:	Girls
School address:	Townley Road Bexleyheath Kent
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr John Paterson
Date of previous inspection:	January 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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17530	Mary Cureton	<i>Team inspector</i>	English; Theatre studies.	How well are students taught? How well does the school care for its students? How well is the school led and managed?
17556	Michael Miller	<i>Team inspector</i>	Art.	
1085	John Laver	<i>Team inspector</i>	History.	
30888	Godelieve Walsh-Nelissen	<i>Team inspector</i>	French.	Assessment.
3643	Derek Jones	<i>Team inspector</i>	Mathematics.	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to students?
18850	Andrew Hodges	<i>Team inspector</i>	Biology; Physics.	
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23552	Ian Whitehouse	<i>Team inspector</i>	Geography.	Advice, support and guidance.
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18888	Jan Boulton	<i>Team inspector</i>	Sociology.	Students' attitudes, values and personal development.

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Townley Grammar School for Girls is a larger than average, selective school situated on a pleasant site near Bexleyheath town centre. Pupils come from a wide catchment area, much of which is relatively advantaged in economic terms. There are currently 1177 pupils on roll, including 256 in the Sixth Form. The school is popular and has grown from five-form entry to six form in Year 9 and seven form in Years 7 and 8. Approximately 25 per cent of children in Bexley are offered selective places. Whilst all are children who attain well above average in selection tests, around a quarter achieve only at the average Level 4 in National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 6 in primary schools in at least one of the three subjects, English, mathematics and science, and some in all three subjects. There are a small number of pupils identified as having special educational needs, with hearing or visual impairment or dyslexia, including two with statements. Whilst the vast majority of pupils come from a white UK heritage background, around six per cent of those in Years 7 to 11 come from other ethnic groups, mainly of Indian or Chinese background. About four per cent of pupils speak English as an additional language, but none are at an early stage of fluency in English. Around three per cent of pupils are entitled to free school meals, which is well below the national average of 15 per cent. Almost all pupils continue in education after age 16, the vast majority remaining at the school, where they are joined by some from other schools. Collaboration with the local boys' grammar school, Post 16, widens the curriculum offer. Around 75 per cent of students continue into higher education, with some others taking a "gap" year and then doing so. The school is currently considering making an application for specialist college status.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Townley Grammar School for Girls is a very good school with very many outstanding features. Both staff and pupils enjoy working in, what is, a very friendly school. Teaching is good, in years 10 and 11 very good, and in all years leads to very good quality learning which ensures that high standards are achieved by pupils whatever their ability. There are examples of excellent learning and teaching across all years. Attainment is well above national averages at all key stages. The leadership and management of the school are very good and correctly focused on improving teaching and learning in order to raise standards, within a caring environment with an emphasis on enriching the curriculum. Provision for pupils' moral and social development is excellent, as are procedures for monitoring pupils' academic performance and personal development. The school gives excellent value for money.

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

- Enables pupils to achieve high standards across the curriculum, especially at GCSE, whatever their prior attainment.
- Provides very good learning experiences, supported by much very good or excellent teaching.
- Makes very good provision for pupils' spiritual, moral and social development, which encourages positive attitudes and excellent relationships and behaviour.
- Provides a broad and balanced curriculum, with a very good emphasis on curriculum enrichment and pupils' cultural development.
- Provides very good quality care for its pupils with excellent procedures for monitoring their academic performance and personal development.
- Provides very good leadership and management with a very clear educational direction centred on raising standards through improving the quality of teaching and learning and providing an enriched curriculum.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

- Aspects of the accommodation and learning resources in order to improve pupils' learning opportunities.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Overall, the school has made very good improvement since the last inspection in January 1997, has successfully addressed the key issues and has the capacity for further improvements. There have been good improvements in pupils' performance in all external assessments, resulting in an increase in the proportion of higher grades achieved, especially at GCSE and in mathematics in National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9. However, the school recognises that further work is necessary in some subjects in furthering opportunities for independent learning, encouraging pupil autonomy and broadening the range of teaching styles. Much greater emphasis has been placed on the monitoring role of managers and the line management of heads of departments has been altered. The roles of heads of year and form tutors in monitoring pupils' academic progress have become strengths of the school and many departments are now assessment rich. Whilst the quality of marking still varies, most teachers give clear information to pupils on how they can improve the quality of their work. Some excellent improvements have been made to the school's accommodation to support specialist teaching. This includes an excellent performing arts building and new science laboratories, an art room and a Sixth Form centre. An attractive piazza provides a place to meet and eat in good weather. However, despite these significant improvements, inadequacies still remain with the accommodation, which have an impact on pupils' learning. The increase in pupil numbers further highlights the shortcomings of the building.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	Compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1999	2000	2001	2001
GCSE examinations	A*	A*	A*	C
A Levels/AS Levels	A	A	N/A	N/A

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

Being a selective school, pupils' attainment on entry into year 7 is above average, although about a quarter of pupils arrive with average achievement in National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 6 in one or more of English, mathematics and science. Attainment at age 14, in National Curriculum tests, is very high, being in the highest 5 per cent of schools. In 2001, results were in line with those achieved in similar grammar schools in English and science, but well above average in mathematics. The results in mathematics were exceptional, with almost all pupils achieving Level 7 or better and over a third Level 8. Compared to results at the end of Year 6, this shows the school making a significant difference. Across all subjects, achievement in Years 7 to 9 is very good and attainment is above average overall.

Very good progress continues to be made in Years 10 and 11. Overall, GCSE results are excellent. On every statistical indicator, pupils achieve very highly compared to all schools, being in the highest 5 per cent of schools, and have improved year on year. The proportion of entries passed at the highest grades A* and A has risen significantly since the last inspection to over half. This is very high. Whilst the average point score achieved by pupils is only in line with the average for grammar schools, this in part is because the number of subjects entered is kept to a manageable level. When results are compared to prior attainment at age 11 in National Curriculum tests, the average point score in 2001 was 15 points higher than the expected score. Results are above the average for grammar schools in English language and literature, art, business studies, design and technology, French, Geography, German, Italian, religious studies and information and communication technology (ICT). Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is very good.

Standards in the Sixth Form are also well above average. The average point score achieved by students was the best ever achieved in 2001 and well above average. Nearly half the entries are passed at the highest grades A and B, a significant improvement since the last inspection and well above that nationally, just over a third of entries. Results over the last two years have been a little better than predicted by the students' GCSE performance. Results at the end of Year 12 at AS Level were very good in 2001, the first year of the new examination. Achievement Post 16 is good.

At every level the school sets challenging targets, both overall, for individual subjects and individual pupils. Whilst these are not always met fully, they provide appropriate challenges. Work seen during the inspection confirmed the results in external examinations. Attainment in English, mathematics and science is consistently above average. The few pupils with special educational needs achieve as well as other pupils. Across all subjects standards improve as pupils move through Years 7 to 11.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Pupils are very keen to come to school, enjoy it and appreciate that they are expected to work hard. They welcome the opportunities provided by the school. They respond positively in lessons. These very positive attitudes contribute to pupils' very good learning.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Excellent. Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. They cope well with cramped conditions in some corridors and classrooms. Temporary exclusions are very rare.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Relationships between pupils in all years and between pupils and adults are excellent. Teachers generally treat pupils with respect. Pupils respect the feelings of others and are relaxed, confident and articulate. Pupils use their initiative well and have many opportunities to take on responsibilities. They respond well in lessons where they are given opportunities to develop independent and collaborative learning skills, which enhance their personal development.
Attendance	Very good. Pupils' attendance is well above the national average. Attendance in the Sixth Form is satisfactory.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

The quality of pupils' learning is very good. All pupils are enthusiastic learners. They concentrate well and, where given the opportunity, are developing very good collaborative and independent learning skills. They are provided with teaching, which is always at least satisfactory and generally good. A good proportion of teaching, especially in Years 10 and 11 is very good or excellent. Examples of excellence were observed in art, mathematics, science, drama and music and very good teaching was observed in most other subjects. Particular strengths in English include the encouragement to work collaboratively and develop skills of critical analysis. In mathematics, teaching encourages pupils to explain their work precisely to each other and to look for alternative methods. Teaching in science makes good use of resources and presents a range of activities to develop pupils' investigational skills. In the best lessons, across the curriculum, pupils are encouraged to take creative risks, to develop independent learning skills and to work collaboratively. Discussion is a feature of many lessons and the best teachers are confident enough to step back and allow learning to develop, whilst inputting new ideas and directions at appropriate moments. Most teachers effectively use a range of teaching strategies. They use much skilful, searching and often targeted questioning to assist understanding and ensure the ablest are challenged. Teachers' expectations are high and pupils work hard. Literacy and numeracy are developed well across the curriculum.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Very good. The curriculum is broad and balanced. The growth in courses in the arts is a welcome trend, which is widening pupils' experiences. The school provides a wide variety of learning opportunities that meet pupils' needs, including a wide range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities, particularly in music, drama and sports. There is good provision for gifted and talented pupils.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	The small numbers of pupils with hearing or visual impairment are well supported. Support for those with dyslexia is less consistent.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	None of the small number of pupils for whom English is an additional language (EAL) is at an early stage of English acquisition. Some enter GCSE in their home language and achieve high grades.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good overall. Excellence in provision for moral and social development. Very good for spiritual and cultural. Strengths in the school's developing citizenship courses leading to greater social awareness. Excellence in the clarity of the school's moral codes and principles, and in its sense of community.
How well the school cares for its pupils	This is a strength. Pupils are very well known by their tutors and year heads and are clear where they would seek help. Child protection procedures are fully implemented. Monitoring of pupils' academic performance and personal development, as is the monitoring and promotion of good behaviour.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good. The head provides outstanding leadership and is well supported by skilled senior and middle managers. The school's aims and development planning are clearly focused on improving teaching and learning.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	A well-informed, supportive and dedicated governing body fulfils its responsibilities well. There is an effective committee structure.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Very good. Excellent use is made of assessment data to track pupils' progress by tutors, heads of department, heads of year and senior managers. Line management structures have been strengthened.
The strategic use of resources	Very good. The school development plan is supported by sound budget plans that make very good strategic use of comparatively limited resources. The school makes the best use it can of its inadequate accommodation. The principles of best value are adhered to closely.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children are expected to work hard and make good progress. • The teaching is good. • Children like school and are helped to become mature and responsible. • The school is well led and managed • The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons. • Behaviour in school is good. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The way the school works with parents. • The information provided on their child's progress. • The amount of homework could be reduced.

The inspection team agrees with the extremely positive perceptions of most parents. The school recognises that good relationships between the school and parents are essential. It provides a range of consultation meetings, both on pupils' progress and specific issues. There is an active Parent Teacher Association and newsletters from the school are sent home at regular intervals. Whilst these are very informative, their layout is fairly formal and contrasts with the excellent newsletter provided to pupils by the library. Parents receive appropriate reports on their children's progress, both through parents' evenings and interim and full reports. Most reports provide pupils with targets on how to improve. Many of those who expressed concerns over the way the school works with parents and the information provided on children's progress had daughters in Year 7 and may have expectations based upon the more regular contact that is feasible in primary schools. The inspection team judged that most teachers set appropriate amounts of homework and have an expectation that girls will take responsibility for organising its completion. This is commendable and older pupils indicated that they had learnt to take this responsibility. Some girls spend too long on homework, but usually this is from a desire to present the best quality of work, rather than to meet teachers' expectations. A range of other concerns were expressed by individual parents, but were usually matched by other parents expressing positive views on the same issue. It is clear that a small minority of parents, whilst pleased to have their daughters at a grammar school, have not fully accepted what this means in practice.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The Sixth Form in this large 11 to 18 girls' grammar school has expanded to 256 students, which is larger than average. There are a small number of ethnic minority students, mainly Indian and Chinese, who speak English well. The Sixth Form provides a very wide range of over 30 subjects, which are examined at AS and A Level. Further subjects can be taken at BETHS, the local boys' grammar school. All students embark on two-year A Level courses. They tackle four subjects in Year 12 in addition to general studies, and usually concentrate on 3 or sometimes 4 subjects in Year 13. For the last four years, the high proportion of students from the main school who enter the Sixth Form has met its stringent entry requirements without difficulty.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The Sixth Form is very good. It is successful and cost-effective. Students learn very well and achieve good results. Almost all go on to higher education. Six girls were accepted into Oxford and Cambridge colleges this last year. In addition to academic provision, the school provides a rich environment for students' personal development. Teaching in the Sixth Form is good in most subjects. From those subjects inspected in detail it was very good in English, mathematics, physics, drama and theatre studies and geography and excellent in art.

STRENGTHS

- The breadth and quality of the curriculum, which continues to improve.
- The good teaching and very good standards of learning in the Sixth Form.
- The excellent monitoring of students' academic performance, which enables all to make the best possible progress and ensures equality of opportunity.
- The excellent monitoring of students' personal development, which ensures all, are given the opportunities to develop confidence and maturity.
- The capacity of students to take an active and highly effective part in their own learning.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

- Procedures for monitoring and improving attendance.
- Careers guidance.
- The provision of books and ICT to fully support independent study in some areas of the curriculum.
- Accommodation for all students to study privately.

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

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

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

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	Very good. Students achieve well because the teaching is very good. Standards are well above the national average. The very good leadership has resulted in very good improvement since the previous inspection.
Biology	Good. Standards are above average. Teachers have strong subject knowledge and teaching is good. Practical tasks to develop further logical thought are being developed. There is insufficient use being made of ICT.
Physics	Very good. Results are well above average and the proportion of students gaining the highest levels was above national averages in 2001. Students are achieving very well as a result of very good teaching. The general use of ICT to enrich learning is improving but is not yet consistently being applied.
Design and technology	Very good. Standards of work in textiles are high. Results at A and AS Level are well above average in food and fashion. Teaching is good and leadership and management are strengths. There are shortcomings in the accommodation and resources, which restrict learning.
Business studies	Satisfactory. The department is in transition and there are no recent A Level results to report. AS results reflect the abilities of students. Students are making good progress and have very good attitudes.
Art	Provision is excellent. Teaching, learning and students' attitudes are excellent. Standards and achievement are very high. This is because the teaching encourages experimentation and artistic risk taking founded on in-depth preparation work. The students' individual creativity and thus imagination is allowed to flourish.
Drama and theatre studies	Provision is good. Teaching and learning in the department are very good. Students' attitudes are excellent. There are exceptionally frequent opportunities for public performance.
Geography	Provision in the Sixth Form is very good. Standards are high and well above the national average. This is the result of very good teaching and learning. Students' attitudes to their work are a particular strength.
History	Provision is good. Standards in Year 12 and 13 are above national expectation. Students are positive about the subject and there is a good retention rate. They progress in their learning at a satisfactory rate in relation to their prior attainment at GCSE Level.
Law	Provision is very good. Results at A Level are well above average due to good teaching. Learning is very well supported by assessment, which informs curriculum planning. There are insufficient opportunities to learn outside the classroom.
Sociology	Overall provision is unsatisfactory, despite average standards. This is due to ineffective leadership of the subject. Teaching is satisfactory, but does not sufficiently involve students in their own learning.
English literature	Provision is very good. Students do well because of the very high standard of teaching and learning. The consistently high proportion who achieve the highest grades in AS and A Level is a notable feature of attainment.
French	Provision for French is good. Recruitment to languages has improved, although about half give up languages after AS Level. Results are broadly in line with national averages, but with fewer high grades. Teaching is good, with accurate and consistent use of the foreign language.

In other subjects where work was sampled, teaching was at least satisfactory. Excellent teaching was observed in music and further mathematics, very good in philosophy, government and politics, German and ICT and good in economics, psychology, Italian, religious studies and chemistry. Teaching in general studies varies from very good to satisfactory. Attainment in 2001 at A Level was well above average in chemistry, government and politics and music, above average in religious studies, average in economics and design and communication but below average in German, and well below in computer studies and physical education. Results in all these subjects, and psychology and philosophy, were mostly above average at AS Level.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Educational support and guidance for students is satisfactory. Students are well inducted into the Sixth Form. Information about Sixth Form and university courses is good. However, expert advice from outside the school on careers is unsatisfactory. Monitoring of students' progress and their personal development is excellent. The new electronic system of monitoring students' attendance is currently unsatisfactory.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the Sixth Form	Leadership and management of the Sixth Form are very good within the context of the whole school. Developmental planning is strong and has a central focus on teaching and learning, which promotes high standards. Monitoring and evaluation of students' academic performance is excellent, maximizes their progress, and allows effective steps to be taken to overcome weaknesses. The governing body plays a very effective part in the leadership 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 quality of most teaching and pastoral care. Teachers are "brilliant" in offering help when it is needed. They enjoy being in the Sixth Form and would advise others to join it. Helped to settle well into the Sixth Form. The way Sixth Form students are involved in the whole school. Information on their progress and assessment of work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Careers advice, including advice on subject choice and on higher education. The way the school listens to students' views and treats them as responsible adults. Enrichment activities.

Students are very positive about the Sixth Form and the strengths they identified were generally confirmed by the inspection. Students have a good understanding of the strengths of teaching and recognise the rare occasions when it is less satisfactory. Students, particularly in Year 12, were very critical of careers advice and sometimes of the advice on choosing courses. Inspectors concurred with students' concerns over careers advice, but felt much good information was given on courses, although an impartial voice on subject choice would be supportive. Inspectors were surprised that some students felt enrichment activities could be improved. Many students were extremely positive about those offered. Those who are not should, perhaps, show the initiative to set up the alternatives they desire.

Negative comments about being treated as adults and having their views listened to appear to refer primarily to the ban on wearing trousers and not being allowed offsite during lesson time. A significant minority of students rejected the governors' offer to allow trouser suits in the Sixth Form as impracticable and unfashionable. The inspection team concurs with students that the issue of trousers should be revisited. However, it understands the school's reasons for wishing to keep students on site during lesson times, but in doing so the school must address shortcomings in accommodation and research facilities to enable students to make the best use of their time. Students appreciate the attractive Sixth Form common rooms, but recognise the lack of library facilities and study space.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Enables pupils to achieve high standards across the curriculum, especially at GCSE, whatever their prior attainment.

1. Pupils achieve high standards in all years, but especially in Years 10 and 11. High quality work in school is translated into high standards of attainment in external assessments, especially at GCSE. Being a grammar school, which takes pupils who are identified as being in the top 25 per cent in tests for selection, pupils are of above average ability. However, whilst the majority attain Level 5 in National Curriculum tests in English, mathematics and science at the end of Year 6 in their primary schools, a sizeable minority only achieve Level 4, the expected level for average pupils, in at least one subject, some in all three. In the current Year 7, about a quarter achieved only Level 4 in mathematics and science and about a seventh in English. Although the number joining the school has increased from five form entry in Years 10 and 11 to seven forms in Years 7 and 8, attainment on entry, as judged by selection tests, has remained fairly constant. The average point score achieved in National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 6 has steadily improved.

2. Results in national tests at the end of Year 9, show a significant improvement on standards on entry. Results are consistently very high in comparison with the national average, placing the school in the top five per cent of schools. All pupils attain the expected Level 5 or better and almost all attain Level 6 or better. In 2001, 93 per cent attained Level 6 or better in English and 95 per cent in science. In mathematics, 99 per cent attained Level 6 or better. In all three subjects, results at Level 6 or better are in line with those achieved nationally in grammar schools. Although hardly any pupils enter school having attained Level 6 in Year 6, by the end of Year 9, in 2001, 93 per cent of pupils attained Level 7 or better in mathematics and 35 per cent Level 8. This is outstanding, and well above the average for grammar schools nationally. The proportions achieving Level 7 or better in English and science, 46 and 49 per cent, were in line with the average for grammar schools. Just over a tenth attained Level 8 in both subjects and one pupil was congratulated for exceptional performance in science. These results indicate that appropriate provision is being made for gifted and talented pupils. In other subjects, teacher assessments are published annually. Those published for 2001 suggest that some subjects are over harsh in their assessments, others over generous. Pupils would be supported in making the most sensible option choices for Years 10 and 11 if moderation of levels was more accurate.

3. The very good progress made at Key Stage 3 is sustained and improved further during Years 10 and 11. For the fourth consecutive year, 100 per cent of pupils achieved five or more grades A*-C. Whilst this might be expected in a selective school, it is not so in all grammar schools. The proportion achieving 5+ grades A*-C in 2001 was very high both compared with similar schools and based upon pupils' prior attainment. A significant improvement since the last inspection is the number of grades A* and A achieved by pupils across almost all subjects. This is now very high. It has steadily risen to a very encouraging 52 per cent of entries in 2001. However, despite this, the school's average point score, based on the average total point score per pupil, is only broadly average for a grammar school. This is entirely due to the school's reluctance to increase the number of subjects taken by pupils at GCSE. Their reasoning is appropriate. Whilst in some schools, pupils will enter more subjects without increasing their workload, the diligence of most pupils at Townley would result in their striving to achieve the highest grades in the extra subjects, thus putting themselves under extra unnecessary pressure. However, the school is looking

at ways of adding additional breadth to the curriculum, which might result in some pupils entering another full or half GCSE. Over recent years, the school's GCSE results have compared very favourably with those achieved in other Bexley grammar schools, both in the proportions achieving 5+ A*-C grades and on average point score.

4. Some parents expressed concern that the school was now placing too much emphasis on achieving the highest grades A* and A in response to the last Ofsted report. No evidence of this was found during the inspection. Results suggest that girls of all abilities are achieving very well and that the high expectations placed on the ablest are, in most subjects, having a positive effect on the performance of the comparatively less able. Based on their National Curriculum levels on entry to Year 7, last year's Year 11 achieved on average a point score 15 points higher than achieved nationally by schools with similar intakes, 62 points compared to 47 points nationally.

5. Whilst overall GCSE results are excellent, they are also excellent in most individual subjects, although in some optional subjects this does sometimes vary between years according to the ability of the groups. Every girl achieves grade A*-C in English language, English literature and mathematics, whilst nationally two or three per cent do not. In English language, the proportion of highest grades A* and A rose from 47 per cent in 2000, in line with the national average for grammar schools, to 60 per cent, well above the average. The proportion of highest grades was well above average for grammar schools in both years in English literature and in line in mathematics. Almost all achieve grades A*-C in double science, 99 per cent in 2001, which is above average for grammar schools, but the proportion of grades A* and A is a little below average. In 2001, all entered achieved grades A*-C in art and design, drama, design and technology (which includes food technology, textiles, graphics and resistant materials), German, Italian and religious studies and most did so in other subjects. In 2000, 100 per cent A*-C grades was also achieved in music and geography. The proportion achieving grades A* and A was above average compared to grammar schools nationally in 2001 in art and design, business studies, design and technology, French, geography, German, Italian and religious studies. In 2000, it was also above in music and history. The proportion of A* and A grades is consistently very high compared to grammar school averages in business studies, geography and Italian.

6. Standards Post 16 are also high. The average point score, based on two points for grade E up to 10 points for grade A, for students entered for two more A Levels has been consistently well above average compared both with all maintained schools, all providers including further education (FE) colleges and independent schools and the average for Bexley schools. The proportion of entries passed at the highest grades A and B, 46 per cent, is also well above average. In 2000, it was 35 per cent nationally in maintained schools. Results in the first year of the new AS Level examinations in Year 12 were also extremely good with a high proportion of entries passed at grades A or B in many subjects. In 2001, results were particularly high in art and design, drama, economics, geography, government and politics, history, law, music and physics at AS Level. At A Level, they were well above average in art and design, chemistry, English literature, geography, history, home economics (including food and textiles), mathematics, music, law, government and politics and physics. A detailed analysis of A and AS results is contained in Section D of this report.

7. Standards observed in lessons and work surveys during the inspection generally matched those achieved in external assessments and in some instances suggested further improvements at GCSE were likely. Standards are above average in earlier years and become well above average as pupils move through the school. Pupils are articulate, write with fluency and are numerate. In English, the quality of pupils' writing is very good, as are their speaking and listening skills. Pupils write in appropriate registers and are able to use textual references to support their arguments. Comprehension skills are very good. Pupils read fluently and with expression, speak confidently, using a range of vocabulary and develop,

by Year 11, very good skills of critical analysis. In mathematics, pupils are confident in understanding concepts and willing to explain their reasoning to the class. They are able to come up with alternative methods of solution as their thinking and problem solving skills are very good. In science, pupils develop very good understanding of concepts and are able to draw together ideas from different areas of the subject. They are developing good investigational skills in languages, pupils are becoming confident users of the foreign language. Attainment in other subjects is generally well above average by the time pupils reach Year 11. Because of good teaching pupils' creative and intellectual abilities are well developed.

Provides very good learning experiences, supported by much very good or excellent teaching.

8. Across the school, the quality of pupils' learning is very good. Pupils are enthusiastic learners. They work hard and produce an enormous amount of work at a good pace. Pupils show an interest in almost all their work, concentrate very well and display good independence, even in some lessons where teaching does not encourage this. Pupils display very good knowledge of their learning, understanding their strengths and weaknesses and have a good grasp of what they need to do to improve. Pupils make good use of the school's facilities and extra-curricular offer to enhance their learning. The library is used extensively during and after the school day as are computers. Pupils attend homework clubs and extend their learning by attending a range of enrichment activities.

9. Pupils' learning is supported by good quality teaching, much of which is very good or excellent. This is especially so in Years 10 and 11. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed in any year, although there is a wide range in quality. Of the 151 lessons observed, just less than half of which were in the Sixth Form, teaching was very good or excellent in 45 per cent and good in a further 37 per cent. These are impressive figures. Teaching was strongest in Years 10 and 11 where 54 per cent was very good or excellent, with a further 37 being good. In the Sixth Form, 47 per cent was very good or excellent and 32 per cent good, whilst in Years 7 to 9, 35 per cent was very good or excellent and 45 per cent good. Examples of excellence were observed in mathematics in Years 7 and 8, art and drama in Year 10, art and science in Year 11 and art (4 times), music and further mathematics in the Sixth Form. In Years 7 to 9, very good teaching was observed in English, mathematics, science, German, French, Italian, dance, ICT, geography and music. In Years 10 and 11, very good teaching was observed in English, mathematics, science, geography, design and technology, German, drama, music, physical education, religious studies and personal development. In the Sixth Form, some very good teaching was observed in English, mathematics, geography, drama, textiles, French, government and politics, law, general studies, philosophy, ICT, art, physics, history, physical education and German. Across the school, good teaching was observed in almost all subjects. As this was a short inspection in the main school, some subjects were inspected far less than others, whilst in the Sixth Form targeted subjects were observed at least four times, others only once. Consequently, very good or excellent teaching may occur in other subjects, but was not observed.

11. Across the school teachers' management of pupils is excellent. Teachers' knowledge and understanding of their subjects is very good and in many cases teachers have a very good understanding of how best to teach their subject. Teaching of basic skills is very good, both in mathematics and English, and across the curriculum. Most teachers stress the importance of using subject specific vocabulary. In most lessons time is used very well as are resources in most subjects, although the use of ICT varies from excellent to unsatisfactory between teachers and departments. Teachers' use of ongoing assessment is very good. Marking is generally good and teachers give pupils good feedback on their work both orally and, in most cases, in writing. Many teachers make it explicit to pupils what they

need to do to improve and set challenging targets, but this is not always the case. Homework is used very well. An appropriate amount is set, although the diligence of pupils means that many of them spend more time than is necessary perfecting the homework. Research skills, which are very well taught in some subjects, are used effectively by pupils across the curriculum. Teachers have high expectations of pupils. They work hard and expect pupils to do so as well. In better lessons, teachers have extension activities available for those who complete tasks, which extend pupils' understanding rather than just repeating similar tasks. For example in a lesson on Japan, pupils were asked to explain how each statistical indicator tells us that Japan is more developed than other countries.

12. The best learning occurs where teachers encourage pupils to take risks, to develop independent learning skills, to become active learners and to work collaboratively. For example, what makes art teaching special is the instinctive way in which the head of department knows when to intervene and when to stand back from the students so that they can 'fly' independently. Across the curriculum, pupils are given a wide range of opportunities to develop intellectual, physical and creative skills. There is much skilful questioning, often targeted at individuals, but in the best lessons there is discussion between pupils both in groups and as a whole class, rather than just a dialogue between the teacher and individuals. For example, a Year 8 lesson on "Twelfth Night" was very good because the teacher actively involved pupils throughout in discussion and critical analysis of a suitably challenging nature. This was reinforced by good assessment, enabling all pupils to make very good progress in their understanding of Shakespeare's use of dramatic irony.

13. There was less very good and excellent teaching in Years 7 to 9 than in other years. Senior managers are encouraging staff to experiment with differing teaching styles, particularly in Year 8, but little of this was observed. However, some very good and excellent practice was seen. The two mathematics lessons where there was excellent teaching and learning were very different from each other. In one, pupils in Year 8 were carrying out an investigation. The teacher used an interactive whiteboard for their presentation, with a smooth flow of questions, most of which were open-ended. Discussion was encouraged through setting work in pairs and groups, who were then expected to present summaries of their work. Girls were challenged to think and all were actively included. As a result of excellent teaching and learning, progress was excellent and attainment very high. In Year 7, pupils were on a second lesson on fractions. Teaching was at pace with girls required and able to explain precisely what they are doing to others in the class. Girls were set time-limited goals and the teacher was continually assessing understanding. Methods used included a recap of the lesson, which included extension work to consolidate their understanding and made clear to pupils what would come next. In a Year 8, dance lesson, three pupils had prepared the warm up activity and pupils were used to provide demonstrations in developing the dance. As a consequence, pupils understood what was expected quickly. The enthusiasm of the teacher was infectious. Girls were encouraged to develop their ideas, worked with concentration and were supportive of each other. Very good lessons in languages were briskly paced, actively involved pupils in a variety of tasks and were suitably challenging with a good focus on the foreign language. Pupils are challenged from the moment they enter the room. Expectations are made clear and objectives shared. In some lessons, such as Year 7 ICT, the teachers' presence is almost unnoticed as they support individuals in carrying out challenging tasks. In these lessons independence is encouraged but so is collaboration in order to solve problems.

14. Almost all teaching and learning seen in Years 10 and 11 was at least good and over half of it was very good or excellent. Excellence in Year 11 science was observed in a lesson on stars and the expanding universe. Pupils understanding of nuclear fusion grew progressively through the lesson. Excellent use is made of resources to aid understanding, including a video clip, a revision CD and practical activities. An excellent variety of teaching strategies are used which encourage pupils to ask the searching questions of themselves.

Models are used effectively to enhance understanding. In Year 10 art, in a lesson following up a visit to the British Museum, there was a targeted review at the start, which set clear objectives and encouraged risk taking. The strength of teaching is in the sharpness of the teacher knowing when to stand back and when to intervene. Effective use was made of ICT. In a Year 10 drama lesson on "The Crucible" the teacher encouraged girls to bring the skills they have developed in working on devised pieces to working on a script. Groups work on presentations of short pieces and make use of any available space, one group presenting to the class in the Piazza. Pupils are encouraged to use a variety of dramatic and vocal techniques. They are expected to work at pace, to collaborate extensively, to enjoy what they are doing, to share ideas, but also to concentrate very hard. The teacher's strong subject knowledge is reflected in the excellent response of pupils in volunteering and developing ideas. In Year 10 music, girls work well in preparation for performance of ensemble pieces. They collaborate effectively, are actively engaged throughout but also show independence. The teacher starts with a brisk introduction developing their musical knowledge and encourages research.

15. Teaching and learning in a Year 11 English lesson on "Macbeth" were very good, because the teacher gave a lot of opportunity to pupils to develop their independent and collaborative learning skills and skills of critical analysis. The teacher was successfully in getting all the girls to think actively and consequently they made good progress. Girls started in pairs critically analysing each other's introduction to essays. Pupils are encouraged to comment on use of language, theme and characterisation, for example. Comments have to be backed up by substantiated judgements. As a consequence pupils have the confidence to challenge the teacher's feedback on their work. Similarly in Year 10, pupils were set an interactive task when working on "The flowers", working in groups. The teacher is enthusiastic, but allows girls time to express their own ideas to the class and only interjects to draw out further learning based on the ideas raised by pupils. Teaching in Year 10 geography was very good because the teacher planned a variety of activities, gave ample opportunity for independent research, used strong subject expertise to relate the topic to local areas and encouraged pupils in feedback to extend and develop their ideas. Similarly in a Year 10 religious studies on euthanasia, a well-produced booklet assisted pupils' learning with a wide range of stimulating questions and case studies. Pupils were stimulated by the lively and enthusiastic approach of their teacher who provides very good attention to individuals during written tasks.

16. Teaching Post-16 is varied. In a few cases, it is very teacher led with pupils remaining too passive and dialogue being confined to question and answer sessions. However, this is not the norm and students are dismissive of the occasional lesson where they do little but note take. Most teaching is at least good and much is very good. Excellence was observed in art lessons where there was a tutorial approach with very thorough support and advice given, very targeted questioning and encouragement to experiment. These lessons also made excellent use of ICT for research and scanning, good development of analytical skills and excellent student involvement with the teacher stepping back to allow creativity to take off. A similar tutorial approach was used in further mathematics, monitoring each step of the work, correcting through discussion. Unusually for mathematics, discussion played an effective part in the lesson, positively impacting on students learning. There were similarities in Year 12 music, with the teacher supporting students in developing their ideas in producing a "Theme and Variation".

Makes very good provision for pupils' spiritual, moral and social development, which encourages positive attitudes and excellent relationships and behaviour.

17. The school makes very good provision for pupils' spiritual and cultural development, whilst provision for moral and social development is excellent. It is delivered through a cross-

curricular approach for which the head takes responsibility for monitoring. There is a strong focus on it, delivered through the school's personal development programme and augmented in Year 12 through the module on ethics in general studies. All appropriate policies are in place to support moral development. Most assemblies have a clear moral theme and lessons across a range of subjects address moral issues. Pupils are very articulate, concentrate well and are very open and willing to give their views. Pupils, as at the time of the last inspection, are provided with many opportunities to develop self-esteem and acquire a sense of responsibility, integrity and morality. The personal development programme covers issues relating to relationships, social questions, health and sex education and environmental and moral issues.

18. Pupils' spiritual development is very good. Provision in religious education contributes well to spiritual and multi-faith understanding. The head has an excellent understanding of spiritual development and ensures relevant opportunities are provided to address the spiritual dimension through assemblies, conferences and across the curriculum. Conferences involving the Holocaust Education Trust and organisations such as Amnesty International are organised and all pupils are encouraged to be involved in charity work. With the increased size of the school, a daily act of collective worship involving the whole school is not possible, although all classes have a number of assemblies each week. In addition, there are clear procedures for class assemblies in the staff handbook. Pupils are encouraged to explore their own spirituality and there is a spiritual element to many lessons and extra-curricular activities. Students' responses to the achievements of others, whether it is a musical or dramatic performance or explaining how to solve a mathematical problem to the class, exemplify the strength of the school's moral and spiritual development. Pupils know right from wrong and are given ample opportunities to reflect their own and other people's lives and beliefs.

19. Pupils' social development is excellent. Interviews show that pupils in all years have a very good understanding of the values and principles on which the life of the school community is based. Pupils in all years speak positively about the friendliness of the school and how well girls get on with each other across year groups. The involvement of Year 8 pupils to support new Year 7 pupils and of Sixth Form students as prefects supports this. There are many examples of extra-curricular activities which require pupils to work together co-operatively across year groups, particularly in the arts and sports. Collaborative learning is encouraged in many lessons across the curriculum and in many subjects pupils are expected to develop independence in lessons and in completing substantial pieces of homework. Pupils in all years are given opportunities to take on responsibilities, with many Sixth Form students performing prefect roles very effectively. Significant sums of money are raised for charities.

20. The School Council is a recent initiative. A meeting observed during the inspection was impressive with girls of all ages making their views known on the inadequacies of the canteen and proposals for change. It was well chaired by a Sixth Form student. A teacher has recently taken on responsibility for co-ordinating the introduction of citizenship. A very good quality audit of what is presently taught has been undertaken. The coordinator has started to put in place monitoring and assessment procedures in preparation for reporting to parents when government guidelines are published.

21. As part of the current personal development programme a range of speakers from the community visit. These include health workers and the police. All are very positive about the social skills of girls who treat visitors with respect, but have the confidence to question what they are being told not just to accept it. This is done in an appropriate way with no hint of arrogance. Girls are used to show visitors, including parents and prospective pupils round the school. The head's letter to parents of prospective pupils, highlights that the girls

themselves are the best advertisement for the quality of the school. The inspection team concurs with this view.

22. The very good provision for pupils' spiritual, moral and social development, supports all aspects of pupils' personal development, their attitudes and values. Attitudes to school are very good. Most pupils are extremely enthusiastic, interested in the work and become fully involved in activities. Behaviour is excellent. There is an almost total absence of oppressive behaviour and pupils and parents know that if bullying occurs it will be dealt with speedily. Parents cited examples where this had been dealt with, usually very effectively. Pupils' understand the impact of their actions on others. They care well for each other across year groups. They are taught to have respect for the feelings, values and beliefs of others and the small proportion of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds are very positive about the school. The senior management and teachers do not shy away from challenging unacceptable views held by some in society at large. Relationships between pupils, within and across year groups, and between pupils and adults are excellent. Most pupils hold very positive views of the school. They list many strengths and struggle to find much to complain of, except for arrangements at lunchtime.

Provides a broad and balanced curriculum, with a very good emphasis on curriculum enrichment and pupils' cultural development.

23. The quality and range of curricular opportunities are very good across the school. There is a clear curriculum philosophy, which ensures pupils receive a broad and balanced curriculum. In the lower school, all pupils take drama, dance as part of physical education and a second foreign language from Year 8, in addition to the statutory curriculum. In years 10 and 11, all take double science, a humanities and a technology subject. Currently it is not compulsory to take an arts subject, but this is being reviewed with growing numbers choosing to take art or drama. Some girls choose not to take music at GCSE, but continue their instrumental tuition throughout the school. There is some flexibility in the option scheme, which allows pupils to take two languages or two humanities or two arts subjects. This is appreciated by pupils. However, this results in some who take a short course in technology having a reduction in physical education. All now take a short course in religious studies and a GCSE in physical education is to be introduced in September. Post 16 students are provided with a wide choice of academic subjects to choose from, which is strengthened by collaboration with the partner boys' grammar school. Vocational courses in business studies have been provided, but their popularity has decreased and they have been replaced by an A Level. From September, this will include dance at AS Level. School is open from 7.30 a.m. so that girls can make the most of facilities, including a breakfast club.

24. The school places great importance on enriching pupils' basic curriculum by a wide range of extra-curricular activities, performances, trips and school journeys, as well as links with the local community. The breadth of this provision is very good in all years, but especially in the Sixth Form where students have participated in an exchange with students in Delhi, the Kenyan Project organised by World Challenge, a visit to Auschwitz and a conference on the Holocaust and Young Enterprise schemes, as well as many other activities, such as excellent life classes in art.

25. Sixth Formers take part in public speaking competitions, attend lectures and conferences and carry out some community service, as well as organising charity reviews and pantomimes and a summer ball. Two Sixth Formers have been short-listed for the "Young at Art" exhibition, an award scheme run by the London Institute.

26. During the inspection pupils were observed in a range of sports clubs, including volleyball and trampolines. There are clubs for netball, cross-country, hockey, football and fitness. A lively session was observed of the school's debating society, where pupils spoke

well for and against the motion that “programmes like *Pop Idol* ruin television”. There are a wide variety of musical clubs and performances. During the inspection, a flute ensemble and various choirs were observed. About a third of pupils have instrumental tuition. There are drama and dance clubs, which put on regular performances. During the inspection, rehearsals and performances were observed of Year 7 in “A Midsummer Night’s Dream”, Year 8 in “Macbeth”, as well as the Year 13 A Level class performing “Top Girls”. Two Sixth Form students were observed rehearsing a dance routine and working with a lower school dance club. Pupils in all these performed with confidence and considerable skill, but more importantly were clearly enjoying themselves. The school has won Bexley Arts’ Council Awards for excellence in music and drama. A higher attaining group of Year 7 girls meet weekly as the Cogito Club, where they are learning aspects of basic Latin and Greek as well as touching on ideas of more lateral thinking. Some Sixth Form pupils are organising a club for younger pupils to look at philosophical questions. Other clubs, include conservation, textiles, art, maths, book and a Christian Union group. Pupils participate in the Mathematics Challenge with success. Many girls attend homework clubs in the library and information technology (IT) clubs where they can use computers to carry out research. Sixth Form students organise a number of events to raise money for charity. Some Year 10 pupils are doing GCSE astronomy at the Greenwich Observatory on Saturday mornings. A large number of Year 10 girls spend a week with families in France and there is a yearly exchange with a German school. There are a range of trips, both field trips in geography and holidays, such as sailing in France, choir trips to Siena and Florence, a band trip to Arnsberg, visits to Venice and Verona and a World Challenge trip to Thailand. Year 7 have an activities holiday. There is an excellent *LMC News* (Learning and Media Centre News) published by the library which includes articles by pupils, a list of publications received on issues related to their curriculum, details of websites and reviews of books and writers.

27. There is a teacher responsible for organising community service, which is offered to Sixth Form students on a voluntary basis. Discussions are taking place to extend more of this lower down the school and in place of general studies in Year 13. Girls work at the Malcolm Sargent Home for young people recovering from cancer, as classroom assistants in infant schools and in special schools. The talents of individuals are used, for example a group of handbell ringers toured residential homes. Girls who have participated in community service are very positive about it.

28. Pupils’ cultural development is very good. Pupils are taught to appreciate not only their own cultural traditions, but also those of other cultures. The equal opportunities policy, recently reviewed, has an emphasis on cultural awareness. There are some good multi-cultural displays around the school, including some celebrating school visits to India and Africa. The school is looking to obtain British Council recognition for its cultural and educational links with schools abroad. As part of their reading, pupils are expected to read texts based in other cultures and experience music and dance from a range of cultures. Good use is made of visiting speakers, and many trips are organised both in this country and abroad. There are a good range of trips to theatres, museums and art galleries. The cultural life of the school is excellent. Pupils’ gifts and talents are recognised and nurtured. The school provides a wide range of activities musical, dramatic and artistic activities. These include orchestras, choirs, various ensembles, life drawing, art, drama and dance clubs, as well as rehearsals for a range of productions. During the inspections, a presentation by Year 7 and 8 drama groups of scenes from “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” and “Macbeth” were seen in an evening with a performance by the A Level drama group of “Top Girls”. The annual school production has been a popular event, which was temporarily

dropped last year because of the pressures of the first year of AS Levels. It is intended that this should be reintroduced this year. Such events, provide important an important role in a school and are often an aspect most fondly remembered by ex-pupils as are events such as the annual leavers' ball.

Provides very good quality care for its pupils with excellent procedures for monitoring their academic performance and personal development.

29. A major strength of the school is the quality of care it provides for its pupils. Procedures for monitoring pupils' academic performance and personal development, including the monitoring of behaviour, are excellent. The pastoral system of heads of year and tutors plays a central role in making school such a positive experience for most pupils. There is good primary liaison, as far as possible given a large number of feeder schools. Any girls arriving on their own for the induction day, for example, receive a letter from a current Year 7 pupil. Year 7 tutors create a secure and caring environment in which pupils settle quickly when they arrive at the school. They are supported by Year 8 pupils, who play an important role in helping new pupils settle into the school. Several parents spoke warmly about the quality of support given to their children and mentioned how well they had settled in to the school. Tutors tend to stay with their forms for Years 7 and 8, with a new tutor for Years 9 to 11. This ensures tutors know their pupils well, but plays to the strengths of staff and ensures that pupils relate to more than one tutor throughout their school career. In all years, prefects from the Sixth Form support tutors in the pastoral care of their forms. The involvement of Sixth Form students as prefects, both connected to forms and in other roles, provides pupils in all years with an additional support system which is they value. Pupils spoke warmly of minor problems being dealt with effectively by prefects and other older pupils. The quality of care provided by girls to each other is a positive characteristic of the school. Pupils of all ages mix well within the school. The school is a happy place and most pupils enjoy being there, many spending far longer hours than is required.

30. Form tutors and heads of year play a vital role in tracking pupils' academic and personal development. Tutors deliver the personal development programme in a regular weekly lesson and have some lengthier tutor periods to carry out form assemblies when not in a larger school assembly. Pupils often develop strong relationships with their tutors and spoke of their confidence in confiding in them or their head of year or a subject teacher they particularly liked, if they had a problem. However, tutors and heads of year do not perform just a traditionally pastoral role. They play a full role in tracking pupils' academic progress. This aspect of their role is a particular strength of the school. It ensures that girls who show signs of under-performance in any area of the curriculum are spotted quickly, not just by subject teachers, and ensures that it is possible to respond in a co-ordinated whole school manner to address any individual's problems. Whilst the data has been provided for some years, it is over the last two years that heads of year and tutors have used the data in a more effective and pro-active manner. Tutors and heads of year monitor pupils' progress on their targets identified in end of year reports.

31. An abundance of assessment data is collected on all pupils and analysed by the deputy head, who oversees this aspect of the school. The data is shared with all staff, as appropriate. Tutors receive the information relevant to their forms, heads of years to their year groups, subject teachers to their classes and heads of department to their subjects. From entry to the school, for each pupil every member of staff is provided with National curriculum levels at the end of Year 6 and results in tests in the mathematics, English, verbal and non-verbal reasoning used for selection. Pupils' work is then graded in a way that relates to potential GCSE grades, as well as being given an effort grade. These are then averaged across all subjects twice a year and recorded. These summary sheets provide a good record of pupils' overall attainment and effort and support target setting. Two targets, high

and low, are produced for each pupil. The deputy provides analysis proformas for each subject at GCSE, AS and A Level, which enable heads of department to compare the relative performance of pupils in their subjects to their performance in other subjects. Excellent use is made of data provided nationally and locally on performance. The excellent use of data by the school ensures that pupils' progress is tracked effectively and that the performance of different departments is monitored closely.

32. Procedures for child protection are very good, as are those for ensuring the health and safety of pupils. A member of the office staff phones home in the case of unexpected absences. Heads of year meet regularly with their teams of tutors. Two such meetings were observed during the inspection. Meetings effectively covered large agendas, including pupil tracking, personal development, commendations, reports and follow up to them, parents' evenings, visits, uniform. Both meetings were very focused, and clearly showed how well teachers know the pupils.

Provides very good leadership and management with a very clear educational direction centred on raising standards through improving the quality of teaching and learning and providing an enriched curriculum.

33. The school is led by a very experienced headteacher who has been in post for ten years, but who recognises that whilst much has been achieved there are new challenges, which have to be addressed. She provides outstanding leadership and a clear vision for the school, focused on raising achievement through improving the quality of teaching and learning, whilst caring for all individuals within the school community. She recognises the importance of offering pupils a broad curriculum with a substantial emphasis on enrichment activities that will broaden their horizons. Her personal touch, which is apparent in many aspects of the school, is strongly appreciated by staff, parents and pupils. She is ably supported by the leadership team of two deputies and two assistant heads. One of the deputies is a recent appointment. The roles of this team have recently been reappraised and all now have line management responsibilities for a number of subject areas. One assistant head has major responsibility for overseeing pastoral aspects of the main school, whilst the other is director of the Sixth Form. One deputy oversees the curriculum and tracking of pupils, whilst the other has responsibility for staff development. There is a clear outline of the school's management systems, which provides a schedule for the year including performance management, school self review including monitoring of departments, development planning, target setting, assessment and reporting. The school has a strong pastoral system, with heads of year and tutors involved in academic monitoring as well as the welfare of pupils. Heads of department have strong subject expertise and are often skilled teachers. Many are excellent departmental managers, whilst some need support in initiating change. The school's strong management supports rising standards and ensures pupils make good progress.

34. The school has a clear set of aims, which value the individual and emphasise the broadest aspects of education, whilst being soundly based on achievement. The aims were reviewed last year. There is a detailed development plan. Priorities for development are very well chosen and support progress. Whilst the plan is for one year, it is augmented by detailed financial and premises development plans for three years and outline areas of development are given for the following year. There are also detailed plans at the departmental level. Development planning is soundly linked to budget planning. There is a detailed set of school policies. Their implementation is monitored regularly and they are reviewed. Performance management is now in place, supported by very good staff development. All staff speak of being able to attend courses for the department's and their own professional development.

35. The school has a wealth of assessment data, which is used to track the progress of pupils from their arrival in school. Data is also provided to departments in order for them to monitor their performance in comparison to other subjects. Target setting is well advanced at every level, individual, subject and school. Targets are often aspirational and challenging. All managers have a key role in monitoring and evaluating standards of teaching and learning. Most perform this role well. There are clear responsibilities laid down in monitoring performance for all teachers, for heads of department and subject leaders, for heads of year and for the leadership team.

36. The school benefits greatly from an experienced, well-informed and supportive governing body. Most have dedicated many years to supporting the school. Governors have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. There is a well-organised committee structure. Governors have a clear stance on the need for a broad and enriched curriculum and provide effective strategic management of the school's resources. The school uses its limited financial resources effectively ensuring best value is obtained.

37. The overriding strength of the school's management is their commitment to what goes on in classrooms. The leadership group has a comparatively heavy teaching load. They lead by example, setting high standards in their own classrooms. The curriculum deputy has instigated training on teaching styles and sessions have been organised where excellent practitioners within the school have shared effective practice with their colleagues. The head's commitment to broadening pupils' educational experiences is shown by the organisation of the exchange with students in Delhi.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Aspects of the accommodation and learning resources in order to improve pupils' learning opportunities.

38. The school is situated on a large and pleasant site. Significant improvements have been made to the school buildings since the last inspection. This has included an excellent arts centre which houses two music rooms, music practice rooms, a drama studio and a dance studio. Adjacent to it, five new science laboratories have been built. A Sixth Form centre, including two large common rooms and a smaller study area has also been built, as have some further teaching rooms including an art room. Between the new buildings and the old, an attractive piazza has been built, which provides a pleasant place for girls to meet and eat outside at lunchtimes in summer. During the inspection it was seen used for the rehearsal and performance of a piece of work in drama. The school has been supported by the local education authority (LEA) in these improvements. Resources have also improved since the last inspection. ICT facilities have much improved and there are satellite and desktop publishing facilities. The mathematics department has purchased an interactive whiteboard. The school also has an intranet system, with each department having an area for use by staff and students to support independent study. This is a growing strength.

39. Despite all these improvements, the accommodation remains unsatisfactory in many respects and learning resources, whilst satisfactory overall, are unsatisfactory in supporting independent learning in the Sixth Form. In part, this is a consequence of the increased pupil numbers over the last three years, but even if numbers were reduced back down to five-form entry, some aspects of the accommodation and resources would continue to impact negatively on pupils' learning. The income the school receives per pupil is well below average for similar schools.

40. The school benefits from having an excellent librarian, who makes the best use of an inadequate resource and provides an excellent newsletter to support independent study. Girls make excellent use of what is provided, but the library is far too small for a large school and has about two-thirds of the book stock recommended by the Schools' Library Association. It is especially lacking in provision for the Sixth Form. There is no separate Sixth Form library and students rightly comment that they need to go to other libraries to find background reading on their subjects. Whilst the library is situated adjacent to ICT rooms, ICT provision in the library is also limited. The librarian is trying to develop a library/ media/ resources centre, but limited funding and space mitigates against this. The library's position on the top floor does not lend itself to being the learning hub of the school, although it is used well during lessons as well as at lunchtime and before and after school.

41. Whilst provision for social development in the school is excellent and there are a range of activities and places to work at lunchtime, such as the library and IT rooms, provision at lunchtime is inadequate, particularly in winter. The new Piazza provides an excellent space for girls to meet informally in good weather. However, the school canteen is totally inadequate for the number of pupils on site. The cramped conditions mitigate against dining in a pleasant and relaxed manner. Pupils in all years complained of the cramped conditions, the speed with which they were expected to eat and the quality of food. Much of lunchtime is wasted queuing and eating lunch is not the calm relaxed period of the day that it should be. Pupils in Years 7 to 10, unless participating in lunchtime activities or able to get into the library or an ICT room, have no internal places to relax. Whilst the cost of supervising an open school policy currently may not be possible, consideration should be given to providing some more internal places for pupils to relax, especially in inclement weather.

42. Significant resources have been spent on improving ICT facilities. Whilst these are now good in many areas of the school, they remain inadequate within the Sixth Form study area and in some subject areas. Excellent examples exist, such as the interactive white board in mathematics, which enhance pupils' learning, but facilities to support independent study need enhancing further.

43. Many other areas of the accommodation need enhancing. Many classrooms are too small to comfortably enable classes to adopt the active learning styles which most teachers are encouraging. Specialist accommodation is limited in some areas. The increasing popularity of art will require a third art room to be found for next year. Within design and technology, there is currently no facility for students to develop good graphical design ideas within a design studio environment and no provision to study electronics and control technology. Provision for science is now split across the site and drama, whilst having an excellent new space, has to use the stage as its second space. Facilities for physical education are also inadequate. Whilst there is very good outdoor provision, both gymnasias are small. A volleyball game was observed in one, where every other serve resulted in the ball hitting beams and having to be retaken, thus seriously hindering learning of the game. Changing facilities are very poor, with no adequate shower facilities. Girls therefore remain without a shower after a period of physical activity. This is both unhealthy and unpleasant.

44. The school makes very good use of its inadequate facilities and has been substantially enhanced by the new accommodation provided since the last inspection. However, given the increase in the roll, the increasing popularity of subjects, such as art, and demands for greater encouragement of independent and active learning, the accommodation and resources of the school need further major improvements.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

45. In order to improve the school further, governors, senior managers and staff should:

- address shortcomings in the school's accommodation and resources provided for students to support their learning. In particular, it should continue to seek solutions to:
 - * expand library provision;
 - * enhance ICT facilities across all departments to provide for independent study;
 - * shortages of specialist accommodation in some subjects;
 - * improve the canteen and facilities for pupils at lunchtime.

Sixth Form

46. In order to improve the Sixth Form further, governors, senior managers and staff should:

- ensure that the new swipe card attendance system is efficient and foolproof in registering students, as a matter of some urgency;
- ensure appropriate, well-informed and disinterested careers guidance is made available to all students;
- review the quality of its resources with particular emphasis on the library and the increased provision of ICT, in order to further support independent learning;
- review the use of Sixth Form accommodation to provide better facilities for independent study.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	79
	Sixth Form	72
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		151

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 7 – 11							
Number	6	28	33	12	0	0	0
Percentage	8	35	42	15	0	0	0
Sixth Form							
Number	5	29	23	15	0	0	0
Percentage	7	40	32	21	0	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth Form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	921	256
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	33	0

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth Form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	2	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	9	0

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	36

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	8
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	4

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	5.9
National comparative data	8.1

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.0
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
	2001	0	158	158

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Girls	157	157	156
	Total	157	157	156
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	School	99 (99)	99 (99)	99 (99)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 6 or above	School	93 (98)	99 (98)	95 (86)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Girls	158	158	158
	Total	158	158	158
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	School	100 (100)	100 (100)	100 (100)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 6 or above	School	93 (95)	98 (99)	98 (88)
	National	31 (31)	42 (39)	33 (29)

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	0	151	151

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	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Girls	151	151	151
	Total	151	151	151
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	100 (100)	100 (100)	100 (100)
	National	48 (47)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	62.8
	National	39.0

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

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

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

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations	Year	Male	Female	Total
		2001	0	125

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Male	Female	All
School	Number of candidates	0	125	125
	Average point score per candidate	N/A	22.7	22.7
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	18	17.5

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS examinations			For candidates entered for Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	Number of candidates	0	125	125	0	6	6
	Average point score per candidate	N/A	22.0	22.0	N/A	11	11
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.9	17.4	9.8	11.4	10.6

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	2
Black – other	1
Indian	29
Pakistani	1
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	15
White	869
Any other minority ethnic group	4

Exclusions in the last school year

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

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	68.4
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.1

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	15
Total aggregate hours worked per week	296.5

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	77
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y13

Key Stage 3	27.3
Key Stage 4	21.3

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000-2001
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	£
Total income	2,949,114.00
Total expenditure	2,950,544.00
Expenditure per pupil	2625.00
Balance brought forward from previous year	79,041.00
Balance carried forward to next year	77,611.00

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	16.7
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	24.7

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	2.6
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	2.6
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

1177
460

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	40	53	5	1	1
My child is making good progress in school.	55	43	1	0	2
Behaviour in the school is good.	42	52	2	0	5
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	23	57	16	2	3
The teaching is good.	36	61	1	0	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	28	52	16	2	3
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	47	43	7	1	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	80	19	0	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	23	51	18	3	5
The school is well led and managed.	52	45	2	0	2
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	49	45	3	0	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	44	44	4	1	6

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

RESULTS AND STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

47. Standards achieved by students in the Sixth Form are well above average. The average point score for students entered for two or more A Levels has been consistently well above average compared both with all maintained schools, all providers including FE colleges and independent schools and the average for Bexley schools. Results achieved in advanced GNVQ have also been above average, although the numbers entered for this qualification have declined, with the vast majority of students now taking three A Levels at the end of Year 13. The proportion of entries passed at the highest grades A and B in 2001, 46 per cent, is also well above average. This was an improvement on 2000, when 40 per cent of entries were passed at these higher grades compared to 35 per cent nationally in maintained schools. The overall pass rate of 98 per cent was high and the average point score was the highest ever achieved by the school, 22.8 compared to 17.4 nationally. Value added analyses based upon GCSE point scores show that students, in both 2000 and 2001, achieved just above the expected levels, whereas in the two previous years achievement had been well above expectations. As both the 2000 and 2001 cohorts had achieved better at GCSE than those before, this difference in valued added analyses may not be significant.

48. At A Level in 2001, results were well above average in art and design, chemistry, English literature, geography, history, home economics (including food and textiles), mathematics, music, law, government and politics and physics. Two thirds of the small group entered for art and design achieved grades A and B. However, all four taking art at the school achieved these higher grades, whereas results in photography taken at the boys school were more varied. In chemistry, over half of a large group achieved grades A or B, 65 per cent compared to 43 per cent nationally, and most of the rest achieved grade C. From a large entry in English literature, 53 per cent achieved high grades compared to 37 per cent nationally. This included over a third with grade A, double the proportion nationally. Results in geography were very high. From 22 entered, all passed, just under two-thirds with high grades compared to just over a third nationally. These excellent results were a drop on the exceptional ones of the previous year, when two thirds achieved grade A and most others grade B. Just over half achieved high grades in history from a large entry, compared to a third nationally. Nearly 60 per cent achieved higher grades in home economics, two-thirds in food and a half in fashion, compared to only 28 per cent nationally. From a large entry in mathematics, 57 per cent achieved higher grades compared to 43 per cent nationally. Of these, 35 per cent achieved grade A compared to 25 per cent nationally. Small numbers enter music, but in 2001 three of the four entered achieved high grades. In contrast, there is a large entry for law. In 2001, 46 per cent achieved grades A or B and all passed, compared to about a third with higher grades nationally. Of the small entry for government and politics in 2001, all except one achieved high grades. Results in physics were very good with two thirds achieving high grades and most of the rest grade C from a sizeable entry.

49. Results in 2001 were above average in biology, religious studies and theatre studies. In biology, the proportion of high grades was close to the national average, whilst all of a large entry passed compared to seven-eighths nationally. These were better results than those achieved previously in most years. From a small entry in religious studies, half achieved high grades. A third of those entered for theatre studies achieved high grades, in line with nationally, but most of the rest achieved grade C, better than nationally.

50. Results were sound in economics, French, sociology, design and technology and GNVQ business studies. In all three A Levels the pass rate was around average, but the proportion of higher grades was below average, especially in sociology. However, in both economics and sociology these were much better results than in previous years. There was

a small group entered for business studies, five of six achieved merits. All of the small entry for German passed, but with only one achieving a high grade. The results were least good in the two other subjects taken at the partner boys' school, computer studies and physical education. In both cases the pass rate was a little below average and there were no higher grades attained. Year 13 students also sat AS general studies achieving well above average results.

51. Results in the first year of the new AS Level examinations in Year 12 were excellent with a high proportion of entries passed at grades A or B in many subjects. In 2001, results were particularly high in art and design, drama, economics, geography, government and politics, history, law, music and physics. In each of these subjects all passed, except for one in geography, and over two thirds achieved high grades, almost all in art, theatre studies and music. Over half also passed with high grades in biology, design and technology, French, home economics and sociology. Only in mathematics, from the subjects with large entries, were results disappointing, especially for those who sat applied mathematics. However, little significance should be read into these results as results in mathematics were disappointing nationally and the department has changed courses to take account of some of difficulties that arose in covering the syllabus. Results in general studies were similar to those of Year 13 and national results.

52. In general, standards observed in lessons closely matched those achieved in 2001. Standards in English literature are very good. In Year 12, students rapidly engage with a range of demanding texts and readily identify symbolism, tone, style and structure. In Year 13, students study demanding texts in greater depth, showing good command of a range of literary theory. Standards in mathematics are very good. In Year 12, students successfully study decision mathematics and rapidly learn new definitions and apply them very well to the solution of problems. Standards in further mathematics in Year 13 are very high. Numeracy skills are very good.

53. In the sciences, in biology students in Year 12 achieve well. They show good understanding, for example, of the nitrogen cycle. Year 13 students are making good progress in relation to the predictions based on their GCSE results. In one lesson on microbiology, students prepared their own immobilised yeast preparations to carry out their own investigations. In physics, students in Year 12 are achieving well. They show a very good understanding of nuclear physics and the basic concepts in mechanics and heat. In Year 13, students tackle practical investigations confidently.

54. In art, standards are very high. A Year 12 student, for example, was exceptionally clear in explaining her rationale behind a work on the theme "Time, Erosion, and Decay." Here, the influence of Andy Goldsworthy and Seurat were both to be seen in a sequence of pointillist paintings recording the stages of decay of an apple. One student in Year 13, for example, undertook some highly imaginative three-dimensional sculpture based on the theme of "Chess", influenced by Jermaine Richier's work and a personal visit to Mexico. In drama and theatre studies, Year 12 students work together constructively in small groups to produce a "devised piece". They work together collaboratively in small groups, using a variety of theatrical techniques to show opposing points of view in a dramatic way. In Year 13, students plan, rehearse and direct scenes played publicly to some acclaim.

55. In the humanities, standards are good in geography. In a Year 12 lesson on river features, students deduced through question and answer how channel width and meander length are linked. Independent study and good knowledge across modular topics are strong features of attainment in Year 13. Students do well in history. They make good progress in learning how to evaluate a range of historical interpretations and develop a longer-term perspective on important developments and key figures of the 19th century. A Year 13 lesson, for example, focusing the Nazi concept of the inclusive "race community" enabled

students discuss the issue more confidently. In law, students achieve very well. In Year 12, their abilities to produce extended analytic writing develop strongly, for example, in work done on the operation of magistrates' courts and the functioning of the legal profession. By the end of Year 13, students demonstrate good knowledge of fatal and non-fatal offences against the person and have a good working understanding of key concepts of law. Students display a clear understanding of justice and its practical consequences. In sociology, attainment observed was above average. In Year 12, students begin to question assumptions and stereotypes. In Year 13, students discuss concepts fluently with an awareness of different theories. For example, they understand that men in certain societies distort religion to suit their own purposes.

56. In business studies, attainment is good. By the end of Year 13, students can both discuss and write incisively about each of the key topics including the competitive business environment, human resources and business planning. Students are less confident in the areas of modelling, interrogating statistical data, and hypothesis testing. In textiles, attainment is high. The best attainment is in Year 13 where students design and make garments to a high level. In textiles, standards are high. In Year 13, students design garments and make them to a high standard.

57. In modern foreign languages, listening skills are above average. The quality of speaking in the foreign language is very variable. Reading is heavily based on textbooks, but students read authentic texts in German. One girl in Year 13, for example, researched the initials of German political parties, which she shared with the class, making good use of the foreign language. Written work is very good and makes some use of ICT.

58. The use of a graphic images and creative text using ICT enhances the coursework of students within many subjects in the Sixth Form. This is particularly true within mathematics and art where ICT is used at many points where it is deemed appropriate, although in art the department recognise that this needs to be extended. In geography, students' studies display an increasing use of ICT, which supports analysis. However, other subjects, such as sociology and languages, have not adopted the use of ICT appropriately. In the designated course of ICT at AS Level students show a high level of competence in the creation of dedicated databases, for example.

59. The key skill of communication is taught through general studies in Year 12. Students write confidently in a variety of styles for a range of purposes. Orally, students present their well-researched material with confidence. The standards of literacy within the Sixth Form are very good and fully support learning. Students in general studies, show themselves to be well informed, on global warming, for example, and make very good use of both internet and intranet access. In their study of approaches to morality, students showed excellent study skills in their exploration of the ethical stance of a wide variety of opinion, such as Christian, pro-life, medical and legal raised by the issue of Siamese twins. In the classroom, students present their findings very confidently. They unflinchingly address such disturbing issues as abortion and the possible death of one twin. They have an excellent grasp of a wide variety of ethical viewpoints and the concept of private and public morality and can apply them effectively to the task in hand.

60. A strength of the Sixth Form, encouraged by all senior managers, is that students' achievements do not stop at the academic. Students are encouraged to take on roles within school, to participate in a range of extra-curricular activities and to take part in community activities such as raising money for charities and participating in debating competitions. Those students who have been able to participate in trips to India and Africa, for example, show that they have achieved an enhanced understanding of the world. Those students who avail themselves of the many opportunities offered by the school, or who initiate activities for themselves, are being prepared very effectively for higher education. The small minority

of students who instead concentrate purely on their academic studies neglect an important aspect of further education, curriculum enrichment, and risk being less well prepared for higher education.

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES, VALUES AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

61. The attitudes and values of students in the Sixth Form are very good and relationships and personal development are excellent. In lessons, students show great interest in their work and determination to succeed. They are ambitious for their future careers. The majority of students have developed very good skills that will enable them to continue learning effectively beyond the Sixth Form. For example, in mathematics, students are highly motivated and their very good study skills allow them to work independently. A few students do not show sufficient initiative and do not extend their studies with independent research and reading widely enough, particularly in history, sociology, English and modern foreign languages. In contrast, some other students have taken the initiative to organise trips and events relevant to their studies and continue to support their learning in a self-motivated way.

62. Although students expressed some criticisms in response to the inspection questionnaire, in discussion they were very positive about their experiences in the Sixth Form, although not shy to comment on aspects they would like to see improved. The great majority of students are confident, courteous and articulate. They enjoy the Sixth Form and the wide range of experiences offered. Whilst nearly half the students who returned the inspection questionnaire felt the school did not listen to them, this mainly concerned the school's requirements to be on site all day and the ban on wearing trousers. One commented wisely, that "the school does make a concerted effort to listen and respond, but often feels unlike this because it does not respond to us in the way we want." In general, students value the relationships they develop with their teachers and recognise that "we work together well".

63. Students play a very active role in the main school in their work as environmental and charity representatives and form and subject prefects. Many Sixth Formers have very good relationships with pupils in the main school and Year 10 pupils felt they could discuss their problems with their form prefects. Students value the opportunities to work with younger pupils. The head girl and her deputies value the opportunity to represent the school on public occasions. The prefect system is a strength of the school.

64. Attendance in the Sixth Form is satisfactory. However, the recently introduced procedures using "swipe cards" are not proving to be as effective as had been hoped. At present, some students are subverting the system. As a consequence the school does not always have an accurate record of those Sixth Formers on site, making it a health and safety concern.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

65. Students are well taught in the Sixth Form. Teaching in nearly half the lessons seen was judged to be very good or excellent and it was good in another third. Teaching was satisfactory in the remaining fifth of lessons. Most teaching seen in art was excellent and excellence was also observed in further mathematics and music. Most teaching seen in English, geography, mathematics, physics and theatre studies was very good. Some very

good teaching was also seen in French, textiles, law, history, physical education, German, general studies, philosophy, ICT and government and politics. Teaching was always good in biology, Italian, chemistry, psychology, economics and religious studies and mostly good in history and general studies.

66. Students learn very well because their intellectual curiosity supports independent study. They show great interest in their work and co-operate well in their own learning. When given the opportunity, well-developed collaborative skills also help them to learn, for example, working in groups in mathematics to solve a problem on probability. Students are conscientious and hard working. Independent learning has been a successful focus in physics and geography, for example, and is developing in biology. In these subjects students learn well, are retentive, work very productively, and respond well to the teacher. In art, the interest and cooperative attitudes of students helps them to become artists in their own right. They are unselfish in the way they help each other. In drama and music, students are required to collaborate continually. For example, a quartet of girls were successfully and skilfully developing through improvisation a "Theme and Variations" based upon "Old MacDonald has a farm". However, in some subjects too little importance is attached to enabling students to become independent and active learners. For example, too little research takes place in sociology and discussion, sometimes, is between teacher and individuals rather than between students. Several students, in some subjects, lack confidence or are reluctant to sustain debate and consequently have relatively underdeveloped independent learning skills. The quality of learning was judged as very good or excellent in just under half the lessons observed, but also good in over a third. Discussions with students and scrutiny of their work, suggests that overall the quality of learning is very good.

67. Teachers show very good subject knowledge, which enables students to learn well. In drama and theatre arts, for example, teachers rapidly give Year 12 students a vocabulary of movement and dramatic techniques, which enables them to succeed in practical drama. In English, the teachers' wide knowledge of texts allows students to deepen their understanding as they are enabled to see the significance of cross-textual references. In mathematics lessons, the very good knowledge of the teachers informs skilful questioning which promotes fluency of learning and good pace, and relates knowledge to earlier learning. In physics, teachers use a good knowledge of the subject to set interesting tasks. Teachers show a high level of personal knowledge and understanding in art. Teachers across almost all subjects are able to use their subject expertise to respond flexibly to students' questions, for example in textiles, sociology, geography and history. Students recognise teachers' expertise and value this highly, but also dismiss occasional lessons where they are expected to copy notes from texts as an indication of less secure subject knowledge.

68. Teachers' planning is consistently good. Lessons are almost always well planned. There are particularly clear learning objectives in drama and theatre arts, sociology and history. These are shared with students. Detailed, purposeful studies by students are a key to their success in art, and these are well planned. In physics and biology, there is sensitive planning that makes the best use of resources.

69. Teachers challenge and inspire students to do their best. This is particularly evident in art, where risk-taking is encouraged with excellent results. In a mathematics lesson, students were well challenged in a discussion of "maxima and minima" in reciprocal relationships in pure mathematics. In physics, students were challenged to discover how beta particles are made and further challenged to go yet further to work out how positrons are formed. This resulted in an excellent standard of learning. In geography, the high proportion of high grades is a direct result of the teachers' commitment to update and advise students how to access these top grades. In history, teachers use questioning both to assess students' understanding and to challenge their assumptions. For example, in Year 13,

persistent questioning on educational developments in the nineteenth century succeeded in improving students' understanding of their significance.

70. Methods and styles of teaching used in the Sixth Form are mostly appropriate and help to keep students interested and well motivated to learn. Lessons are nearly always more than lectures, whether involving public performance or active evaluation in drama and theatre arts, an emphasis on active discussion in history, or systematic teaching of practical methods in biology and physics. In many mathematics lessons, teaching methods match the needs of students precisely, because they are tutorial in nature and permit excellent day-to-day assessment of work-in-progress. There is much skilful and challenging questioning across most subjects, although, as in business studies, this is targeted too rarely at more diffident students. In law, for example, conceptual knowledge is reinforced by careful building up of concepts, through questioning and reference to case law. In languages, there is a balance of activities across all four skill areas and excellent use of the target language and a good use of teacher humour. Since the last inspection there has been a significant and welcome increase in the amount of research and discussion required from students. The introduction of the research report in Year 13 geography has extended the opportunities for independent study and required students to use the Internet and up to date publications. However, in contrast, in sociology they do not have the opportunity to gain further knowledge and understanding through a personal investigative study.

71. Good use is made of time across a range of subjects. Lessons are generally brisk. There is some good use of high quality resources. In mathematics, a computer controlled white board was very well used to enhance visual learning in a lesson on curve sketching. In this lesson, students could see an asymptote more clearly in this way than by other teaching methods. Efficient use of overhead projectors saves time in the subject, as students are not required to take notes. In English, an excellent anthology of poetry and prose of the First World War extended students' reading experience, whilst giving them an introduction to formal literary theories. Good use of ICT supports research in geography, law and mathematics, but not in history or sociology. ICT also could be increased to good effect in textiles and modern foreign languages. The resources in biology are particularly well prepared. Whilst visits are used extensively in some areas of the curriculum, particularly art and drama, there is much room for this being extended. There has been some reduction in the range of visits and courses attended by students, in response to the pressures of AS Levels. Whilst Young Enterprise provides good quality opportunities for students to develop practical knowledge and understanding of integrated business processes, there are no planned opportunities for work experience. Students spoke of organising their own trip to Parliament, but sometimes fail to take the initiative to do so in other subjects. They do not always recognise the need to broaden their subject experiences whether directly relevant to their course or not.

72. Assessment procedures are very good in all subjects. They allow teachers to focus explanations and activities particularly well and so shape the curriculum to maximise students' progress. Students are left in no doubt, in most subjects, what they need to do to succeed. In mathematics, for example, teachers offer written comments to aid learning and cover students' concerns inside and outside lesson time. In languages, marking is extremely thorough. Students tackle the sensible, extending homework with interest, energy and success.

73. Teaching of key skills is confined to communication, which is taught as part of general studies. Teaching of this is generally satisfactory, although the quality is uneven. Teachers are knowledgeable but do not all transmit their enthusiasms effectively. Although the lesson on ethics observed was supported by video clips, one on global-warming relied entirely on information obtainable from the computer, and would have improved if a greater range of resources for learning were provided for students. Lesson planning is generally satisfactory,

but inconsistent. In the lesson on ethics there were good, well planned opportunities for oral collaboration. Research materials were stimulating. Independent learning was well supported by reference to websites. Students were animated and enthusiastic and learned very well.

CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS

74. The Sixth Form curriculum is very good. It provides students with a broad academic curriculum of very good quality. Provision continues to develop, with the introduction of dance at AS Level next year. Teachers know the needs, interests and aspirations of the students well, and this knowledge, allied with high quality monitoring of students' academic and personal development allows the school to give very good support to students' individual requirements. The school has responded to local circumstances in its well-focused provision. It acknowledges the high demand for academic qualifications in the area and provides them. It also encourages girls to aspire to continue their education at university and most do so, many being the first generation in their family to so aspire.

75. The traditional range of AS and A Level subjects is offered, including three languages. There is also a choice of design and technology courses in food, fashion and product design and a wide range of additional courses in the business and humanities curriculum areas, including business studies, economics, sociology, psychology, government and politics, philosophy and law. The strength of the provision in law is an unusual feature. Music and drama, as well as art, provide for those with more creative interests. Effective collaboration with the partner boys' grammar school enable girls to take additional courses not offered at Townley. This has included ICT and design and technology courses, and currently includes physical education. The only vocational courses offered have been in business studies at advanced level. The latter did not run this year and the former is being phased out. Whilst the lack of vocational courses could be considered a weakness in many schools, it is not so at Townley. The breadth of the academic offer, including creative and technology subjects, caters effectively for the school's students, enhanced by the link with the boys' school. There is excellent equality of access and opportunity. Whilst quite stringent entry qualifications are set for many subjects, there is the opportunity to have a new start on subjects not previously taken.

76. All students take five subjects at AS Level in Year 12, which should give them a good breadth of knowledge upon which to base future learning. In most cases this includes general studies, although the most able can take a fifth specialist AS Level if aspiring to Oxbridge qualifications. Whilst most students are now choosing a fairly broad range of courses, this is not always the case. Some indicated that they had subverted the intentions of AS Level by choosing yet another humanities subject. However, the growing popularity of the arts and technology provision is changing this. There is satisfactory provision for students to develop the key skill of communication in their general studies lessons in Year 12. The key skills of numeracy and ICT are not taught, both having been well catered for in Years 7 to 11. Some students are critical of the general studies offer, pointing out that they could sit the paper successfully without following the course. Whilst general studies is a sensible option for most students, a more creative choice of curriculum offer and delivery, for example making greater use of conferences and research projects within the course, could alter students' perceptions and improve results. In Years 13, students study successfully for three or four A Level subjects. Schemes of work are coherent, and good planning allows for a seamless transition between the AS Level and A Level programmes of study. Requirements of the Agreed Syllabus for the delivery of religious education Post 16 are met,

although those for collective worship are not. All students in Year 12 are able to spend at least one period a week in physical education, but no discrete provision is made for all Year 13 students. This is a weakness, which should be addressed ensuring all girls have the opportunity to sustain their fitness alongside the pressures of academic study.

77. Extra-curricular provision is very good. Many areas of the curriculum are well supported, with provision for drama, musical activities and a wide range of sports being particularly notable. A particularly lively debating society was seen in action during the week of the inspection. Students take part in public-speaking competitions, attend external lectures and conferences and participate in discussions as a matter of routine. The provision of life classes as an extra-curricular offer in art is an excellent new opportunity for students to extend their learning and offers challenge. Students help organise activities for younger pupils. For example, two students taking dance A Level outside school were observed taking an after-school dance club and others hold weekly language clubs, helped by the language assistants. Some students participate in the Young Enterprise Scheme, which provide useful links with business, and there are trips linked to some subjects. For one week in July in Year 12, English students attend a week's course on Shakespeare. Some students attend the residential WISE (Women in Science and Engineering) conference and others attend summer schools at the University of London on accountancy, dentistry and medicine. However, not all students recognise the importance of participating in visits, which are only tenuously linked to their courses, but which would broaden their understanding of the subject. Despite the very good extra-curricular provision that exists, a sizeable minority of students indicated some dissatisfaction with the offer when responding to the inspection questionnaire. The inspection team were surprised by these views. This minority of students could be encouraged to use their initiative and develop further activities, which meet their needs.

78. Enrichment studies and activities, which provide for students' spiritual development, are very good. One of the compulsory components of general studies at AS Level is entitled "Beliefs, Values and Moral Reasoning," taught by religious education specialists. In the final year of their advanced study all students attend a one-day conference on "The Holocaust," which gives very good opportunities for students to explore the spiritual dimension. Some have visited Auschwitz in the company of a survivor, and continue to reflect about the enormity of suffering and spiritual impact of it. Groups of students attend conferences, which involve beliefs and values, throughout their time in the Sixth Form, such as the Amnesty International Sixth Form conference, the Holocaust Memorial Day commemoration at the Central Hall, Westminster, the Holocaust exhibition at the Imperial War Museum and the Jewish Museum in Finchley. As in the main school, the study of ethics rightly encompasses an understanding of all world religions.

79. Opportunities for enrichment of moral development are excellent, addressed particularly in the general studies programme, where students have very good opportunities to study, for example, the ethics of genetic engineering and cloning. Students have excellent and ongoing opportunities for developing personal morality as they marshal facts and come to a range of considered opinions as preparation for essays and debate. Students are looking forward to a projected conference on industry, which is designed to tackle moral dilemmas in the workplace, which they believe should provide them with an exceptionally wide range of moral issues for discussion.

80. Provision for students' social development in the Sixth Form is also excellent, as they meet an increasing range of visitors to the Sixth Form and visit other institutions and groups of people in return. Personal development is very well promoted as students are given significant responsibilities, such as helping teachers with particular classes, or organising charity performances in school. Some run an excellent road safety project for the LEA. Students take total responsibility for the organisation of the school's prestigious summer ball. Students participate in a range of charity projects, including, for example, a talent show to

raise money for Marie Curie and a charity week linked to a student with leukaemia. The school has started exchange visits with a school in Delhi, and the return visits to Bexleyheath of Indian students constitute an excellent provision for social development. Students from Delhi participated in the last Holocaust conference and led a workshop on the impact of partition on the Hindu and Muslim community of northern India, which many Bexleyheath students had never previously considered. Those Year 12 students fortunate enough to be chosen to visit Delhi speak tellingly of the impact of the visit and the contrasts observed throughout the visit. Other girls participated in a Kenyan Project through World Challenge, which included working in a children's home and primary schools. Those spoke with passion about seeing animals in their home environment and the poverty of street children. Both groups spoke of the trips combining the best parts of tourism and the opportunity to experience different cultures at first hand. Theatre trips, and visits to galleries and conventional museums support the development of students' knowledge of British and world cultures. Trips to sample music and art in European countries further enrich curricular provision.

81. Links with the local community are good. There are curriculum visits, for example, to the House of Commons for those studying government and politics, organised by a student through the local MP. As part of their personal social and health education (PSHE) programme, the sexual health team visits the school regularly. A small number of girls undertake community service in the locality, working, for example, with a cancer charity for young people and a special school. There are excellent links with the Bexley Music Centre. Students have attended conferences related to business and industry. Whilst the pressures of AS Level have understandably reduced the amount of courses attended by students in Year 12, the school recognises the importance of these and encourages students to participate where possible. The school is regarded highly in the community.

THE SCHOOL'S CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS

Assessment

82. Arrangements for assessing students' academic attainment in the Sixth Form are excellent and are focused on academic achievement. Procedures follow those used in the main school. The school has detailed information on students' prior attainment and uses this, alongside regular assessments by teachers, to track students' progress. Students are set appropriate targets and tutors and subject teachers track whether students are on course to meet these targets. Teachers in charge of subjects are provided with regular information about performance in their subject, both relative to other subjects and to national standards.

83. There is a system of regular assessment through homework and after the completion of significant pieces of coursework. Mock examinations are held at appropriate times throughout Years 12 and 13. Reports are well considered and informative and their distribution is closely followed by a parents' evening at which they may be discussed. Senior managers are also closely involved in students' assessment, academic mentoring and regular monitoring and updating of predicted achievement. The system is implemented in all departments. Students read and pursue matters raised by their assessment and demonstrate their positive attitudes to work by building on their strengths and tackling their weaknesses, well supported by staff.

84. Most teachers provide good quality support to students through the marking of work and regular feedback showing them clearly how they can improve their grades. Teachers often give willingly of their time outside lessons to address students' concerns over work. Most students are satisfied with the information provided on their progress, although a minority indicated they were not kept well enough informed. In the majority of the curriculum

areas care is taken to ensure that students understand the criteria used to evaluate their work and students are given accurate and reliable information on their progress. This information is based on previously recorded achievement so that expectations are realistic. As a consequence students are able to evaluate their own achievements accurately and are confident in doing so. An example of this was observed in Year 13 drama, where students accurately evaluated their public performances and were able to eradicate some practical difficulties, making learning more rapid.

Advice, and guidance

85. The school provides ongoing personal guidance to all students based on the very good monitoring procedures. Procedures for monitoring and supporting students' personal development are excellent. Sixth Form students relate well to their tutors and are appreciative of the quality support given by the director of the Sixth Form and her deputy. Students are happy with the support they receive in the Sixth Form. They praise the quality of teaching and pastoral care and appreciate the teachers' involvement and the quality of help they offer when it is required. The majority of students believe that they are well informed about their progress and that their work is thoroughly assessed. There is an appropriate programme of personal development in Year 12, which builds upon the programme from previous years. No such programme exists in Year 13, where tutorial time is used for counselling of individual students.

86. Guidance on to courses is well considered and appropriate, so that there are few, if any, changes after the first half term, and very few students drop out. However, although advice on university courses is thorough, advice on careers subsequent to higher education is not sufficiently stressed. Not all students receive the professional, disinterested guidance both before and during the Sixth Form, that would encourage them to look beyond their university course, and even some Year 13 students are unsure as to where higher education will lead them. Some students, particularly in Year 12, are very critical of the careers advice they have received, particularly that from the careers service. Although there is an adequate careers library, some students feel that more could be done to widen their horizons in choice of occupation. Any work experience during the Sixth Form is usually organised by students themselves, but the majority already have paid jobs outside school, and the work experience chosen does not always broaden their experiences.

87. As in many schools, there is a tension between the pressures of the Sixth Form courses and the need for Sixth Form students to earn money. The school issues sound advice on the amount of work, which is appropriate. However, some ignore this advice and whilst some of these cope well, for others it impacts on their studies. Students only very infrequently undertake European or American work experience, which is commonplace in some schools. Students gain additional work experience in such activities as managing mini enterprises. They receive very good guidance in choosing university courses. They visit universities, and welcome the school's ex-students who talk about their university experiences. Students are early encouraged to consider how they will finance their studies, and many choose not to take a gap year because of this. Some students in Year 12, who are yet to receive this advice, are concerned that it is provided too late. In part, this may have been due this year to temporary arrangements in the management of the Sixth Form during the second half of 2001 due to staff illness.

88. Procedures for monitoring students' attendance in the Sixth Form are currently unsatisfactory. The Sixth Formers register by the use of swipe cards. Whilst the system was introduced to accommodate the more flexible arrangements necessary Post 16 and in light of weaknesses in previous systems, the present procedure does not meet set statutory requirements and would constitute a health and safety risk in the case of fire. The procedure

is subverted by students who wish to leave the school site. Senior managers are aware of this and taking steps to improve the system. The school is rightly concerned that all should be full time students and not carry out jobs during the school day, but whilst it provides excellent social facilities for both year groups, there is inadequate study space, no separate Sixth Form library and inadequate resources for the Sixth Form in the main library.

89. Parents are generally very satisfied with what the school provides and achieves. They are pleased their daughters enjoy the Sixth Form, and are fully satisfied with the standard of teaching provided. They are delighted with the insistence that students work hard. They appreciate the range of enriching extra-curricular activities on offer, such as the cultural exchange with the school in Delhi, which have given their daughters exceptionally good opportunities to travel and to learn.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT IN THE SIXTH FORM

Leadership and management

90. The Sixth Form is very well led. Management is very good, and closely bound with whole school management. Strong leadership has achieved a good and improving Sixth Form, in which all students can and do achieve and are well supported. Equality of opportunity for all students is excellent. Very good leadership ensures clear direction for all Sixth Form work, and successfully promotes high standards of teaching and learning. The assistant head, as director of Sixth Form studies, works closely with other colleagues to plan the development of an increasing range of academic courses. Her strong personality has guided the Sixth Form over many years and supported the introduction of a range of courses, such as law and philosophy, which she teaches as well as teaching music. She is ably assisted by her deputy, who is also head of English, who took over leadership of the Sixth Form during the director's absence for part of last year. Sensibly, responsibility for managing some Sixth Form courses has been given to newer, younger teachers. Their presence in the Sixth Form team, alongside some very experienced more senior staff, provides students with younger role models who can relate their more recent experiences of university life. Staff as a whole provide students with excellent examples of women in worthwhile careers, which are based on academic success.

91. The governing body fulfils all its statutory responsibilities. Governors are a dedicated group of people who show a high level of commitment to the school. They are very well informed on all Sixth Form issues and have very good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of provision. They act as critical friends to advise management on aspects of the Sixth Form, effectively influencing and shaping its work. They make a valuable contribution to the management of the Sixth Form provision. Staff and students are strongly aware of their interest and wise guidance.

92. Monitoring and evaluation of the performance of the Sixth Form are very good. Strategy is ongoing and highly effective. All tutors, as well as the director of the Sixth Form and other senior managers are involved in academic monitoring and target setting, alongside subject teachers. The monitoring of teaching within the framework of performance management is good, and has already begun to raise standards. As in the main school, procedures for ascertaining the amount of value added within the Sixth Form in each subject is very good in all aspects. This informs future development.

93. One of the great strengths of Sixth Form leadership is the positive and caring ethos it provides. This is reflected in the constructive ways students are involved with the whole school community and activities with younger pupils and the positive relationships that are promoted between staff and students. Students like and admire most of their teachers and this helps their academic success.

Resources

94. The match of teachers and support staff to the demands of the curriculum is very good. Teachers are well qualified and mainly employed in their areas of greatest expertise. Many have higher degrees. The librarian is knowledgeable and highly efficient. She supports learning well by obtaining particular volumes from a variety of sources. Performance management is well addressed, so that teachers are kept carefully up to date with regard to the demands of their subjects and the requirements of external examinations. The school strongly supports individual teacher's career development, which accounts in part, for the high staff morale, which informs much of the good teaching seen.

95. There is sufficient accommodation for the Sixth Form, but too much is given to ground floor common-room provision. The workroom for Sixth Form use is too small. There is no Sixth Form library to provide accommodation for students to study with reference close to hand. The limited space in many subjects limits the opportunities for students to use subject specific areas outside their lessons. Accommodation and resources for design and technology are limited. For example, there is no facility for students to develop good graphical design ideas within a design studio environment. Accommodation and resources for drama rehearsals and performance are, in contrast, good.

96. Resources for the Sixth Form are inadequate. The library as a whole contains only two-thirds of the books recommended by the School Library Association. There is no specific Sixth Form library, although there are some books devolved to departments. There are insufficient computers in some classrooms to fully support independent study. However, the purchase of an interactive white board in mathematics has enhanced the quality of learning in aspects of the subject.

97. Strategic financial planning is efficient. The income received for Sixth Form matches almost exactly the expenditure on staffing. There is a bidding system in place for the allocation of learning and other resources. Financial decisions are linked closely to the priorities of the school development plan. The improvement of resources within departments remains a priority for governors, who recognise that overall funding of the school is low compared to that in many other LEAs.

98. In the last financial year training for staff Post 16 accounted for approximately half of the whole school staff training budget. It was focused on the new AS Level and A Level examination requirements. This relates directly to the school development plan and the stated objective of improving the proportion of pupils achieving higher grades at AS and A Level.

99. The school remains popular as a choice for secondary education and is over-subscribed because parents feel secure in the knowledge that girls will be catered for from age 11 until they go to university. Therefore, the school has taken a considered decision to offer a wide variety of courses to retain pupils Post 16. The governors and senior managers are aware that there are small groups in a minority of subjects, but these small groups are balanced by large groups in other areas. The principles of best value are used in making spending decisions. Given the size of Sixth Form, range of courses offered and the high standards achieved by most students, the cost-effectiveness of the Sixth Form is very good.

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

In the inspection, 13 subjects and courses were inspected and are reported on in detail. Work in other subjects and courses was sampled and contributed to the overall picture of teaching and learning in the school.

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2001. It does not include results for Year 12 students.

GCE AS Level courses Year 13

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	5	100	62	20	15	2.6	1.5
Physics	2	100	52	0	4	2.0	0.9
ICT	2	100	N/A	0	N/A	1.5	N/A
Physical education	1	100	N/A	0	N/A	3.0	N/A
Art	1	100	N/A	100	N/A	5.0	N/A
Home economics	2	100	N/A	100	N/A	4.0	N/A
Sociology	1	100	63	0	7	1.0	1.2
Other social studies (law, government & politics)	5	100	74	40	11	3.0	1.5
Philosophy	17	94	N/A	47	N/A	3.0	N/A
General studies	120	90	77	28	19	2.6	1.9
Psychology	3	100	N/A	67	N/A	3.7	N/A

GCE A Level and AVCE courses Year 13

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	37	100	87	57	43	7.1	5.8
Chemistry	26	100	90	56	43	7.3	5.9
Biology	30	100	88	27	34	5.4	5.3
Physics	19	100	88	63	40	7.4	5.7
Design and technology	5	100	91	20	30	4.8	5.4
Home economics (food and fashion)	22	95	83	59	28	7.2	4.7
Business Studies VQ	6	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	11.0	10.5
Economics	13	85	89	23	36	4.9	5.5
Computer studies	3	67	86	0	23	2.7	4.6
Physical education	6	83	92	0	25	3.3	5.1
Art and design	8	100	96	63	46	7.5	6.6
Music	4	100	93	75	35	8.0	5.7
Theatre studies	9	100	93	33	31	6.2	5.5
Geography	22	100	92	64	38	7.55	5.74
History	31	100	88	52	35	6.8	5.5
Religious studies	6	100	92	50	38	6.7	5.8
Sociology	17	94	86	18	35	4.7	5.3
Other social sciences (law, government & politics)	30	100	87	53	34	6.7	5.3
English literature	45	100	95	53	37	7.1	5.9
French	14	86	89	21	38	5.0	5.6
German	8	100	91	13	40	4.8	5.8
Other languages (Chinese)	1	100	93	100	56	8.0	6.8

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

100. The focus was on mathematics, biology and physics, but chemistry and further mathematics were also sampled. In chemistry, results were above average in 2001 and students did as expected given their GCSE results. Within teaching, particularly good explanations were observed that enabled students to gain a clear understanding of hydrogen bonding within the structure of ethanal. In further mathematics, standards are very high and the teaching has no weaknesses.

Mathematics

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

Strengths:

- A Level standards in recent years have been well above the national average.
- The quality of teaching is very good, which is why students achieve well.
- The curriculum is very good, offering a broad range of modules and the depth of further mathematics.
- The monitoring of subject performance is very good, informing the planning of the curriculum well.

Areas for improvement:

- Strategies to maintain well above average standards, as the number of students completing the A Level course rises.
- Results at AS Level.

102. The inspection covered modules in decision mathematics, mechanics, pure mathematics and statistics. In addition, further mathematics was also inspected. The school does not offer the application of number course leading to the key skills qualification.

103. The mathematics department does very well for its Sixth Form students. Over the last four years standards at A Level have shown little variation and in 2001 were well above the national average. Notable features have been the 100 per cent pass rate each year and the well above average proportion of students with the higher A/B grades. This represents good achievement given the above average standard of students when they start the course and is an improvement since the previous inspection. Performance matched the standards of other subjects in the school. The take-up of mathematics has been fairly constant in the recent past. The AS Level results at the end of Year 12 were well above the national average for all schools but somewhat lower than other subjects in the school, particularly in relation to the proportion of higher grades. This is due in part to difficulties faced by students nationally in the subject, the reduction in teaching time by approximately 50 minutes per week and the choice of option modules for examination. Fifty-seven students sat the AS examination and 39 continued into Year 13, the largest number in recent years. Minority ethnic students do very well, as other students do. Standards in numeracy are well above average.

104. The work seen in lessons and in students' workbooks confirms that standards are well above average. Students studying the third pure mathematics module sketch curves with understanding. They can determine the likely value of one variable as the other becomes very large, either positive or negative, and relate the outcome to their sketch very well. Students studying statistics can calculate complex probabilities and use them to test whether

or not to reject a hypothesis. Students in mechanics solve problems involving connected particles and those involving the principle of taking moments. Year 12 students, this year, are studying decision mathematics as opposed to the mechanics module covered last year. This is a new and discrete piece of learning for students, less dependent on prior learning as in mechanics and pure mathematics. Students are learning their new definitions and apply them very well in the solution of problems, such as the best way to match two sets of objects given specific relationships between them. Students' algebraic skills are secure. This stands them in good stead in the Year 12 pure mathematics modules as they extend their knowledge of the solution of equations to more difficult types, such as those involving logarithms.

105. The standard of work seen in the inspection of further mathematics is high. Students can define complex numbers in a variety of ways. They correctly describe a locus in one complex plane when it is transformed from another one under given conditions.

106. The teaching and learning of A Level mathematics are very good overall. It is good or better in all lessons, an improvement since the previous inspection. Students' learning is very good because the teaching is very good. The very good subject expertise of the teachers provides fluency and very good pace to students' learning through the quality of the questions posed in lessons. These encourage contributions from students that show understanding or the need for further work, as in a lesson on the solution of equations that related new learning to earlier knowledge very well. Challenges to the students' learning are very good, by the nature of the problems in the subject and the expectations implicit in the teaching. This is seen in the very good teaching methods used in lessons, as in a discussion of maxima and minima in reciprocal relationships in pure mathematics, and the way students explained their ideas showing that very good learning had taken place. Students acquired new understanding in a statistics lesson, for example, by working as a group, showing great interest in their work. "Tell me something. Tell me something else", are the demands of the teacher looking for the initial conditions, so essential to a solution of a problem on probability. The department has acquired a computer-controlled whiteboard, which is beginning to be used to enhance visual learning, as in a lesson on curve sketching. Students' concepts of different graphs are enhanced by the rapidly changing parameters, for example, and they can see an asymptote more clearly than by other teaching methods. In those lessons judged good overall, resources like these, and the overhead projectors, can be used to enhance good learning further by cutting down the time taken to write lengthy examples on the board, concentrating more on the learning processes. Students have excellent attitudes to their work. They concentrate very well in lessons and use their private study work to very good effect. The teachers' marking is very good, offering written comments to aid learning and covering students' concerns in and outside lesson time.

107. The teaching and learning of further mathematics have no weaknesses. Teaching methods match the needs of the students precisely, being tutorial in nature and permitting excellent day-to-day assessment of the work in progress. One of the students has completed a module herself in private study, an excellent example of independent learning.

108. The standard of leadership and management in the department is very good and responsible for the very good improvement since the last inspection. The impact of the very good improvement in standards lower down the school has yet to feed through to the Sixth Form. Teaching arrangements in Years 8 and 9, changed since the previous inspection, have already produced high standards at the end of Year 9. In Year 11, an increasingly large majority of pupils are entering the higher level course for GCSE, more of them are likely to earn the highest A* grade, enhancing further the possibility of increased numbers in Year 12. The department is committed to achieving the highest possible standards and the teachers work hard and well as a team to bring this about. The use of assessment is very good, enabling the head of department to focus on the standards of all students. The move to

teaching modules in mechanics in Year 13, for example, is a positive response to the AS Level results in Year 12 last year. Students on those courses in the future will have a sound basis of pure mathematics to use in the solution of problems in mechanics. Students have very good views of the subject, enjoying every possible support in their studies.

Biology

109. Overall, the quality of provision in biology is **good**.

Strengths:

- The results are above average when compared with national results and students display a good grasp of concepts.
- Teaching is good; lessons are well organised and run very smoothly.
- Students work very hard in groups, support each other's efforts by listening carefully to responses and show very good levels of concentration in lessons.
- The subject is well led and organised, with good monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning and analysis of test results, which is used to inform students on what to do to improve.

Areas for improvement:

- Encourage greater use of ICT by students to enhance their work.
- Continue to develop the planning documents to ensure that a wide variety of teaching strategies are encouraged.
- Continue to develop a range of practical tasks that enrich the learning experiences of students.

110. The GCE A Level examination results are above national averages when compared to all students nationally. All the students who took the exam in 2001 gained a pass grade but the proportion gaining the highest grades A and B was a little below average. Very few students did not complete the course.

111. The standard of work of current students is above average. In Year 13, students are achieving well in relation to the predictions based on their GCSE results. In lessons they are making good progress and this is due to the good teaching they receive. Lessons are carefully planned, use resources well and run smoothly. In one lesson on microbiology, students prepared their own immobilised yeast preparations and used them to carry out their own investigations.

112. Students in Year 12 are making good progress and are achieving well. They show a good understanding of the nitrogen cycle and the action of nitrifying and denitrifying bacteria. Students know that plants cannot use nitrogen from the air because it is not very reactive because of the triple bond in the nitrogen molecule. Students present their work well and are always willing to answer teachers' questions. Work in students' files shows that comparatively little use is made of ICT. When there are opportunities for its use students show themselves to be skilful users.

113. Teaching and learning are good overall, and students make good progress as a result. Teachers plan their lessons well, making good use of well-prepared resources. Good questioning skills draw previous learning out of the students and this makes a significant contribution to the logical thought given by the students to their individual practical tasks. Teachers also model good responses to questions and this enables students in a lesson on protein synthesis to come to a good understanding of the action of a degenerate code.

114. Much of the written work demanded of the students takes the form of structured questions, which effectively follow up the lessons. Notes are efficiently made and are used well as a revision aid. Marking is always done and verbal feedback on performance is given to students. This, however, is not reinforced by written comments that show students how they can improve their work.

115. Students learn well. They are very attentive, work very productively and respond well to the teaching they receive. Behaviour in lessons is always excellent and students listen to each other very well. Students are incisive in identifying areas where their understanding is weaker and in asking for guidance. In lessons, time is well used. Students support and help each other, effectively offering ideas in more open discussions. Students have a mature outlook and this, combined with their determination to perform and concentrate well in lessons, means that progress is made in every lesson.

116. Independent working has been a recent focus for development in the department. Students are becoming more confident with tasks involving research. They are able to construct their own notes using material from a variety of sources. These notes are detailed and provide a very good basis for revision. Students use a variety of ways to present their work but do not use ICT in a consistent way to enhance their work.

117. The good teaching and learning result from the work in the subject being well led and managed. The planning documents effectively reflect the subjects' requirements and identify general approaches that encourage learning. The performance of students in tests is closely monitored and this information is used to predict future grades as well as having an influence on the way the subject is taught. The monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning is well developed and has started to identify the good and effective practice within the department.

Physics

118. Overall, the quality of provision in physics is **very good**.

Strengths:

- The results are well above average when compared with national results and have been consistently so.
- Present students have a very good grasp of concepts, apply them well in answering questions and overall are achieving well.
- Teaching is very good; lessons are well structured and organised and students' test results are monitored well to help them improve their knowledge and understanding.
- Students work very well in groups, support each other's learning and concentrate well in lessons.
- The subject is well led and has an adequate range of resources, which are used creatively to enable students to learn well.

Areas for improvement:

- Continue to develop expertise and resources to use ICT to enrich the teaching and learning.

119. The GCE A Level examination results show the subject to be maintaining it's very good, above average results, when compared to students nationally. All the students who took the examination gained a pass grade and the proportion gaining the highest grades A and B was above average. Very few students did not complete the course.

120. The standards of work of current students are above average. In Year 13, students are achieving well in relation to the predictions based on their GCSE results. In lessons seen, they are doing well because of the effective teaching they receive which demands much of them. The way in which lessons are organised clearly focuses students on their learning. In one lesson on energy and mass, students were able to draw on previous knowledge of calculations with powers of ten to conclude that a small amount of mass can create a lot of energy. Students use their numeracy skills confidently and this supports the high standards they obtain.

121. Students in Year 12 are also achieving well. They show a very good understanding of nuclear physics and the basic concepts in mechanics and heat. The very good numeracy skills that the students have are also strengths and greatly support the students' learning. Students' work in files shows comparatively little use is made of ICT. When opportunities are available, students show themselves to be competent users.

122. Teaching is very good overall, and students learn well as a result. The principal features of the best teaching are sensitive planning that makes very good use of the available resources, a brisk pace within lessons and the creation of a very good working atmosphere. Teachers show very good subject knowledge in their questioning and explanations and also use in well in setting interesting tasks. In a Year 13 lesson, with a focus of preparation for practical investigations, the teacher ensured that all became confident users of the measuring equipment by using demonstration and individual tuition. Students worked on a series of exercises as individuals and in groups using and practicing these skills. In this way they gained confidence in their work and results. Students were then able to concentrate fully on their explanations of what happened in the investigation.

123. Much of the written work demanded of the students takes the form of structured questions that follow up the lessons. Marking is promptly done and teachers always check for accuracy. Students receive verbal feedback on their performance but this is not reinforced by comments reminding students how they can improve their work and reach higher levels.

124. Students are very attentive, work productively and respond well to the supportive teaching they receive. Behaviour in lessons is always excellent and very good listening skills are always exhibited. These enable students to learn well from each other in discussions and when responding to questions. Year 12 students responded well to the challenge of working out how beta particles are made and then going further to work out how positrons are formed. The teacher skilfully uses time to ensure that very high levels of concentration are maintained. Students learn very well as a result.

125. Independent working has been a recent focus for development in the department. Students are becoming more confident with research tasks. They are able to extract information from a variety of sources and construct their own notes that are both copious and detailed. Students use a variety of ways to present their work but do not use ICT in a consistent way to enhance their work.

126. The very good teaching and learning result from the work in the subject being well led and managed. There is a commitment in the department to building on what has already been achieved to ensure the maintenance of high standards. To this end a very good range of helpful support material has been developed. The performance of students in tests is monitored and this information is affecting the standards achieved by fully influencing the planning of future lessons. The monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning is developing well and has started to identify the good practice within the department.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

127. All aspects of design and technology within the Sixth Form were considered as part of the inspection, although the focus was given to work involving fashion/textiles. All the courses, including food technology and product design, are reported here under the title of 'Design and technology'. A range of design and technology courses has been followed by students, with some girls taught at the partner boys' grammar school.

Design and technology

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

Strengths:

- Standards of work are very high in both textiles and food.
- Results in examinations at both A and AS Level are very good; a high proportion of students achieve A and B grades in food and fashion.
- Leadership and management of the courses are very good.
- The behaviour and attitudes of the students are excellent in lessons.
- Teaching and learning are strengths in textiles lessons.

Areas for improvement:

- The accommodation and teaching resources of the department need significant development to allow for further gains in standards.
- Grades of students studying courses in A Level design and technology.

129. Standards in fashion/textiles work at A Level are high. In the last examinations held in 2001, students achieved grades that are significantly high when compared with other schools. Approximately 70 per cent of all students achieved a grade between A and C and 40 per cent achieved a grade A. This is very high when compared with the national picture. Students also did extremely well in food technology where all achieved a grade between A and C; however, in this examination only one pupil achieved a grade A. The numbers of students studying design and technology A Level last year were relatively low and their achievement was less good than in other subjects of the department and the school. This aspect needs further research in order to promote higher achievement in the future. However, results at AS Level in 2001 suggest weaknesses may have been addressed. All eight entered for design and technology passed, half at grade A or B, whilst all but one of eighteen entered for food or fashion passed, ten at grade A or B

130. Attainment in lessons is well above average and standards are being maintained at the same high level as were witnessed in the last inspection. The best attainment in this inspection was seen in Year 13 textile lessons, where students were making garments, which they had designed themselves, to a high level. The quality of construction in this media in a range of contrasting materials is highly commendable. Of these students, all were judged to be working at a level of A/B in the A Level examination. Students are able to discuss their work with intelligence, enthusiasm and empathy. There is evidence of them using ICT skills and equipment effectively and to a high level in these examination courses. Design folios contain much work that is well produced, informative and of good quality.

131. Progress is at least satisfactory in most lessons and in a large majority of observed lessons was judged to be good or very good. The progress made from the end of Year 11 is good overall and gains in knowledge, understanding and skills are quite significant. Students apply themselves to their work in an enthusiastic way demonstrating a mature approach to learning. They show a rapt interest in what is taking place and concentration is good in those lessons where the learning environment is very rich. The ambience in several classes is

ideal. Good progress is made in an environment where humour is valued and individual contributions of all students are considered fully. Pace in lessons is normally good or better. In the best practical lessons teaching was almost unobtrusive. Students determined how quickly they were going to move on and teachers offered empathetic assistance with a tutorial-style approach for each student. The quality of this approach was sometimes excellent in that it gave each student individual attention so that their work was furthered in the best way possible. Despite some shortfalls in learning resources, students make the most of what is available.

132. All of the teachers observed were knowledgeable in their subject areas, this being particularly true in both food and textiles. They expect their students to work hard. Much of the question and answer sessions seen were penetrative and provoked students to consider the finer points of the subject matter. The teacher's use of ICT in lessons could be increased with good effect, helping overcome sometimes an overload of distribution in photocopied papers. All teaching seen was satisfactory or better. In two thirds of lessons it was judged to be good or very good.

133. Departmental management is very good, as is the management of individual teachers in leading courses within their subjects. Assessment is closely monitored by the head of department and staff are able to predict with some accuracy where a student is at any point throughout the school. Further integration needs to be brought about to ensure full cohesion of all facets of the department. Accommodation for design and technology is unsatisfactory. There is currently no facility for students to develop good graphical design ideas within a design studio environment. Equally there is no provision for students to study electronics or control adequately in an environment conducive to this type of work.

BUSINESS

134. The Sixth Form offers opportunities to study business studies via a two year GNVQ AVCE programme, a one year AS course or a two year AS / A2 Level option. The latter two options were inspected. An economics lesson was also sampled.

Business studies

135. Overall, the quality of provision in business studies is **satisfactory**.

Strengths:

- There are good quality schemes of work, which reflect the learning needs of students.
- Student attitudes to learning are very good and this affects progress in the subject positively.

Areas for improvement:

- Learning opportunities outside the classroom are unsatisfactory and these need to be developed to give students more access to the workplace.

136. There were no candidates entered for the GCE A Level examination in 2001, as this is a new course, students previously having entered an advanced GNVQ. At AS Level, in Year 12, almost all passed and the proportion of students gaining A and B grades was around the national average, with over a third of those entered achieving at this standard.

137. In the work seen during the inspection, the standards that students achieve by the end of Year 13 are above the national average. Achievement for the majority of students based on their achievement on entry to the Sixth Form is satisfactory. Numeracy is very good for higher and middle attaining students and understanding and application of correlation and regression analysis to business contexts is secure. By the end of Year 13, students can both discuss and write incisively about each of the key topics, including the competitive business environment, human resources and business planning. Standards of written presentation are at least good and sometimes very good. Applied ICT skills, whilst good, are not as well developed as might be expected. Students are less confident in the areas of modelling and interrogating statistical data or hypothesis testing.

138. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers have good subject knowledge and support individual students well. Lessons are well prepared and staff-student relationships are very good and maintain the momentum in working through the prescribed modules. There is careful chaining of questions but these are not always targeted to include more diffident students. The pace of some lessons is slow and does not always take into account the range of abilities within teaching groups. Basic skills are well taught, particularly in respect of numeracy, for example in a lesson dealing with the break even formula. Expectations are usually set, but more explicit reference to accreditation requirements could be made. Work is promptly marked and is usually well annotated. Students report positively on the value of oral feedback and know how well they are doing. Target setting would, however, be more effective if it formed part of written comment on assessed work. Homework is set regularly but is not usually a discreet activity and was only briefly drawn upon in the lessons observed. There is good consolidation of learning as a result of teachers carefully checking on comprehension of both vocabulary and concepts, for example in a lesson dealing with budget setting. More opportunities could be given for students to learn from each other. The lessons observed were too teacher-centred and work set was of an individual rather than group nature, for example in a lesson dealing with stakeholder interests. Good opportunities are given for dealing with business as an integrated activity and the ethical aspects of 'for profit' and 'not for profit' enterprises are well addressed in programmes of work.

139. Attitudes to the subject are very good. Students are keen to do well and many are focused on taking their study of the subject further on leaving school. In the lessons observed, and where given opportunity, students show interest and enthusiasm in working collaboratively. These attitudes support the pace of learning across both year groups.

140. Leadership and management in the subject are satisfactory. There is clear departmental documentation, which enables staff to work in a coherent manner. The match of teaching staff to the curriculum is satisfactory. The department is in transition to new syllabuses, which are now being developed and implemented. Some extra-curricular enhancement is planned for. Young Enterprise provides a good quality opportunity for students to develop practical knowledge and understanding of integrated business processes. There are, however, no planned opportunities for work experience and this limits a wider appreciation of business processes for some students. The reporting of student progress to both students and their parents is good and ensures that students know what they have to do to improve at regular intervals during each academic year.

141. The subject was not reported on specifically in the last inspection. Improvement since last inspection has been satisfactory. Attainment on entry to the Sixth Form is improving and clear planning is in place to increase the number of students pursuing business studies in the Sixth Form.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

142. No subject in this curriculum area was included as a focus in this inspection. However, a lesson was sampled. Results in AS Level ICT in 2001 were broadly in line with those nationally, but with all candidates achieving a grade. Small numbers in previous years entered A Level computer studies at the partner boys' grammar school.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

143. An A Level is offered in sports studies which is taught at the linked boys' school. No lessons were sampled. In 2001, the six students attained below average standards and no higher grades were achieved.

144. All Year 12 students take part in at least one physical education lesson each week. The teaching and provision is very good and students work with interest to improve their standards. No provision is made for physical education in Year 13.

145. The school does not yet offer any other courses in this curriculum area.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

146. The school offers three subjects in this area to AS and A2 examination levels: art, music and drama. However, the school currently has plans to extend the visual and performing arts curriculum to include dance at AS Level from September 2002. This is part of the school's expansion programme for the arts as part of its work towards achieving specialist school status for the performing arts. In addition, students are enabled to study photography at a partner institution. Of these subjects only art and drama were the focus for the Sixth Form inspection, although an excellent Year 12 music lesson was sampled.

ART

147. Overall, the quality of provision in art is **excellent**.

Strengths:

- The very high standards achieved by students in Years 12 and 13.
- The excellent quality of teaching and learning, throughout the Sixth Form art groups, which encourages very high levels of creativity and individual artistic imagination.
- The excellence shown in the students' attitudes and approach to the subject and their willingness to take artistic risks.
- The thorough preparation studies undertaken which indicate the exceptional breadth and depth of the students' research for AS and A2 examination work.

Areas for improvement:

- Develop resources for printmaking to improve the scope of the work already being achieved.
- The ICT resources for art, as these are currently insufficient to meet the demand from students.

148. Standards of work seen in the Sixth Form during the inspection are very high. These standards are achieved because the teaching is excellent. Students' excellent attitudes also result in the quality of their learning in art and design being outstanding. Because of this, students' make first-rate progress in the Sixth Form and achieve very highly. This is a substantial improvement on the quality observed in the last inspection.

149. There has been a very significant improvement in examination standards since the last inspection, when results were lower than the local and national averages. In 2001, A Level results for Year 13 were well above those attained nationally for the average points score, with all students gaining a higher grade A or B. Students in Year 12, taking the AS Level examination, gained well above average results with all but one student gaining an A or B grade. In addition, one Year 13 student also took the AS examination and gained a grade A pass. The average points score achieved by these students was over twice the national average.

150. The success of the department has led to higher levels of recruitment to the art courses for the current academic year. Retention rates for the art department are very high. Students now stay with the courses unless they move from the area. In the last year only one girl left to take up a vocational art course elsewhere. The majority of Year 13 leavers go on to further or higher education art related courses.

151. The standard of work of students in Years 12 and 13 is very high because they have an excellent grounding in key artwork skills and techniques, which reflects the above average standards now being achieved at GCSE by pupils in Year 11. Students are enabled to become independent artists in their own right. Their autonomous decision-making skills, and knowledge and understanding of the subject, are of a high order. Most of the work is conceptually adventurous, but exceptionally well founded in detailed, purposeful preparation studies. Students work in a wide range of media with confidence and competence. They show a high degree of individuality and a willingness to explore ideas and styles. Standards of oral and written literacy are very good. Their critical and analytical skills are of a high order. This leads to in-depth self-evaluation, and clarity of vision, when refining and developing their main pieces. Technical skills are very high. This results in most of the students' work being of an exceptionally high standard and produced in innovative ways.

152. A hallmark of the students' approach is the range and depth of their preparation work. For example, one Year 13 girl was undertaking some highly imaginative three-dimensional sculpture work based on the theme of 'Chess' for her A2 course. Her initial inspiration was Jermaine Richier's work in the Tate Modern, however, this was further influenced by a personal visit to Mexico. The impact of modern Mexican artists, such as Charles C. Stewart, led to further study of traditional Mexican art as seen during her visits to museums there. Another student working on the theme 'Between a Cinema and a Hard Place', made excellent and extensive use of her experience when working at a local cinema; she collected a wide range source material, including photographic imagery. Her main piece not only reflected her own perceptions and experience but contained elements of re-interpretation of, for example the 'barcode' images of James Rosenquist. Other influences, such as Bridget Riley, Jasper Johns and Warhol's 'icon' coke bottle, showed some exceptional understanding of space, repetition and the atmosphere of a cinema.

153. Students take heed of the quotation from John Ruskin, posted on an art room door: "*Quality is never an accident; it is always the result of intelligent struggle.*" There are very high levels of self-motivation in all Sixth Form art groups. It is very clear that students are prepared to take artistic risks in experimentation and 'go out on a limb' to achieve high standards. This is a major, contributory factor to the quality of their learning. In lessons

seen, it was difficult to envisage how they could have been more involved or apply themselves harder to their studies. At the same time, there are high levels of co-operation between students and they are unselfish in the way they help each other. This shows great maturity and speaks highly of the contribution the department makes to the girls' personal development.

154. Achievement in the Sixth Form is very high. This results from a very well structured course, which gives students the skills and confidence to do their best. For example, a Year 12 AS course student was exceptionally clear in explaining the rationale behind her work on the theme of 'Time, Erosion and Decay'. Here, the influence of Andy Goldsworthy and Seurat were both to be seen in a sequence of pointillist paintings recording the stages of decay of an apple. These were interspersed with drawings of a dog's head, with overlays showing the structure from external fur to internal skull. Another girl, working on the theme 'India' showed some outstanding achievement in the development and production of her own fabric designs based on the Taj Mahal. This resulted from extensive cultural studies and a personal visit to the monument. It also involved an appreciation of the fabric and patchwork style of Tracey Emin, as well as the more traditional values of Sarah Furman Warner Williams.

155. Underpinning the standards, achievement and learning is excellent teaching. This has a very significant impact on the quality of provision for the students. Teaching is exceptionally challenging. This is simply illustrated in a short poem, which the head of department has reproduced and displayed all around the main art room: *"Come to the edge. / We might fall. / Come to the edge. / It's too high. / Come to the edge. / And they came and he pushed and they flew."* Sixth Form art teaching shows very high levels of personal subject knowledge and understanding. However, what makes it special is the instinctive way in which the teacher knows when to intervene and when to stand back from the students so that they can 'fly' independently. It is excellent because it places no bounds on the students' development as artists. At the time of the inspection the work of two students had been selected for the national "Young at Art" exhibition in London. Many opportunities are provided for the students to visit museums, exhibitions and art galleries. The provision of a life class is excellent experience for those intending to go to art college. Such opportunities make a very important contribution to the personal as well as artistic development of the students. Learning is consequently excellent because the students appreciate that everything they undertake, including things which do not turn out as successfully as they would have liked, involves a useful, positive, artistic experience.

156. The new head of department has ensured that all the issues from the previous inspection have been effectively addressed. The department's priorities for development are not only practical but also very well considered. These include much needed improvements in facilities for printing and the expansion of the department's ICT provision, which at present does not meet the increasing demands of the students. This is indicative of excellent management through its focus on resources to enable improved learning opportunities and the potential for continued high achievement. There is clear leadership by example and the use of performance management to monitor teaching and learning. Targets are sharply focused. The commitment shown to further improvement and the capacity to succeed in this are excellent.

Drama and theatre studies

157. Overall, the quality of provision in drama and theatre studies is **good**.

Strengths:

- Teaching and learning in the department.
- Exceptionally good opportunities for public performance.
- Dynamic and well informed management.

Areas for improvement:

- A Level examination grades.
- The further development of resources within the department.

158. Students' AS Levels results were well above the national average in 2001, with almost all achieving very high grades. This was the first year of this examination and bodes well for A Level results this year. The GCSE A Level examination results last year were above the national average. In the past, students' achievement has varied greatly with a high proportion of grades A and B in 2000. All students completed the course last year.

159. The standards of work of current students in Year 13 are above average. In their preparation of a scripted performance of "Top Girls" by Caryl Churchill, students achieved a good level of integration of text, style and theatrical method. The intention of the group was well defined and appropriate to their presentation of the play. Students had taken seriously the key concept of dramatic communication, and they interpreted the script with the audience very much in mind. The public performance of scenes from the play was good, with excellent characterisation and believable interaction. The set had been carefully considered and worked well. Strong ensemble playing was a notable feature of attainment. The pace of the production, too slow in the opening scenes, rapidly increased until it was appropriate.

160. Students were confident in their presentation, and showed a good grasp of a difficult accent. They had seen a London production, but used their creativity and intelligence to produce a different interpretation, which, nevertheless, realised the playwright's intentions. There were some technical weaknesses and problems with stage management, not immediately obvious to a lay audience.

161. Students took criticism well during subsequent evaluation and sharpened scene changes and practical moves. This session was student-led, brisk and well focused on achieving improvement. Students showed very good skills of self and peer evaluation, rooted in practical experience of production. They marked up their scripts accordingly.

162. Students in Year 12 are working at a standard that is slightly above national average. In their production of a "devised piece" they worked together constructively in small groups and used a variety of theatrical technique to show opposing points of view in a dramatic way. Skills of oral collaboration were well developed. They co-operated effectively to rehearse, and performed confidently. They showed intelligence and good previous knowledge as they considered the wider implications of the use of space as a dramatic tool in relation to levels and lighting.

163. Teaching and learning are very good. Lessons have clear learning objectives. Students know precisely what the learning requirements of the upper band of the examination are and aim to achieve them. Teachers are knowledgeable, and have already given students a good vocabulary of movement and dramatic techniques, which enables them to succeed in practical drama. Teachers make suggestions with regard to interpretation, for example, such as the use of glove puppets instead of a narrator, which extends students knowledge of

technique. Students enjoy the lessons. They delight in the activities. They readily enter into animated and constructive discussion with the teacher and each other. Students co-operate in their learning and work very hard indeed.

164. The standard of assessment is very good, and shapes the curriculum, thus maximising progress. The curriculum is very good, and supports the requirements of the examination fully. Learning is enhanced by frequent trips to the theatre. Professional workshops visit the school. Exceptionally good opportunities for public performance are a strong feature of provision. The newly appointed co-ordinator is knowledgeable and dynamic. She has analysed the requirements of the department and has already improved resources.

HUMANITIES

165. The focus was on geography, history, sociology and law but lessons other subjects were also sampled. One lesson was observed in each of government and politics, philosophy, psychology, and religious studies. Attainment overall is good.

Geography

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

Strengths:

- Overall student achievement is well above the national average.
- Teaching is consistently very good. Teachers are very well informed and have developed the use of ICT and other resources to research topics.
- Teachers have a strong rapport with the students and support them well.
- Students' attitudes to the subject are excellent and they contribute to lively discussion in the classroom.
- The subject is well led and managed and a wide range of books and equipment is used.

Areas for improvement:

- Continue to develop the resources for the new AS/A2 courses in order to maintain standards.
- Continue to upgrade the accommodation for geography in the school.

167. GCE A Level examination results over the past three years have been consistently well above the national average. In 2000, of the 19 students who sat the examination, 12 achieved a grade A, 4 achieved a grade B and 3 a grade C. These outstanding results placed the department within the range of the top five per cent of schools across the country. Although standards were a little lower in 2001, 64 per cent of students entered for the examination achieved either an A or B grade and all 22 students achieved at least a D grade. These results are well above the national average for similar schools. Student performance in geography is significantly higher when compared to their performance in other subjects. AS results in 2001 were equally impressive: 74 per cent of students achieved an A or B grade and 97 per cent A-E. Overall, these results are an improvement from those reported at the last inspection.

168. The high proportions of A and B grades are a result of the teachers' commitment to update and to advise the students how to access the top levels. The students' very positive attitude to their studies also plays an important part. In a Year 13 lesson, feeding back on an essay done previously in class on cross modular themes, the students were encouraged to assess the work of others and advise them how it could be improved. The discussion that followed built well on previous knowledge and extended awareness of the need to evaluate

and give a balanced argument. The increase in the opportunity for discussion is an improvement from the last inspection.

169. Observation of students in lessons and an analysis of samples of work confirms that standards in Year 12 and 13 are very high. The transition from GCSE is managed well. Work folders are thorough and well organised, matching the high levels of attainment achieved in the classroom. Students' coursework shows a depth of knowledge of physical and human processes and how they inter-relate. In one outstanding study on the relationship between river velocity and distance from the bank sides, presentation techniques, including annotated photographs and labelled field sketches, are of high quality. The use of statistics is adding to the development of the students' number skills. Other studies show an increasing amount of ICT and the ability to analyse and evaluate. The introduction of the research report in Year 13 has extended the opportunities for independent study. Students have been using a wide variety of sources to access information, including the internet and up to date geography publications available in the department.

170. Students work very purposefully whether individually or in small groups and remain focused on their work throughout the lesson. In a very good Year 12 lesson, students working in groups had to decide which strategies to introduce in order to ease the problems caused by inner city decline. They supported each other well in discussion and, although they were given a detailed brief, they were able to add their own ideas and thoughts. The impact of this lesson would have been even greater if there had been an opportunity to visit such an area locally.

171. Teaching and learning are consistently very good and is a key factor in maintaining high standards. Lessons are well planned and the teachers have good knowledge of the subject. Most lessons involve note taking linked to general discussion but skilful questioning allows students to extend their understanding. In a Year 12 lesson on river features, students could deduce through question and answer how channel width and meander length are linked. This was then built upon by the class teacher, to show other meander relationships, using information displayed on a scattergraph. Teachers encourage the use of ICT to research topics and the newly refurbished computer suite in the department has extended the opportunity for independent study. This is an improvement since the last inspection.

172. Students are very positive about geography within the school and their attitudes to study are excellent. Year 12 students assist younger pupils to collect information from the schools weather station located on site. This is then displayed each day in the department. The students speak highly of their teachers and they have enjoyed the breadth of the topics covered in the course. The students are pleasant and forthcoming and the teachers ensure that they have every opportunity to succeed.

173. The improvement in the quality of teaching and learning since the last inspection is the result of very good leadership and management. The head of department is very passionate about the subject and is committed to build on what has already been achieved and to maintain high standards. She is well aware of the need to extend the resources in the department to meet the requirements of the new syllabuses. The teachers are constantly updating their knowledge through well-targeted training courses. The team work well together and share ideas. Marking of students work is thorough and helps to target

strengths and weaknesses of individual students. Accommodation has been upgraded since the last report but further improvements are still needed. A third specialist teaching room in the department is desirable. There remains a real desire to build on established good practice and develop the subject further within the school.

HISTORY

174. Overall, the quality of provision in history is **good**.

Strengths:

- Good standards, well above national averages.
- Good teaching, leading to good learning by students.
- Popularity of the subject with students, and a good retention rate on courses.

Areas for improvement:

- Continuing to broaden the range of teaching strategies, in particular to encourage more active learning by students.

175. In the 2001 AS Level examinations for students in Year 12, and in the A Level examinations for those in Year 13, the proportion of grades A and B was well above the national average. This continued the trend in A Level results of the previous three years. The 2001 results represented satisfactory achievement for most students in relation to their prior attainment at the age of 16, when high standards were attained in the GCSE examination. The inspection confirmed that standards of students in both Years 12 and 13 are above national expectations in the key areas of knowledge and understanding and the skills of analysing and evaluating a range of historical evidence.

176. Students of all levels of ability achieve satisfactorily in relation to their prior attainment. They further their knowledge and understanding of key areas of twentieth century Russian and German history and nineteenth century British history. Students make a detailed study of German history in the period after the First World War, investigating the rise of Hitler and key economic, political and social developments in Nazi Germany. They make good progress in learning how to evaluate a range of historical interpretations, for example when determining the causes of parliamentary reform. In their study of nineteenth century British history, students gradually develop a longer-term perspective on important developments such as progress towards democracy, and they learn to appreciate the significance of individuals like Robert Peel. When using historical sources, students show good comprehension skills and a developing ability to evaluate the evidence in context, as seen for example in lessons in which students analysed the reasons for the rise of the Nazis in Germany.

177. Students are conscientious and hardworking in their studies, and produce well structured and well presented essays. However, several students lack confidence or are reluctant to sustain debate on some of the key issues on the course, although they do respond willingly to direct questioning from teachers. Consequently a minority of students have relatively undeveloped independent learning skills, although they do research information from sources such as the Internet.

178. The overall quality of teaching and learning in history are good. Teachers have good subject knowledge of all aspects of the syllabus. They set out their objectives clearly, and use questioning very effectively both to assess students' understanding and to challenge their assumptions. For example, in a Year 13 lesson on British history, the teacher asked challenging questions about educational developments in the nineteenth century, and by persisting with this approach succeeded in improving students' understanding of their

significance. Teachers also provide good feedback to students, clearly showing them how they can improve their grades. This is also achieved through detailed and constructive marking. In the best lessons, teachers get students working collaboratively, researching topics such as Hitler's rise to power and thereby developing their ability to evaluate different interpretations. In a Year 13 lesson focusing on the Nazi concept of the inclusive "race community", the teacher prompted students' research with challenging questions on a difficult topic, and gave good advice on how students could relate their work to the assessment criteria. However, the success of the lesson lay chiefly in getting the students to discuss difficult concepts in a challenging way, and by the end of the lesson several of the students were more confident in debate.

179. Where teaching is less effective, the pace of lessons slackens whilst students take notes and the learning becomes passive. For example, in a Year 12 lesson in which some students gave brief presentations on the rise of the Nazis, other students were more concerned with passively making notes rather than debating the issues with the presenters.

180. There is good leadership of the history department. There has been professional development to increase teachers' expertise in the relatively new history syllabuses, and there is now more monitoring of teaching, which is leading to some sharing of good practice across the department. Schemes of work have been developed to make teaching of new courses more effective. The success of the department is evident in the popularity of the subject with many students, and the good retention rate.

181. As in 1997, standards in history are above national expectations. Therefore, there has been satisfactory progress in history since the previous Ofsted inspection.

LAW

182. Overall, the quality of provision in law is **very good**.

Strengths:

- Results at A and AS Level are very good overall as a result of the very good attitudes of students and good teaching.
- Leadership and management are very good and there is a clear vision for raising standards.
- Students make very good progress and perform better in law than in their other subjects.
- Resources are very good and support students' learning well.

Areas for improvement:

- Students need clearer guidance and encouragement to develop independent learning skills.
- Opportunities to observe law outside the classroom are not planned for sufficiently.

183. Results in AS Level examinations in 2001 were very good. Students achieved very well and in the majority of cases achieved higher than in their other Sixth Form subjects. The results at A Level in 2001 were good. Students achieved well and performed better than in their other subjects at this level. Taken as a whole, results over the past three years are improving. Law is an increasingly popular subject and boys from the partner grammar school are now choosing this option. No meaningful gender comparisons are yet possible as to the relative attainment of girls and boys.

184. In the work seen, students make very good progress. Higher attaining students make good oral contributions in class, for example in work being undertaken on the standards applying to the duty of care in a lesson dealing with aspects of negligence. As students progress through Year 12, their abilities to produce extended analytical writing develop strongly, for example in work done on the operation of magistrates courts and the functioning of the legal profession.

185. By the end of Year 13, students of all abilities have made at least good and usually very good progress. They can demonstrate good knowledge of fatal and non-fatal offences against the person and have a good working understanding of the concepts of law. More able students can grasp the philosophical aspects within modules studied and can give well-structured presentations using appropriate information and communication technology, for example on the case of the 'Birmingham Six'. Students of middle attainment and above can apply concepts learned to factual situations. They can distinguish between relevant and irrelevant information in case studies with increasing confidence. Similarly, they display a clear understanding of justice and its practical consequences.

186. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers know their students well and are able to comment with confidence on their strengths and weaknesses; for example in observing shortcomings in study skills and marshalling information to support case studies. Teachers' knowledge is secure. Lessons are normally well planned, though, in a minority of those observed, both the structure and learning objectives could have been made more explicit. Generally, question and answer sessions are well managed, for example in a lesson touching on the concept of the 'reasonable man'. However, in some lessons, students are given insufficient opportunity to develop oral responses, particularly in peer group discussions.

187. Conceptual knowledge is reinforced in the best lessons by a careful build up of concepts, for example in a lesson dealing with conditional fee arrangements. Teaching prompts good use of IT and students are invited to use the internet and intranet as sources of additional information. Lessons are conducted at a brisk pace and expectation is high. Marking is prompt and the quality of comment is generally good though more written target setting would usefully supplement end of year reporting arrangements.

188. Attitudes to learning are very good. Students persist in tackling new and unfamiliar topics at both A and AS Levels. They collect information from a commendably wide range of resources including the quality press. This strengthens the debating and reflective skills of students, particularly those of middle attainment and above. They are prepared to work independently and co-operatively when given the opportunity to do so, for example in a lesson dealing with recklessness. Students overall, however, need to be encouraged to be more proactive in raising issues where knowledge, understanding and application are uncertain. Opportunities to observe law outside the classroom are not planned for sufficiently. Students would benefit from more opportunities to visit courts and observe legal arguments being made in practice.

189. Management of the subject is very good and there is a clear vision for the further development of law options in the Sixth Form. Schemes of work are well matched to both the learning needs of students and external accreditation requirements. Subject staff analyse and use value added data very effectively. Underachievement is a matter for scrutiny and adjustments to teaching the English legal system module have been made following the 2001 results. Reporting to parents is very good. Students know clearly how they have achieved in modules and what they need to do to improve, for example in collating factual information in a more coherent fashion. There is a good match of staff to the curriculum at both AS and A Level and this has a positive effect on student learning.

190. Resources are very good and support students' learning well. There are up to date texts and reference materials and the subject is also represented on the school intranet. Funding for the subject is adequate but will need to be monitored carefully if the range and relevance of law materials are to be maintained. Accommodation is unsatisfactory with a significant proportion of lessons being taught in a science laboratory where both the seating arrangements and acoustics represent a barrier to learning.

191. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. External examination results are improving. The subject is an increasingly popular choice and students report positively of their experiences of learning in this subject. The majority of students undertaking AS Level study continue on to the A Level programme. Of those students interviewed and school data examined, an increasing proportion of students are pursuing legal studies in higher education to degree level and beyond.

SOCIOLOGY

192. Overall, the quality of provision in sociology is **unsatisfactory**.

Strengths:

- The percentage of higher grades in the AS Level examinations in 2001 was above average.
- Attitudes of students are very good. Students are attentive and work hard to succeed.
- Marking is thorough and gives students a clear indication of how to improve their work.

Areas for improvement:

- Attainment and achievement of the majority of students.
- There is too little variety of teaching methods. Delivery is often directed, gives few opportunities for independent research and does not encourage sufficient discussion and debate of controversial issues.
- Schemes of work are insufficiently detailed and do not include teaching methods or assessment opportunities.
- Learning resources are limited mostly to handouts and textbooks and there are insufficient opportunities for the use of ICT.
- Further analysis and use of results to promote higher standards by focusing teaching and learning.

193. Sociology is offered at GCE A and AS Levels. Courses are gaining in popularity and students now have to be taught in two groups in both years. Over the previous four years attainment has fluctuated but has been broadly in line with the national average. Higher grades have been attained by few students, with the percentage of higher grades consistently below the national average. In the 2001, AS examinations, 52 per cent of students attained A and B grades. This percentage is higher than in any previous year's A Level results. However, one fifth of students did not attain as well in sociology as they did in their other subjects. Over previous years, students' achievement has been average when compared to their GCSE results but 7 out of 17 students at A Level in 2001 did not attain as well in sociology as they did in their other subjects. Boys and girls achieve comparable standards, though many more girls than boys join the course.

194. The work seen during the inspection indicates above average attainment in both Years 12 and 13. Students' achievement is mostly average, based on their GCSE grades. In lessons, discussions with students and work observed, students in Year 12 are beginning to question assumptions and stereotypes. Year 13 students discuss concepts more fluently with an awareness of different theories. For example, they understand that men in certain

societies distort religion to suit their own purposes. Students write about sociological methodology but they do not have the opportunity to gain further knowledge and understanding through a personal investigative study. Higher ability students are confident and articulate and extend their thinking beyond the initial topic. They showed evidence of this in a lesson about feminism when they illustrated key concepts by reference to religion, wealth and education. However, a few students accept only one perspective and do not always challenge or debate sufficiently. Students' files are organised and presented very well. They take pride in their work. However, lower attaining students lack depth in their essays, especially in the evaluative content.

195. The teaching is satisfactory and the learning of students of all abilities is at least sound as a result. Teaching has clear aims and objectives that are shared with the students at the start of lessons. Teachers have very good subject knowledge. Relationships are very good and students are prepared to ask for help and clarification. Consistency in practice varies but the majority of teaching lacks the rigour and challenge to make a positive impact on students' learning. Students are not always encouraged to be controversial or to debate everyday assumptions and stereotypes. In the best lessons, the teacher's delivery is short, and active analytical tasks are set that encourage students to research information in small groups and pairs. However, the department has insufficient up to date sociological textbooks and one teacher is working closely with the librarian to redress this issue. Resources in lessons are mostly limited to handouts and one basic textbook. There is very little evidence in students' files of the use of ICT in lessons or for research. One lesson during the inspection was taken in a computer room but teachers do not make sufficient use of new technology throughout the course and there are no references to it in the units of work. Marking is thorough and gives students a clear indication of what they need to do to improve. Students' attitudes are very good. There is a very good level of engagement in all lessons. Students are attentive and want to succeed. However, some students do not undertake sufficient independent reading and research and this limits their learning.

196. Leadership and management are unsatisfactory. There are now two teachers in the sociology department and this enables students to access a wider range of teaching approaches and sociological views. Units of work are perfunctory. There is no indication of how the course is divided between the two teachers, of teaching strategies, of assessment opportunities and of the use of different learning resources. Assumptions are made about the lack of suitability of coursework assignments and assessments and performance data and results are not used to guide curriculum planning. The two teaching rooms are small, there are no computers and the formal furniture arrangements severely limit teaching strategies.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

197. The focus of the inspection was on English literature and French. Communication studies, as part of general studies, German and Italian were also sampled. Standards of provision are particularly good in English. Attainment is satisfactory in communication skills and broadly in line with national averages German and Italian.

English literature

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

Strengths:

- The very high quality of teaching and learning.
- The very good results at AS and A Level.
- The proportion of very high grades achieved at AS and A Level.
- The management of the subject.

Areas for improvement:

- The provision of additional volumes to encourage further wider reading.
- Expectations could be raised even further for some students and groups of students.

199. Students' AS results were well above the national average in 2001. The school's results were within the range of the top quarter of students across the country. Fifty-two per cent achieved A and B grades. All students except one achieved grades A to C. Seventeen of the papers sat were awarded full marks. Two students achieved full marks in the entire examination.

200. The GCSE A Level results were well above the national average in 2001. The proportion of students achieving grades A and B was particularly notable and a considerable improvement from the previous year. In 2001, students' performance at A Level in English literature was significantly above the average of other subjects taught by the school. All students completed the course.

201. The standards of work of current students are also well above average. In Year 13, students are achieving well in relation to predictions based on their GCSE results. In the lessons seen, students engaged deeply with a range of demanding texts in their study of prose and poetry of the First World War. In their reading of "The Great War and Modern Memory" by Paul Fussell, and Lynn MacDonald's transcription of Private Roy Bealey's account of the Battle of the Somme, students used well developed skills of literary analysis to distinguish between the styles of writing. They were clear what these were. They stated their stylistic preference and gave compelling reasons for them. In their reading of Aldous Huxley's "Brave New World", students annotated text to point up the implicit and sophisticated humour of the novel. They successfully explored their own attitudes to a variety of pleasures, real or imagined, and were able to compare and contrast these with the characters' quest for pleasure described in the novel, key to a proper understanding of the text. Students struggled, successfully, to define happiness in this context. Different interpretations, besides "money", "love", and "health" included "wrestling with a sunbeam", used by one student to describe her own personal development and continual quest for new experience. In their lessons on the novel, students were enabled to make constructive and interesting comparisons with "1984" by George Orwell. Students' comments, when comparing themes, characters and situations in the novels were articulate and perceptive, the result both of insight and reflection.

202. Students' writing is confident and convincing in its literary analysis. Essays are carefully and effectively planned and well constructed to develop an argument in, for example, "Is Iago a devil or merely a practical joker?" Close and well informed study of style is apparent in essays examining the way Philip Larkin has chosen to present his thoughts

and feelings in the poem "Lines on a young lady's photograph album". The idiom of an age was well captured in such essays as those on Tennyson's use of settings "to reveal, or to create a character's soul. "Writing is exceptionally well presented, and often word-processed to a professional standard. Spelling, punctuation and grammar are almost always of an exemplary standard.

203. Work seen in Year 12 is well above the national average and already showing good value-added progress from GCSE. Students have begun actively and thoughtfully to engage with a range of demanding texts. By a process of identification of symbolism, tone, style and structure they identify Margaret Atwood's intentions in the novel "The Handmaid's Tale". They realise "The Glass Menagerie" by Tennessee Williams is a non-realistic play based on the vagaries of memory, and give cogent reasons as to why they do not trust Amanda's account of her past life. In their close study of the text, they connect the title and stage directions with the themes of the play, and realise that the animals of the menagerie, in their fragility, are metaphors for the situation of some of the characters.

204. Students' writing is formed by their ability to make comprehensive, original notes. Essays are well planned, and well presented using correct and appropriate English. In their essays on Shakespeare's presentation of the love between Anthony and Cleopatra in Act I of the play, students differentiate clearly between the principals' certainty of their love, and the opinions of other people around them. Students have an acute sense of character, and perceive cause and effect. Their opinions are well rooted in the text and illustrated by quotations. Lower achievers tackle demanding questions confidently, but in an essay in which they were asked to address the way Shakespeare shapes the audience's response to Caesar, in the play "Julius Caesar", some failed to spot all the techniques, which were used.

205. Students do so well because they are very well taught. Teachers are enthusiastic about the canon of English literature and the texts they teach, with the result that students become enthusiastic learners. Teachers' erudition supports learning very well indeed. In a lesson on "The Handmaid's Tale", for example, the teacher effectively connected lines from Milton's sonnet on his blindness to the handmaid's life of waiting. A reference to the parable of the sower was also applied to the handmaid's possible fate. This deepened students' understanding. The teacher's knowledge of the context and historical background of a text is very well taught and informs the examination of Victorian poetry with a social message, "The Cry of the Children", by Elizabeth Barrett Browning, for example, and "The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim Point". Teachers question students very skilfully to elicit perceptive and analytical comments which extend and deepen engagement with symbolic and, in some cases, many-layered text.

206. Assessment is very good. Teachers have a comprehensive knowledge of the requirements of the examinations, and students are left in no doubt as to what they must do to succeed in them. In some cases, teachers model literary essays to help students who have failed to tackle a piece of writing adequately, and this helps lower achievers to catch up. However, expectations could be raised even further for some students and groups of students.

207. Students are given a good knowledge of technical terms, which helps them to speak and write about their perceptions. A personal glossary is always to hand. Resources used in lessons are very good, and occasionally of exceptional quality, such as the anthology of poetry and prose of the First World War, which allows students to read more widely than usual and to extend their learning on critical theory. Learning is further supported by a very good selection of literary criticism, contemporary with the publication of the piece being studied. This was especially effectively used in the study of "In Memoriam" by Tennyson.

208. Response to the lessons is excellent. Students actively cooperate in their own learning. In one very demanding lesson, students made more progress than the teacher realised and expectation could have been raised even higher.

209. The curriculum is very good and has adequate extra-curricular enrichment. Management of all teachers, students and resources is well informed, conscientious and successful. The co-ordinator and her team successfully promote a culture of praise in which students and teachers strive to do their best. The provision of additional volumes in the library to encourage further wider reading would enhance standards even further.

210. Since the last inspection, there has been a good level of improvement. The proportion of higher grades achieved in the new examinations has improved significantly, since 2000. Structured monitoring of teaching has been introduced. Students' performance is now systematically and continuously monitored. Resources have been significantly improved.

French

211. Overall, the quality of provision in French is **good**.

Strengths:

- Good quality teaching. Teachers have high expectations of their pupils.
- Accurate and consistent use of the foreign language in all lessons.
- Increased popularity of the subjects with Year 12 students.

Areas for improvement:

- Renew efforts to widen the range of teaching styles and encourage students to learn independently.

212. French is the main language taught at AS and A Level. German and Italian are also offered and one lesson of each was observed. In both the teaching was good or better. Students may choose to study up to two languages, provided that they have achieved at least a B grade in their chosen language at GCSE. All teachers teach at least two languages. The number of students taking languages as part of their AS and A Level studies has risen since 1999, however approximately half do not continue their language studies after AS Level. In 2001, at AS Level, the proportions of students achieving grades A-B and A-E were both above the national average. At A Level in French, in recent years, the percentage of students achieving grades A-B has been below the national average, although the percentage of A-E grades is broadly in line with national expectations. Small numbers make it impossible to attribute significance to these variations.

213. In work seen during the inspection, standards in listening skills are above average. This is due to the excellent use of the foreign language by all members of the staff. Much use is made of authentic taped material in lessons. In a Year 12 lesson, imaginative use was made of Edith Piaf's recording of, "Man on a Motorcycle", to illustrate the difference between the perfect and imperfect tenses. Standards of spoken language vary with the teaching styles adopted by teachers. In some lessons students are still reluctant to speak. When they are keen to speak, they are also eager to be correct in both their pronunciation and their use of grammar. More work needs to be done to widen teaching styles through the use of multimedia ICT and interactive programmes. There are opportunities for reading, but with heavy reliance on course textbooks. Writing skills are developed consistently in both Years 12 and 13. Informative marking is evident in all work. This helps students to understand clearly what they need to do to improve their written work. Higher attaining students are often not given opportunities to learn independently because of the lack of interactive material within

the department. In a Year 13 French class, a small number, who completed the task before the rest of the group, were provided with extension work. The lack of a nearby multimedia PCs, means that the work set is a task very similar to the one already so promptly completed. In Years 12 and 13 students cover a wide range of topics and higher attaining students can use both spoken and written language to discuss abstract issues. No use can be made of up-to-date material from the Internet because of a lack of ICT resources within the department. There are facilities in the library but these are remote from the department and, therefore, cannot be used readily in lessons.

214. The quality of teaching is good overall and learning is very good. It was good or very good in two-thirds of the lessons observed. The best lessons are well planned to take into account the needs of individual students. They are balanced and activities involve all four skill areas: listening, reading, writing and speaking. Such lessons are conducted at a brisk pace and give students a chance to assess their work. There is a pervasive atmosphere of mutual respect and trust throughout the department. Students take their work seriously and respond well to teacher humour being used to relieve tension when sensitive topics are being discussed. Teachers use assessment to help pupils improve their work. Marking is thorough. Students are fully aware of their attainments and what they need to do to improve. Teachers have high expectations of them.

215. Students have an extremely positive attitude to their work. They show interest at all times. They have high aspirations and are very motivated by most of the teaching they receive. Behaviour in all lessons is excellent. Students take great pride in their work; this is reflected in the high completion rate of work and attractive presentation of it. Displays are good and in most rooms they reflect the students' excellent written work and show some use of ICT. There is a group of Year 12 students who hold weekly language clubs for younger pupils, helped by the language assistants. Teachers remain close by and are ready to help if needed.

216. The management of the languages department is very good. The head of department has clear, well thought out, intermediate and long term plans, which implement the school development plan, which itself reflects the considered policy of the governing body. Teachers in the department work well together under his guidance. This has led to considerable improvements in the way students are taught. Insistence on the use of the foreign language is leading to improved standards in teaching and learning. Further progress in widening the choice of teaching styles will now depend on the provision of a less scattered suite of rooms, some multimedia PCs and library provision for Sixth Form research. Working under the supportive direction of the head of department and the other teachers, language assistants provide a valuable extension of the students' authentic experience. The head of department also mentors the newly qualified teacher in the department, who feels valued and supported.

217. Since the last inspection the department has improved in the accurate use of the foreign language. There is no unsatisfactory teaching. The pace of lessons is brisk. There are good schemes of work in place and a staff handbook in which the head of department shares his targets and gives comprehensive guidance for AS and A Level students. This is a good department offering a wide range of valuable opportunities to all its students. It has expanded rapidly without the full range of resources in accommodation, training and equipment necessary for such an expansion. The action plan is being progressively realised by the joint efforts of governors, senior management team and departmental staff.