

INSPECTION REPORT

WILLIAM DE FERRERS SCHOOL

South Woodham Ferrers, Essex

LEA area: Essex

Unique reference number: 115343

Headteacher: Mr. D J Parry

Reporting inspector: Brian Oppenheim
2686

Dates of inspection: 15-19 April 2002

Inspection number: 194311

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Foundation
Age range of pupils:	11-18 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr. Anthony Graham
Date of previous inspection:	18 November 1996

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9980	Joanna Adams	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
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18967	Brenda Loydell	Team inspector	Mathematics	
31548	Grahame Smith	Team inspector	English (support)	
31685	Val Girling	Team inspector	Art	How well does the school care for its pupils?
7084	Jack Haslam	Team inspector	Design & Technology	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered?
19613	Sue Thomas-Pounce	Team inspector	Information technology	
2731	Penny Holden	Team inspector	Equal opportunities Special educational needs English as an additional language Sociology	How well are pupils taught?
20192	Terry McDermott	Team inspector	Physical education	

28178	John Connor	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	
24127	Jim Kidd	Team inspector	History	
15926	Janet Dyson	Team inspector	Religious education	
31549	Helen Moulton	Team inspector	Music	
11939	Andrew Marshall	Team inspector	Geography	
30825	Keith Hayton	Team inspector	Science	
61114	Ann Power	Team inspector	Physical education (support)	
22370	Peter Harwood	Team inspector	P16 science	
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

William de Ferrers School is a very large mixed comprehensive school. There are 1799 pupils aged 11-18 including 275 in the sixth form. Pupils come mainly from local primary schools but about 60 pupils each year come from the wider surrounding area. Nearly all pupils come from white heritage backgrounds and there is a small proportion from a range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds including Black, Chinese, Pakistani and Indian. Two pupils speak a language other than English at home but are relatively proficient in using English at school. The proportion of pupils entitled to school meals free of charge is much lower than average. Nine and a half per cent of pupils have identified learning needs and one per cent has statement of need: these are both below the national average but the range of special need is wide. When pupils start at the school, their attainment is broadly above average.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

William de Ferrers School provides a good education. Good teaching helps to ensure that pupils' academic achievements are high. The way the school is led and managed creates a very positive atmosphere in which pupils develop their personal achievements very well. The school is doing well but there is room to raise pupils' academic achievements further so that standards are very high. As a result value for money is sound.

What the school does well

- GCSE results are high and most pupils gain great benefit from what the school offers.
- Teaching is good and contributes well to pupils' learning and attitudes.
- Relationships between pupils and teachers are very positive and encourage pupils' learning very well.
- Pupils are very enthusiastic about school and have very positive attitudes.
- Pupils with special learning needs make good progress and get full access to what the school offers because they are very well supported.
- A close eye is kept on pupils' personal development: as a result the school develops well-adjusted pupils and students.

What could be improved

- The standards achieved by some boys and some of the brightest pupils are not as high as they should be.
- The work provided for some pupils is not demanding enough.
- The way the school checks how well it is doing and what it can do to make things better is not rigorous enough: the school is doing well but could do even better.
- The legal requirements for teaching information and communication technology in Years 10 and 11 are not met in full.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has improved well since the last inspection in 1996 and nearly all the important issues have been tackled successfully. Standards have risen faster than in other schools because pupils continue to have very positive attitudes and very good relationships with their teachers. The governing body is now more involved in helping the school plan for the future. However, the way the school evaluates how well it is doing and how it can make things better is still not sharp enough, and the legal requirements for teaching information and communication technology in Years 10 and 11 are still not met in full.

STANDARDS

The table 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	D
A-levels/AS-levels	C	D	C	

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

Pupils achieve high standards by the end of Year 11 and their GCSE results are well above average. GCSE results are lower than schools similar to William de Ferrers School¹ but pupils make good progress between the end of Year 9 and the end of Year 11. This is borne out by comparing pupils' GCSE results with their achievements in the Year 9 national tests:² pupils do very well to maintain their above average standards by the end of Year 11. A more detailed look at GCSE results shows that there are big differences between the achievements of boys and girls: both groups do better than the national picture but girls do much better than boys and the gap is much larger than it is in other schools. This is most evident in the proportion of pupils who gain the top grades: girls' achievements were some 19-percentage points better than boys in 2001. This large difference helps to explain why the school's GCSE results are below those of similar schools but higher compared with pupils' attainment at the end of Year 9.

Over the last five years GCSE standards have risen at a faster rate than results nationally: this helps to confirm that the school does well. Targets for GCSE results are reasonably tough: the school predicts that this year it will achieve its targets and will close the gap between girls and boys. In 2001 nearly all subjects achieved well at GCSE and results were above or well above average. Information and communication technology was the only subject to get below average results but is predicted to perform better this year.

GCE A and A/S level results show that standards have improved in the last year and are broadly average overall. The best results are in English where students' achievements are very high. Standards are also high in art, business studies, communication studies and religious studies. The school's analysis of results indicates that students make at least satisfactory progress and this is backed up by evidence from lessons.

The work seen in lessons confirms the high test and examination results: pupils make good progress particularly in English, drama, art, design and technology, history, modern languages and physical education but this is not to deny the achievements of other subjects. In science, pupils do not do quite as well in lessons as they do in tests and examinations. This is because teaching is effective in helping pupils achieve good results but does not always hold pupils' interest enough. As with GCSE, information and communication technology (ICT) does least well but even here standards are improving. Most pupils make good progress as they move through the school and achieve well compared with where they started at the beginning of Year 7 but some boys, particularly those who are more difficult to motivate, are not making as much progress as they should.

¹ Similar schools means schools with a similar proportion of pupils who qualify for school meals free of charge which, for William de Ferrers School, is up to five per cent of pupils.

² This means that pupils' GCSE results are compared with other schools that have similar National Curriculum test results (SATs) at the end of Year 9.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils have very positive attitudes to learning and are enthusiastic about all the school has to offer: this has a strong influence on the high standards pupils achieve.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour in lessons and around the school is good: there are clear expectations about how to behave and pupils respond well.
Personal development and relationships	Pupils' personal development is good and they develop well as mature young people. Relationships between pupils and teachers are very good: pupils feel they can approach teachers at any time.
Attendance	Good: above average.

Pupils' attitudes, the values they leave school with and the relationships they have with their teachers are all very strong characteristics. They contribute very strongly to pupils' learning and their personal and academic achievements.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Teaching in Years 7 to 11 is good overall. It is good in most subjects except in history and physical education, where it is very good, and in science and religious education where teaching is satisfactory. Teaching of literacy across the school is beginning to be effective but numeracy is not as well developed. Pupils with special learning needs are taught very well and as a result make good progress. Teaching and learning are good because:

- pupils respond very well to the good relationships they have with their teachers;
- teachers organise lessons well so that they start promptly with pupils listening and ready to work;
- teachers plan work well and make clear what pupils are to learn;
- pupils believe that learning is important and work hard even where teaching is rather unexciting;
- teachers use their good knowledge of their subject to motivate pupils.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory in a relatively small number of lessons and unsatisfactory in only a few. Weaknesses in teaching in these lessons include:

- teachers who do not always expect enough of pupils and tend to give information rather than encourage discussion;
- the unsatisfactory behaviour of a few boys which is not challenged effectively;
- work which is either too easy or too hard because the range of pupils' capabilities is not catered for well;
- a few teachers who have poor subject knowledge because they are teaching outside their expertise or are temporary.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good. The school provides a curriculum that generally supports the needs of pupils well.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Very good. Pupils with special learning needs get very good support and have good access to all the subjects.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	The very few pupils who are developing their skill in speaking English as an additional language make good progress in lessons.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good overall. There are strengths in the way many subjects approach these aspects but there is no clear strategy across the school to ensure that pupils have a coherent and consistent experience.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Good. Teachers know their pupils well and understand their educational, social and personal needs. Assessment procedures are good overall.

The school generally keeps parents well informed: parents are happy that their children enjoy school and feel confident in approaching the school. The legal requirement to teach information and communication technology to all pupils in Years 10 and 11 are not met but the school is continuing to develop the use of computers. The school does not comply with the need to hold a daily act of collective worship.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Leadership and management have a very strong impact on many aspects of pupils' achievements and the school is doing well. But gaps in the information about the quality of teaching and learning mean that senior managers are not in a strong position to challenge weaknesses.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The role of governors has improved well since the last inspection. Governors fulfil nearly all their responsibilities and are effective in helping to set the school's positive climate.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Some subjects do this very well but inconsistencies mean that overall the way the school evaluates its performance is not effective enough.
The strategic use of resources	Satisfactory: the budget is used appropriately to support the school's educational priorities.

Broadly, there are enough resources, such as books and materials, for pupils' needs. In science, however, there are not enough textbooks for all pupils in a class. The accommodation is good although the classrooms in K Block mean the school has to oversee pupils walking from one building to another: this it does very successfully ensuring that pupils get to lessons on time. There is not nearly enough space for all those pupils who stay for lunch but the school manages this so well that it causes minimal disruption. The principles of best value are beginning to be used appropriately by the school and the governing body is good at ensuring competition in its contractual arrangements.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pupils work hard and make good progress.• Teaching is good.• Parents feel comfortable approaching the school.• The help given by the supportive education department.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More information about how well their children are doing.• There is some poor teaching.• Some parents felt that homework was not always set regularly.

Thirty parents attended the meeting for parents before the inspection and nearly 16 ½ per cent responded to a questionnaire about their views of the school. The inspection team supports the parents' positive comments. The inspection team agrees with parents that there is not always enough information about their children's progress. During the inspection only a very small number of lessons were poor. Nevertheless, inspectors agree that some aspects of teaching need to be improved so that even more are good or very good. In many lessons seen homework was set and gave pupils good opportunities to extend their learning and support class work. However, pupils do not always write down the homework tasks carefully enough and thus they do not complete the work as well as they could.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

William de Ferrers School has a sixth form of 275 students which makes it larger than most other sixth forms. The ethnic mix of the sixth form broadly reflects that of the main school: nearly all students come from white backgrounds. There is a broad range of mainly academic subjects but the school is introducing new Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) courses. The school also provides courses in key skills such as literacy, numeracy and ICT. Examination results at the end of Year 11 are above average but the school sets the entry requirements to the sixth form at a relatively low level in order to give all students access to the courses offered. Most students take A/S and A-level courses but some sign up for the new AVCE programmes.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The sixth form is broadly successful and is cost effective. Performance in examinations is average for sixth forms nationally and students learn well: given their starting point students achieve well because the teaching is good. Nearly all the students who start in the sixth form finish their courses. Students enjoy being in the sixth form and school is very good at promoting their personal development.

Strengths

- Standards in English which were very high in 2001.
- The attitudes of students are very positive: students have a strong commitment to their learning and the life of the school.
- Teachers have very good knowledge of the subjects they teach and pass this on to students effectively.
- Relationships between teachers and students are very good and this promotes learning effectively.

What could be improved

- Not as many boys as girls achieve the highest standards in lessons and examinations.
- Assessment is not used effectively to help plan lessons and courses.
- Teachers do not always give students enough opportunities to use computers in lessons and this can limit the range and scope of their learning.

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	Good. Results are above average overall. Teaching is good and teachers have good subject knowledge.
Chemistry	Good. Standards in Year 13 are above average. Teaching is good but strategies are limited. Students are motivated, and productive, and

	work hard: as a result they make good progress.
Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Physics	Satisfactory. Standards are average and are better than those in recent years. Teaching is satisfactory overall and students make appropriate progress by the end of Year 13
Design and technology	Very good. The teaching is very good and this leads to students gaining a secure knowledge and understanding of the subject.
Business studies	Good. Examination results are high and students achieve well because of the good teaching. Teachers have excellent relationships with students which promotes learning successfully.
ICT	Satisfactory. Standards are average: students achieve appropriately considering their starting points. Teaching is sound and students respond well developing positive relationships which are productive.
Physical education	Very good. Results are above average and students' achievement is good. Teaching is very good and means that students' attitudes are excellent.
Music	Satisfactory. Standards are broadly average. Teachers have good subject knowledge and teaching is good.
History	Very good. History results have improved markedly over the past three years. Good teaching, very secure subject knowledge of teachers, high levels of intellectual challenge and detailed essay marking mean that students make good progress.
Sociology	Good. Standards are average but are set to rise because teaching is good. Teachers use good knowledge of their subject to interest students. As a result students work hard.
Psychology	Good. Standards are above average. Teaching and learning are good although some activities are too teacher directed. Students' attitudes towards the subject are very good. Insufficient use is made of ICT.
English	Very good. Results are very high compared with the national average. Students achieve well in relation to their GCSE results. Teaching overall is very good and staff have very secure subject knowledge. Students' attitudes are a major strength.
Key Skills	Good. Good quality teaching ensures that the progress made by students is good overall. All students make at least satisfactory progress in developing their basic literacy, numeracy and information technology (ICT) skills in the sixth form and many make good progress.

The work of nearly all other subjects was sampled. Teaching is good overall particularly in drama, media studies and law. In theatre studies very good teaching and very positive student attitudes lead to the high standards of performance, self-evaluation and knowledge of texts and theory. In media studies students are also achieving high standards. Numbers taking these subjects have increased.

In art, standards are very high and teaching is very good. Students are extremely well motivated and learn well. As a result students achieve well in these subjects.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	The advice and guidance given to students is satisfactory overall. There are inconsistencies in the quality of support from one subject to another. The head of sixth form monitors students' progress at key points during the year. The advice and support for students are good for those continuing into higher education.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Broadly, the sixth form is led and managed well. But like the main school, the systems for monitoring and evaluating performance are not rigorous enough which means that areas for improvement are not always clearly identified.

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"> • Students enjoy being in the sixth form. • Students are treated as mature young people. • Students have very good relationships with their teachers. • Teachers always give up their time to help and support students. • There are opportunities to help younger pupils. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some students would like more information about how well they are doing in some subjects. • Many students feel that they are not always well advised about careers. • A fairly large minority would like the school to listen more to their views.

Questionnaires were returned by 81 per cent of the sixth form students. Nearly all had positive views about the sixth form and the inspection team endorses these strengths. Inspectors judge that careers advice is satisfactory but agree that in some subjects more information about progress would help students improve their work. Inspectors judge that the school does listen to students' views.

COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

Inspectors make judgements about provision in subjects and courses, and about leadership and management, in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. Excellent and very good are equivalent to the judgement "outstanding" in further education and sixth form college reports; poor and very poor are equivalent to "very weak".

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. Pupils achieve high standards by the end of Year 11. GCSE results are well above the average for all schools in England but below those schools that have a similar proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals as William de Ferrers. At the end of Year 9 standards are also well above average in the national tests that pupils take in English, mathematics and science. When GCSE results are compared with those schools that achieve similar results in the Year 11 national tests, performance is above average. This shows that pupils make good progress between the end of Year 9 and the end of Year 11. A more detailed analysis of GCSE results shows that there are big differences between the achievements of boys and girls: both groups do better than the national average but girls do much better than boys and the gap is much larger than it is in other schools. This is most evident in the proportion of pupils who gain the top grades: girls' achievements were some 19 percentage points better than boys in 2001. This large difference helps to explain why the school's results are below those of similar schools.

2. Over the last five years GCSE standards have risen at a faster rate than results nationally: this helps to confirm that the school does well. Targets for GCSE results are reasonably tough: the school predicts that this year it will achieve its targets and will close the gap between girls and boys. In 2001 nearly all subjects achieved well at GCSE and results were above or well above average. Information and communication technology was the only subject to get below average results but is predicted to perform better this year.

3. The work seen in lessons confirms the high test and examination results. In nearly all subjects achievement in lessons mirrors the Year 9 test and GCSE results: pupils make good progress particularly in English, drama, art, design and technology, history, modern languages and physical education but this is not to deny the achievements of other subjects. In science, pupils do not do quite as well in lessons as they do in tests and examinations. This is because teaching is effective in helping pupils achieve good results but does not always hold pupils' interest enough. As with GCSE, information and communication technology (ICT) does least well but even here standards are improving. Most pupils make good progress as they move through the school and achieve well compared with where they started at the beginning of Year 7 but some boys, particularly those who are more difficult to motivate, are not making as much progress as they should.

4. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress especially in improving their skills in reading and writing. Some pupils have significant medical needs and make good progress despite considerable difficulties. This progress is due to the variety of support and different opportunities for learning given to these pupils. They make better progress than might be expected considering their starting point. For example, there are pupils with statements of special educational need in the sixth form studying A' level courses.

5. Only a very few pupils speak English as an additional language and are broadly fluent bilingual speakers. The one or two pupils who are still developing their skill in speaking English as an additional language make good progress in lessons. This is because they are highly motivated to learn and because the teaching they receive in many subjects is good.

6. In Year 7 pupils' literacy skills are above average, according to standardised tests. Nevertheless, literacy skills are not as well developed as they could be and the school has identified speaking, listening and research as priorities. Standards in numeracy are good because the mathematics department develops number skills well. However, this good work has not yet had an impact in other subjects mainly because numeracy is a fairly recent initiative.

7. Some departments are helping to raise literacy skills, for example, by implementation of spelling policies and display of key words, but a focus on improving pupils' skills across all subjects is

not as strong as it could be. Twenty-five minutes of tutor time is designated each day but this is not used effectively. Strategies for teaching numeracy skills are unsatisfactory because the school strategy has yet to be implemented by all departments.

Sixth form

8. GCE A and A/S level results show that standards have improved in the last year and are broadly average overall. Not as many boys as girls achieve the highest standards in lessons and examinations: boys' results are average overall and girls' are above average. The best results are in English where students' achievements are very high. Standards are also high in art, business studies, communication studies and religious studies. The school's analysis of results indicates that students make at least satisfactory progress and this is backed up by evidence from lessons.

9. Students achieve well in the skills of communication, number and information and communication technology. They make good progress overall in these basic skills. The proportion of pupils who continue with their sixth form studies is very high: around 98 per cent of students complete their courses.

10. The work seen in lessons broadly confirms the standards reached in examinations. It also confirms that some subjects are improving and doing particularly well. In English, for example, standards of work are above average and students are achieving well in relation to their GCSE results. This, together with the upward trend in examination results, shows that students make good progress in English during their time in the sixth form.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

11. Pupils have very positive attitudes to learning. This is a significant factor contributing to the standards achieved. Pupils show enthusiasm for all the school has to offer: the learning, the relationships and in particular, membership of the school community. Pupils feel glad and proud to be at William de Ferrers. This is reflected in the above average attendance rate and the low level of unauthorised absences. Pupils want to learn and to achieve. In discussion, pupils state very articulately that they enjoy coming to school and are keen to be involved in school activities. They show obvious pride in their school.

12. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. Walking around the school at any time it is clear that the school is an orderly community; there are clear expectations about how to behave and pupils respond well. Despite the large numbers of pupils there was very little evidence of pushing and shoving in corridors as pupils move between lessons. In lessons the vast majority of pupils behave well; they respect the teachers' high expectations, which are embedded in the culture of the school. For example, in a Year 9 ICT lesson, pupils' behaviour was exemplary whilst working on control and data logging and this contributed significantly to their learning. Pupils are very well aware of the rules and procedures in place to promote good behaviour and are keen to achieve certificates and awards. The few instances of unsatisfactory behaviour occur in lessons where teaching is unsatisfactory; the teacher does not manage the pupils well or the task is inappropriate. In these instances, and occasionally when teaching is satisfactory, a number of pupils, often boys, become chatty, restless and do not listen. Their behaviour disrupts not only their own learning but also the learning of others in the class. Last year there were 35 fixed period exclusions and most of these were boys. There are a number of pupils with behavioural difficulties but the close monitoring of them and the good awareness of their needs means that their behaviour is mostly satisfactory in lessons.

13. Bullying is not a serious problem in the school but in discussion with pupils some mentioned that they had been bullied. They were quick to add that the problem had been quickly and efficiently dealt with. Bullying workshops have started and are being developed.

14. Pupils' personal development is good. Pupils are keen to take responsibility around the school, to contribute to the community. In Years 7, 8 and 9 they act as monitors taking the comments book between lessons and as litter monitors. There are fewer formal opportunities for Years 10 and

11 to take responsibility as the sixth form performs some of the more responsible tasks. The representatives on the school council show a high degree of social responsibility. They are active in working to improve the school, for example, they have organised for the toilets to be painted with anti graffiti paint. Informally, however, pupils demonstrate an awareness of their individual responsibilities, for example, pupils show initiative in supporting their peers particularly where they may have mobility problems. Large numbers of pupils take part in the Duke of Edinburgh Scheme involving working and supporting the wider community. In addition, pupils are keen and active in raising money for a range of charities. All these activities contribute to the pupils' personal development and overall maturity which prepares them for life ahead.

15. The impact of the good provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is clear in their written and creative work, the quality of their discussions with others and the way they behave in and around the school. The good spiritual development, which is effectively promoted in some subjects, is demonstrated through their ability to show that they understand and respect the needs, feelings and beliefs of others. The quality of their work in art, music and drama shows that their creative impulses are effectively supported. The good provision for pupils' moral development is evident in the way most pupils show a good understanding of the values promoted by the school and apply this to their own actions. Good social development is clear in their ability to express reasoned judgements on important issues such as racism. They take on roles of responsibility within the school and participate in social and cultural activities linked to the local and wider communities. They demonstrate good cultural development through their participation in a range of artistic and cultural activities.

16. Relationships throughout the school are very good. Of particular note are the very good relationships between pupils and staff; pupils feel they can approach teachers at any time and are confident in receiving help. Many pupils said that they often actively sought out teachers at lunch and after school if they needed help with work or individual problems. Teachers show respect for the pupils at all times and this helps significantly in raising pupils' self esteem and providing role models for how to behave towards others. These relationships have an important effect on pupils' learning and the standards they achieve. In lessons pupils relate very well to each other for example in a PE lesson in Year 8 pupils playing badminton supported each other well and were tolerant of each other's efforts. Whilst some pupils are gaining confidence in working independently, many still lack confidence and rely heavily on teachers for support.

17. Pupils are able to reflect on the issues in the wider world through their work, for example, in history and English. They are developing an awareness of other cultures through the religious education programme. Teachers work hard to promote pupils' confidence in voicing their opinions and many are developing good listening skills and an awareness of the need to respect others' points of view. For example, in English pupils debating their choice of books showed an understanding that others have different opinions. Similarly during the school council meeting pupils listened to each other's views constructively.

18. Levels of attendance are above the national average and there are lower than average levels of unauthorised absence. There are, however, a significant number of pupils missing school for family holidays.

Sixth form

19. Students in the sixth form have very positive attitudes to learning with a clear desire to achieve and a focus on where they want to go after school. They value their position within the school and make the most of the opportunities available. Students are very involved in the life of the school; helping with supporting reading, the homework club and after school activities. Through the A Pause programme sixth formers are trained to facilitate the PSHE lessons in Year 9. A number showed a very high degree of maturity and responsibility in leading a discussion on personal issues.

20. Sixth formers have a very clear desire to achieve in their examinations and work hard not only in lessons but also during private study time. Many are developing good skills of independent

research and study which will enable them to continue in learning. There are a few who find it harder to work without support and the school is actively encouraging these pupils to work on their own. Students are aware of the opportunities to develop their social and moral understanding; for example, in the sixth form committees they work closely with all students and their tutors to organise fundraising events and to listen to and work with senior management and each other. They respond well to enrichment activities such as the Insight into Management course in Year 12.

21. Relationships between each other and with their teachers and head of sixth form are very good and as in the rest of the school this is a very important contributory factor to the standards attained. Attendance of individuals is closely monitored. There are no overall statistics of levels of attendance but most pupils are present in lessons. The sixth form is an active and important part of the school where students develop independence, work hard and mature as young adults as well as achieving high standards.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

22. Teaching in Years 7 to 11 is good. Teachers have good relationships with most pupils and treat them respectfully; they respond to this very well. Teachers organise and manage pupils in lessons well so that lessons start promptly with pupils listening and ready to work. They plan lessons well and generally have clear objectives and start by telling the pupils clearly the purpose of the lesson, the work to be covered and what they are to learn. In a Year 7 English lesson examining writing to argue and persuade, the teacher started by explaining the objectives so clearly she was able to engage pupils quickly and very effectively in responding to the question, 'What is a fact?'. This quick involvement set the speed and the character of the whole lesson with pupils totally involved, working at a very brisk pace. When the teaching is good pupils are very willing to work extremely hard and can apply considerable concentration and effort. Indeed, even when teaching is quite unexciting pupils will work surprisingly hard and will show interest often at rather dull and boring tasks. Pupils believe that learning is important.

23. Teachers have good subject knowledge in the vast majority of subjects. This good subject knowledge is used very well to set interesting tasks and motivate the pupils. It also means they set challenging work which engages the pupils and ensures they become totally involved and work hard.

24. In the better lessons teachers are good at assessing the work pupils are doing, giving them advice and setting further challenges. Some teachers also do this very well in their marking which is informative and encouraging, and helps pupils understand how well they are doing. This is the case in history and English where there is much good practice. However, in some subjects marking is perfunctory and unhelpful.

25. In a number of lessons teaching would have been improved if teachers expected more of their pupils; they were inclined to lecture, giving pupils information rather than making them discuss and evaluate it. However, pupils believe that learning is important and work hard even where teaching is rather unexciting. Occasionally tasks were too easy or too hard for pupils because the teacher had not considered the range of abilities in the class. In the small number of lessons where teaching was ineffective it was often because teachers had poor subject knowledge; they were teaching outside their expertise or were temporary.

26. Teaching of literacy in lessons is beginning to be effective and have an impact in many departments but the teaching of numeracy in other subjects is in much earlier stages.

27. Teaching by the supportive education department staff is never less than good and is very focused on the needs of individual pupils with learning needs. They have a very good knowledge of each pupil's strengths and weaknesses and therefore know what to do to help that pupil take the next step in their learning. Individual education plans for every pupil are excellent; they are clearly written, with realistic and achievable targets. Support staff and the most effective subject teachers use these plans well to make their approaches to special needs pupils consistent and useful. In support sessions pupils learn well as they have work that is tailored well to their needs, not too easy and not

too hard. Sometimes the special needs pupils can be challenging; they concentrate poorly or seek attention inappropriately even in small groups and the supportive education staff deal with this extremely well. They are skilful at dealing with this inappropriate behaviour quickly and calmly, not allowing it to take up the whole lesson but always focusing pupils quickly back on their learning.

28. In some subject lessons teachers do not use the support staff in their lessons as well as they might. For much of the lesson the subject teacher gives pupils facts or asks questions and the support staff play a passive rather than an active role. Occasionally teachers set exactly the same work for all pupils without giving special needs pupils any support or extra guidance. Sometimes these tasks are far too difficult for pupils with special educational needs and only serve to reinforce their feelings of failure. Supportive education staff willingly give time to helping pupils who come to them with difficult work but occasionally the task concerns concepts or ideas that are impossible to simplify.

29. The link between good teaching and pupils learning well is very strong in the school for those pupils who do have special educational needs. In the best lessons subject and support staff work as partners helping all pupils get the most from the lesson, setting a variety of tasks and using a variety of approaches, helping those who learn in different ways. Pupils are prepared to try and work hard as they want to do well. Given the encouragement of working in well planned lessons where their learning is structured by the teacher, step by step, they learn well.

Sixth form

30. Teaching in the sixth form is good. Particular strengths include teachers' knowledge and understanding of the subjects and courses they teach. In a law lesson, for example, the teacher's excellent knowledge of current cases in the public eye as well as law theory and the examination syllabus ensured students were motivated and able to relate theory to reality usefully. Students are managed very well and respond extremely well to small group work. They listen well to one another and respect each other's ideas well. Relationships between students and teachers are extremely good in the sixth form and students are very quick to recognise their teachers' interest and care; this contributes very well to the good learning atmosphere in sixth form lessons. Students want to do well in their examinations and therefore take great notice of their teachers' advice and work hard.

31. On the whole, students in both Year 12 and 13 work more autonomously, and with less adult direction than in the main school, but it is noticeable that the best teaching fosters and develops this independence. Some lessons ask students to be very passive and just note down information rather than taking part in activities and discussions that get them to use information and analyse for themselves. Homework contributes considerably to students' understanding of the subject they are studying and to their developing good habits of concentration, study and independent organisation. It is generally well set and useful but marking is very variable, sometimes poor and sometimes very good; good marking helps students understand exactly how well they are doing and what they have to do to improve further.

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

32. Pupils receive a generally broad, balanced and relevant education that meets their needs well. All pupils have a range of constructive experiences including good provision for personal, social and health education and a sound choice of well-attended extra curricular activities.

33. Pupils are taught the full range of National Curriculum subjects and religious education but arrangements for teaching information and communication technology do not meet statutory requirements. This is because computers are not used enough in subjects to enable pupils to cover all aspects of the National Curriculum and pupils have only one lesson a week in Year 7, 9, and 11 experiencing an information and communication technology course. Some pupils use their ICT skills to improve the presentation of their coursework but practice varies between subjects. There are initiatives for developing pupils' literacy skills in subject lessons. Some departments, for example English, are using the policies on spelling and the display of key words. A similar strategy for teaching numeracy skills in subjects is beginning to have an impact but is much less developed.

34. Pupils are taught for 26 hours 40 minutes each week in Years 7 to 11: this is longer than in most secondary schools. This allows the school to allocate a generous amount of time to modern foreign languages so that all but a few pupils can study two foreign languages in Years 8 and 9. In Years 10 and 11 all pupils have the opportunity to gain a broad science education by taking double science. The after school club for gifted pupils, where they can take part in enrichment activities, is helping to extend experiences. The curriculum is not, as yet, modified to meet the specific needs of gifted and talented pupils.

35. The good personal, social and health education course is taught by teachers who specialise in particular aspects of the programme as well as by outside speakers. This programme includes good modules on sex education, drug misuse and citizenship. Careers education is also good and the library has an easily accessible and extensive range of up-to-date and relevant information about careers. Work experience is provided for all Year 11 pupils and contributes very well to their personal development. A small number of pupils follow a work related course which is better suited to their needs. The school is monitoring how well these pupils do, and is planning to extend the vocational curriculum if deemed appropriate, particularly to cater for boys who are disaffected or who would do better following a less academic diet. There is no daily act of collective worship: some teachers use the twenty-five minutes of tutor time each day well to include a moment of reflection but this is not usual and more often than not the time is not used particularly effectively.

36. Extra curricular activities extend pupils' range of experiences and make a significant contribution to the sense of community within the school. Extra-curricular opportunities for music, for example, are very good, catering for all musical interests, although only a relatively small number of pupils are involved. Many sporting activities are provided which are not restricted to the most talented pupils and all have the opportunity to go on a residential trip if they wish. There are a variety of musical, drama and dance activities at lunchtime and after school, and there are several other clubs, such as homework clubs, that meet regularly. All these opportunities are part of the way the school creates the very positive atmosphere in which all pupils are able to develop their personal achievements well.

37. The school has excellent links with the community: not least of which is being sited within the town and in the same building as the library and the adult education institute. The community links also ensure the wide and varied list of companies that offer pupils work experience placements. Local business people help give very useful practice and advice to prospective school leavers on a range of topics including how to behave on interviews. Visits locally, and visitors to the school who take part in assemblies and the personal social and health education courses, for example, add a great deal to pupils' experiences. The learning support department use the expertise of many members of the local and wider community to add to pupils' experiences and the staff's knowledge. The department is working closely with a provider to develop a course to train classroom assistants

for schools across the region. The school has good relationships with the other schools in the area and liaises well with its partner primary schools.

38. The needs of pupils with special educational needs are effectively supported through a variety of curriculum additions. These include well-targeted catch up courses helping pupils improve their numeracy and literacy skills, small group sessions and the good support they receive from the supportive education staff in lessons and out. Support in lessons by supportive education staff is skilful and effective. They follow the strategies outlined in individual education plans and encourage pupils to try for themselves in a variety of ways, for example, by asking questions to direct thinking or by guiding pupils' focus. The good teaching all pupils receive in many subjects contributes to the good progress that pupils with special educational needs make.

39. The few pupils speaking English as an additional language have extremely positive attitudes to school and play a full part in school life. The sessions with small groups or individual, where one or two pupils learning English as an additional language are withdrawn from lessons, are effective and give the pupils time to explore ideas and subjects orally and in writing.

40. The school's provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall. There are strengths in the ways many departments approach these aspects but there is no clear strategy across the school to ensure that pupils have a coherent and consistent experience.

41. Provision for spiritual development is satisfactory with examples of very good provision in some subjects. In religious education (RE) there is a strong emphasis on helping pupils to understand their own beliefs and values as well as those of other people, through the study of the life of Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights movement at GCSE, for example. In history Year 8 pupils demonstrated heartfelt opposition to racism in a debate on slavery in America. There is little evidence of a whole school approach to spiritual development. In some subjects opportunities to encourage spiritual development are missed. In the weekly year group assemblies pupils were frequently passive recipients of information and these occasions do not contribute as effectively as they should to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

42. Provision both for pupils' social and moral development is good. Social issues and moral questions are covered well in English and drama. Provision is also very effective in PE where teaching encourages pupils to appreciate the gifts and talents of others, to challenge stereotypes and to treat the views of others with respect. In science presentations given by Year 11 pupils showed an understanding of the moral and social dilemmas raised by bio-technology. The GCSE RE courses provide good opportunities for all pupils to explore and understand their own responses to moral and ethical issues and to learn about the impact of religious beliefs on actions. The issues of racism and equality are covered in depth in both RE and in history leading pupils to an appreciation of the rights and responsibilities of individuals in the wider world. In history 'Why?' and 'How?' questions designed to encourage pupils to justify their views are a fundamental part of all lessons. Social responsibility is promoted strongly across the school. There is a clear emphasis on caring for the needs of others and pupils raise funds for a wide range of charities, particularly through activities held on 'Sponsor Day'.

43. Provision for pupils' cultural development is good. Both art and music introduce pupils to work from a range of cultural backgrounds. The reflections of Year 8 pupils on the suffering caused by war inspired their work in art. In one music lesson in Year 10 the teaching encouraged pupils to re-appraise their initial response to Balinese music, resulting in a more positive analytical and constructively critical approach. Educational visits provide further opportunities for pupils to extend their cultural development and broaden their experiences. These include history department visits to Auschwitz and Ypres, sixth form visits to major art galleries and trips to theatre productions for all year groups.

Sixth form

44. In the sixth form the wide range of subjects offered at GCE A and A/S level, as well as a small number of vocational subjects provides successfully meets the needs of the students. The vocational course the school offers include the AVCE courses in business studies and the certificate in child care course. A small number of students follow a somewhat narrow curriculum but this is by choice and the school is sympathetic to the needs of individual students and their wish to stay on in the sixth form.

45. The work of the sixth form, and the range of courses offered, is managed well through the co-ordinator who works closely with other staff who have management responsibilities. Staff provide students with worthwhile experiences and support their learning effectively. There is, however, an area for development which is recognised by the school: students are sometimes very passive learners, taking in information given by teachers but not questioning and analysing for themselves. Sometimes teachers do not always have enough information about the prior experiences of students.

46. The school offers good opportunities for students to develop their key skills in English, numeracy and ICT although opportunities in lessons are not quite as good. The range of additional activities available to sixth form students is broadly good. There are residential trips organised with higher education institutions and local employers to develop students' interview skills and to explore career opportunities. Work placements are also arranged for students, giving them an insight into different types of employment and opportunities to fulfil course work assignments. In addition, students take up school-wide responsibilities: they help with sports clubs, enter debating competitions, help younger students with their reading and mentor others. A number have been trained to assist with the teaching of the PSHE programme in Year 9 and this support has been very successful.

47. Overall, the provision of careers is satisfactory. There are opportunities, for example, to attend careers conventions, and visits to higher education institutions are organised.

48. Provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good in the sixth form. Students are actively involved in the life of the school and organise many activities and events. They help to foster the sense of community which is a strong element in the life of the school. Most subjects make an effective contribution to these aspects of students' development. For example, students study the social and moral implications of political issues such as child labour and the role of women in art. Chosen themes enable them to explore relationships and self awareness. A conference on racism organised as part of the religious education provision enabled Year 12 students to confront issues of justice and equality and to explore cultural diversity. There is a clear emphasis on broadening students' cultural and social experiences through a varied programme of visits, residential activities and involvement in school productions. Students make the most of these good opportunities. Overall the spiritual dimension is not as strongly developed as the other aspects. The assembly programme does not contribute as effectively to these aspects as it should.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

49. Arrangements for the care of students are good and include a well-organised and effective pastoral system. The staff know the students well and understand their educational, social and personal needs. There are appropriate arrangements for child protection. A senior member of staff is the named and trained child protection person for the school and has ensured that all staff are aware of their relevant responsibilities.

50. Procedures for ensuring students' welfare are good. Tutors know students well. Those with personal and academic problems are particularly well supported through the Individual Pupil Monitoring System introduced three years ago. The pastoral committee is very effective in dealing with the needs of any student causing concern. The working environment is safe and students are well supervised at work and during breaks.

51. Procedures for monitoring and supporting students' personal development are very good. Form tutors remain constant throughout the student's time in the school, and this continuity helps to ensure that members of the staff know them very well. The form tutors work very closely with the Heads of Year and senior management to address the needs of any students causing concern and there are very good links with other members of staff, such as the supportive education co-ordinator, to help students deal with any difficulties they have with studying or coping with school life. This is one of the reasons for the school's positive ethos and students' good attitudes.

52. Expectations of good behaviour are implicit. Adults are good role models and set good standards. Behaviour is well managed by most teachers. Procedures for promoting good behaviour are effective. Some bullying does occur, but it is firmly and effectively dealt with.

53. Procedures for promoting attendance are good. Attendance is well monitored and checked quickly if there are concerns. An educational welfare officer has recently joined the team to provide further support.

54. Assessment procedures are good overall but there are some weaknesses. Marking of pupils' work particularly lacks consistency across the school and in some subjects does not adequately inform pupils and parents about how to raise standards. The use that subject departments make of information collected varies. Some subjects such as English, history, PE and supportive education use it well to inform the curriculum. For example, as a result of evaluating results English changed the way pupils are grouped together in lessons; changed the exam syllabus at GCSE and their seating arrangements for boys and girls. The result has been effective and has helped to raise standards in English.

55. Pupils with special educational needs value the support they are offered by the supportive education department and by their teachers. This has the effect of ensuring most have very positive attitudes to school. Pupils with special educational needs are eager to take up the opportunities the school offers them to improve their skills. Working with supportive education staff is not seen as a stigma; pupils come to support and homework sessions happily. The attitudes of other pupils to those with learning needs are positive and many pupils volunteer to help one another. The productive relationships between pupils with special educational needs and the supportive education department encourage pupils to improve and to believe that they can improve.

56. The supportive education department works extremely well with specialists outside the school to provide a variety of specialised services. For example, a teacher from the local pupil referral unit makes regular visits to advise pupils and staff. Pupils are offered appointments with trained counsellors and this helps them talk about their concerns and difficulties, and with the permission of pupils can help the department provide the most appropriate learning support.

57. Only a very small number of pupils speak English as an additional language and most are fluent bilingual speakers. The one or two pupils who are still developing their skill in speaking English as an additional language are highly motivated to learn because the teaching they receive in many subjects is good. Whilst few teachers have much experience of, or training in, teaching pupils with English as an additional language they are prepared to give extra time and attention to help them understand a particular topic.

Careers Education

58. The provision for careers education is good. In Year 9 students become well informed about careers and advice is related to their interests, attainment and aspirations to help them choose their GCSE courses wisely. The work experience programme is good, ensuring all students are safe and have a worthwhile experience. The school is supported by many local businesses to provide invaluable application procedures and realistic interviews. Steps are taken to ensure students are informed and supported in their choices at post-sixteen and many stay on in the Sixth Form.

Sixth form

Assessment

59. Overall, the procedures for assessing students' attainment and progress are satisfactory, as practices vary from one subject to another. The school has comprehensive information on individual students' earlier achievements that are used to set examination targets for the end of the sixth form. Until recently the school used a recognised scheme to set A level targets and judge how much "value" was added by sixth form teaching. This scheme is not being used this year but the school continues to draw on its principles to help set examination targets. The use of assessment to help plan lessons and courses is not as effective: broadly work is matched well to students' needs and could be more precise.

Advice, support and guidance

60. The advice and guidance given to students is satisfactory overall: there are differences from one subject to another which means that practice is not always consistent. The head of sixth form monitors students' progress at key points during the year. On the other hand, the advice and support for students continuing into higher education are good. Students in Year 12 are given an opportunity to attend a residential management course sponsored by BT which takes place at Essex University. Any student has the opportunity to have an interview with the careers adviser.

61. The written information provided for parents in reports is broadly sound. Health and safety procedures are good, although the day-to-day system whereby sixth form students sign in and out is not used rigorously enough.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

62. Parents are generally very supportive of the school. They are happy that their children enjoy school and this is reflected in the positive attitudes seen. They appreciate that the school is helping their child to mature and is expected to work hard and that behaviour is good. Most stated that they feel confident and happy in approaching the school. Parents at the meeting prior to the inspection were particularly supportive of the attitudes and values that the school promotes and this too is reflected in the school.

63. Students in the sixth form show a high level of support for the school as demonstrated in their involvement in activities. In discussion, they said that they feel well supported and they appreciate the very good relationships they have with their teachers and head of sixth form. A number were not happy with the guidance they are given regarding choices and also with the information about their progress.

64. Parents responding to the questionnaire and at the meeting expressed a few concerns. These were in relation to the amount of work their child is given to do, the fact that they feel that the school does not work closely with parents and that a number felt that they are not kept sufficiently well informed about their child's progress. The inspection found that there are some inconsistencies between departments and forms as to the use of homework but overall appropriate homework is set and pupils are given the right amount of work. The use of the homework diary is varied.

65. The school generally keeps parents well informed. The prospectus and governors' annual report are detailed and provide useful information about the work of the school. There are regular letters home from the head teacher letting parents know dates for the diary and information about developments. Detailed information is provided on specific trips and events for year groups. The school holds meetings for parents of particular year groups to inform them about important activities such as choosing GCSE options and arrangements for work experience.

66. Parents in Years 7 to 11 are kept well informed about their child's progress. There are annual parent consultation evenings and an annual written report. There is some inconsistency

between departments as to how these are presented and how useful they are. However, the reports do tell parents what their child can do, the levels attained, and what they need to do to improve further, although this area is more detailed for some subjects than others. The school also provides individual pupil monitoring forms which provide a summary of levels attained and efforts in all subjects. These give a good ongoing summary of progress which can be used to show areas or subjects needing more attention. In addition, in some departments, letters are sent home to parents letting them know when their child has achieved particularly good results in their work. This successfully celebrates achievement.

67. The partnership with parents whose children have special educational needs, and those who are learning to speak English as an additional language is very important to the supportive education department. The entrance lobby to the department is welcoming to parents who come in for review meetings, to discuss their children's timetables or just to share concerns and discuss strategies. Staff in the supportive education department make every effort to develop and keep good relationships with the families of pupils they work with and parents recognise and value this greatly. Parents felt they were welcome to call in or to telephone at anytime and that they would be listened to and their views taken account of. Pupils are also very keen to please their parents and understand that their parents and their teachers discuss their progress.

68. The school has effective links with parents who are keen for their children to achieve and take an interest in their education. Many parents regularly sign the homework diaries although this is not consistent throughout the school and depends on the tutors' monitoring of the diaries. Quite a large number of parents help in school, for example, with supporting reading. Many have helped over a number of years and their help is appreciated and contributes to the standards attained. They receive helpful guidance from the school and work closely with teachers feeding back and liaising. There is a Friends Association which organises events and raises valuable funds. Parents make a positive impact on the work of the school and the standards their children achieve. Despite busy lives, many parents support their children with homework and coursework where possible and the school gives guidance on how they can help their child.

69. The school is keen to work closely with parents and has recently undertaken its own questionnaire with parents from selected year groups. In order to improve communications with parents and to speed up responses to concerns the school has made available direct line telephone numbers of heads of department and heads of year. The school is monitoring the efficiency of this system and feels that communication has been made easier.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

70. Overall, the school is well managed and suitably led. The way the school is led and managed has a very strong impact on many aspects of pupils' experiences and achievements. The impact of leadership and management on the school's arrangements to evaluate and improve its performance still further, however, is not so successful: this means that some pupils do not achieve as much as they should.

71. The headteacher sets a strong example for both staff and pupils: high standards of behaviour, very good relationships, the care pupils receive and the respect with which they are treated are all successful characteristics of the school. As a result the school's climate is very positive and the conditions for learning are very good. This ensures that pupils are able to work in an atmosphere that encourages individual achievement and high standards of personal conduct. What is most impressive is the way this climate, or ethos, is understood by everyone and acts as a sort of unspoken promise and commitment to making the school a comfortable and pleasant place in which to work. There is little doubt that this is successful: the school is well-maintained, happy and an encouraging place in which to work where pupils learn in an atmosphere of mutual respect and shared values. The school is also very well organised and runs very smoothly from day to day. These strong factors explain why pupils' attitudes to school are so positive, why they achieve so much in their personal development and why standards are high.

72. What this does not explain, however, is why some subjects perform better than others and why some pupils, particularly boys, are not achieving as much as they should. The answer to this lies in understanding what the school does to check how well it is doing and whether it is doing well enough, identify areas for improvement and take appropriate steps as a result. Put simply, it is about the effectiveness of the school's systems for self-evaluation and improvement. It is here that the school falls down on its otherwise high standards: the systems for self-evaluation of the school as a whole are not robust enough. Nevertheless, some subjects departments such as English and history have relatively sophisticated methods that give teachers good information about how well they are doing and what needs to be improved. It is no coincidence that teaching and learning are consistently good in these areas and that pupils are achieving well. Similarly, the school has identified that there is a group of boys who are disaffected with school: plans are well-advanced to develop a broader range of vocational courses with outside providers which are better suited to pupils' needs. Nevertheless, the school-wide systems do not give senior staff enough detailed information about how well the different areas are doing, whether they could be doing even better and how all this contributes to pupils' experiences across the school.

73. Significantly, the school collects a great deal of performance data about individual pupils and uses this well to predict GCSE results, for example. However, because there are too few systems to bring all this together to give an overview of performance, it is difficult to evaluate strengths and relative weaknesses and take the necessary action to improve. This does not mean that the school is doing badly: on the contrary, the school is doing rather well but because information about performance is patchy it is difficult for senior managers to evaluate reliably whether this is good enough.

74. The way the school monitors teaching and learning is an example of the gaps in the information senior managers have about performance. Certainly, senior managers have a view about how good teaching and learning is across the school. But this view comes mainly from the lessons observed as part of the performance management process and from discussions with heads of subjects. Other strategies, such as looking at pupils' work books or checking that assessment is used effectively, are limited. This means that senior managers have only a partial, and sometimes anecdotal, view of teaching and learning across the school. Thus the school is not in a strong position to identify which aspects of teaching have the most impact on pupils' learning and whether there are improvements to be made. Importantly, too, the lack of a more systematic approach to monitoring teaching and learning, and evaluating what is and is not successful, means that the opportunities to discuss and agree what makes teaching effective are missed. Again, the picture is mixed: some subjects clearly have had the debate about teaching and learning but this is not a shared feature across the school. As a result, there are inconsistencies and weaknesses in teaching and learning which go unchallenged because the "big picture" is incomplete and differently understood.

75. The way the school evaluates its performance as a whole shows similar inconsistencies. A good example is the use of performance data. Some subjects are very good at analysing data and identifying areas for improvement. Others are rightly sceptical about drawing conclusions from national curriculum tests and GCSE examination results: after all, they say, tests and examinations do not get to the heart of what we really do and comparing our results with schools nationally only gives half the picture. However, by not analysing performance data fully, teachers miss opportunities to identify aspects of their work that they might improve. In other words, performance data is not used to test and challenge the status quo. Similarly, the school improvement plan is not as sharp as it could be and this also makes it more difficult than it should be for the school to check how well it is doing. Overall, the plan is fairly clear and identifies five broad school areas, followed by similar plans for subjects and year groups. What the plan is quite good at is identifying the costs associated with each of the targets. However, many of the targets lack detail and there are no clear statements about what the school is trying to achieve. Of course, none of this would matter much if the school was evaluating its performance effectively: but because the plan is not sharp enough in stating clearly what is to be achieved the school is not in a strong position to check whether the action it takes is really having the an impact on pupils' achievements.

76. The role of the governing body has improved well since the last inspection when involvement in the long-term direction of the school and fulfilling its legal responsibilities were identified as areas for improvement. Governors now take a great deal of care to debate fully the issues facing the school and to ensure that they have sufficient information on which to base their discussions and decisions. Decisions about bidding to the government for technology college status, for example, were supported fully by governors. Similarly, governors have a strong input into budget plans and are developing ways to ensure that the accounts are in a format that allows them to monitor expenditure and make decisions about future spending plans. The new classroom building shows the effectiveness of this: here, by identifying clear priorities and careful housekeeping, the school has been able to improve the quality of the accommodation. Financial management is effective and the school can account accurately for its spending. In the previous financial year the school had a fairly large financial surplus but has since used a good amount of this to lease new computers and pay for some of the new buildings: as a result, the surplus is now considerably reduced. The money the school has to support pupils with special learning needs is used well: this is why these pupils make good progress with their learning.

77. Accommodation is good although the classrooms in K Block, which is in a building above shops in the town, mean the school has to oversee pupils walking from one building to another: this it does very successfully ensuring that pupils get to lessons on time. The music accommodation is tight and this limits the group performing and composing requirements of the national curriculum.

78. Library provision is very good. This is because the town's public library is located in the main building and is also used by the school. As a result pupils have very good access to a broad range of books and they use the library very well for personal study. The space for pupils to sit comfortably in decent surroundings and eat their lunch is completely inadequate for numbers staying for school dinners. This is because the original projections for the number of pupils staying for lunch, used when the school was built, are now completely out of date. What is significant, however, is that the school manages this so well that it both minimises disruption and ensures that pupils get the best possible deal the school can give them. This illustrates very effectively the strong impact that leadership and management has on the experiences of pupils.

79. Resources for learning, such as books, materials and equipment, are broadly sufficient for pupils' needs but there are a few deficiencies. There are not enough text books in science, for example. The range and experience of staff are good and the school has been successful in retaining teachers: mathematics, for example, is staffed fully and this contributes significantly to pupils' learning.

Sixth form

Leadership and management

80. The sixth form is led and managed well. The learning climate created in the sixth form reflects the strong and caring ethos of the whole school. In a short time the head of the sixth form has begun to broaden the range of subjects from which students can choose so that there are more opportunities to study vocational subjects as well the more academic.

81. The way sixth form performance is monitored and evaluated reflects the systems for the main school: examination results are used effectively to track individual students and the head of the sixth form carries out a value-added analysis, which is used to check that students are meeting their targets. However, this information is not routinely used to challenge perceptions of how well the sixth form is doing and to identify what it could do better. Similarly, the monitoring of teaching in the sixth form mirrors that across the school as a whole and is not sufficiently rigorous to identify what does and does not work well. Again, like the school as a whole, the sixth form is doing quite well but could do better.

82. The sixth form is cost-effective and the money allocated for students' education is used appropriately: the sixth form does not receive extra money from funds allocated for pupils in the main school. Similarly, money meant for sixth form students is not used to subsidise spending in the main

school. The development of vocational courses and the provision of courses in basic skills adds to this cost effectiveness ensuring that students have an appropriate range of subjects from which to choose. However, this could be improved and this is an issue recognised by the head of the sixth form who has begun to introduce more vocational courses to give a broader choice for students.

83. Overall, the governing body fulfils its responsibilities appropriately. Governors take their responsibilities seriously and support the development of a broader range of courses for students. The governing body's involvement in budget planning is shown in the cost effectiveness of the sixth form.

Resources

84. There are sufficient learning resources for the sixth form courses including information and communication technology. There is reasonably good access to computers in the sixth form study rooms but teachers do not always give students enough opportunities to use computers in lessons: this can limit the range and scope of their learning. Accommodation for the sixth form is broadly adequate: the school rightly uses space for study areas rather than social areas which makes the latter rather tight. Nevertheless, the school's decision to put learning and study space first is the best use of the relatively limited accommodation. Students have good access to the public library and use it well for private study. Teachers are well matched to the subjects they teach: this is one of the main reasons why teaching is good.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

85. In order to improve the standards achieved by some boys and some of the brightest pupils the school and governors should:

- (1) Ensure that the work in all subjects is challenging and demanding and always expects the most of pupils;
(paragraphs: 25, 87, 89, 108, 118, 130, 132, 141, 144, 195, 199, 200 – 202, 203)
- (2) Develop more rigorous systems for self-evaluation by:
 - making sure that all subject departments carry out regular checks of their performance particularly the quality of teaching and learning;
 - bringing together the use of performance data to analyse trends across the school and to check whether pupils and students are doing as well as they should in all subjects
 - ensuring that school development targets are sharp and that there are clear statements about how they are to be achieved.(paragraphs: 72 – 75, 111, 129, 137, 145, 146, 171, 190, 196, 206)
- (3) Ensure that statutory requirements for teaching information and communication technology in Years 10 and 11 are met in full
(paragraphs: 33, 89, 110, 120, 152, 153 – 159, 167, 181)

Sixth form

- (1) Raise the standards achieved by boys by:
 - using assessment more effectively to help plan lessons and courses;
 - giving pupils more opportunities to use computers in lessons so that they develop a wider range of learning styles suited to their needs, particular boys.(paragraphs: 8, 59, 231, 245 – 248, 251, 268, 274, 276, 279, 282, 285, 289, 298, 301)

Other issues which should be considered by the school

Meeting the legal requirement to hold a daily act of collective worship.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	200
0	Sixth form	74
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		50

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

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

Number	4	31	93	60	9	2	1
Percentage	2	16	47	30	5	1	1

Sixth form

Number	2	17	34	19	1	0	0
Percentage	3	23	47	26	1	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	1524	275
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	46	

Special educational needs

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	19	1
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	143	1

English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	2

Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	29
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	45

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	7.3
National comparative data	8.1

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.4
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2001	166	150	316

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	127	135	139
	Girls	134	120	124
	Total	261	255	263
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	83 (82)	81 (80)	84 (78)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	37 (40)	60 (54)	43 (42)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	124	142	135
	Girls	135	125	117
	Total	259	267	252
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	83 (82)	84 (76)	80 (85)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	43 (43)	58 (46)	34 (46)
	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	166	154	320

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	90	157	160
	Girls	113	149	152
	Total	203	306	312
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	63 (70)	96 (96)	98 (97)
	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	45.3
	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

Attainment at the end of the sixth form (Year 13)

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	47	65	112
	Average point score per candidate	13.6	18	16.1
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		
		Boys	Girls	All	Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	47	65	112	0	0	0
	Average point score per candidate	13.6	18	16.1	n/a	N/a	n/a
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.9	17.4	9.8	11.4	10.6

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	2
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	2
Indian	2
Pakistani	1
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	1
White	1791
Any other minority ethnic group	0

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	39	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)	107.8
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.1

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	35
Total aggregate hours worked per week	844

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	77.5
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 2	
Key Stage 3	24
Key Stage 4	19.5

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000/2001
	£
Total income	5,054,555
Total expenditure	4,959,475
Expenditure per pupil	2,768
Balance brought forward from previous year	164,765
Balance carried forward to next year	259,845

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	32.8
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	40.4
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	2.7
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1,799
Number of questionnaires returned	295

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	29	60	9	2	0
My child is making good progress in school.	39	56	3	0	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	22	64	6	2	5
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	20	57	15	5	3
The teaching is good.	25	68	3	0	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	21	54	21	4	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	41	51	7	0	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	50	45	4	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	23	50	19	5	3
The school is well led and managed.	31	53	7	2	7
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	31	61	4	2	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	34	51	7	1	6

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

ENGLISH

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

Strengths

- The examination results are good, especially at GCSE
- Teaching is good.
- Assessment of pupils is very good.
- Pupils have positive attitudes.
- There is very good subject leadership.

Areas for improvement

- Boys' results in GCSE English could be improved further.

87. Pupils at the school do well in tests and examinations. In tests taken at the end of Year 9, the percentage of pupils achieving Level 5 and above was well above the national average; the percentage achieving Level 6 and above was above the national average. Boys and girls, at this stage, exceed their national average. English results in GCSE examinations have improved significantly over the last five years. In 1996, the percentage reaching grades A*-C was close to the national average; in 2001 it was 16 per cent above the national figure in English and 18 percent above in English literature. The results in 2000 were even higher, and it is worth noting that boys have performed significantly better in English literature than in other subject areas in the school. In the last two years, they have outperformed their counterparts nationally to a greater degree than have girls. The reverse, however, is true in English: although boys do better than boys nationally, girls do even better than their national counterparts.

88. From work seen during the inspection and in lessons observed, the evidence is that these standards are being maintained. Good progress is made by pupils of all ages, although the progress is greater in Years 10 and 11. By the end of Year 9, pupils are competent writers and can plan answers in a way that suggests well over 80 per cent of the year group should reach National Curriculum Level 5 in the tests this term. Their reading has advanced well and their speaking and listening skills have developed to a greater extent than would be found in most schools. By the end of Year 11, at least three quarters of the pupils look set to gain higher grades in the GCSE examinations. They are able to recognise the quality of work required to achieve particular grades; they are familiar with literary devices and not only identify them accurately but can explain their impact.

89. Good teaching contributes significantly to the pupils' attainment. During the inspection, no unsatisfactory teaching was seen. Most lessons were good, and many were very good. Teachers know their subject very well; they plan their lessons well. They have high expectations of their pupils, who are well informed about the levels and grades they are achieving. Classroom behaviour is managed very well, and there is a sense that pupils both respect and trust their teachers. They are prepared very well for tests and examinations, but not in a dry mechanical way. A Year 11 class, for instance, was seen having a lively discussion about what makes good written work; excellent relationships between teacher and pupils made the lesson fun as well as a valuable learning experience. Amongst younger pupils, there are a range of strategies to enhance learning: observation and writing skills were enhanced in a Year 7 lesson that was based on a story on video because the teacher ensured a good pace to the lesson and had high expectations of her pupils, which they rose to. Wall displays show the quality of work expected, and achieved, and includes work done using ICT. In the limited time available for ICT in English lessons, teachers are covering a good range of skills. Teachers in Years 7 and 8 teach literacy skills well, and have a variety of good strategies for teaching reading: the reading skills of pupils are monitored carefully by teachers, with good use being made of reading logs and dialogue sheets. In these year groups, half an hour a week is devoted to private reading in class, and up to six pupils are allowed to visit the library. This is proving to be an effective

use of time. Pupils of different abilities all make progress; those who need special support make at least as much progress as the others. Boys learn as well as girls up to the end of Year 9, but the learning of girls in English outstrips that of boys after that, although not in English literature. It could well be that the reading strategy in the first two or three years is giving boys a better foundation for literature work than is found in most schools.

90. Pupils have a positive attitude to learning, which also contributes to their achievement. There are good relationships in most lessons: pupils co-operate well with each other and with their teachers. Paired and group work can be very effective. There is a sense that pupils want to learn, and many are ready to take responsibility for their own learning.

91. The English department is very well led and managed: a team of 12 well-qualified and experienced teachers is held together well: indeed they work as a very effective unit, sharing ideas and resources, taking on responsibilities, and helping each other's professional development. The head of department monitors the quality of teaching very effectively and the whole department monitors the work of their pupils very well. Changes to teaching groupings have come about, for instance, as a result of careful assessment of pupils' attainment. The change, a few years ago, to mixed ability classes was not the result of any doctrinaire attitude, but was based rather on a rigorous analysis of how well different ability sets performed. The change seemed right, and has been followed by a marked rise in standards. This year, a slight refinement has been implemented, with the provision of two 'top' sets in Year 10. The aim is to ensure that the more gifted pupils do not underachieve, whilst not ignoring the needs of the majority. The department is right to experiment, and should continue to monitor the effects of these changes.

92. Provision in English has undoubtedly improved since the last inspection, as teaching has become better and better. The improvement in GCSE results is the chief indicator of this.

Drama

93. Drama is taught as a discrete subject in Years 7 to 9, and is an increasingly popular option at GCSE. Recent results in GCSE drama have been close to the national average, and current standards in lessons reflect this. Pupils prepare and present some thoughtful work and can evaluate what they are doing very well.

94. Teaching by the established members of the department is very good; some teaching is excellent. Teachers are particularly effective at using drama to explore moral and social issues, and elicit some very good responses from pupils. Lessons on bullying and drugs were extremely effective, and demonstrate how the subject is contributing to the moral and personal development of pupils. Drama pupils clearly enjoy the subject, and respond very well in lessons. There is an active drama club, and younger pupils are keen to attend workshops put on for them by sixth formers. School productions have been highly rated, but usage of the performance space by the community is limiting what can be presented by the school.

95. The subject is very well led and managed, with a strong team of teachers. Good links exist with other departments in areas where syllabuses and practices overlap. The success of drama leads to an increasing uptake of the subject in the sixth form.

Literacy

96. There is a whole school literacy policy and a literacy co-ordinator, a history teacher, has been in post since autumn 2001.

97. The standards of literacy of pupils starting Year 7 are above average, according to standardised tests. Nevertheless, the school is aware of the need to develop literacy skills, and speaking and listening and research skills have been identified as priorities.

98. An audit of literacy in Year 7 has taken place across the curriculum, and various departments are evolving their own policy. These are most developed in English and history.

99. In history, all the language skills are given prominence – pupils read aloud, give oral presentations and participate in debates, for instance, on slavery. They are helped to write better by the provision of very good writing frames. In every room there are displays about how to write essays. Sorting and sequencing exercises are used. High quality essays are photocopied for the benefit of the rest of the class.

100. This also happens in English, where again pupils are helped to structure their written work and are made aware of what to do to improve their writing. Speaking and listening skills are developed in a range of ways, including group discussions and oral presentations to the class, sometimes on books the pupils wish to recommend to others. Time is provided for private reading in lessons, with a number of pupils being able to visit the library during lesson time. Pupils have a reading log, which enables effective monitoring of what they read; a good feature of this is the dialogue sheet through which teachers and parents can comment and ask questions about the work being done.

101. Good use is made of word books. Lists of subject specific words are included in these, reinforcing the displays in subject rooms. There is inconsistency, however, in the attention paid to literacy across subjects. Drama makes excellent provision for speaking and listening, but in mathematics this is largely restricted to listening to the teacher: pupils do not have regular opportunities to work in pairs or groups. Good discussions occur in design technology, geography and art, helping the development of subject specific language. In physical education, speaking and listening skills are an integral part of the curriculum. But in other subjects, there is still room for improvement. Attention is not always drawn to the words on the walls, and literacy skills are not always written into schemes of work or lesson plans. Some subjects make good use of research skills; the library plays a key role in this.

102. Subjects are beginning to use the literacy strategy. Training days have heightened awareness and more staff are now keen to address the needs of pupils. The supportive education department has been particularly active; they have conducted a pupil tracking survey of questions asked and responses.

103. The literacy co-ordinator meets fortnightly with the headteacher and the heads of English and supportive education. There is also a literacy management group, comprising the literacy co-ordinator, a senior teacher and representatives from each department. Although it is true to say that the school has been slow in adopting the National Literacy Strategy, progress is now evident. As each department audits their own provision, they are recognising the benefits for their own subject of integrating literacy approaches into all that they do.

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths

- There is a full team of specialist Mathematics teachers, whose subject knowledge is good.
- Standards in national tests at the end of Years 9 and 11 are very good, with thorough preparation of pupils.
- Relationships between teachers and pupils are good overall.
- There is good leadership and management, with energy and enthusiasm from the acting head of department.

Areas for improvement

- Teaching across the department and sharing good practice is not consistent.
- The range and variety of teaching and learning activities needs increasing.
- Target setting and showing pupils how they can improve is under developed.
- Links with primary schools and development of the National Numeracy Strategy.

105. Standards in the national tests at the end of Year 9 are well above the national average in 2001. This was an increase on previous years. Boys and girls achieved equally well. Standards at GCSE are well above the national average for those gaining grade A* - C and for average points score, and above average for the proportion of passes. The percentage of Year 11 pupils in 2001 obtaining grade B is very high, although there were fewer A* grades than nationally. This was an improvement on previous years and shows an improving trend largely due to intensive preparation and revision sessions.

106. In lessons standards are above national expectations overall but varied with the quality of teaching and the attitude of pupils. In Year 7, where pupils are taught in mixed ability forms, standards are in line with national expectations. Some teachers keep the class together, so that higher attaining pupils are not given more or harder work, and often sit doing nothing waiting for others to finish. Learning support teachers and assistants give good support to slower and weaker pupils. Computers are being used well in Year 7, for example, with a set of lap-top computers to produce statistical charts and graphs in a joint project with the geography department. Pupils are grouped according to ability from Year 8 onwards and pupils make better progress, especially with the better teachers who set high expectations and a fast pace with a range of learning activities. An example was a Year 8 lower achieving group that was mastering the addition and subtraction of negative numbers well, and were supported by the individual attention of a special education teacher as well as the mathematics teacher. A Year 9 higher achieving group made great progress in their learning through the excellent preparation and explanation by the teacher. Middle achieving groups in all years tend to include a significant minority of pupils who chatter off-task throughout the lesson, even in some cases when the teacher was talking to the class, and this disrupts the flow of learning and slows the pace and productivity.

107. Standards in Year 10 lessons do not reflect the very good results of these pupils from the previous year. Lower attaining groups achieve well with good teaching but the higher groups find the demands of the more advanced GCSE paper difficult: they manage well with straightforward examples but struggle when thinking around complex problems. Expectations of lower attaining groups are high with the majority aiming for Intermediate level GCSE rather than the Foundation level: for example, a Year 10 class of lower achievers showed understanding of some complex notation ideas after one lesson. In a Year 11 lesson a top set developed their understanding of vectors and engaged with a challenging worksheet on vector algebra. Preparation for GCSE examinations is very good; after school and Easter holiday revision sessions are well attended.

108. Standards and achievement in each class are related to the quality of teaching and learning. Where teachers set high expectations of attainment and behaviour, pupils usually respond well. The effectiveness of the way different teachers manage discipline varies considerably and pupils'

tendency to chatter about things other than work is not always corrected. Relationships are good overall and pupils mostly work very well with each other, discussing methods and answers co-operatively. Structured discussion or group work is not used to help pupils learn and some teachers have a limited range of teaching strategies. Pupils respond well to a variety of learning activities throughout a lesson and concentration throughout is improved by the fast pace set by the best teachers. Pupils use subject specific language well, encouraged by the teachers, and many complex concepts were introduced to pupils at an earlier age than is usual. This challenged many pupils and developed their knowledge, with consolidation of ideas needed to embed their understanding and provide more secure learning. In some lessons there is an imbalance between stretching the higher attaining pupils and supporting others. Work set did not always match the pupils' prior attainment and aptitude, although the gifted and talented are challenged well from Year 8 upwards. In most lessons achievement is good, with little difference between boys and girls, although many boys tended to give up earlier when work became difficult. The few pupils with English as a second language achieved well, and pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds are well integrated, achieving equally with others.

109. Teaching overall is good and has improved since the previous inspection but some inconsistencies remain. Teaching is monitored through the performance management system but because the emphasis on learning is limited it is not sufficiently rigorous. In the best teaching high quality worksheets enabled pupils to get involved in learning immediately: for example, in a Year 8 middle set where pupils used prepared grids to plot straight lines, they recognised the relationship between equations and the 'look' of the line. Resources produced by the department are of high quality, such as the revision booklets for Year 11, the 'booster' booklets for Year 9 and the numeracy 'enrichment' booklets. Pupils appreciated these well designed aids to learning and the new text-books that have been recently purchased. All pupils from Year 8 have their own textbook, although some are rather dilapidated; this provision enhances all pupils' achievement. Homework is regularly set from textbook or worksheet; it is usually completed and marked promptly and is a valuable aid to learning. Marking by teachers is good on the whole, although the helpfulness of the comments' to pupils is inconsistent in telling them what they are doing well and how they can improve. Most teachers circulate well around the class, helping pupils with problems and giving feedback on good work with praise and congratulations. Learning support assistants also circulate giving good individual attention, improving learning. Assessment procedures and practices are good, with comprehensive collection of data. Not all pupils, however, are aware of how well they are doing because they do not always get feedback or individual targets to help them improve.

110. Number skills are well taught, and numeracy skills are good overall, aiding learning in other subjects where calculation or graphical skills are used. The National Numeracy Strategy (NNS) has been introduced, with a staff training day and attachment of mathematics staff to other departments, but has not developed yet to all departments completing an audit or updating policies or schemes of work as regards numeracy. The mathematics department policy and schemes of work need to be reviewed in the light of the NNS recommendations. Mental mathematics 'starters' are developing well in Years 7 and 8 with good uses of the personal whiteboards. The recommended lesson organisation is being implemented effectively, with some good plenary sessions summarizing learning. ICT is being developed well, with a good planned programme, although access to computers is still too limited, a criticism also in the last inspection.

111. Leadership and management of the department are good; mathematics is led with energy and enthusiasm. The full complement of specialist mathematics teachers is a great benefit, contributing good subject knowledge and a range of experience. Improvement since the previous inspection is good, with improved standards and better teaching, although more rigorous monitoring and sharing of good practice would improve consistency.

Numeracy

112. Standards in numeracy are good. Pupils show recognition of number bonds and recall of multiplication tables, and are able to calculate appropriately. Place value understanding is usually good, although sometimes division by powers of ten and decimal number multiplication and division is weak. Many pupils have difficulty with negative numbers, and need practical demonstrations to make sense of adding and subtracting directed numbers. Measuring skills are usually good, and are used extensively in subjects such as design technology and physical education. Graphical skills are good, and are used well in English for graphs of emotional tension in literature. Pupils have a good sense of time, used well in chronology work in history, and in modern foreign language work. Overall, pupils' numeracy skills do not impede learning in other subjects, although lower attaining pupils sometimes struggle with complicated calculation. Most pupils have their own calculators and use them well.

113. Number skills are well taught by mathematics teachers, and are used well in many other subjects. The Key Stage 3 National Numeracy Strategy is being introduced this year, with a whole staff training day held in February. The mathematics department's numeracy policy needs updating to take into account the NNS, and to arrange for monitoring and evaluation. Mental mathematics 'starters' are developing well in Year 7 and 8 mathematics lessons, and many teachers are planning to use the recommended lesson structure, including a plenary to summarise learning and to prepare for the next stage. Those pupils entering the school with National Curriculum level less than 4 are withdrawn from mathematics lesson once per week for extra intensive 'catch-up' sessions, and many of those with special educational needs also have lunch time numeracy session. The mathematics department have produced numeracy enrichment booklets which all pupils in Year 7 and 8 spend some time on each week to extend their understanding of number and mathematical notation. Provision for developing number skills is good in the mathematics department but has not yet had an effect in other subjects.

SCIENCE

114. Overall, the quality of provision in science is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- Pupils reach high standards in examinations and there is a strong commitment to raising standards further.
- There are clear and helpful work schemes.
- Examination data is used well to inform timetable planning.

Areas for improvement

- Science is not a consistently challenging and stimulating experience for the pupils.
- The marking of books and the setting of short term targets is not developed.
- There is insufficient provision of textbooks.
- ICT and policies for literacy and numeracy need to be developed.

115. The 2001 GCSE results in science are well above the national average although they are not as good as those for English and mathematics. Results in the national tests are also well above average but are below those of similar schools. Results for boys and girls were almost the same at both key stages which shows how successful the school is in helping pupils do well in examinations.

116. Pupils entering the school for the years taking examinations in 2001 were above the national average. This is shown by both the data from primary schools and data from the tests set by the school in Year 7. In achieving the results at the end of Year 9 they had achieved an increase in standard below the national average but achievement at the end of Year 11 was better than this and at least satisfactory.

117. The standards seen in lessons were not as good as those achieved in examinations but were average overall. Pupils show a good understanding of the basic scientific principles and a

willingness to participate in the lessons. The long revision programme and the number of revision lessons seen helps to explain why examination results are higher than the attainment observed in lessons. It also helps to explain why examination attainment is well above average despite teaching and learning being satisfactory overall during the inspection: there were occasions when revision was leading to a lack of motivation and interest from the pupils.

118. Teaching was satisfactory overall. It was satisfactory in the majority of lessons observed and good in some. Where teaching was good, lessons proceeded at a good pace and pupils were stimulated and challenged, for example, in one Year 11 lesson, revision was taking place by pupils preparing presentations on biotechnology and bringing out the environmental sections of the syllabus. Where lessons were only satisfactory there was often a lack of pace and the pupils were not given sufficient challenge to stimulate and interest them. There were also instances where the same work was set to all pupils and this led to the higher achievers finishing work and having time on their hands, leading in turn to inefficient learning and even boredom. This was seen in several of the revision lessons observed: for example, pupils in a high ability Year 9 class were asked to copy from the board and fill in missing words from the copied paragraph with no extension work available. Pupils were generally keen to progress, very aware of the importance of examination success and willing to work. The few instances of unsatisfactory behaviour tended to occur when the pace was slow and the material was insufficiently challenging. Relationships in the classroom were good with teachers and pupils treating each other with respect and courtesy and pupils co-operated well with each other. Teaching and learning are hampered by the low standard of the marking of pupils' exercise books. Improved marking would provide short-term targets for the pupils and better inform pupils and parents of progress in science. There were some examples seen of the use of key words in topics but the department has yet to develop a literacy policy. There is no departmental policy for numeracy and in the instances where numbers were used a consistent approach would have been beneficial.

119. The department is well managed and has clear, detailed and helpful work schemes. Staff have worked together in the development of these and this co-operation, and the shared determination to see standards rise, are important strengths of the department. The laboratories provide a pleasant working environment and they are clean, airy and well equipped. There were good posters and displays of work in the laboratories and key words were shown in some rooms. However, there is a severe shortage of textbooks and at present no pupil is issued with one although revision guides are provided for Years 9 and 11.

120. The department has made good improvement since the last inspection. Examination results have increased and the increase in the last three years has been greater than the national average. The difficulties over the loss of science lessons for some pupils taking additional foreign languages have been resolved. Work still needs to be done on ICT but this has started and the department's development plan ensures further action will be taken.

ART AND DESIGN

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

Strengths

- Teachers have very good subject knowledge.
- The results are well above average at GCSE and A level.
- Teaching is good.
- The department makes an excellent contribution to the school environment through extensive displays of art work.

Areas for improvement

- The effectiveness of the department is not evaluated so information is not used to inform the curriculum.
- Marking in Years 7 - 9 does not show progress clearly enough.
- The imbalance of achievement between boys and girls needs to be addressed.

122. Standards at GCSE in 2001 were well above the national average for both boys and girls. There were almost equal numbers of boys and girls who took art. Girls' results were 20 per cent above the national average and boys' results were 15 per cent above the national average leaving a five percent imbalance. Although results are high, students did not achieve as well as in many other subjects in the curriculum.

123. In work seen during the inspection Year 9 pupils are working around the level of national expectation. Pupils with special educational needs make progress consistent with their classmates. Higher attaining pupils demonstrate their understanding when they use subject specific language to talk about the work of Kandinsky. A variety of media such as inks, paints and coloured pencils was used to produce lively and spontaneous work in response to listening to music. Most pupils draw well and understand the use of tone to show form and texture.

124. In work seen during the inspection Year 11 pupils are working well above the national average. Pupils with special educational needs make progress consistent with others in the class. Higher attaining students show their flair and creativity in a wide variety of final pieces in response to the exam theme. For example, one girl used oil paint, pieces of sheet music and a whole piano keyboard to produce a huge, multi-media composition in response to her love of Mozart. Research supporting the project showed excellent drawing techniques, original ways to develop ideas and confident use of oil paint. Sculptural work is similarly challenging and one high attaining boy created a life size sculpture in plaster with wire support. Supporting studies show research from a wide variety of sources including the effective use of ICT.

125. According to results from national tests on entry the cohort of students in Year 9 is capable of achieving better in art. Inadequate steps were taken during their time in Years 7 - 9 to suit teaching styles to the learning needs of the pupils with the result that progress is satisfactory. Achievement by the end of Year 11 is good overall when previous standards at the end of Year 9 are taken into account. More rigorous evaluation of the performance of individuals and the department is needed and steps taken to suit the learning needs of all students whether it is those with learning difficulties or the difference between preferred learning styles of boys and girls. The sharing of excellent practice of some teachers in the department would inform this process.

126. The quality of teaching and learning is good at both key stages. Teaching is generally good with two excellent lessons seen in Year 7. Pupils' attitudes are very good and contribute greatly to the quality of learning. Most pupils are keen to do well and participate eagerly in discussion and question and answer, particularly in Years 7 - 9. Teachers can trust pupils to work independently in the computer suite and pupils are sufficiently motivated to do so. Where teaching is good there is excellent use of visual aids and practical demonstrations to ensure that pupils understand. Teachers have good subject knowledge enabling pupils to know and understand about art and artists and to

learn and consolidate practical techniques. Teachers have good relationships with their pupils and give them good advice and encouragement in their lessons. Pupils appreciate the care their teachers take and the time they give before and after school and at lunchtimes to help them. Where teaching is weak planning does not include different strategies to adequately address the needs of every pupil in the group, resulting in some pupils making less progress than others in the group. Evaluating work at the end of the lesson is also unhelpful if it does not re-visit the lesson objectives and assess whether they were met and if they were not met, question why not.

127. The art department makes an excellent contribution to the school environment with its many varied and stimulating displays of work. It makes an excellent contribution to the cultural aspect of pupils' personal development by offering many opportunities to visit major exhibitions at London galleries and other places of interest including Duxford Air Museum and Kew Gardens in order to inspire and inform work. Pupils are encouraged to investigate art and crafts from other countries. This could be of further value if it were developed to feature more evenly alongside the presently more predominant western-European and American artists. The department offers a wide variety of media to experience including work in clay, plaster, fabric, information and communication technology and the opportunity to work on a large scale in Years 10 and 11.

128. Good progress has been made since the last inspection. GCSE results have improved to be well above average. Steps have been taken to tackle inconsistencies in the teaching of basic skills in Years 7 - 9 through regular standardisation of work and weekly department meetings. The department is well managed and has secured improved provision for the teaching of information and communication technology with a new computer suite for the sole use of the art department. Helpful comments made by some teachers when marking work in Years 7 - 9 help pupils to improve but the scheme itself does not show progress well enough to pupils and more particularly, parents.

129. Procedures for assessing and monitoring pupil progress are satisfactory in both key stages but information derived from evaluating this information is not sufficiently used to inform planning of the curriculum or influence teaching strategies. The lack of evaluation of the work of the department means that procedures are not in place to explain achievement and the discrepancies in targets which were set, nor steps to take to address any imbalance in achievement between boys and girls. Evaluation of the work of the department will confirm its successes and inform steps to address weakness.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- Pupils achieve well and make good progress, including those with special educational needs because the skills taught lead to more demanding tasks.
- Teaching is consistently good; lessons are planned well and proceed at a good pace.
- Leadership and management of the faculty are good.

Areas for improvement

- A sharper focus needs to be given to moderation of pupils' work in each year.
- The development plan does not include the necessary focus on raising standards.
- There is no analysis of assessment data to set targets to inform planning and teaching and to raise standards further.

130. In year 2001 GCSE examinations, results were above the national average. The results were lower in resistant materials and electronics. At the end of Year 11 pupils achieve the results expected for their prior attainment. The teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2001 show that pupils are in line with the national average. Girls achieve much higher standards than boys.

131. The review of pupils' work in Years 7 to 9 shows that standards are above those expected. Pupils are very enthusiastic and well motivated by the activities provided because learning is relevant and they are successful. They learn about a wide range of materials and they use a good range of small and large equipment competently and safely, for example, when making a powered vehicle in Year 7. They demonstrate good graphical skills in Year 8 when producing orthographic drawings. They are proud of new products they have developed in food technology lessons. Higher achieving pupils plan their work and evaluate it objectively against specific criteria. Lower achieving pupils carefully evaluate how well they have worked. Higher levels of attainment are achieved by girls because they manage their learning, setting themselves targets, priorities, taking more care with their work and producing better quality outcomes.

132. By the end of Year 11, standards are above those expected. Pupils have sufficient confidence, knowledge and understanding to experiment and explore materials and processes when they develop their designs and specifications. The higher achieving students work well independently and are very well motivated to succeed. Their work is thoughtfully and professionally presented. Pupils have opportunities to use information and communication technology, particularly to present their work but also when they are designing. Pupils' design work and practical work show progression in development and a satisfactory level of craftsmanship in their execution. The higher achieving pupils critically analyse their work well. Higher attaining pupils, regardless of gender, achieve well because teachers expect them to learn well. A small minority of boys do not always reach the standards expected for their prior attainment because of a lack of motivation and their attitude towards the subject.

133. Teaching in all aspects of the subject is good overall. In lessons, the teachers' enthusiasm and knowledge engage pupils. Their skilful handling of materials and equipment enables pupils to be successful. All staff work hard to develop productive relationships with classes and these are always good. Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge. The teaching is well planned and leads to a coherent learning programme that is well supported with prepared lesson notes and worksheets which can then be retained to build up a good picture of individual progress. Pupils are rightly proud of what they achieve. The lessons are well structured and teachers' questioning is good. Key learning points are systematically reinforced and the good range of activities ensures that all students are actively involved in their learning. New knowledge is introduced as it is needed so that students can immediately use it to develop their understanding.

134. In the best lessons there is a cooperative approach to the learning that encourages students to become curious and ask questions. The planning and purpose of the lesson is sufficiently focused and the objectives are shared sufficiently with the students. There are good introductions to lessons which link with previous work and teachers use technical vocabulary to help pupils understand and extend their vocabulary. The differing needs of pupils are well met and their designing and making skills are sufficiently developed. Teachers work well with pupils with special educational needs, and are aware of targets in individual education plans. Special educational needs pupils make good progress and the teachers provide extra support for learning. Teachers support literacy well and are careful to introduce new words. There is an emphasis on health and safety during lessons. There is a good level of display of pupils' work in classrooms and the open areas around the department and this contributes considerably to pupil interest and the development of ideas.

135. The lessons are characterised by the quality of teachers' focus on the progress and needs of individual pupils. The effective challenging, but supportive, relationships between the teacher and the pupils, coupled with ongoing individual feedback and support, ensure that all pupils make good progress.

136. Overall, teachers have good knowledge of their subjects and this is effectively transmitted to pupils. Homework contributes markedly to pupils' learning. Key words are reinforced well in many lessons. Classes are competently managed and pupils are attentive, co-operative and eager to learn. Pupils make best progress in the lessons where activities are practical and challenging and they have opportunities to discuss their ideas with others. There is ongoing marking and assessment to ensure that all pupils make good progress. Teachers have a wide understanding of pupils' individual needs

and provide appropriately challenging tasks for the more able pupils and alternative ways for pupils with particular learning needs to understand.

137. Leadership and management of design and technology are good. The head of department has a clear view of how the department should be developed and is fully aware of the need to provide more support for pupils in both key stages in the form of monitoring and assessment of attainment and progress. There is a shared commitment to improvement and the capacity to succeed. Assessments are used to predict GCSE grades but are not used as effectively to improve standards by setting targets or giving effective feedback to pupils so that they know what they need to do to improve and make progress. The development plan is adequate but it does not include the necessary focus on raising standards.

Child Development (GCSE)

138. Pupils take part in a number of projects in Year 10 and Year 11 to complete their course work assignments. The individual practical projects are of a good standard and include research and observational studies. The projects seen during the one lesson observation and the scrutiny of pupils' work were of a good standard. Pupils take care with the presentation of their work and take pride in the quality of their project work. They are keen to discuss their work and do so with a level of confidence. They enjoyed the work which provided stimulus and challenge and endeavour to succeed through patience and determination. The behaviour of pupils and their attitude to learning is always good. Pupils show an interest in their work and maintain good levels of concentration to work to their best standards. They take responsibility for organising their tasks and there is much independent work.

139. The teaching seen was good. The teacher had a good knowledge of the subject, planning ensured that lessons had a suitable pace. The lesson was effective having clear, short term objectives and was well planned, with careful attention paid to the sequence of activities, which contributed to a good pace. Activities were well organised and the supervision of lessons effective, with appropriate interventions to support and sustain individual pupils' learning and maintain appropriate expectations. Work was sufficiently linked to the requirements of the examination syllabus. The teacher's expectations of pupils' performance and behaviour was high. Learning objectives were clearly stated and work was flexibly planned to provide for pupils' different levels of attainment and interests. Pupils' work was marked regularly and the teacher gave helpful oral and written comments. The comments were informative, constructive and encouraged pupils. Homework was set to reinforce the content of lessons.

GEOGRAPHY

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

Strengths

- Teaching is generally good and some is very good.
- Schemes of work are clear, helpful and comprehensive.
- Marking and assessment are used to inform learning and set targets.
- Standards are above average.
- The department is well led and managed.

Areas for improvement

- Boys achieve substantially below girls.
- The most able need more opportunities to extend their learning.

141. Attainment in GCSE is considerably above the national average. The achievements of both boys and girls are above average but there is a 16 percentage point gap: girls achieve more of the highest grades than boys. This picture is confirmed by lessons where attainment is high at the end of both Year 9 and Year 11.

142. Standards are above average at the end of Year 9 and Year 11. Year 8 pupils have a thorough understanding of the food chain and webs and used complex terminology with confidence. In a Year 11 lesson on migration all pupils had clearly grasped the concept of push and pull factors, the age and social profile of migrants and could relate it to issues of soil erosion and poor farming methods. Pupils on the special educational needs register and those of average ability make good progress. The most able need more opportunities to extend their learning so that they can achieve at a higher level.

143. The quality of teaching is generally good at both key stages and some teaching is very good. Teachers have good subject knowledge, plan well, share learning objectives, question pupils astutely, move lessons along at pace, recall prior learning and demonstrate good classroom management, particularly ensuring girls equal participation. A Year 7 class studying urban land use patterns were also able to demonstrate the rationale of industrial location past and present as the teacher skilfully guided them to reveal the depth of their knowledge. Suitable and varied materials and stimuli are used. In a lesson on migration, the use of a video, photos and astute questioning led to understanding of key ideas and linkages to other areas of learning. Regular assessment, diagnostic marking and homework reinforce pupils' learning.

144. Pupils' attitudes are good. They are well motivated, concentrate, work hard and collaborate. They respond readily to questioning and express themselves well orally and in writing. The majority present their work neatly and use their initiative in presentation, particularly in Years 10 and 11 where they use spider diagrams, tables and sketch plans appropriately in presentation. Behaviour is good although boys approached their work in a less mature fashion than girls.

145. The department is well led and managed. There is a clear sense of direction. Responsibilities are shared so that performance management and professional development reinforce teaching skills. The department plans together and monitors the quality of its work on a termly basis. However, the department plan still needs greater precision through use of success criteria and monitoring and evaluation procedures.

146. Satisfactory progress has been made since the last inspection and most areas for development have been addressed. However, the department needs to look further at measures to improve boys' achievement and to provide greater challenge to the most able pupils.

HISTORY

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

Strengths

- It is a very popular subject and pupils are genuinely interested in what it provides.
- Teaching is good: teachers have very secure knowledge of the subject, ask challenging questions and have very good relationships with their pupils.
- Results in GCSE examinations have been well above average for the past three years.
- The close monitoring of pupils' progress is having a positive effect on standards. Teachers mark work in depth and target very effectively those pupils who underachieve.
- The department is very well led and all teachers share a vision for the future development of the subject.

Areas for improvement

- Although improving, ICT is not used enough as a tool for research.

147. Standards of work seen during the inspection are above average in the Years 7 - 9 and well above average in Years 10 and 11. Pupils achieve well because of good teaching which is challenging, rigorous yet supportive. In Years 7 - 9, for example, pupils make good progress, from an average baseline, in using the language of history and in understanding how historians work. In Years

10 and 11, pupils put these skills to further use when they become more adept at analysing source material in greater depth and when they begin to defend their views with confidence and with the evidence available to them. Girls generally approach their work with more maturity than boys and ask quite perceptive questions of their teachers. Because teachers display the utmost concern for the welfare of their charges and because they involve everyone in what the subject has to offer, pupils with learning difficulties make good progress, too, and get much out of their history lessons. All pupils benefit from the talents of their teachers and respond most positively to the thought-provoking and challenge resources which they produce.

148. In 2000 and also in 2001, GCSE results were well above average and the percentages of pupils attaining at A*, A and B were also well above national norms. Girls attained better than boys, but the gap between their performance was less than that noted across the country; boys do at least as well in history as in most other subjects.

149. The standards observed during lessons mirror these examination results. Pupils in Year 7, for example, not only have a good background knowledge of the events of 1066, they can also question quite cogently whether winning the Battle of Hastings meant that Duke William's control over England was automatically assured. In Year 8, they can act as "devil's advocate" during a debate on slavery in North America, expressing their views clearly, with skill and verve. The use of sources to analyse the relative strengths of the RAF and the Luftwaffe during the Battle of Britain is a key feature of the work in Year 9. Pupils can also produce well-constructed essays to consider how the lives of non-combatants was changed by the Second World War. Pupils following GCSE courses have built on the historical skills gained lower down the school and in Year 10; for example, they can describe castle defences in detail and can make accurate judgements about their effectiveness. In Year 11, their sophisticated chronological skills and their ability to make links between periods of history, different countries and relevant social conditions leads them to display a profound understanding of developments in medical knowledge.

150. The quality of teaching is a major strength of the history department. It is characterised by very secure subject knowledge of teachers, questioning which is both challenging and relentless, high expectations of what pupils can achieve and detailed marking which offers extensive advice on how pupils may improve their performance. Teachers encourage their pupils to think and produce resources, which ensure that historical skills can be acquired from the moment they join the school. During the inspection, teaching was never less than satisfactory, and was good or very good in nearly 80 per cent of lessons.

151. Teachers use historical terminology quite naturally during lessons so pupils are becoming quite articulate at an early stage in their secondary school careers and are beginning to use the language of history accurately in their assignments, particularly in extended essays in Years 8 and 9. Moreover, because teachers give credit for all answers and because they treat everyone with dignity, pupils are not afraid to make contributions and are often desperate to answer questions. The rare incidences of misbehaviour are handled most effectively and pupils generally respond very well during lessons. Teachers are concerned to offer all pupils opportunities to make progress and therefore they provide a variety of teaching methods to meet their learning needs. Debates, active revision sessions, paired and group work and the use of the overhead projector are examples of different approaches to the delivery of the subject. Teachers are now looking at ways of extending their teaching methods even further, in the light of ongoing research into the ways in which pupils learn and because they wish to target the performance of boys more directly. The department complements its teaching by a range of extra-curricular activities, which include visits to castles, an annual trip to the Science Museum, a visit to Ypres and the trench system at Sanctuary Wood and also a visit to Auschwitz in Poland.

152. The department is very well led and is a very good example of effective management. The department is reflective, evaluates its work regularly, is skilled at data analysis and is not afraid to amend its policies if underachievement is detected. Staffing and accommodation are good, and the displays in the classrooms are a testament to the respect in which the teachers hold their pupils. Resources are satisfactory and are augmented by the industry of the teachers, who co-operate well

to produce worksheets, games and other activities to motivate their pupils. The department has made good progress since the last inspection and is now considering ways in which ICT may be incorporated in order to enhance teaching, learning and attainment. The department is well placed for future development.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

153. Overall, the quality of provision in information and communication technology is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- Teachers have good subject knowledge and teaching is good.
- Students are taught in specialist rooms with up to date equipment and software.
- Relationships are good.
- Pupils have a positive attitude to the subject.

Areas for improvement

- Assessment of pupils' work is not used sufficiently to set targets for improvement.
- ICT is under developed and is not effectively co-ordinated across the curriculum.
- Pupils in Year 8 require specialist ICT lessons.
- The statutory requirements in ICT are not being met in Years 10 and 11.

154. Lessons observed in Years 7 - 9 during the inspection confirm that standards for the majority of pupils are in line with the national average. This is as a result of a well-planned course taught by subject specialists. In Years 10 and 11 the school does not offer ICT as a separate subject and there is no formal qualification. Standards at the end of Year 11 have fluctuated because the teaching of ICT capability has not been systematic. The school has sought to manage the teaching of ICT by developing links with other subjects. From the work seen on inspection and in discussion with pupils there is every indication that overall standards are in line with what is expected nationally.

155. Pupils' experiences of ICT when they arrive in the school are diverse, however, standards of attainment are mostly below the national average. By Year 9 and Year 11 most pupils are able to undertake a range of appropriate tasks using the computer, confidently and often independently. Pupils are confident users of word processing, spreadsheet applications and use Power Point to generate and communicate their ideas in different forms incorporating text, graphs and pictures as appropriate. In their design and technology studies, pupils have the opportunity to use control technology, using computers effectively for design in project work. Overall, pupils have an average grasp of the way that ICT can help them in their work and the effects it has on society. The pupils' knowledge and skill in other aspects of the curriculum such as the creation and use of databases and the use of the Internet are average. Most students can search the Internet for particular topics and present that information for their own purposes. In all lessons observed pupils demonstrated the ability to use ICT with confidence and have sufficient skills to enhance their work in a variety of subject areas, most noticeably in modern foreign languages. Pupils persevere with their tasks and help each other overcome problems and share information and expertise. Many have access to computers at home and pupils of all ages discuss competently the benefit of the Internet using it to send and receive e-mails.

156. Pupils at both key stages demonstrate good positive attitudes to learning, they are responsive and able to work individually. They are beginning to take responsibility for their own learning and work collaboratively. The quality of relationships between teachers and pupils are good. Equipment is treated well and routines to log on, save and retrieve work are carried out smoothly and efficiently. During lessons, pupils with particular needs get all the help they need either from the teachers, classroom assistants or the ICT technician.

157. The overall quality of teaching is good even though most staff are at a relatively early stage in their own familiarity with the new resources. They communicate with confidence and set high expectations for their pupils. Teachers are well prepared, they give clear introductions to lessons and pupils understand the programmes they are using. In a Year 10 lesson on data logging, for example,

the lesson got off to a good start: the teacher explained the work carefully which meant that by the end pupils were able to create sets of instructions. There is evidence of effective planning and secure subject knowledge within the department. In a Year 7 lesson about spreadsheets the teacher's secure subject knowledge and confidence with computers helped to ensure that pupils learnt appropriately. In all lessons observed pupils are managed well and a high standard of discipline achieved. Support staff and skilled technicians are well prepared and an essential part of the team. In a number of lessons, such a Year 7 lesson being taken by a non-specialist, the support staff made the difference ensuring that pupils made sound progress.

158. The system of assessing ICT capability is at an early stage of development and co-ordination. Collation of assessment between curriculum areas is not yet systematic or consistent. Pupils are not clear about the assessment procedures but are aware of the formal reporting procedures at the end of Year 9: these meet the statutory requirements. However, arrangements for teaching ICT in Years 10 and 11 do not meet statutory requirements in full. The lack of specialist lessons for pupils, particularly in Year 8, and the reliance on the contribution of other subjects to develop pupils' skills and understanding, means that some elements of the National Curriculum are not covered well.

159. Progress since the last inspection is just satisfactory. There is a clear framework teaching ICT but this is not formalised in all subjects: as a result it is difficult to ensure that all pupils are guaranteed ICT experiences. However progress in the development of resources has been very good with significant improvement in facilities and provision for the subject. New computer suites, ICT timetabling and staff training has taken place, for example. The school has made a considerable investment in ICT and the ratio of computers is now good. Leadership of the ICT department is good and the management of resources is exemplary: however, the way ICT is planned, and pupils' achievements assessed is not as regularly monitored as they need to be. As a result it is difficult for the department to identify what skills pupils may have developed. This matches the findings of the last inspection. The school is making good use of all available opportunities during lunch times and after school to involve pupils with the subject.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

160. Overall, the quality of provision in modern languages is **good**.

Strengths

- There are good results in German.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good.
- Planning is generally good.
- Accommodation is attractive and provides a stimulating environment for learning.
- Relationships between staff and pupils are good.

Areas for improvement

- The analysis of pupil performance data is not yet refined enough to further inform subsequent planning.
- Monitoring and evaluating learning, and by extension teaching, does not focus on raising attainment.
- Opportunities for pupils to use information and communication technology is still fairly limited.
- The proportion of pupils, particularly boys, who attain A*-B grades at GCSE is still relatively low.

161. By the end of Year 9 in 2001 the assessments teachers made show that the percentage of pupils attaining Level 5 and above of the National Curriculum was above the national percentage. Teachers assess the work of pupils across the department, and the assessments that they make are generally reliable.

162. By the end of Year 11, when they leave the school, the attainment of 16-year-old pupils in French at GCSE in 2001 was broadly in line with the national average. All pupils who were entered for

the examination achieved a graded result. Analysis shows that pupils taking French GCSE do not perform as well as they do in other subjects. Girls attained better than boys, and by a wider margin than nationally. A feature of the examination results is that over half of the pupils attaining A*-C grades actually attained a grade C. No boys attained an A* grade. This was also true of the results in 2000.

163. In German the results of Year 11 pupils at GCSE in 2001 were well above the national average. As in French, all pupils entered for the examination achieved a graded result. Although boys overall attained better than girls in a direct contradiction of the national trend, no boys attained an A* grade. It was also the case in 2001 that pupils taking German did not perform as well as they did in other subjects. These results have to be seen in the light of the relatively small numbers of pupils entered for the examination.

164. Standards of work seen in Years 7 to 9 are satisfactory overall. By the end of Year 9 higher attaining pupils can produce extended writing and refer to past and future events. They can speak with reasonable confidence, but often need support. Standards produced by lower attaining pupils are average. Pupils can understand short extracts and dialogues in familiar contexts; they can copy single words or short phrases correctly; they can produce some extended writing and attempt to refer to past and future events. In some groups boys can attain as well as girls, but resistant attitudes to the subject sometimes prevent them from contributing to the best of their capabilities.

165. In Years 10 and 11 a similar picture exists. Standards of work produced by higher attaining pupils are satisfactory. There is more evidence of extended writing, pupils are able to refer to past and future events; pupils are encouraged to improve the quality of their writing by increasing its complexity; they are encouraged to improve the presentation of their work by drafting and using word processing. Lower attaining pupils are working at lower levels in all four skills: they can take part in simple structured conversations; they can read short extracts made up of familiar language; the extended writing that they produce is not well organised and shows inaccuracies; and their listening skills are not well developed.

166. Achievement in Years 7 to 9 is good given that pupils do not start to study the subject until they arrive at the school. Higher attaining pupils achieve better. Pupils with special educational needs achieve as well as other pupils in relation to their prior attainment. This is more evident when teachers match materials carefully to the needs of the learners and take account of individual education plans.

167. In Years 10 and 11 achievement is satisfactory overall. It is good among higher attaining pupils. Pupils with special educational needs achieve as well as other pupils when there is a close match of materials to learners' needs. Boys overall do not achieve as well as girls. This is partly a result of a lack of perceived relevance of the subject, and partly because specific strategies for addressing boys' underachievement are not fully embedded across the department. The department contributes to the improvement of pupils' literacy through its focus on accurate spelling, the grammar of the foreign language, and work on sentence construction. It makes a small contribution to developing pupils' numeracy through the counting systems of the target language countries, currency conversions, distances and the twenty four hour clock as used in transport timetables. Opportunities for the use of information and communication technology (ICT) are limited at present, making it difficult for the department to meet the statutory requirements of the National Curriculum for the use of ICT in modern languages.

168. Teaching overall is good. In Years 7 to 9 approximately one lesson in five was very good, two in five were good and the rest satisfactory. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen. In Years 10 and 11 three lessons in four were good and one in four satisfactory. Features of the good teaching include a crisp start to the lesson, with a warm-up activity designed to engage pupils and teachers sharing learning objectives with them. This means that they have a clear idea of what they are expected to learn. The lesson proceeds at a brisk pace, which means that pupils are productive throughout. There are a variety of methods of presentation, which means that pupils' interest is maintained; teachers use visuals or real objects to support understanding so that pupils quickly learn new material. Teachers place a high expectation on pupils through consistent, effective use of the target language, which means that pupils are able to respond quickly and confidently. Teachers review

pupils' learning at the end of the lesson. Homework is an appropriate follow-up to the lesson. Marking is regular, but the department's marking policy is not always consistently applied. As a consequence, pupils do not always know what they need to do to improve.

169. Learning is good overall. Higher attaining pupils apply themselves to their work: they concentrate well; they co-operate with each other and make intellectual efforts, persevering when they come across difficulty. Among lower attaining pupils learning is satisfactory in approximately two in five lessons. However, some do lack strategies for committing language to memory, and are almost entirely dependent on the teacher, making little independent contribution to lessons. This is particularly noticeable amongst boys in Years 7 to 9.

170. The contribution of the department to pupils' spiritual development is unsatisfactory. Although some pupils do show each other respect by listening, and some teachers probe by asking "Why?" questions, there are too few opportunities for pupils to reflect on the nature of language and language learning. Pupils' moral development is satisfactorily promoted through the example set by their teachers who work hard and who are unfailingly polite to them. Their social development within the department is satisfactory because of the emphasis placed on pair and group work, and the opportunities offered to pupils to travel abroad. Cultural development is satisfactory. Display in classrooms creates a sense of the culture of the target language country and the visits abroad help pupils develop an awareness of other cultures. There is, however, little recognition of the other areas of the world in which the target languages are spoken, for example French- and German-speaking Africa and Latin America.

171. Leadership and management in modern foreign languages are good. The department has developed its procedures for assessing pupils quite well. Monitoring of teaching and learning quality is done informally outside the school's performance management arrangements; teachers do share ideas, but the work lacks a sharp focus on raising attainment. The department development plan is up to date; it links into the school development plan and is presented in an appropriate format, although it lacks precise success criteria, some time scales are vague.

172. Resources in German are adequate, but the courses available to pupils in Spanish are outdated and do not comply fully with the requirements of the National Curriculum or the new GCSE. Provision for modern foreign languages in the library is unsatisfactory. The range of up-to-date reading material available for pupils' use is limited.

173. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory. Some progress has been made on the issues of information and communication technology, the second foreign language and sharing good practice across the department, but there remains some work to be done on making strategies for tackling boys' underachievement stronger.

MUSIC

174. Overall, the quality of provision in music is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- Specialist music teachers have good subject knowledge that they pass effectively to pupils.
- The good relationships between pupils and their teachers make a significant contribution to pupils' attainment and progress.
- Leadership is good ensuring that standards of work are improving.

Areas for improvement

- The curriculum in Years 7 - 9 does not ensure adequate coverage in group work and in singing.
- The use of ICT in Years 7 - 9 does not extend beyond keyboards.
- Assessment procedures and the use of data is under developed.

175. Standards of attainment in music are broadly in line with national expectations in both key stages. These findings are consistent with those noted in the previous inspection report. At GCSE, a small number of pupils with specialised instrumental skills have consistently achieved A and B grades, but option numbers have generally been low. The number of candidates is now increasing at GCSE and there is now an A level group.

176. In Years 7 - 9 standards are satisfactory overall but there are differences between classes and year groups. In Year 7, pupils achieve above national levels but by the end of Year 9 standards are more variable and broadly average. Most groups of pupils in Year 9 achieve the national expectation but a significant number do not. In Years 7 - 9 girls achieve higher standards than boys, though in Years 10 and 11 there is no significant difference. In lessons standards are above national levels in Year 10, whilst in Year 11 they are in line. This variation in achievement between years is because of staffing difficulties last year when pupils made insufficient progress.

177. In Years 7 - 9 progress within lessons is broadly satisfactory and is often good. Pupils with special educational needs are well catered for and they make satisfactory progress based on prior attainment. Pupils with musical abilities make good progress because they are given additional opportunities to develop their skills within differentiated lessons, such as in a blues lesson where they were asked to add dotted doubled note bass lines and chords to a walking bass. Pupils develop secure understanding and knowledge of basic musical concepts. They learn to read simple notation and they understand sharps and flats. They can use musical vocabulary to describe their own music and the works of others. They are familiar with a variety of styles such as Renaissance music, film music, jazz and blues. By the end of the key stage they can play well-known melodies such as Fur Elise and The Entertainer and they can play their own compositions on keyboards. Group performing and composing is under developed, as is singing.

178. Progress is satisfactory in Year 11 and good in Year 10. Where progress is good, pupils are given a clear task to complete which has limited time scales and which challenges pupils to work together in small groups to achieve an outcome. Examples of this style of learning can be found in Year 10 lessons where students work in small groups to create their own Gamelan compositions and arrangements of rock and pop music. One musically able Year 10 pupil is taking the GCSE examination at the end of Year 10.

179. Pupils' attitudes to music are satisfactory in Years 7 - 9 and they are good in Years 10 and 11. Pupils are interested in their lessons and they participate fully. They show confidence in speaking in class discussion and debate, knowing their contribution will be valued by their teachers and classmates. They enjoy performing in front of each other and they listen carefully to each other's work. The good relationships between pupils and their teachers make a significant contribution to pupils' attainment and progress.

180. Teaching is satisfactory: lessons are usually satisfactory and often good. On one occasion where the teaching was very poor, a temporary teacher without a music background was not properly prepared to undertake the tasks and activities. Despite good materials this meant that standards were poor. Where teaching is good, teachers have specialist subject knowledge, learning is carefully focused and clear explanations of the task are given: as a result pupils are given good opportunities to think carefully about the ways in which they organise their musical ideas. Pupils work at a fast pace to complete the assignment within a set time scale. In a Year 10 lesson, for example, the teacher set clear expectations and was careful to set clear time limits for activities, allowing just 10 minutes for setting up a melody before moving on to the next 10 minute task. As a result pupils were able to concentrate well and made good progress. The way that pupils' progress and achievements are assessed, and the way this information is used to help plan lessons, is under-developed. In a Year 7 lesson, for example, books were marked with ticks but lacked comments about how pupils could improve. This meant that the teaching and learning were good rather than very good.

181. The previous inspection report highlighted the need to improve participation in extra-curricular activities and the school is tackling this successfully. Instrumental lessons play a significant role in improving standards of attainment. Traditional ensembles, including a small singing ensemble, are complemented by more unusual ensembles, such as a Year 8 stomp group: this is encouraging wider participation of pupils. Community links are improving with regular public performances now taking place. The new head of department is making a real impact in raising the status of music within the school and the community it serves. Good leadership is ensuring pupils' attitudes to the subject are improving, resulting in higher standards of achievement. The department manages its resources well but access to computers is limited and ICT is rarely used to support musical learning.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- The quality of teaching is consistently very good.
- Pupils achieve well.
- The leadership and management of the department are very good.
- The attitude and behaviour of pupils in lessons are very good.
- The accommodation and resources for the subject are very good.

Areas for improvement

- The monitoring of teaching lacks focus on learning outcomes.
- The departmental improvement plan lacks success criteria, and does not specify procedures for monitoring, evaluation, review and action.

183. Standards at GCSE in 2001 were well above the national average for the subject, and above average for the school.

184. Competencies and fitness levels on entry to the school are below the national average. The standard of work seen in lessons during the inspection is average at Year 9, and above average at Year 11. Achievement is therefore consistently good.

185. By the end of Year 9, detailed teacher assessments show that the attainment of pupils is in line with national expectation in all areas of the physical education curriculum. Observation in lessons supports this view. Pupils are able to perform with appropriate skill in a range of games and athletic activities. Year 8 pupils can execute ground shots in tennis to good effect, and are able to identify and improve the component actions which make up a successful volley. All pupils have a good understanding of health related fitness and they know how and why to warm up before exercise. Pupils with special needs make similar progress to their peers. There are no discernible differences between boys and girls. All pupils make good progress.

186. By the end of Year 11, standards are above the national average, as pupils build on the strong foundations of earlier years. Pupils achieve well in lessons, and progress and learning in a wide range of activities is always at least good. The very large majority of pupils, from all groups, effectively apply their activity specific knowledge, their performance skills and their understanding of rules and tactics in full game situations. This is best exemplified in a mixed Year 10 hockey lesson, when pupils were able to transfer and apply the skills learned and practised in drills very effectively into a high paced and technically advanced game. As tactical awareness develops alongside technical skills, pupils are able to make effective decisions in offensive and defensive situations in many different activities, and they are able to officiate accurately when required.

187. The quality of teaching at all ages is very good and sometimes excellent. The all specialist teaching team have secure knowledge and are enthusiastic in their delivery. Detailed lesson plans are used to support well laid out and comprehensive schemes of work, which are adapted to meet the needs of all pupils. Class management is never less than good, giving all pupils the opportunity to engage successfully in lessons. The use of shared learning objectives, allied to very searching questions, which probe pupil understanding and knowledge, ensures consistency and progression. Teachers challenge pupils to work hard and produce high quality outcomes. They have consistently high expectations of all pupils, and have generated an ethos of success for all based on challenge, support and trust.

188. Pupils learn well in lessons. They respond well to the exciting environment created by purposeful and stimulating teaching. There are no differences in progress between girls and boys. In all lessons pupils demonstrate increasing control, fluency and precision in a range of skills. They are well turned out and are positive about the subject. They pay close attention to teacher guidance, and work with energy and enthusiasm. Observing and evaluating performance against set criteria are common in the best lessons, and they encourage recognition and ownership of achievement. Pupils are able and willing to offer cogent responses to searching questions. Consequently, relationships and behaviour are very good and contribute strongly to good overall progress in lessons. In a Year 9 badminton lesson, girls were able to break down the service stroke into discrete skills, and were able to modify their own actions to secure greater accuracy and control.

189. The department is very effectively led and managed. The recently appointed head of department has a clear vision of the standards she wishes to achieve, and knows how she intends to reach these standards. Relationships are excellent, and there is a very good balance of experience. They support each other well, and work with commitment to the pupils and the subject. They are consistent in their challenge and support, and contribute significantly to the ethos, work and life of the school. The school holds the prestigious Sportsmark Gold Award.

190. The detailed assessments, and precise recording arrangements, provide accurate information on pupil performance. Pupils know how well they are progressing, and teachers are provided with objective data for measuring learning outcomes, and setting targets for improvement. This links closely with the on-going programme of staff and curriculum development, and is helping to secure high standards. The departmental improvement plan currently lacks detail in specifying successful outcomes, and in arrangements for action following review. Though monitoring of teaching takes place, it is not yet specifically tied to raising standards and facilitating learning.

191. The range of provision in lessons and the breadth of extra-curricular sporting activities provide many opportunities for pupils to refine and develop their knowledge, skills and understanding. Many pupils compete successfully in a range of activities from inter-house competition, through to regional and national level.

192. The subject has improved significantly since the last inspection. Strong aspects have been maintained and extended. Areas noted for improvement have been successfully addressed.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

193. Overall, the quality of provision in religious education is **satisfactory** with a number of strengths.

Strengths

- The successful introduction of the GCSE Short Course for all pupils in Years 10 and 11.
- The commitment of teachers in running a full GCSE course during lunchtime.

Areas for improvement

- The system for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning is not rigorous enough.
- The use of information from monitoring to provide effective support for non-specialist teachers, including training, is under developed.
- The range of tasks and activities is not yet wide enough to provide greater challenge.

194. By the end of Year 9 pupils' attainment in religious education is broadly in line with the expectations of the Essex Agreed Syllabus. The majority of pupils show knowledge and understanding of beliefs and practices in the religions they are studying. They can explain the significance of symbols such as the Five Ks in Sikhism, for example, and the importance of key figures in religion. Year 9 pupils writing about the experience of meditation showed that they had evaluated a mystical religious experience. By Year 9 pupils are beginning to analyse religious and personal responses to moral and ethical issues such as capital punishment. Their capacity to analyse and evaluate in depth improves as they progress through the school. The standards achieved in GCSE and at A level are high. Examination results for the GCSE short course, which is followed by all pupils in Years 10 and 11, are in line with the national expectation. Analysis of the results shows that girls perform better than boys. For pupils who have taken the full GCSE course during lunchtime lessons, standards are high with 98 per cent achieving A*-C grades in 2001 and 60 per cent achieving A* and A grades. This is significantly above the national expectation.

195. The majority of teaching is satisfactory with some lessons having good features. In Years 7 to 11 teaching is most effective when teachers employ a range of strategies, particularly those which engage pupils by involving them in activities such as paired discussions, brainstorming and giving feedback to the whole class. When this happens pupils are motivated and respond to questions with interest and insight. In some Year 10 and 11 lessons questioning is used well to identify misconceptions and some teachers build well on pupils' answers. Some teachers give good guidance for tackling examination questions. Their advice on the use of quotations to support answers is particularly helpful to pupils taking the GCSE short course. In all years some lessons seen involved pupils in a limited range of low level tasks and there was little opportunity for them to be actively engaged. Where teachers have specialist subject knowledge there is a greater degree of confidence to involve pupils in a variety of activities. Teachers who lack subject knowledge and confidence sometimes take refuge in 'safe' approaches which do not challenge pupils, leading to poor motivation and low interest.

196. The head of the department has a good overview of strengths and weaknesses and has identified appropriate targets for development, including the improvement of teaching and learning. Some useful strategies have been introduced such as a mentoring system linking non-specialists with specialists. However, this will become more difficult to implement as the number of specialist religious education teachers in the school is diminishing. Opportunities to monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching are limited and do not include the large number of non-specialists who are teaching religious education.

197. Religious education makes a strong contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Through the GCSE courses all pupils study the impact of beliefs on actions and a wide range of social, moral and cultural issues is covered, the work of Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights movement, for example. A recent successful conference for sixth form students tackled the subject of racism. The religious education classrooms are made attractive and interesting by relevant

displays which, during the inspection, included a Buddhist shrine complete with prayer flags. This raises the profile of the subject in the school and enhances the learning experience for those pupils who are taught in those rooms.

BUSINESS STUDIES

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

Strengths

- Teachers have a secure knowledge of the subject so that most lessons are well prepared.
- Pupils make steady progress overall.
- Where pupils use real examples from the business world they make good progress.

Areas for improvement

- Some boys do not achieve high enough standards.
- Teaching needs to be consistently good so that all pupils achieve higher standards.
- Pupils' skills in analysing and solving problems are not well developed.

199. Standards in business studies are broadly average. In the 2001 GCSE examinations the percentage of pupils who gained the higher grades was a little above the national average. A more detailed analysis of the 2001 examination results shows that a much higher proportion of girls achieve the higher grades than boys. This difference is confirmed by the evidence from lessons: girls do better than boys usually because they are more diligent and have better attitudes to learning. Evidence from lessons also shows that standards are not quite as good as examination results, particularly pupils' skills in analysing and solving problems, and are thus average overall. The reason for both these aspects is teaching: some teaching is good but in other lessons pupils are being given too much information and not encouraged to think for themselves enough. These weaknesses limit pupils' progress, particularly that of boys.

200. Pupils have satisfactory knowledge of the business studies examination syllabus. In a Year 11 lesson revising finance, for example, pupils were able to use their knowledge of accounting to calculate the point at which a business might break even. Similarly in a Year 10 lesson on balance sheets pupils consolidated their knowledge of accounting techniques appropriately. By the end of Year 11 pupils are able to discuss ideas quite confidently but cannot always draw conclusions, particularly where the ideas are abstract and not really related to the real world. This happened, for example, in a Year 10 lesson where pupils were able to talk about the things that motivate workers but did not really apply this knowledge to different business scenarios. As a result, the work did not stretch pupils' understanding enough and the pace of learning was slow. Overall, pupils make satisfactory progress from the start of Year 10 to the end of Year 11: again it is because teaching tends to give pupils too much information and does not expect them to apply this knowledge.

201. Teaching is satisfactory overall: some lessons are good but rather too many have weaknesses that limit pupils' progress and learning. However, a particular strength of teaching in nearly all lessons is the knowledge that teachers have of business studies. Here, teachers are able to give expert answers to pupils' questions, they prepare their lessons well so that there is always enough work, and they mostly present ideas clearly. Sometimes, the work is relevant to pupils because teachers use case studies that make reference to the real business world. Where this happens pupils are motivated and interested and respond very positively to their work. In a Year 11 lesson on finance, for example, pupils concentrated well and made brisk progress with their learning. In some other lessons, however, pupils do not make as much progress because the teaching does too little to motivate. In one example, in Year 10, pupils were talked at for too long and the tasks they were expected to do did too little to stretch their understanding: one boy finished answering the questions on the worksheet before the others and marked time for too long. Consequently learning was slow and achievement was not as high as it should have been. This is particularly evident in boys who are more relaxed about learning than girls and need more encouragement. Another weakness of teaching is that pupils are not always clear about what they are expected to achieve by

the end of the lesson because teachers do not set out clearly enough what they intend. The result is that teachers set work that does not stretch pupils enough: pupils thus make only satisfactory progress and achieve average results when they could be doing better.

202. Despite boys' somewhat relaxed approach to learning, pupils' attitudes are broadly positive: pupils behave very well, concentrate well and remain working for most of the lesson. The relationships they have with their teachers are particularly good and explain why the atmosphere in lessons is always positive.

203. Business studies is led and managed satisfactorily. Teaching and learning are monitored as part of the school's performance management scheme but this does not provide a comprehensive enough overview of what is, and is not, successful. This means that it is difficult to identify areas for improvement, share good practice and ultimately improve teaching and learning. Business studies was not reported on in the last inspection but examination results have remained more or less steady over the last three years. Interestingly, boys' results have improved since 1999 but girls' have fallen: there is still a large gap between boys and girls but girls' results remain well above the average for all girls. This shows that standards could be better, particularly for the boys.

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.

GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	n/a	n/a	62	n/a	15	n/a	1.51
Chemistry	16	88	n/a	38	n/a	2.81	n/a
Physics	23	96	n/a	30	n/a	2.78	0.9
Design and technology	20	85	n/a	20	n/a	2.55	n/a
Business education	30	97	n/a	30	n/a	2.87	n/a
Information & Communication technology	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Physical education	8	100	n/a	25	n/a	2.5	n/a
Music	5	80	n/a	0	n/a	1.6	2.41
History	59	98	n/a	42	n/a	3.13	n/a
Sociology	22	86	n/a	18	n/a	2.32	n/a
Psychology	16	94	n/a	38	n/a	2.69	n/a
English	58	98	n/a	38	n/a	3.03	n/a
Key Skills	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

GCE A level and AVCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	11	100	87	45	43	6.18	5.80
Chemistry	12	100	90	50	43	6.83	5.90
Physics	10	70	88	20	40	4.4	5.67
Design and technology	2	100	91	50	30	7.00	5.38
Business education	26	100	92	46	32	6.76	5.5
Information & Communication technology	2	100	n/a	50	n/a	7	n/a
Physical education	6	100	92	33	25	6	5.09
Music	4	75	93	0	35	2.5	5.74
History	27	100	88	37	35	6.00	5.45
Sociology	12	100	86	25	35	5.33	5.32
Psychology	15	100	n/a	46	n/a	5.86	n/a
English	27	100	95	70	37	8.07	5.91

Key Skills	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
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SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

208. The focus of the inspection was on mathematics, chemistry and physics, but biology was also sampled. In biology examination results are a little above average in 2001 and students did broadly as expected considering their GCSE results. In the lessons, students worked maturely and made secure progress because teaching was clearly focussed on tasks that closely matched the exam syllabus and exam papers. There was a good structure with an effective sequence of tasks, clear explanations by the teacher and regular review of ideas, so that by the end of the lessons students had a secure understanding and they made good progress.

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- A level results have been consistently well above national averages in previous years, with results in 2001 in line with national standards. The department has a good record of 100 per cent passes at A level.
- A/S results are above average, and rates of retention to A2 are good.
- The standards of work which students produce are good and students have a clear sense of responsibility for their own progress.
- Teaching is good overall and students engage positively in learning.

Areas for improvement

- The range of teaching styles is relatively limited, particularly in giving more opportunities for students to explain and develop their thinking.

210. The mathematics department makes good provision for its sixth form students. Results in most years recently have been better than the national picture, with a 100 per cent pass rate and higher than average proportions of students gaining A and B grades. Many students begin their A level course at above average standards and they are supported in continuing to achieve well. There are also some students who achieve very well having begun the course without having covered the full higher level GCSE course. In most years there are more males than females taking up A level study in mathematics, but there are no significant differences in their results over time.

211. The standard of work seen during the inspection indicates attainment is at least in line with the national average, with many students achieving above this level. Many students, though not all, have very good, concise notes which are well organised into topics. These are accompanied by extensive practice exercises done as homework, which effectively support and consolidate classroom learning. Students have a good understanding of the mathematics they have learnt and use this well when introduced to new topics, for example, in building on previous work on definite integrals to find the area under a curve. Most students have a good understanding of fundamental algebraic principles and are able to apply this well, for example, in factorising polynomials. This underpins much of their work and helps them to do well.

212. Teaching is good overall. Students learn well on the A/S and A level courses because the teaching is good. Lessons are well planned and well structured. Teachers know their subject well and give very clear explanations, which are consistently well supported by good board work. It is logical and rigorously set out, so that it supports learning and the development of understanding and provides a good model for students. Most lessons are well paced. Teachers have high expectations and strike a good balance between challenge and support. Homework is used very effectively to support, consolidate and extend the teaching and learning that goes on in the classroom. Students

respond very positively to their teachers and work hard. They complete homework assignments and follow up any difficulties with their teachers. They make good use of the resources provided as part of the well planned revision programme set up by the department, meeting the expectation that they will take responsibility for their own learning in this way. In lessons they are attentive and concentrate well. In one or two lessons, students were given good opportunities to develop their understanding and oral communication skills through extended discussions and student demonstration of solutions involving the whole class. This practice should be developed more widely. Students enjoyed this, and it also made a positive contribution to their confidence and self-esteem.

213. The small number of students following the GCSE re-sit course are well taught and given good support and guidance in tackling examination questions.

214. The management of the department is good. There is a united ethos amongst staff and they work well together to support students' learning. A well planned curriculum and well organised resources support both students and teachers effectively. There is considerable good will in the department, which enables students to take further mathematics successfully when it cannot be accommodated within the school timetable.

Chemistry

215. Overall, the quality of provision in chemistry is **good**.

Strengths

- The current standards in Year 13 are above average and are considerably better than those at the last inspection.
- Teaching is clear and logical.
- Students make good progress if pace is good.
- Students are motivated, work hard and productively.
- The curriculum is clearly focussed on the exam syllabus and on exam performance.
- The leadership is good.

Areas for improvement

- The variety of teaching methods is fairly limited, especially to help students explore ideas and apply knowledge.
- The monitoring of teaching does not enable teachers to share good practice.

216. The GCE A-level examination results in 2001 are broadly average. All students who took the examination gained a pass grade and the proportion gaining the highest grade is a little above average, as was the number obtaining the lowest pass grade.

217. These achievements are confirmed by lessons: standards are at least average overall. Students in Year 12 are a significant way into their course and are achieving much as expected, but a number lack confidence in their responses and are insecure in their knowledge. The course includes some work covered for GCSE and some students are secure about the use of equations which they needed to tackle calculations: however, for a few, these calculations presented difficulties. There is not always a systematic and rigorous grounding in balancing equations and doing calculations. In Year 13, students achieve much better overall. In the lessons seen they were doing well as a result of clear, logical teaching that constantly referred to exam and syllabus content they needed to know. This lesson structure and the written activities clearly directed their learning towards attainment. In one lesson, they drew on their knowledge and information in books to predict successfully the products of an organic chemistry reaction and explain how and why it occurred. In another, students showed good understanding of rates of reactions. The students completed the concentration/time graph, determined order of reaction by measuring gradient at different points. They were also asked to speculate on possible reaction mechanisms; this was beyond the syllabus but two students could suggest plausible ideas based on their existing knowledge.

218. Teaching is satisfactory overall. The principal features of the better lessons are clear objectives, sharp planning, brisk pace, and a strong emphasis on reinforcement and linking of ideas. Teachers show good subject knowledge in their questioning, explanations and in the tasks they set. Although the lessons show a clear focus they often lack variety in terms of strategies. The lessons are didactic and do not involve the students in interrogating evidence from practical work, although assessed coursework demonstrates that by Year 13 the students can analyse and evaluate their practical work competently. Some lessons are not as dynamic, and although the standard of work is high enough, the students are much more passive as learners and learning is not so good.

219. Day-to-day marking is variable but satisfactory overall: some sets of questions remain unchecked by either the teacher or students. The comments made on the coursework pro forma are better and give students a clear idea about how they can improve and meet their targets.

220. Students learn well. They are attentive, work productively and respond well to the structured teaching that they experience. Overall, they are positive in their attitude to work in class. They recognise that what they are doing will support them for their exams so they are committed to the lessons. They approach independent work maturely, and most are able to extract information and make their own notes; for example, this was shown in a lesson about the effect of intermolecular forces on the properties of water compared to other hydrides. Some are less confident in seeing the focus of tasks. Students support and help each other well and, in groups, talk and listen to each other maturely as part of their learning. They are not always as confident in offering ideas in more open discussion; the teachers are sensitive to the personalities and abilities of the students when involved in questioning.

221. The subject is well led and managed. There is a commitment to building on what has already been achieved and to improving standards. A new scheme of work sets the stage for good teaching and a consistent approach. However, teaching is not monitored well and this makes it difficult to identify and share good practice.

Physics

222. Overall, the quality of provision in physics is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- The current standards are average and are better than those in recent years.
- Teaching is satisfactory.
- Students make good progress by the end of Year 13.
- Students are motivated, work hard and productively.
- The curriculum is clearly focussed on the exam syllabus and on exam performance.
- The leadership is good.

Areas for improvement

- The variety in teaching methods is fairly narrow and this makes it more difficult for students to explore their own ideas and apply their knowledge.
- There are inconsistencies in marking that mean that some work is not checked.
- The monitoring of teaching and the sharing of good practice are not well developed.

223. The standard of work of students currently studying physics is about average. The students observed show a level of attainment in lessons and in their work which broadly matches their ability. In previous years attainment has been below average and in 2000 was well below average, however, the work in class and the current available data indicate that attainment is improving. In Year 13 students can confidently discuss their work and can apply their knowledge in new situations.

224. Teaching is competent and there is a clear focus on what has to be achieved in terms of the syllabus content and examinations. The teachers have good subject knowledge in their questioning, explanations and the work set. In a lesson on vision defects as part of the unit on medical physics, most students could correctly respond to most levels of questioning and written tasks. This

demonstrates at least average attainment and reinforces the prediction that standards in physics are improving. The teaching is supportive for those students who have more difficulty, but the lack of different teaching methods is affecting how well some groups of students make progress.

225. Students are set targets based on their performance in tests but there are inconsistencies in day-to-day marking and some sets of questions remain unchecked by either the teacher or students. The comments made on the coursework pro forma show better quality marking which will inform students how they can improve and meet their targets. Although this is done informally, there are no formal strategies for the students to develop self assessment skills.

226. There is evidence in physics, as with other science subjects, that attainment improves in Year 13 compared to Year 12. In Year 13 students show that they can work independently with confidence. Two separate groups of Year 13 students carrying out a radioactivity investigation showed safe, skilful handling of the apparatus; they could take measurements to the required degree of accuracy obtaining reliable and justifiable results. They could use their physics knowledge to perform all the appropriate calculations and check the reliability of their results. They could also answer wider questions about radioactivity. The quality of their coursework and their knowledge are well above average.

227. Work in the subject is well led and managed. There is a commitment to improving standards and developing systems which will support this. However, the monitoring of teaching is not well developed and this makes it difficult to share the good practice that exists in science.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

228. The focus was on A/S and A level design technology and textiles. Four sessions were observed. The teaching was very good. During the lessons there was good use of questioning and explanation, regular review of student progress and a well structured sequence of activities. This led to students gaining a secure knowledge and understanding of preparing a specification for the design and manufacture of a product.

Design and technology

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

Strengths

- Students have a sound grasp of design concepts and apply them well in assignments, in answering questions and during discussions; they are achieving well overall.
- Teaching is very good; the sessions are well structured with a range of activities which effectively help students to build up their knowledge and understanding.
- Students work well together: they share ideas and information freely.
- The subject area is very well led and there is a good range of learning resources.

Areas for improvement

- The analysis of assessment information and data is not used well to set targets, inform lesson planning and teaching, and thus raise standards further.

230. The GCE A/S and A level results are above average. All students who took the examination gained a grade. The standard of work of current students is also above average confirming the examination results. Students are achieving very well in relation to predictions based on GCSE results. In the lesson seen they were doing very well as a result of effective teaching which demanded much of them. The lesson structure and activities clearly focused their learning. Students recall knowledge well and apply it; their project work shows the same confidence as their class work. Standards of work are particularly high in textiles design.

231. Teaching was very good and students learnt well as a result. The principal features of the good teaching were clear objectives, sharp planning, brisk pace and a range of teaching strategies to bring about learning. The teachers had very good subject knowledge and used this well in questioning and the tasks set. The lessons provided opportunities for students to practise what had been discussed and their skills and techniques improved as the lesson progressed. In the lessons students had opportunities to carry out research working as individuals to formulate ideas and record their findings. The teacher drew together their ideas and provided explanations. Students responded confidently to the activities.

232. Students learn very well. They are attentive, work productively and respond very well to the supportive teaching and different learning styles they experience. They rose to the challenge of designing products for a specific purpose. In the lesson time was used well. Students support and help each other effectively and, in groups, talk and listen to each other in a mature way as part of their learning. Students are always confident when offering ideas in more open discussion.

233. The standard of students' work seen meets the demands of the course requirements. In the sessions observed, they were doing well as a result of effective teaching which demanded much of them. The lesson structure and activities clearly focused their learning. In the lessons seen students drew well on their knowledge of design and meeting the requirements of a specification. The students recall knowledge and understanding well and apply it. Project work generally shows the same confidence as their work in class.

BUSINESS

234. The focus of the inspection was business studies at A and A/S level. The Advanced Vocational course in business studies was also sampled: in the two lessons seen teaching was good and students achieved well, making good progress with their learning. The course is well matched to the particular students taking the course and this is an important factor in their good progress.

Business studies

235. Overall, the quality of provision in business studies is **good**.

Strengths

- Teachers have a secure knowledge of the subject and most lessons are well prepared.
- Progress in basic knowledge and understanding of business is good.
- Teachers' relationships with students are very good: this motivates students well.
- Students have very positive attitudes to their work and this promotes their learning effectively.

Areas for improvement

- Some students are not developing their skills in analysing information and drawing conclusions as much as they should.
- The range of teaching methods is quite narrow and does not help pupils to develop their analytical skills enough.

236. Standards are above average. The standards achieved at A level are above the national average and this is confirmed in lessons. In 2001, 43 per cent of students entered for the examination achieved grades A and B compared with 32 per cent nationally. Results have increased since 1999. In lessons standards are also above average although boys do not do quite as well as girls. This is mainly because they are less skilled in drawing conclusions from information.

237. Students have good levels of knowledge of the ideas involved in their work and many are able to apply this well. For example, in a Year 12 lesson students working on case studies such as multination companies or the impact of September 11 were able to explain the background to the situation they were researching. Many were also able to draw conclusions from this research by analysing the information and evaluating the impact. However, this was not secure for all students and some found the task of drawing conclusions quite difficult. Broadly, students have fairly good ICT skills and know how computers are used in business settings. The key skills are covered well and as a result students' literacy, numeracy and ICT skills are sound.

238. Students' attitudes towards their work are very good. They are attentive, respond well to the work, maintain their concentration and are keen to do well. There is little doubt that their very good attitudes to work have a very strong impact on their learning: this is one of the reasons why they make good progress.

239. The other reason that students make good progress is that teaching is good: all lessons are at least satisfactory, most are good and some are very good. As a result students' learn effectively. One of the real strengths in teaching is that teachers are secure in their knowledge of business studies, and they prepare their lessons effectively. In the really effective lessons teachers use their good knowledge to present work in an interesting way that motivates students. In a very good Year 12 lesson on the social responsibilities of businesses, for example, a very quick, pacy start got students thinking very quickly. Good use of a video and group work meant that students were challenged to think about conflicting evidence and develop an argument for themselves. The result was that learning was brisk and progress very good. Teachers also have very good relationships with students. In a good Year 13 lesson the very positive relationships were used well to go over homework: students were given helpful advice about their work and praised about things they had done well. As a result students responded very well and were very involved in the work and asked pertinent questions. All this meant that teaching took students' learning forward.

240. In a few lessons, where teaching is satisfactory, there are some minor weaknesses that mean that students do not achieve as well as they should. There are two main areas for development:

- the lesson is directed by the teacher giving too little opportunity for pupils to contribute;
- the range of teaching methods is quite narrow and the level of demand is not high enough.

241. The result of both these weaknesses is that they do not give enough opportunities for students to think for themselves. This explains why some students are not developing their skills in analysing information and drawing conclusions as much as they should. However, teachers are aware that this aspect of learning needs developing and the evidence from lessons shows that there is clear improvement.

242. Business studies is efficiently managed and this has resulted in a commitment to improvement. It is suitably led but the way teaching is monitored and evaluated is not strong enough: this makes it difficult to really get to the heart of what does and does not work effectively. The subject was not reported in the last inspection.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

243. The focus of the inspection was computing at A and A/S level. The Advanced Vocational course in ICT was also sampled: in the two lessons seen teaching was good in one and satisfactory in the other. Students made good progress and the course is suited well to their particular needs: the vocational focus enables them to achieve well.

244. Overall, the quality of provision in information and communication technology is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- Teaching is sound and students respond well.
- Students are taught in specialist rooms with up-to-date equipment and software.
- In small groups students share ideas and work well together.

Areas for improvement

- The monitoring and evaluation of student progress are insufficiently based upon systematic analysis of their prior attainment.
- Following the monitoring of student performance targets need to be more clearly defined.

245. Results at A level are low taken over the last 3 years; however, systematic comparisons are difficult as the small number of students taking the course presents difficulties in comparative analysis. Results in 2001 are better. A relatively low number of students take computer studies at A level but most are achieving well in relation to their predictions based on GCSE results. Students in Year 13 demonstrated the ability to apply knowledge, skills and understanding to the given task and there was sufficient evidence that sustainable progress was being made.

246. Students enter the course with a variety of ICT experience; many have not taken the subject at GCSE. Students' written work demonstrates sound progress and students in Year 12 demonstrated a level of competence and confidence commensurate with a sound understanding of course expectations. Research skills are well developed and their work demonstrated a good balance between independent learning and teacher support.

247. The overall quality of teaching is good. Teachers have good subject knowledge: in one Year 12 lesson, for example, the teachers' good knowledge of computing and of the examination requirements meant that students developed well. Another strength of the teaching is way teachers question students and explain the work. In Year 13 lesson the teacher worked with students individually to discuss and explain their project for the examination: this worked well and helped students get the most out of the lesson. The work offers plenty of intellectual challenge and higher

attaining students understand the crucial importance of analysing evidence and selecting the relevant evidence for inclusion. When students were working individually the teacher circulated well and advised on the next stage of learning.

248. Further use of the informative comments given to enable students to judge their progress effectively would be desirable as would the clarity with which student progress is measured against their prior attainment. Targets for future attainment could then be shared and validated.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

249. The focus of the inspection was on physical education. The school does not teach any other subjects in this curriculum area.

Physical education

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

Strengths

- Teaching and learning are very good.
- Student achievement is good.
- Relationships are very good and students work well together.

Areas for improvement

- There is very little provision of courses other than academic at advanced level.
- Guidance on how to improve is inconsistent.

251. In both 2000 and 2001, standards at both A level and A/S level were above the national average. There were no significant differences in the performance of male or female students.

252. Both A level and A/S level students produce coursework and practical performances of a high standard. All students have good levels of technical knowledge and understanding and a good range of performance skills. Scrutiny and analysis of the theoretical work in folders, observation in lessons, and evidence of prior attainment, indicate that students are generally achieving above the expectations and predictions based on their GCSE grades.

253. In lessons seen, A level students successfully meet the challenges set by well planned and demanding teaching. Drawing on their knowledge and understanding of human exercise psychology, they are able to debate and exchange alternative views in a mature manner. All students are able to analyse and evaluate physical performances, suggest improvements and predict final outcomes. They are secure in their wider knowledge, and this has a positive impact on the quality of their coursework. They have a good understanding of the technical vocabulary of the subject. They are beginning to grasp the complex interactions taking place within the human mind and body to govern the successful completion of complex tasks under increasing stress. They can analyse successfully and rapidly the key elements of examination questions.

254. A/S level students are achieving well. They show good knowledge and understanding of the theoretic aspects, and their performance skills are of a high standard. As they move on successfully from GCSE work into new areas, they find the higher level work demanding, but interesting and exciting. They take an active part in discussions, and show good skills as independent learners when carrying out individual research. They are prepared to question and challenge different views, but always with respect and consideration.

255. Teaching overall is very good, and this encourages students of all abilities to learn well. The best teaching is characterised by the clarity of its objectives, which consolidate and extend previous work, and by the challenges it presents to students to take responsibility for their own learning. Teachers demonstrate very good subject knowledge in their questioning and exposition. They have

high expectations of their students in terms of work rate and quality of performance, both physical and intellectual. The students respond with confidence and trust to the demands of their teachers. The lack of a vocational dimension to the curriculum narrows the range of learning opportunities available. Evidence suggests that written guidance for improvement lacks consistency both individually and corporately, though students' work is often analysed in great detail verbally.

256. The very large majority of students make progress at least at the expected rate, and many exceed the expectation. They have a very good attitude to work, and respond well to challenges set by the teachers. Relationships between the students themselves, and between the students and their teachers are excellent, they respect each other's views, and they give mutual support and encouragement. Students work well co-operatively in groups of various sizes, and they are enthusiastic about their involvement in physical education. Most are fully committed to representing the school in competitive sporting fixtures, both team and individual. Several have gained representative honours at regional and national level across a range of activities.

257. Leadership and management are very good. The subject leader has brought renewed energy and commitment, as well as a strong determination to raise standards. She is well supported by hard working colleagues in the staff team. Assessments are regular, and give students a clear picture of their progress within the subject. Student performance data is very well used for tracking progress comparatively, for measuring students' progress, and for purposes of curriculum development.

258. Students are happy with their choice of courses, and feel confident of confidential and valuable support from teachers when needed. They appreciate the effectiveness of the different teaching styles used, and feel that they are treated as adults within the subject. They have a very strong feeling of group identity.

259. Very good accommodation and resources, particularly for the practical aspects, support the effectiveness of lessons which are well planned and organised. A permanent teaching base for theoretical aspects would be an advantage.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

260. The focus was on music but art, theatre studies and media studies were also sampled. The provision for art is very good. Standards in art in the A level exams are very high. Standards seen during the inspection confirm this. Teaching is very good. Students are extremely well motivated and learn well as a result.

261. In theatre studies, examination results were above average in 2001; all ten students were successful, the majority gaining grades A or B. Work done by the present sixth form students is of a similar standard. Very good teaching and very positive student attitudes lead to the high standards of performance, self-evaluation and knowledge of texts and theory. Examination results were also above average in media studies last year: all eight candidates reached at least grade C; half obtained A or B grades. The current students, thanks to their positive motivation and to good teaching, are also achieving high standards. Numbers taking these subjects have increased.

Music

262. Overall, the quality of provision in music is **satisfactory**

Strengths

- There is a good balance of independent work and teacher-guided work.
- Students are well supported by individual composition and technology lessons.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge which they share effectively with their students.
- Teachers review and analyse past results to ensure coursework addresses examination criteria sufficiently.

Areas for improvement

- Schemes of work are not developed fully and so do not ensure students' skills develop in a logical progression.
- Students are unsure of their marks and need additional guidance of how their work will be assessed.

263. Overall standards are average. Students are offered good support and guidance on an individual basis. Starting at varying levels of musicianship, students make good progress, as seen in the high standards of eight-part sequencing work they produce for A/S and A level compositions. Progress is satisfactory overall and enhanced by the high levels of specialist support students receive through working with a professional musician in individual composing and technology lessons. In class lessons, they study a broad variety of styles and techniques, including Bartok String Quartets, a Schubert quintet, show music backing tracks and free composition.

264. Teaching is satisfactory overall with some good lessons. Students are given the freedom to work independently whilst receiving good support appropriate to their individual need. This happened in a Year 13 lesson, for example, where teaching enabled students to make the best use of their own initiative and allowed them to take decisions for themselves. However, assessment is not a strong feature of the subject and procedures are not well-developed. As a result students are not always clear about how their work is marked and what the marks mean. Sometimes work is not assess well leaving some students unclear about how well they are doing.

265. Management of the department is improving, enabling the department to analyse its examination results more effectively and so make curriculum improvements and adaptations to teaching but schemes of work are still at an early stage of development. This means that teachers do not always set work that is quite as demanding enough.

HUMANITIES

266. The focus was on history, psychology and sociology. Geography, religious education and law were also sampled. In geography two lessons were seen: standards are slightly below average but students make satisfactory progress and achieve appropriately given their prior achievement. In religious education a Year 12 lesson was seen and students' work was inspected. Students are attaining high standards in the religious studies A level course. Teaching is very good. Good specialist knowledge and enthusiasm for the subject motivate the students. They respond well to the high expectations and challenge in their lessons.

History

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

Strengths

- History is a popular subject and there has been a significant improvement in results over the past four years.
- The quality of teaching, characterised by impressive subject knowledge of teachers and high levels of intellectual challenge, ensures that students are given the utmost support in their search for the truth.
- The marking of students' essays is of a very high standard and teachers offer students extensive diagnostic advice on how they may improve their writing.
- The subject is very well led and students' performance is analysed in a most sophisticated fashion.

Areas for improvement

- ICT is not used enough as a tool for research.
- The department does not have enough textbooks for the number of teaching groups.

268. Students' performance in A level examinations from 1998 to 2001 has improved markedly. From significantly below national averages in 1998, the results in 2001 were just above norms and over 60 per cent of students reached grades at or above what were expected. The attainment of both male and female students has improved, but female students' results have improved at a faster rate, since they often approach their work in a more studious fashion. Over the same period, the numbers opting to study history have doubled and the subject is now one of the largest in the sixth form. A/S results in 2001 were well above average with 42 per cent of students attaining A/B grades and 69 per cent achieving at A-C.

269. Standards of work seen during the inspection were at least as good as examination results indicate and, in one group in Year 13, were higher; this is primarily because of good teaching, a new scheme of study and teacher-prepared resources of very high quality. From an average baseline on entry to the subject, students are making good progress and they achieve well. Students are articulate and they use historical register accurately and in context. In Year 12, for example, they demonstrate good knowledge of Nazi economic policy before 1939 and they ask most perceptive questions of their teachers. Moreover, they make interesting comments about the key features of Henry VII's reign and can decide why England's power compared unfavourably with that of France and Spain in 1500. In Year 13, they build upon their knowledge of Nazi Germany and discuss the "Hitler Myth" convincingly. They also compare and contrast Soviet and US foreign policy following the Korean War in the early 1950s.

270. Students make good progress in the analysis and interpretation of source material and they give considered arguments about its validity and use to students of history. Furthermore, they are adept at summarising the evidence contained in the sources and often add knowledge gained from their own personal research to their oral and written answers. They thrive on intellectual challenge and debate historical issues willingly and with confidence; they enjoy challenging their teachers and their peers. The quality of students' essays, particularly in Year 13, is high and they are not afraid to question the views of historians.

271. Teaching is a major strength of the work of the department. Teachers know their subject well and prepare thoroughly for its delivery. Lessons are very often a dialogue between teachers and students and intellectual challenge is both rigorous and relentless. Teachers have real presence and place great emphasis on objectivity. They encourage their students to see the past in shades of grey, rather than black and white, and their questions imply that history should be judged on its own standards and values. In a very good Year 13 lessons, for example, students were fascinated by the teacher's exposition on the aftermath of the Korean War and their response was such that many contributions would not have gone amiss in an undergraduate class. Because teachers place

considerable demands on their students and because they offer full support in turn, students recognise the progress they are making. They pay tribute to the talents of their teachers and make particular reference to the amount of feedback they receive. As one student in Year 12 said, "In the history department, the quality of marking is consistently excellent." This, coupled with the teachers' insistence that students read the works of major historians, leads to good progress in students' depth of thinking and in their willingness and ability to debate.

272. Very good relations abound in history lessons. Teachers treat their students with respect and with dignity and students respond warmly to their teachers, of whom they speak highly. There is much smiling during lessons and students are happy to learn from their classmates, expressing delight when their peers succeed. Students are especially grateful for the individual help they receive after school, when teachers revise complex topics or offer advice on university entrance.

273. Teachers know their students well, monitor their progress closely and act swiftly if they perceive that difficulties have arisen. They check regularly on the notes taken in class and they ensure that everyone is benefiting from what is on offer.

274. Improvements in uptake, high rates of retention from Year 12 to Year 13 and higher attainment over the past three years, are the result of very effective departmental management. Teachers work closely together and share a vision for the teaching of advanced history. The new scheme of study has had a positive effect on departmental provision and ensures that students can further develop their historical skills. Teachers work hard to provide thought-provoking resources for their students but are hampered by the lack of relevant textbooks, particularly since there are such large numbers studying history. Although improving, ICT is underdeveloped and the department is now looking at how it may be effectively included in the teaching. However, the department is well placed for future development in sixth form history.

Sociology

275. Overall, the provision for sociology is **good**.

Strengths

- Teachers question the students well to help develop their understanding.
- There are good relationships between teachers and students.
- Students are keen and enthusiastic; they are willing to work hard and take their work seriously.

Areas for improvement

- Marking is inconsistent and varies from task to task, within tasks and between teachers and does not always help students know what they should do to improve.
- Not enough use is made of information and communication technology.

276. Results at A level last year were in line with the average nationally although in the school the subject did not do quite as well as other subjects. Many more girls than boys do the subject but the small number of boys achieve well. Some students have chosen to do sociology because it is not a subject they have learnt before and it represents a fresh start. Consequently, some students who have been less successful in traditional subjects select sociology and have to work very hard to cope with the standards expected. These students achieve well although they may not get the higher grades. Sociology was not taught during the last inspection.

277. This year the subject is taught by a completely new set of teachers. Standards of work this year are average overall with a good number of students showing they are on track to get the higher grades. There is a clear difference between the Years 12 and 13, indicating that students make good progress from A/S to A level. Year 13 students are able to analyse and use concepts and theories to explain ideas. For example, after group work where they had made posters explaining some sociological definitions, students presented their ideas well to the class. Those talking about relative deprivation made their explanation very lively because they could relate this to their own experience.

Year 13 also understood the differences between cults, sects and denominations and readily discussed their views of intolerant attitudes and prejudice. Year 12 students are beginning to develop their critical abilities and to become more objective in their views. They can recognise differences and similarities between ideologies of Marxism and Functionalism when they are led by their teacher. They do not have a real understanding yet and are relying on memory. This also means that they express ideas reusing the teacher's words rather their own.

278. Teaching and learning is good. Teachers are very good at asking the students questions to get them to recall information they have learnt previously. They give them excellent strategies to help organise their notes and to help memorise important information, including the use of colour codes and Venn diagrams. Students in both years are very keen to learn and find the subject very interesting. Many students are discovering views and outlooks that are completely new to them and the subject is considerably widening their horizons. They adjust to this well and this helps them listen to one another with respect and to value other opinions. Relationships are very good and students are keen to learn and to do well.

279. Much of the work in both Year 12 and 13 was focused on revision for exams this term and therefore does not represent the full range of activity normally covered. However, the students' work in both years is neat and well organised so that it provides a very useful resource for reference and further study. Work covers a suitable range of topics and demonstrates that the students can be systematic and can collect and present findings, clearly producing coherent conclusions. Information and communications technology is little used in either Year 12 or 13. In both classrooms teachers have displayed very useful information to help students understand examination question and advice about collecting information in the subject. However, marking is less good and does not always show students the ways they might improve their work.

280. Sociology is part of a department with a wide variety of subjects. The sociology teachers are given a helpful induction programme but have little specialist advice, as there are no other sociologists in the department.

Psychology

281. Overall, the quality of provision in psychology is **good**.

Strengths

- Results at A and A/S level are good; they have improved over recent years with a good proportion of high grades.
- The attitudes of students are very good. Many students work very hard to succeed.
- Teachers' have good subject expertise, which enhances the quality of their teaching.
- The social studies department are encouraged to use a range of teaching strategies, which enable students to become active learners.

Areas for improvement

- All marking is not consistently thorough and does not always give students a clear indication of how to improve their work.
- Opportunities for the use of ICT are limited.

282. GCE A level results have steadily improved over the last three years. In both 2000 and 2001, results were above the national average with nearly half who sat the examination achieving the highest grades, A or B. These results were a significant improvement on results in 1999, where two thirds achieved low grades, D or E, and two candidates failed. Results in the new A/S level, at the end of Year 12 in 2001, were in line with results nationally. Whilst 38 per cent achieved grades A or B, nearly half achieved grades D or E and one failed. Whilst nationally results tend towards a "normal distribution", with grade C most common, results in school at both levels tend to split into two fairly equal groups, with candidates either achieving high or low grades, with few in the middle. In light of their previous attainment at GCSE, results suggest that whilst most achieve in line with expectations

and some achieve better than expected, some do under perform. Significantly more girls than boys study psychology and they generally achieve higher grades.

283. Observation of lessons and analysis of samples of work suggest similar standards to those achieved in previous years, although standards in some lessons were only in line with national expectations. Three of four psychology groups were observed, one twice. In Year 13, three-quarters of those who sat A/S level in Year 12 have continued onto the second year of the course. About half of these are producing work, which is of a high standard. Numbers studying psychology are more than double in the current Year 12 than in previous years. Records and observation suggests about a third are achieving very well. In both years, there is a wide range of standards being achieved. Some students respond confidently to teachers' questioning, have a good grasp of concepts and psychological theories, and can recall the names of psychologists and associated experiments or theories. Others lack confidence or need prompting too frequently. Most in Year 12 were able to recall types of social influence. Another Year 12 group had prepared for a debate on whether "psychological processes cause eating disorders". Some good arguments were prepared, making appropriate reference to psychological theories but debate was limited. In a lesson about eye-witness reports, students had a good understanding of issues but had difficulty in defining how much importance to attach to these.

284. Students work purposefully, whether individually or in groups, and most remain focused on their work throughout the lesson. Most have adopted successful learning strategies, keep notes effectively and annotate them as appropriate. They are supported in this by teachers' good choice of materials. However, whilst some organise their work in an exemplary manner, others are very disorganised. Students have excellent relationships with each other and their teachers. They are pleasant and forthcoming, although in some lessons, too many remain too passive. Students are very positive about the subject and most have excellent attitudes towards their studies.

285. Overall, the quality of teaching is good. Psychology is taught by two newly qualified, further education teachers, who both have degrees in the subject. Their subject expertise is very good, enabling them to respond effectively to students' questions, both in supplying appropriate references and giving practical examples to illuminate theories. A good range of teaching strategies are used. In the best lessons, students are provided with opportunities to work in groups and individually, and are provided with a range of activities which they move through at pace. Most lessons involve some teacher exposition and whole class or targeted questioning. Much of this is challenging. Students are given opportunities to research, to prepare presentations and to debate. Good use is made of texts, worksheets and quizzes. In Year 13 the teacher had sensibly linked work closely to the style of examination questions. Whilst students are encouraged to research, there is little evidence in students' files of the use of ICT either in lessons or for their research. The quality of teaching and learning is good, although activities are sometimes too teacher directed.

286. The two teachers have effectively shared the teaching but monitoring is not rigorous enough to ensure consistency, for example, in the quality of marking. Some marking is very thorough, giving excellent advice to students on what needs to be done to improve the standard of the work: other marking is more superficial. Similarly, whilst records are kept of students' progress on a regular basis, these are not always used to help improve the performance of lower achieving students.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

287. The focus for the inspection was English but one French lesson was sampled. Standards in French are average. Students are developing an appropriate base of vocabulary and acquiring increasing grammatical knowledge. A lack of confidence, however, inhibits their ability to use language spontaneously to a high degree of sophistication. This stems from an uncertain grasp of the complexities of some language patterns. Students are dependent on the teacher to a large extent for the expression of more abstract ideas.

English

288. Overall, the quality of provision is **very good**.

Strengths

- Examination results are very good and have improved significantly since the last inspection, with a high proportion of students achieving the top grades.
- The high quality of teaching, aligned with positive pupil attitudes, ensures that students make very good progress and achieve very well in relation to their previous attainment.
- Very good leadership and management ensure that staff and students are well supported.

Areas for improvement

- There is a much lower proportion of male students taking English Literature A level than is found nationally.
- In a very few lessons there are insufficient opportunities for students to make extended oral contributions in order to test hypotheses, formulate ideas and articulate their learning.

289. The GCE A level results for English Literature have improved significantly over the past three years. Standards, which were average in 1998, were very high in 2001 in comparison to the national average. All students who took the examination in 2001 gained an A-C pass, with 70 per cent achieving the highest grades of A and B. This is more than double the figure of 1998. In relation to their GCSE results, students achieved very well, making swift progress during their time in the sixth form. Very few students who started the course failed to complete it, though the proportion of male students taking the course in recent years is significantly lower than is normally found and this is a cause for concern.

290. The standards of work of current students are above average in Year 12 and well above average in Year 13. Students are achieving well in relation to their GCSE results.

291. In Year 12 students are still developing their independent learning skills and adjusting to the demands of English beyond GCSE. They have a strong personal response to the texts they have studied, though the more formal conventions of advanced literary criticism are still being developed, and the use of key vocabulary is not yet secure. Most students have a very thorough knowledge of the individual texts studied and they are able to select appropriate examples, formulate hypotheses and offer evidence in support of their views. A small minority of students, however, have difficulty in locating and orchestrating enough evidence to support their evaluations. The emergence of A Level English Language and Literature has also exposed a lack of confidence in students' independent analytical skills in Year 12, particularly with regard to language features.

292. By Year 13, students have made very good progress. They are confident independent learners and literary terminology is used routinely. Students have a well developed sense of the relationships between different texts and the varying social and political contexts in which they have been produced. Students are also adept at generalising the skills they have learnt whilst studying individual texts and applying that understanding to unseen texts. Formal writing styles are well developed and some higher attaining students show real intellectual rigour in their coursework.

293. Overall, the quality of teaching is very good. In half of the lessons seen during the inspection, teaching was judged to be very good and there was no unsatisfactory teaching. English teachers are well qualified and subject knowledge is very secure. This leads to skilful questioning which helps to stretch students' learning and supports their progress. Marking is very detailed and clear targets for improvement are set. Judicious use of exam board guidance and assessment criteria ensures that students know what they need to do to succeed and what to do to improve. This has a positive effect on standards achieved.

294. The best teaching seen was characterised by strategies that offered students enough guidance to support their independence without stifling it. This was seen in two Year 13 lessons

where, on both occasions, the key areas of language, form and structure were highlighted for investigation and this provided a helpful frame to support students' responses and focus their analysis. As a consequence, students' learning on these occasions was swift and the feedback on their findings, which compared two texts, was cogent and incisive.

295. In a very effective Year 12 lesson, all students were given responsibility to prepare an aspect of the text "The Glass Menagerie" by Tennessee Williams. Structured opportunities were then found for all individuals to feed back to the group, receive others' responses and have their points challenged. Consequently, all students were included in the lesson and had the opportunity to articulate their views.

296. On the very few occasions where there were elements of less effective teaching, lessons were too teacher-led, resulting in insufficient opportunities for students to make their own extended oral contributions, despite having the ability to do so. There are also a small minority of students who tend to be passive in class discussions. Although well supported in other ways, they are not brought in to the discussions frequently enough.

297. Students learn very well. They are attentive and many demonstrate real engagement and enthusiasm for the work. They develop well as independent learners, making sound use of private study facilities, ICT, and the reading lists supplied by the department. Most students have developed detailed notes to support their studies and are proficient in a range of note-taking skills. Students work very well collaboratively, formulating ideas and challenging each other constructively and sympathetically. When given the opportunity, they are able to provide confident oral responses that are pertinent and well conceived. The ability to transfer the skills and knowledge learnt in lessons to a range of other contexts develops well during the two years of the sixth form.

298. Post-16 English is very well led and managed. Provision is well organised and effective procedures for assessment, resourcing and teaching ensure that both students and teachers are given very good support. New and revised courses have been effectively implemented and staff have received clear guidance and attended appropriate training. The departmental development plan, which includes post-16, is monitored well. The use of data and target setting for students is sound though there is a need to use data for a wider range of monitoring purposes, for example, boys' uptake and retention rates. Overall, improvement since the last inspection in post-16 English has been good.

FOUNDATION FOR STUDY AND WORK

Key skills

299. Overall, the quality of provision in key skills is **good**.

Strengths

- Good quality teaching enables students to make at least satisfactory, and often good progress.
- Students' achievements in the national tests for communication and ICT are considerably better than the national average.
- The school's commitment to key skills recognises student entitlement through the provision of a good quality taught programme in each of the key skill areas.
- There is a clear key skills policy and good schemes of work.

Areas for improvement

- Portfolio completion rates are low, particularly in ICT.
- A better match could be achieved between the context of the key skills assignments and the experiences and main programmes being followed by students in Year 12.

300. The school has a strong commitment to key skills. All students in Year 12, apart from those studying a subject which is recognised as an alternative to key skill in ICT, are expected to take the ICT course.

301. Achievement was better than average and in 2001 and students in Year 12 achieved results in the tests for communication and ICT which were considerably higher than the national averages. In the application of number tests they achieved results which were in line with the national average. In communication, 96 per cent of students completed a portfolio (85 per cent at Level 3 and 11 per cent at Level 2) and in application of number, 37 per cent completed a Level 3 portfolio and 55 per cent a portfolio at level 2. The portfolio completion rate in ICT was disappointingly low at only 26 per cent. The inspection confirms that many students had been disillusioned by the lack of status given to key skills in the university application process. All the students spoken to during the inspection felt that they had benefited enormously from the key skills work. Many felt, however, that the extra work involved in completing their portfolio was not justified by the credence given to key skills by higher education. A further factor which affects portfolio completion rates is that students are only offered one choice and for some, this is not particularly stimulating. The school is appropriately considering offering next year's Year 12 students a wider range of choices within which to develop and apply their ICT skills.

302. The good quality teaching enables students to make good progress in developing their basic literacy, numeracy and ICT skills and they achieve well. Teachers have good subject knowledge and teach basic skills well, but they are also very familiar with the key skills specifications and support students very effectively for both the national tests and in preparing their portfolios. They use a wide range of teaching techniques and methods to develop students' confidence in applying their skills. In all the key skill areas, lessons often start with a whole class teaching session focused on specific skills development and then move into a group session where the teacher gives support to individual students. In these sessions a noticeable feature was how well the individual students supported each other by sharing their skills and expertise. In ICT good use was made of the wide screen projector to demonstrate particular command sequences during whole class and support sessions within the lesson.

303. Lessons are well planned with appropriate emphasis on the skills to be developed and the sections in Part A of the specification which will be covered. This planning sets a clear climate for learning and students respond well and generally make good progress in developing their skills. Teachers have received good training to develop their assessment skills and they use these skills effectively to provide good quality oral and written feedback about how students can improve their work. Assessments are clear and assessor judgements are clearly tracked in the students' portfolios. However, assessors are still developing their understanding of the assessment requirements and particularly in showing evidence of students' skills in discussions and presentations. Assessments in these areas sometimes repeat the specifications rather than clearly identify how individual students satisfied the specification.

304. The management of key skills is good. Overall, the key skills provision prepares students well for future study and makes an important contribution to developing their study skills. All the students spoken to during the inspection recognised the benefits of the key skills provision even though some could not see the immediate benefit that the qualification would bring them.