

INSPECTION REPORT

DAME ALICE OWEN'S SCHOOL

Potters Bar, Herts

LEA area: Hertfordshire

Unique reference number:117579

Headteacher: Mrs Aldon Williamson

Reporting inspector: Clare Gillies

Dates of inspection: 4 – 8 March 2002

Inspection number: 194318

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Partially selective comprehensive

School category: Voluntary aided

Age range of pupils: 11 to 18 years

Gender of pupils: Mixed

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Appropriate authority: The governing body

Name of chair of governors: Mr Michael Delahooke

Date of previous inspection: December 1996

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** Members of the inspection team looking at the provision in Years 7 to 11 and the school as a whole.

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Dame Alice Owen's is a partially selective voluntary aided mixed school. The school is financially supported by the Dame Alice Owen Foundation. The trustees of this are the Worshipful Company of Brewers of the City of London. With just over 1000 pupils in Years seven to eleven and 342 students in the Sixth Form, the total of 1351 is larger than most secondary school. Boys slightly outnumber girls. Two hundred pupils enter the school each year. Ninety places, and since 1999 65 places, are offered for academic ability and ten for musical aptitude. All siblings are offered places and a further 20 are reserved for pupils who live in Islington, where the Dame Alice Owen's selective schools were founded in 1613 and 1886. The schools moved to Hertfordshire in 1973 and became one comprehensive. The school is heavily over subscribed, with seven applicants for each place. Pupils come from over 100 primary schools and attainment on entry is well above average. Over 90 per cent are white. The percentage eligible for free school meals is well below average, as is the percentage on the register of special educational needs. Fewer than 20 pupils have statements of special educational needs – below average. A few pupils speak English as an additional language (EAL), all fluently. The school has been a specialist Language College since 1996. A major project, to build the Dame Alice Owen Centre for the Performing Arts, is well underway.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This very good school has a considerable number of impressive features, in addition to well above average standards and results in all years. It offers strong provision for music and sports, and courses in five languages at various levels. Teaching has improved since the last inspection and it is now good in Years 7 to 11 and very good in the Sixth Form. Leadership and management are very good. With foundation and parental contributions, the school has an above average income, which it uses well to provide good value for money.

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

- Standards are very high both in the National Curriculum tests in Year 9 and in terms of GCSE points scores. A well above average standard of work was seen during the inspection.
- Pupils and students have very good attitudes to school life, work extremely hard and achieve very well. Their behaviour and relationships are excellent.
- Teaching is good in Years 7 to 11. It was good in 85 per cent of lessons seen during the inspection. Teaching is very good in the Sixth Form.
- The number and range of musical groups are impressive. Pupils perform very well. They also attain high standards in games and sports and can join in a very good range of extra-curricular activities. Pupils can study at least two modern foreign languages.
- Leadership, management and pastoral care are all very good.
- The Sixth Form, which is a valuable and integral part of the school, is a great strength.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

- The depth of provision for pupils' spiritual and cultural growth. Pupils have only 12 hours of religious education in total during Years 10 and 11, which is not enough to conform to the Agreed Syllabus guidelines. A limited number of assemblies have a meaningful spiritual element. The governors and senior management team have not focused on how the school can raise students' awareness of the multicultural and multifaith diversity within the UK and the wider world.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION (December 1996)

Improvement since the last inspection has been good. Achievement is measured meticulously against standards when pupils enter the school and when they start their GCSE courses. Data are analysed by gender and ethnic background, to be sure that each individual pupil is making as much progress as possible. Monitoring by the senior management team has been tightened up. Members observe lessons and meet with heads of departments regularly, although not all heads of department formally monitor the work of their colleagues. Standards in information and communication technology (ICT) have improved and pupils' levels of attainment are assessed well. Standards in products and systems have also been raised because the design and technology schemes of work have been rewritten and the department is managed efficiently.

STANDARDS

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

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

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

A* shows that the school's results are in the top five percent nationally.

** With partial selection, no similar school data exist for Dame Alice Owen's School. The intake is not typical of a comprehensive school, but neither is it comparable with a grammar school.

End of Year 9 2001: In the National Curriculum tests almost 100 per cent of pupils attained the nationally expected Level 5. The upward trend since the last inspection is above that seen nationally.

GCSEs 2001: The average total points score is very high. Almost 90 per cent of pupils attained five or more GCSE grades A*-C and just under 100 per cent attained five GCSE grades A*-G. The upward trend is above that seen nationally. Over 90 per cent of pupils attained grades A*-C in English and mathematics and over 70 per cent in double science. Over 50 pupils took the separate sciences; the A*-C rate was close to 100 per cent. Only in a few subjects did less than 90 per cent of pupils attain A*-C grades: business studies,

double science, design and technology, geography, information and communications technology (ICT) and Spanish. Geography results are normally higher.

Years 7 to 11: standards seen during the inspection were high overall and very high in several subjects, including mathematics and science.

Sixth Form 2001: The average A Level points score was well above average and up by almost two points since 1998. In nine A Level subjects, two out of three students attained A/B grades. In all AS subjects, the pass rate was over 90 per cent. In seven subjects, two out of three students attained A/B grades. Eight students passed the Advanced GNVQ business course, six with merit. Standards of work seen were very high in mathematics and biology, above average in design and economics, and high in all others. Students make rapid progress in the majority of subjects, achieve well in design, music and economics and make sound progress in English.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Excellent. Pupils are proud to attend the school and appreciate the very good education and teaching they receive. They are articulate and friendly, and enjoy celebrating each other's successes. The majority involve themselves fully and show interest in lessons.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Excellent. Pupils work hard and contribute much to the success of many lessons. They are attentive, co-operative, and many join in extra-curricular activities enthusiastically.
Personal development and relationships	Excellent. Whatever their gender, religious or cultural background, all pupils get on very well together and with their teachers. They respect each other.
Attendance	Well above the national average.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Years 7 - 9	Years 10 - 11	Years 12 - 13
Lessons seen overall	Good	Good	Very 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.

Years 7 to 11: the high percentage of good teaching in Years 7 to 11 contributes to the fact that pupils learn very well. Teaching was very good in 35 per cent of lessons, including four when it was excellent. It is particularly effective in Year 7, where almost half was very good. It is good in English, mathematics, science and ICT. Teachers have excellent knowledge and understanding. Literacy and numeracy skills are taught extremely well through English and mathematics. Because middle and lower attaining groups are smaller, pupils' individual needs are addressed very well. Pupils selected by academic ability achieve highly – as well as their grammar school peers. Other higher attainers, and the few middle and lower attainers, also do very well.

Sixth Form: teaching is very good overall. During the inspection it was very good in over half the lessons seen. The percentage of very good teaching was slightly higher in Year 12. Student's learning was equally impressive and they achieved highly and made rapid progress in the majority of lessons observed.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good, with notable strengths in the number of languages offered, trips and visits, foreign exchanges and extra-curricular activities, particularly in music and sport. The time for religious education in Years 10 and 11 and the Sixth Form is not enough to conform to the Agreed Syllabus guidelines.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Very good. The small number of these pupils receives well-considered support in withdrawal lessons and in class. They make very good progress and gain confidence as their personal needs are addressed sensitively.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good overall and particularly strong for moral and social development. With a limited amount of time for religious education in Years 10 to 13 and a limited number of assemblies that have a meaningful spiritual element, provision for pupils' and students' spiritual growth lacks depth. There is no clear focus on raising their awareness of the multicultural and multifaith diversity within the UK and the wider world.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very good. From senior management, heads of year and form tutors, pupils receive much helpful support and advice and thoughtful consideration for their welfare and development.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good. The headteacher continues to lead the school with authority and a clear vision of how to secure future development and growth. She is well supported by an efficient senior management team. Some departments have recently appointed heads of department; all are run efficiently. The administrative and support staff certainly contribute helpfully to the smooth and efficient functioning of this large and complex school.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Good. Many governors live considerable distances from the school, but they support it well and are fully aware of its strengths and areas for development. They do not accept information at face value but probe performance data and decisions. The chair and chair of finance devote many hours to their duties. Few governors have links with subjects to focus their support.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Very good. Information about performance and standards is analysed thoroughly to be sure that every pupil is making as much progress as possible. Members of the senior management team observe lessons and meet with heads of departments regularly, although not all heads of department formally monitor the work of their colleagues. The school development plan includes a valuable review of the present situation as well as the wide range of factors to be considered in plans for the future.
The strategic use of resources	Very good. Financial planning and administration are excellent. The school uses its income, and donations from the foundation and other sources carefully. The principles of best value are applied properly in all contracts and orders. The school provides good value

for money.

Staff are well qualified and experienced. The accommodation has improved considerably with major developments towards the Dame Alice Performing Arts Centre well underway. Major structural problems remain in the art and design block. The governors are doing everything possible to secure funds to replace this worn out building. Statutory requirements for a daily act of collective worship and religious education are not met.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Their child likes school and is making good progress.• The school is helping their child to become mature and responsible.• Teaching is good.• The school is well led and managed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Almost a quarter who returned the questionnaire do not feel they are kept well informed about how their child is getting on.• More than a quarter who returned the questionnaire do not feel the school works closely with them.• Several feel there is too much homework and roughly the same number feel there is too little.

The inspection confirmed the parents' positive views about the school. One short and one full report are sent out each year. The latter is not sent out until the end of the academic year and it is probably the timing of these reports that concerns parents. The school is keen to work closely with parents and there is no evidence that this is not the case. The amount of homework set is no greater than that set in other schools with a closely similar academic intake and generally pupils cope well with it. The inspection did not reveal that there is too little homework in any particular year or subject, although it inevitably varies between subjects.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

With partial selection, no similar school data exist for Dame Alice Owen's School. The well above average intake is not typical of a comprehensive school, but neither is it comparable with a grammar school.

Standards are very high both in the National Curriculum tests in Year 9 and in terms of GCSE points scores. A high standard of work was seen during the inspection.

1. In the end of Year 9 National Curriculum tests, almost 100 per cent of pupils attain the nationally expected Level 5. What is impressive is that in 2001 at least 76 per cent of pupils attained Level 6 in English, 92 per cent in mathematics and 88 per cent in science. These percentages are in the top five per cent nationally and, although they compare less well with grammar school figures, the percentages of pupils attaining the higher Level 7 compare favourably. This shows that pupils who are selected by academic ability achieve highly. Considering that at least one in five pupils enters the school with average standards, progress in all years is very good. The upward trend in Year 9 results since the last inspection is above that seen nationally. Standards seen during the inspection were high overall and very high in several subjects, including mathematics and science.
2. The average total GCSE points score is very high and in the top five per cent nationally. The upward trend in this statistic is also above that seen nationally. In 2001, over 90 per cent of pupils attained grades A*-C in English and the same percentage in mathematics. In GCSE double science the figure drops to 73 per cent because over 50 pupils took the separate sciences, where the A*-C rate was close to 100 per cent. Almost 90 per cent of pupils attain five or more GCSE grades A*-C and just under 100 per cent attained five GCSE grades A*-G. These figures are well above average. The 1996 academically selected pupils made as good progress by the end of Year 9 and in GCSE as their grammar school peers. Other higher attainers, and the few middle and lower attainers, also did very well. Only in a few subjects did less than 90 per cent of pupils attain A*-C grades: business studies, double science, design and technology, geography, information and communications technology (ICT) and Spanish. Geography results are normally higher.
3. Boys' slightly lower than girls' performance in double award science is an area that the school has identified for attention. Otherwise, there are no significant differences in standards and the small gap between the total average points scores of girls and boys reflects the national picture. The school monitors standards, performance and progress, by gender, attainment on entry, special educational needs and ethnicity. In this way, so it checks carefully that all pupils make at least the expected amount of progress, which practically all do.
4. Pupils have well above average reading skills with clear intonation. Their written work is excellent in both quality and quantity, with accurate spelling and punctuation. The vocabulary they use is wide, for example 'derogatory' and 'opinionated' in Year 9. Several Year 9 pupils read complex texts on their own and understand how to analyse characters. By Year 11 pupils make informed and sensible comments on literature texts and explain their views in well-extended sentences. Lower attainers have difficulties with spelling but

some work extremely hard to produce essays of excellent length. The highest attainers in Year 11 write superbly in different styles and are fully aware of how colloquial language can be used. Some Year 11 higher attainers have written A Level standard responses to Macbeth as a tragic figure, which also show their wide knowledge of Shakespeare. In many subjects pupils use the correct terms at an early age, for example biodiversity, biome and albedo in Year 9 geography.

5. In the higher attaining Year 7 groups, pupils have excellent numeracy skills. They can explain why they get particular answers confidently. They use geometrical instruments correctly. Year 8 pupils have a very high level of understanding about volumes of prisms, cuboids and cylinders, multiplication bonds and units of capacity. Efficient use of calculators was seen in all years. Year 10 pupils have very good mastery of algebra and inequalities. In Year 11, pupils understand the differences between linear and quadratic formulae clearly.

6. By Year 9 pupils have fine practical skills, handling chemicals and measuring liquids and temperature accurately in science. Year 9 lower attainers have a good understanding of energy, and terms such as evaporation and conduction. By GCSE, pupils understand atomic structure and confidently predict formulae from atomic diagrams. Higher attainers apply their theoretical knowledge very well to practical problems.

7. In the Year 7 ICT lessons pupils, master all the basic software programmes they need for study. Standards are above average in all years. Year 7 pupils use the Internet effectively to research jungles for artwork. It is interesting that a few of them prefer getting information from books rather than the Internet! A few insert video clips into their PowerPoint presentations and all discussed the skills they learned in previous lessons, for example clip art, sequencing and animation. They understand how to construct databases and higher attainers interrogate them well. Year 11 business pupils' PowerPoint presentations are impressive; they include a good variety of images and persuasive language. GCSE design and technology pupils use ICT and digital photographs very well to present impressive coursework and to process data.

8. Standards in modern foreign languages are impressive. By Year 9, many pupils have very good accents and fluency in French and German. Year 7 pupils already ask questions well in German. Pupils in Year 11 use dictionaries independently and effectively in French, and have an excellent grasp of the past tense; they accurately described what they did on holiday. Year 9 Spanish pupils, some very fluently and with excellent pronunciation, described a range of Spanish foods. Year 9 German pupils confidently transposed sentences from the first to the third person; higher attainers changed the possessive pronouns too, at well above average standards. Year 11 German pupils discussed houses and homes in great detail. Excellent reading skills and competence with business vocabulary, such as computer and fax, were observed in Italian classes.

9. The following is a selection of examples showing the standards seen during the inspection:

- Above average drawing skills in Year 9 resistant materials.
- Impressive observational drawings of plants in Year 7 art.
- Very high standards in boys' hockey.
- Convincing understanding of health and safety requirements in GCSE textiles and food.
- Detailed knowledge about the two faiths studied in GCSE religious education.
- Fine listening skills by GCSE musicians. Most are excellent instrumentalists who read music effortlessly. This is true for many other pupils of all ages, but non-

instrumentalists and lower attainers do very well. In Year 8, for example, pupils composed jazz tunes over a twelve bar blues, which had real, character and interest.

- Imaginative use of flashbacks and monologues in Year 11 drama.
- Exceptionally high levels of understanding and empathy by some pupils in history, for example discussing the origins of the First World War.

Pupils have very good attitudes to school life, work extremely hard and achieve very well. Their behaviour and relationships are excellent.

10. Pupils' behaviour overall is excellent. During the inspection, it was very good in over two-thirds of the lessons seen. In several it was exemplary. Pupils therefore contribute much to their academic success and progress. In numerous lessons pupils worked sensibly in pairs or small groups. They get on extremely well together. Boys and girls tend to sit apart in most lessons and form times, but they appreciate sitting with friends and treat each other respectfully. Pupils with special educational needs are mutually supportive and kind to each other, and all other pupils are too. It is praise indeed that the bus drivers describe the pupils as well behaved, polite and co-operative.

11. Pupils' attitudes to work are similarly excellent and in most lessons they concentrate, work hard and join in enthusiastically. Years 7, 10 and 11 made very good progress in 40 per cent of the lessons seen. Pupils' achievements reflect their diligence, as was clearly seen during the inspection:

- Year 8 pupils discussed freedom and justice in religious education with maturity and insight;
- Pupils in Year 11 asked intelligent and interesting questions about genetic control of fingerprint patterns in science, and searching questions when they were unclear about mathematical explanations. They mastered new material quickly, in logical jumps. Many Year 8 pupils complete and hand in mathematics coursework before the deadline;
- Many notebooks are well kept, especially by Year 9 girls in science. Mathematics books contain accurate work and neat diagrams, as do several geography books.
- Pupils helped each other really well in art. In several Year 7 ICT lessons, computer literate pupils solved others' problems and happily told the teachers if they had extra knowledge about a procedure.
- Year 7 pupils offered sound and confident evaluation of their design work and were very clear about the processes needed to make masks.
- Pupils often enjoy and respond well to teachers' use of humour, but they manage to be relaxed and polite at the same time.
- Year 9 pupils were enthusiastic and energetic in physical education lessons, even when their basketball shooting was not good! Pupils respond quickly to physical education guidance and practise their skills well.
- Pupils following the short GCSE courses in design and technology and ICT have to work hard to complete the coursework in the limited time. They do this consistently, often spending many hours at home on it. 'Yes, we have found it a rush, but feel the course is worthwhile'.
- In many lessons where the previous homework had been to prepare work or read texts, pupils had obviously done it conscientiously, so lessons got off to a fine start.
- Pupils studying religious education for GCSE appreciate the links between different elements of the course and discuss issues keenly. They describe the subject content as 'fantastic'.

- Year 7 pupils work sensibly in the confined space of the drama studio. They throw ideas at each other and come up with agreement.
- In many lessons it was clear that pupils had researched topics on the Internet, mainly at home, for example on nuclear power and energy for Year 11 science. A few Year 8 pupils confessed that they had spent hours researching their textiles project, but they acknowledged they had enjoyed this.
- Imaginative and creative work was seen in dance. Year 9 lower attainers' very good acrobatic sequences included imaginative sequences, ripple movements and cartwheels.
- In music many apply the knowledge they acquire in instrumental lessons to class work. Some improvise confidently.
- A few Year 7 pupils introduced a touch of drama into their science presentations, which made a revision lesson memorable.

12. Pupils' enthusiasm and commitment for musical, sporting and other extra-curricular activities are described in paragraphs 20, 21 and 49. Pupils enjoy speaking in the junior debating society and here their social skills develop well. During the inspection the motion was 'Shock tactics do not prevent drug taking'. Letters from work experience placements refer to pupils' application, enthusiasm and efficiency. For example, they remark, 'what a joy they were to work with, and that they are 'great ambassadors for the school'. A group of Year 10 pupils raised money for the North London Hospice by organising a Popstars competition, and many pupils bring produce for distribution locally at Harvest Thanksgiving. In the Autumn term 2001, one Year 8 class wrote a joke book which raised funds for Christian Aid and two Year 9 girls went on a 24-hour sponsored silence to raise money for the Kiddies' Support Scheme.

Teaching is good. It was good in 85 per cent of lessons seen during the inspection.

13. The high percentage of good teaching in Years 7 to 11 contributes to the fact that pupils learn very well. Teaching was very good in 35 per cent of lessons, including four when it was excellent. It is particularly effective in Year 7, where almost half was very good. It is good in English, mathematics and science.

14. One feature of many successful lessons seen was that teachers linked work to pupils' experiences, often humorously, for example discussing the volume of prisms in terms of tents and Toblerone in Year 8 mathematics. Pupils studying Italian enjoyed learning the past tense by describing the life of Pavarotti. Year 8 scientists appreciated the teacher's comment about 'being in the limelight', related to the glow given off from heating limestone. Geography teachers referred to Virgin radio to reinforce understanding of the different temperatures within and outside London in Year 11. Year 7 pupils appreciated the opportunity to choose topics that interest them for their ICT PowerPoint presentations, for example spiders and football, or to make toys for young children in design and technology. In English, Year 9 pupils compared a Jamie Oliver recipe with the witches' concoction in Macbeth.

15. Teachers and pupils get on very well with each other, and the relaxed yet purposeful atmosphere in several lessons certainly contributed to enjoyable learning. The atmosphere in a music lesson for lower attaining Year 7 pupils was wonderful after the teacher started with, 'Good morning, I hope you're all well, it's good to see you all'. Fifty minutes later, after listening and evaluating their previous compositions, the pupils sang a complex two-part song from memory. Year 9 science pupils understood the function of the diaphragm because they stood up and held their ribcages. Physical education teachers conveyed enthusiasm and enjoyment when they gave demonstrations, and pupils' skills improved. A mathematics

teacher conveyed genuine interest in a question about multiplication by zero in Year 10, and a valuable discussion followed.

16. Most of the homework set is worthwhile and reasonably interesting. Several teachers, especially in English, skilfully set homework which leads into the next lesson. Particularly good marking was noted in Year 11 mathematics and Year 9 science. In history comments are helpfully diagnostic, and in English they give good pointers for development.

17. Many teachers check what pupils remember; state the aims of lessons clearly and quickly, and also round off lessons with fine summaries and reviews. They give timed activities and warn pupils when there is a short time left. They adjust work to match pupils' needs, for example by covering the same content about tabloid newspaper language but emphasising spelling and vocabulary more for lower attainers in English. All materials are well organised and to hand for art and resistant materials, so the pace never flags. Geography teachers use video extracts sensibly, pausing regularly to give pupils time to write down notes, and history teachers invariably pack in several different activities. Pupils have to listen to French, German or Spanish spoken fast; and teachers use cassettes and the language laboratory very well for this. Year 9 pupils had instant feedback on their acrobatic sequences as the teacher used a video camera. Drama lessons set off with a fast warm up. A Year 10 spirituality lesson on victims had an unusually dramatic, planned start; a boy was sent out of the room as the teacher emphasised authority.

18. The quality of displays and of the resources used in lessons is generally very good. English technical terms are clearly displayed on a literacy board, and the rooms have generally stimulating displays. The geography rooms have lively walls showing examples of pupils' work, for example on Italy and 'The Ideal City'. The latter features work by students in Year 13 and provides a good stimulus to younger pupils. Attractive displays about chocolate bar brand images and different newspaper styles liven up the business rooms. To introduce hearing and sound to Year 9 pupils in science, the teacher used a model of the ear (which sadly lacked the essential inner ear) and a signal generator so that they could understand frequencies. Questions cards make mental mathematics fast and fun - 'I have 63 who has 7 less?' - and singing the song, 'Summer in the City', certainly introduced the idea of urban heat islands effectively in geography. The teacher selected the ideal short video extracts in a spirituality lesson about Amnesty International related to crime and punishment in Year 11.

19. Three other important aspects of good teaching were observed during the inspection. Health and safety issues were dealt with seriously in science and design and technology so that pupils worked efficiently and sensibly. The well-ordered environment and helpful worksheets, with stages of production clearly set out, mean that pupils make products safely. Several teachers share work with classroom assistants before lessons, so they can be alert to what specific help pupils with special educational needs require. This is good practice. Finally, it undoubtedly raises the profile of ICT when it is taught most competently by non-specialist teachers. This was seen in Years 7, 10 and 11 during the inspection, and evidence suggests the GCSE short course ICT results will be better this year.

The number and range of musical groups are impressive. Pupils perform very well. They also attain high standards in games and sports and can join in a very good range of extra-curricular activities. Pupils can study at least two modern foreign languages.

20. In addition to the long list of high-performing musical groups described in paragraph 49, which many pupils play in regularly, they also perform in the junior chamber choir, brass group, wind quintet and band. Many of them also play in small ensemble groups. The Junior Chamber choir won the North London Music Festival in 2001. A significant number of pupils attain very high standards in the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music examinations.

21. Every week pupils join in a wide range of physical education activities in the lunch hour or after school. These include badminton, football, basketball, trampolining, netball, rugby, gym club, boys' soccer, and girls' basketball, hockey and football. As there are several pitches, many boys practise football in the lunch hour. Over 100 pupils perform in the annual, popular gym and dance display. The Year 7 football team, athletics groups, cricket teams, Year 9 basketball teams, girls' hockey and netball teams, the U14 badminton and tennis teams, have all had considerable successes in county and national competitions. As these successes are too numerous to list, it is perhaps apt to quote the first two lines of the school song:

'On many a well-remembered field
Have Owen's fought and won'.

22. If pupils do not wish to participate in music or sport, they can choose from the following everyday: computing (usually doing coursework or playing games) or working in the art studio and design and technology areas. Many pupils work enthusiastically in these areas. The junior debating and mathematics clubs meet regularly. The science club for Year 7 pupils only started up this year. In inspection week, pupils compared Smarties and M and Ms using chromatography. Year 7 pupils confidently stated that the best things about the school were: the sport and music facilities, art, food technology and physical education.

23. Pupils have been successful in many ways beyond the classroom, with creative writing successes, recommendations in a screenwriting competition, good performances in debating competitions, and reaching the semi-finals of the Magistrates Court Mock Bar trials. In the Maths Challenge, over 180 Years 7 and 8 pupils and well over 100 Year 9 to 11 pupils won awards, over one-third of which were gold. Ten continue to the Junior Maths Olympiad. Two Year 9 groups came second nationally in the Millennium challenge.

24. Pupils study French or German in Year 7 and add one of these, or Spanish, in Year 8. In Years 8 to 11 practically all pupils learn two modern foreign languages, although some take one as a short course GCSE, rather than two full GCSEs. Forty pupils in Year 8, and 25 in Year 9, have opted to study all three languages. In Years 10 and 11, the Certificate of Business Language Competence in Italian or Spanish is offered. This rich provision for modern foreign languages is supported by the school's Language College status, awarded in 1996. There are two computerised language laboratories, and language assistants for all three main languages.

Leadership, management and pastoral care are all very good.

25. The headteacher continues to lead the school with authority and a clear vision of how to secure future development and growth. She is well supported by an efficient senior management team and a governing body that works hard to maintain the school's many strengths. Some departments have recently appointed heads of department; all are run efficiently. The administrative and support staff certainly contribute helpfully to the smooth and efficient functioning of this large and complex school.

26. Data about performance and standards are analysed thoroughly to be sure that every pupil is making as much progress as possible. Members of the senior management team observe lessons and meet with heads of departments regularly, although not all heads of department formally monitor the work of their colleagues. The school development plan includes a valuable review of the present situation as well as the wide range of factors to be considered in plans for the future.

27. From senior management, heads of year and form tutors, pupils receive much helpful support and advice and thoughtful consideration for their welfare and development. The school is fully aware that, with five higher attaining groups and only one middle and one lower one, some pupils might feel insecure, but this is not the case. For the first time this year, the form groups are not the same as the teaching groups. The small numbers in the middle and lower teaching groups help these pupils to make as much progress as others, to gain in confidence and feel valued.

28. The special educational needs co-ordinator organises just the right support and care for individuals, and balances nurture with encouragement of independence carefully. Special educational needs teachers make lessons fun and the classroom assistants know exactly how to help those pupils with particular problems, such as lacking confidence in reading, poor co-ordination or low self esteem. In a Year 11 ICT class, the classroom assistant was helping a pupil to improve his basic keyboard skills, which was exactly what he needed. The few pupils with physical disabilities make fine progress and teachers are sensitively aware of their particular needs.

29. The very few pupils in Year 7 who find school life difficult receive helpful and thoughtful guidance from the Sixth Formers who run the Talk 33 counselling service. Pupils feel secure in these sessions as the Sixth Formers treat them respectfully. In all years, pupils stated with great confidence that bullying does not go on, or rather that if anything happens it is dealt with immediately and taken seriously. What pupils do not appreciate is being 'stuck outside' during breaks and lunchtime. Girls complained that they cannot wear trousers and, that their lavatories are not in a good state. In a few lavatories there are broken locks and old, mouldy soap holders.

30. Many pupils spoke appreciatively about their form tutors, and particularly the heads of years: - 'really nice', 'would definitely go to them with a problem'. The picture of the role of the year councils was interesting. Year 7 think they were worthwhile; Year 8 that they do not achieve anything; Year 9 are not sure if they exist, and Year 10 confidently state they do not exist. Year 11 feel that they are to blame for the breakdown of their year council after Year 7.

31. The management and organisation of the careers programme are very good, although pupils' perceptions of it vary from positive to 'it doesn't happen'. Work experience is also organised efficiently. Not only do employers, the teachers who visit the pupils and the pupils themselves give feedback, but parents also complete a short questionnaire. This is sensible as it involves all parties in evaluation.

The Sixth Form, which is a valuable and integral part of the school, is a great strength.

A full commentary on this strength is provided in parts D and E of this report.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

The depth of provision for pupils' spiritual and cultural growth. Pupils have only eleven hours of religious education in total during Years 10 and 11, which is not enough to conform to the Agreed Syllabus guidelines. A limited number of assemblies have a meaningful spiritual element. The governors and senior management team have not focused on how the school can raise students' awareness of the multicultural and multifaith diversity within the UK and the wider world.

32. The amount of time for religious education in Years 10 and 11 was criticised in the last inspection report. It is still less than half the thirty hours recommended in the Agreed Syllabus. Another important point is that, because Year 10 pupils come out of their GCSE ICT short course lessons to attend spirituality ones, they feel frustrated that they cannot get on with their coursework. This is not the ideal frame of mind for young people to approach spirituality lessons. The same happens in Year 11 as they have followed the ICT short course over two years. The teaching and content of the religious education lessons in Years 7 to 9 and of spirituality lessons in Years 10 and 11 are always good, and pupils enjoy them and get much out of them.

33. During the inspection, nine assemblies were observed. Three were not planned to have any spiritual content. Two had Bible readings and prayers delivered, as in the whole-school assembly, with no introduction, comment or reflection. Whilst admirably celebrating achievement and fostering a sense of community, the thanks, presentations and notices in the whole-school assembly, did not inspire all pupils at the start of the day, least of all those who were watching a television screen outside the hall. An assembly about great achievers of the last century missed an opportunity to consider cultural and ethnic diversity.

34. The upper assembly, taken by a Rabbi, was stimulating and interesting and contained spiritual elements. There was spontaneous applause at the end. The lower school assembly included a Bible reading which was linked to an incident in a Harry Potter film towards the end. Pupils did not respond much to the humour introduced, perhaps because of the formality of the gowned, mainly male, staff on the platform. Year 7 are fairly happy with assemblies, but the older the pupil or student, the less they, and some of their parents, are impressed by them. One Year 11 tutor mentioned that 'they all think they are a waste of time', and in several discussions about life beyond Potters Bar, older pupils and students felt the school could do more to widen their cultural horizons. Pupils in Year 11 mentioned, 'We're not strong on other faiths, though we have done some when younger'. Year 10 referred to, 'Lots of Christianity but few others in depth – oh no - we did Divali'.

35. The school certainly 'fosters a real understanding of moral and social issues', but this quotation from the prospectus is not supported by reference to cultural and spiritual issues, which young adults must understand to be 'mature, well-rounded adults'. There is no doubt that pupils get on extremely well together and do not give a second thought to their different ethnic or cultural backgrounds. Pupils of different faiths attend both the Christian Union and the Jewish Society. However, during the inspection, opportunities for brief development of cultural issues and perspectives were missed in several lessons, simply because the governors and senior management team have not included 'racial equality as an integral part of all formal and informal training' (Learning for All, the Commission for Racial Equality 2000). In a geography lesson, pupils raised interesting points about the non-quantifiable aspects of the quality of life in different parts of the world, but these were not picked up and exploited. In a Sixth Form English literature lesson examining unseen poems, all those studied were written by white poets.

36. The National Curriculum refers to 'using materials which reflect cultural diversity and provide positive images of race, sex and disability'. The school has very few such materials, for example posters and information about the achievements of black scientists, which are easily available. An audit of each subject's contribution to pupils' awareness of multi-faith and multi-cultural issues has not been carried out. Much is already happening, but the focus and importance of these have not been emphasised enough.

37. The excellent citizenship programme, which is to be delivered through humanities subjects, and others too, has the potential to recognise and value the importance of diverse cultures and ethnic backgrounds. Similarly, the revised personal, social and health education course (PSHE), which has only been rewritten and delivered for Year 7 so far, also contains relevant sections and units of study. With careful monitoring and greater awareness of the importance of these cultural and racial references, this programme could be most valuable. Two most worthwhile Year 7 sessions were seen. At present older pupils spend form time mainly discussing school matters and careers.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

38. In order to improve the overall high standards and quality of education provided, the governors and senior management team should:

- Develop provision for pupils' and students' spiritual growth, and for strengthening their awareness of the multicultural and multifaith diversity within the UK and the wider world by:
(Paragraphs: 32 to 37 and 69)
 - * increasing the amount of time for religious education in Years 10 to 13, to conform to the guidelines of the Agreed Syllabus;
 - * discussing with pupils and students the purpose and value of assemblies so as to incorporate their views and perceptions into future ones;
 - * considering how these elements can be further blended into assemblies, and linking this to...
 - * asking every department to examine its curriculum to assess and raise its contribution;
 - * monitoring the effectiveness of the evolving personal, social and health education (PSHE) and citizenship programmes.

Sixth Form only

- Review the career library's opening hours so that students find it easier to use. Evaluate how the role of the manager of this area can contribute more to students' long-term education and career plans;
(Paragraphs: 80 and 81).
- Tighten up procedures for monitoring attendance so that the school can be sure how many students are on site. Impress on students that this is an essential health and safety requirement.
(Paragraphs: 57 and 77).

In addition to the above, the governors and senior management team could also consider the following minor issues for inclusion in the action plan:

The whole school:

- Technical support for science;
(Paragraphs: 85, 89 and 110)
- Accommodation for science, design and technology (also resources) and art;
(Paragraphs: 89, 90, 116, 126, 131 and 133)
- Moving forward as fast as possible with plans to improve the girls' lavatories, and immediately replacing the broken locks and removing the old, mouldy soap holders;
(Paragraph: 29)
- Addressing all the health and safety issues, particularly in design and technology, brought to the school's attention during the inspection;
(Paragraphs; 77 and 133)

The main school

- Evaluating whether girls should be allowed to wear trousers and whether it is sensible to insist pupils go outside during break and lunch time;
(*Paragraph: 29*).

Sixth Form

- Linking minimum target grades based on data analysis with teachers' views on students' aptitude and potential in their AS subjects.
(*Paragraphs: 74, 156 and 186*)
- In the light of some of the students' comments, before and during the inspection, consideration of whether they could be treated more as young adults.
(*Paragraph: 52*)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons and part lessons observed	Years 7 to 11	81
	Sixth Form	79
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		78

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 7 - 11							
Number	4	24	41	12	0	0	0
Percentage	5	30	50	15	0	0	0
Sixth Form							
Number	2	39	30	8	0	0	0
Percentage	3	49	40	8	0	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 to Y11	Sixth Form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1009	342
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	13	1

Special educational needs	Y7 to Y11	Sixth Form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	19	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	21	0

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	24

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	5
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	9

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	4.6
National comparative data	8.1

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.0
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year:	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	105	97	202

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	96	103	103
	Girls	96	94	97
	Total	192	197	200
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	School	95 (94)	98 (96)	99 (94)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 6 or above	School	76 (70)	92 (90)	88 (84)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	102	98	97
	Girls	96	89	94
	Total	198	187	191
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	School	99 (93)	93 (94)	95 (93)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 6 or above	School	84 (78)	75 (88)	84 (82)
	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	114	84	198

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* - C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	101	114	114
	Girls	77	84	84
	Total	178	198	198
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	89 (91)	100 (99)	100 (99)
	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	59
	National	39

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

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations:	Year	Male	Female	Total
	2001	95	92	187

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Male	Female	All
School	Number of candidates	95	92	187
	Average point score per candidate	21.2	23.7	22.4
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	18	17.5

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS examinations			For candidates entered for Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	Number of candidates	92	92	184	10	1	11
	Average point score per candidate	20.8	23.6	22.2	9.6	6	9.3
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	1
Black – African heritage	10
Black – other	7
Indian	43
Pakistani	1
Bangladeshi	1
Chinese	23
White	1218
Any other minority ethnic group	26

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	13	0
Other minority ethnic groups	3	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 to Y11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	89.2
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	15.1

Education support staff:

Y7 to Y11

Total number of education support staff	19
Total aggregate hours worked per week	457

Deployment of teachers:

Y7 to Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	74.2
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Average teaching group size:

Y7 to Y11

Key Stage3	24.1
Key Stage4	19.1

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000/2001
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	£
Total income	4349185.00
Total expenditure	4231586.00
Expenditure per pupil	3109.17.00
Balance brought forward from previous year	229583.00
Balance carried forward to next year	347182.00

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	29.5
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	35.3
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	1
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out
Number of questionnaires returned

1351
371

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	52	43	4	0	2
My child is making good progress in school.	62	35	2	0	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	33	57	5	1	4
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	32	52	13	2	1
The teaching is good.	38	53	4	1	4
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	31	44	22	2	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	50	36	12	1	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	71	25	2	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	22	48	24	3	3
The school is well led and managed.	57	34	5	0	4
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	48	47	4	0	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	52	35	7	2	4

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

RESULTS AND STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

39. The average points score that students attained at A Level in 2001 was well above average. It has gone up by almost two points since 1998. Between 1998 and 2000, boys performed slightly better than girls overall; the opposite applied in 2001. There is no significant difference in performance between boys and girls, neither is there between groups of different ethnic backgrounds. In nine A Level subjects, two out of three students attained A/B grades: art and design, biology, chemistry, geography, German, history, psychology, religious studies and textiles. In only biology, chemistry, economics, French, history and mathematics, did a very small number of students not attain a pass grade. Females perform slightly better than males in mathematics and biology; the opposite is the case in history and English literature.

40. In the school prospectus, the headteacher states, 'We are extremely proud of our school with its long history of academic excellence'; students' impressive performance in the 2001 AS examinations suggests that the future looks equally bright. In all subjects the pass rate was over 90 per cent, and in seven subjects, two out of three students attained A/B grades. Eight students passed the Advanced GNVQ business course, six with merit. Ten students obtained the full RSA qualification in Italian. Many obtained Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music certificates, on a variety of instruments.

41. In the Autumn term 2001, almost 90 students entered the National Senior Mathematics Challenge; two-thirds obtained certificates, including nine gold. These were outstanding results. One gained the maximum marks and has been put forward for the British Mathematical Olympiad. A small number of students participated in the Physics and Chemistry Senior Challenges. One physics student has been put forward for the Physics Olympiad, and the chemistry department awaits its results with interest. Several students will take the Biology Olympiad in Spring 2002. These competitions provide an excellent intellectual stimulus for such gifted students.

42. Standards of work seen during the inspection were very high in mathematics and biology, above average in design and economics and high in all others. Students make rapid progress in the majority of subjects; achieve well in design, music and economics, and make sound progress in English.

43. Students studying English, especially males and higher attaining females, are articulate and intellectually interested in extending their ideas. Comparing the language of two extracts from, 'Jane Eyre' and 'Thornbirds', a Year 12 group made perceptive suggestions about the sentimental and romanticised language of the latter. Students use technical terms with increasing assurance; 'bathos' was introduced to a Year 12 group and used with assurance in Year 13. They know their set texts well and select appropriate quotations. They read aloud with convincing expression and comment effectively on style. They write well, as do many Sixth Form students in other subjects. Lower attaining students struggle to compare unseen poetry, and do not focus on the detail of language in their analysis.

44. Students' mathematical skills are very strong in almost all cases; they are particularly competent in factorisation. In a good lesson on co-ordinate geometry, studying the equations of circles and curve sketching, students handled the expansion of brackets very well and most securely understood the factorisation of complicated expressions. Students' folders show very good progression: increasingly difficult examples are seen in written work.

45. Biology students have a well above average understanding of basic concepts. They predict well, control variables and test their results accurately, and have good investigation skills. When faced with unexpected results, they suggest alternative methods of solving the problem. However, not all of them have developed adequate skills in lateral thinking. This was shown by the difficulty they had explaining why plants have to take in nutrients to photosynthesise. By Year 13, chemistry students have very well developed laboratory skills, although in one lesson they too readily accepted unpredicted results rather than adjusting the conditions and repeating the experiment. Evidence of the high standards attained is that students understand complex organic reaction mechanisms early in their course. In a physics lesson about induction motors, Year 13 students demonstrated well above expected knowledge of Lenz's Law, which enabled them to ask some very perceptive questions.

46. Students have very good skills in the key areas of communication, number and ICT, which they use sensibly in whatever subjects they choose. It is unusual if they cannot cope with the necessary calculations in chemistry and physics. Year 13 students had no difficulty in dealing with negative Standard Electrode Potentials when investigating redox reactions. Learning about relative velocities in physics, Year 12 students used their GCSE mathematical knowledge very well to decide whether two vehicles approaching each other would collide. The standard of debate seen in lessons and during the inspection was very impressive. The speakers delivered eloquent, balanced and well-prepared speeches, and the questions from the house were intelligent. Responses to them showed that students can think on their feet.

47. In business studies and economics, students communicate effectively in discussions and when giving presentations; they apply mathematical concepts sensibly in their written work and use ICT for research confidently. The external examiner for the AS individual geographical enquiry noted that the excellent coursework included impressive use of ICT. Students use ICT competently to present their work in geography, but they are given limited opportunities to use it for data logging and for collating and analysing data. This is an area for development. Students in English do not use computers enough, either for research or to present their work.

48. The following highlights a few key features of students' attainment and achievement in other subjects and activities:

- Higher attaining students compile complex design briefs in resistant materials and write clear specifications; they use two- and three- dimensional sketches effectively. Textiles' students produce creative ideas and well-made products.
- Several Year 13 economics students have an outstanding grasp of economic theory. A minority of Year 12 students are not yet able to understand the important principles of cause and effect associated with economic decision-making.
- Students quickly grasp difficult geographical concepts, as was seen in a Year 12 lesson on rivers' sediment budgets. They often share their research with the rest of the class but their oral skills are weak compared to their ability to research and display their findings on overhead transparencies.
- In government and politics, students assimilate new learning quickly and very effectively. They talk confidently about the role of the judiciary and use the language of the subject accurately and extensively when they take part in intellectual discussions.
- History students are adept at questioning source material and they make convincing comments on the reliability of a variety of documentation.
- Many students speak French outstandingly well, and in Year 13, they use a variety of tenses and adjectives fluently and accurately, some at almost native speaker level. They readily understand formal and colloquial language, including French slang!

- Year 13 sports studies students have a good understanding of anatomy and physiology.
- Music students play with very good technical control and musical understanding. The best performances, both solo and ensemble, are outstanding.

49. Many of the music groups achieve outstanding standards. The symphony orchestra (one of four orchestras) played extremely well, with enjoyment and precision, in a rehearsal of Tchaikovsky's 'Romeo and Juliet Overture'. One of the four main choirs practised Haydn's Nelson Mass, a study piece for A Level, with very good tone, diction and intonation. The largest of the three concert bands, involving over 60 pupils and students, gave a spirited and lively rendition of 'The girl from Ipanema'. A rehearsal of 'West Side Story' demonstrated the versatility and competence of singers and instrumentalists in managing a difficult score. Students spoke particularly enthusiastically about this event.

50. In terms of sports, it is almost impossible to summarise the numerous team and individual successes. At county level the football and cricket teams are regularly in the finals. In 2001, the school was the overall athletics champion of mid Hertfordshire. Individuals have been selected for county rugby and cricket. The girls' netball teams were district champions and reached the county semi final; the hockey team reached the county final. Two girls were part of the tennis team which came fourth in the country. Students involved in dance groups perform extremely well. The senior sports report rightly concluded, 'The physical education staff provide a huge and varied programme for all'.

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES, VALUES AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

51. Practically all students have very good opinions of the Sixth Form and are proud to be identified with the school. Many of their responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire were very positive. They have excellent attitudes to school life and work. They have clear objectives for their current and future education, and many are able to outline their career paths. Demonstrating very good independent study skills, they reliably complete and submit complex assignments. They have very positive views about many of their chosen courses. They are highly motivated and often show exceptionally high levels of interest. Many enjoy expressing their views, which they do with aplomb in government and politics; the quality of political debate in Year 13 is of a very high standard. Many, but by no means all, English students read extensively around their texts; one girl has read all of Jane Austen's novels. Many modern foreign language students reveal a striking confidence to tackle advanced speaking, and those who pick up another language work extremely hard to learn from scratch business Italian or Japanese, for example.

52. Students' behaviour is excellent, and often exemplary. They have very good relationships with teachers. History students, for example, enjoy the cut and thrust of debate and are not afraid to challenge teachers' views. All students respond enthusiastically to new ideas and concepts, and accept or dispute each other's views with good humour and sharp analysis. Students also have relaxed yet respectful relationships with tutors, and excellent ones with the three senior managers of the Sixth Form. However, in the pre-inspection questionnaire, 58 per cent of students observed that the school does

not value their views. During the inspection many confirmed that the school does not have an adequate structure for listening to them or responding to their views. Teachers certainly have high regard for their intelligence and maturity, but year group councils do not function systematically and the regular meetings of the senior prefects and senior managers are not discussed widely.

53. As prefects, Sixth Formers are pivotal to the life of the school. Sixth Formers greet Year 6 pupils who come to take the entrance examination; one father described them as 'extremely considerate... my daughter felt welcomed and at ease'. The large majority provides very good role models for younger pupils, whom they guide and treat respectfully. Several of them spend time with Year 7 pupils in their PSHE sessions and take their responsibility for these pupils seriously. The Sixth Form counselling service, Talk 33, is well organised and effective. Students provide excellent role models for Year 7 pupils, whom they speak to with respect and without any hint of being patronising. During the inspection they skilfully dealt with three pupils' concerns about a couple of teachers.

54. A few Year 12 students run a mathematics club for younger pupils at lunchtime; a great deal of innovative mathematical thinking takes place and one student has strikingly effective questioning techniques. One Year 13 female student has organised an ensemble of clarinettists, as there are so many of them that they cannot all play in the school groups. Another student runs a small singing group and a small group, interested in drama, produce plays. During the inspection, a Sixth Form student helped out in a Year 7 drama lesson and a few help out in ICT lessons too. Many are involved in community service, for example working with senior citizens.

55. Fund raising is certainly within the agenda. A Level music students organised a concert and performed in the local Anglican church to raise funds for its new community halls appeal. Over the last academic year, the whole school raised over £8000 for local, national and international groups. The Sixth Form fashion show raised £1700 for a Tanzanian school and Imperial Cancer Research. Many students participate enthusiastically and with considerable commitment in the numerous musical, sporting and other extra-curricular activities on offer, which are described in paragraphs 21, 49, 50 and 72.

56. Students' very good understanding of social and moral issues and standards is sharpened in the debating society. During the inspection, the house decided that a police state would be unsuitable for Britain. The philosophy and ethics modules of the spirituality course provide a valuable opportunity for students to reflect on and challenge their own ideas and feelings. Students find these lessons stimulating, but they only have seven of them, which is not enough time to develop this important aspect of students' education and meet statutory requirements. Their appreciation of spiritual issues is satisfactory. This, and students' sense of the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural world, are discussed further in paragraphs 33 to 37. When given opportunities, students enjoy contributing to assemblies and the vicar of the local Anglican Church, who occasionally takes assemblies, notes that 'students are generously attentive, even at an early hour of the morning'.

57. Attendance is very good in Year 12, and is good in Year 13. Recorded attendance figures are diminished by the failure of some students to sign-in at the office when they arrive late for morning school. Consistent attendance has a positive effect upon the attainment of students in both year groups. A few students studying theatre studies do not attend regularly; this lowers the quality of their work. Registration periods by form tutors are brief and efficient, and lessons during the day begin promptly.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

58. Teaching is very good overall. During the inspection it was very good in over half the lessons seen and good in 40 per cent. It was excellent in two lessons. The percentage of very good teaching was slightly higher in Year 12. In the pre-inspection questionnaire, over 80 per cent of students said they are taught well and challenged to do their best in most of their subjects. Students' learning was equally impressive and they achieved highly and made rapid progress in the majority of lessons observed.

59. Overall, teachers have excellent knowledge of the AS and A Level subjects they teach. Many give students particularly helpful advice about examination techniques. English teachers use their extensive understanding and enthusiasm for Shakespeare to deepen students' appreciation. Mathematics teachers present lessons with exceptional confidence and deal effectively with every question students pose. Government and politics teachers are occasionally carried away by their love for the subject and talk a bit too much. Biology teachers introduce a commendable degree of breadth, which effectively widens students' knowledge and understanding. Challenging questions in physics make students think about and discuss topics very carefully. Occasionally physics teachers use a rather directed approach, but prior to note-taking, students usually discuss, experiment, or watch a demonstration.

60. Design and textiles teachers are very knowledgeable and act effectively as consultants and facilitators; students develop carefully chosen projects. Teachers use their own personal experiences to enliven classroom discussion and set business studies topics into relevant contexts. History teachers have outstanding knowledge so they can both support and relentlessly challenge students, who describe them as 'dynamic'. In an excellent Year 12 economics lesson, the teacher stimulated the class with questions such as, 'Think about the effects of industrial action'. Geography teachers have a keen enthusiasm, which they pass on to their students. All language teachers speak fluently and with perfect pronunciation. Many music lessons, for example one on the differences between Mozart's and Schumann's piano works, reflect the teachers' excellent knowledge and experience.

61. A noticeable feature of many successful lessons is the excellent relationships between teachers and students. Mathematics teachers help students in a very caring manner, and give students much encouragement. The same is true in chemistry. When Year 13 students had mixed up the method of working and sign conventions, the teacher explained very patiently to them, individually, how they might overcome their problems, which they did. In economics, lessons are conducted in a friendly but purposeful manner and students are encouraged to offer their own opinions.

62. In response to the very good quality of teaching, students work extremely hard. Mathematics students are keen and committed and demonstrate exceptionally high levels of self-discipline. Biology students' very complete notes show a consistent approach by teachers, with the correct amount of intervention. The quality of teaching is not consistently high in physics and several students expressed concerns about the quality of one teacher's explanations. They set high standards for themselves and, if they have not understood aspects of a lesson, they work hard, and seek help. Thus their standards remain high but their enjoyment is less than it should be. In a very well taught Year 13 business studies lesson, despite the short time available, students worked in small groups, analysed a situation, drafted a mission statement and prepared a brief presentation to the whole group.

63. The most successful lessons seen used a range of teaching methods and involved students in a variety of activities designed to make them think, and develop their capacity to work independently. In a Year 12 biology lesson on nutrition, the teacher's good questions complemented the students' independent research work. Business studies teachers insist that students discuss topics using the right technical vocabulary and with maturity. Because students are attentive and diligent, there is a tendency in some lessons to adopt a didactic teaching style and rely on students' ability to make independent notes. A good attempt to make students learn independently through a simulated training exercise, in a Year 12 AVCE lesson, was less effective than it might have been because opportunities to highlight the relevance of the activity were missed. In a good Year 12 economics lesson on market failure, the teacher organised an imaginative role-play exercise on the Heathrow Airport Terminal 5 enquiry.

64. In geography teachers make sure students have a sound understanding of the relevant processes and concepts, and access to a range of well-selected, relevant case studies, before they embark on decision-making exercises. Lessons move fast and contain a good variety of activities so students invariably concentrate well. Government and politics teachers recognise that students learn in a variety of ways and introduce group discussion, paired activities, student presentations and, during the inspection, a referendum on whether the United Kingdom should join the European Monetary Union. French teachers' effective use of the language laboratories ensures that students develop good listening skills. English teachers plan work well. Often students prepare work in advance for discussions, so the pace of lessons and students' involvement are increased. Music students develop their own skills, knowledge and understanding in a carefully sequenced way.

65. Teachers' expectations of students are exceptionally high. Students are required to listen very carefully in mathematics lessons and to concentrate for long periods of time. Teaching methods are mainly traditional and are strongly teacher directed. This does not encourage all students to become independent learners. However, in an active statistics lesson, students were issued with personal white boards, which they used confidently. They held up the boards with their answers and very good discussion took place. In the best English lessons, pupils develop good understanding at a rapid pace. In a few, however, although they join in discussion and take notes vigorously, learning is too teacher directed. Gifted and talented mathematicians and scientists enter subject Challenges, as described in paragraphs 95, 110, 114 and 124. The chemistry and physics departments make good provision for them through open-ended coursework investigations. Gifted economics' students attend the Adam Smith Institute and other related activities.

66. In most subjects students write a considerable volume of notes, which are both well presented, and well organised. Most mathematics students set out mathematical examples well, but a few do not clearly show when one finishes and another one starts. Students' biology folders show meticulous attention to factual detail. Business students have folders containing detailed and extensive notes from which they compile well-written portfolio work. The folders of higher attaining AVCE students contain detailed research from a variety of sources. Government and politics students are adept at making notes and summarise key arguments very effectively. Students' written French is accurate and they use the correct register of language for business advertising and communication. Most use tenses and verbs accurately although a few, even in Year 13, confuse different past tenses and make some basic errors.

67. English and mathematics teachers mark work thoroughly, with very good advice on how it can be improved, and students are clear about their own strengths and weaknesses. Day-to-day marking and feed-back are consistently good in biology though teachers do not give students enough opportunities to learn independently in lessons and homework.

Chemistry students value the frequent end of topic tests. In resistant materials teachers give students good written and verbal guidance on their quality of work and what to do to improve. In business studies, students' work is monitored thoroughly and they receive detailed information on their level of attainment and progress. Because history teachers mark work in depth and offer sound advice on how to improve, students' essay writing improves noticeably over the two years. Year 13 students produce extended writing of a first year undergraduate quality.

CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS

68. In the pre-inspection questionnaire, 80 per cent of students found that the choice of courses allowed them to follow a programme suited to their talents and career aspirations. In addition to GCSE subjects, students also select from psychology, government and politics and theatre studies. Business studies is provided as an AS and A Level and also as an AVCE. Sociology will be introduced in September 2002. In English only literature is offered, not language. In mathematics, it is excellent that students can combine mechanics, statistics and decision-making in four different ways. Thus students can select the best combination to match their career aspirations and other Sixth Form subjects. The options available in music are traditional and no technology course is available. More males than females study physics and economics, and more females study English literature.

69. In modern foreign languages, the range of languages is very good with French, German and Spanish for A and AS Level and NVQ Level 2. Japanese and Italian are taught and Certificates in Business Language Competence taken. A large number of students visit these countries on exchanges, which enriches their knowledge and understanding of these countries, their languages and cultures. In English, the choice of some GCSE texts, for example, 'Of Mice and Men' and 'An Inspector Calls', is too limited for the calibre of Dame Alice Owen's students. The department plans to study more challenging GCSE texts in future. Generally, students are exposed to too few texts and issues reflecting the multi-cultural nature of society, not just in English. Students do, however, take part in many extra-curricular activities, such as study days, theatre visits and debating societies, all of which help to develop their all-round knowledge.

70. The physics syllabus contains modern topics that are not usually included in traditional courses. This is good, as is the fact that it offers many opportunities for students to develop their independent learning skills. A CD ROM provides help for the independent learner and also contains considerable extension material. Government and politics visits to Russia and the Czech Republic, debates in school, and outside speakers, all provide valuable opportunities for these students to learn outside the classroom. In addition to attendance at a variety of revision conferences, history students benefit from the annual field trip to Berlin, where they visit the Reichstag and the Wannsee and SS museums. In geography, outside lectures and field-courses enrich the curriculum. The fieldwork in biology, undertaken early in Year 13, is very good.

71. The resistant materials course has maintained its popularity. The majority of students are male but there is an encouraging number of female students and both achieve equally well. Students start the course with either electronics, graphics, art or short GCSE design experience. This presents organisational difficulties for teachers in their attempt to improve standards. The music department has already identified that it needs to review the current syllabus options taught, as the present range is narrow, and to reconsider offering music technology as well. The department also recognises that it has too few computers for students to work independently and efficiently on compositions and other tasks. Students also identified both of these issues as areas that should be developed.

72. Extra-curricular activities specifically for Sixth Formers include the debating society and a small drama club; several attend the Christian Discover, Christian Union and Jewish Society meetings. The most popular extra-curricular activities are in music and sports. Well over 60 pupils and students play in the concert band, which performs about three times a year and travels overseas as well, this year to Belgium. In 2001 Britten's 'Noyes Fludde' was performed with local primary school pupils, and the chamber orchestra and senior choir toured Normandy. The symphony orchestra has toured Italy. After the March 2001 performance of the 'The Sorcerer's Apprentice', one parent was moved to write that she 'Came away uplifted and excited by the wonderful professional performance from the orchestra'. An ex-pupil added, 'As far as the concert band and orchestra are concerned, I can only say that it thrills me just to be there and feel part of it'.

THE SCHOOL'S CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS

Assessment

73. The assessment and monitoring of students' academic standards and progress are consistently good overall, and particularly effective in mathematics, history and modern foreign languages. The mathematics department organises internal practice and re-sit examinations well. Students appreciate this very rigorous approach; several even choose to take examinations again, to improve their performance and to have even more examination practice. Tests are not set regularly enough in physics.

74. In all subjects, students are aware of what they are currently achieving and what they are expected to achieve. Some of the target minimum grades, which are based on students' GCSE performance, are rather low in the light of their capabilities, but teachers usually adjust them upwards after a few months. Students find the latter the most helpful. Departments consider results carefully and adjust the courses in response. The English literature, and the design syllabuses, for example, are under consideration following relatively disappointing results in the 2001 examinations.

75. Recent developments in biology coursework assessment have been praised by the examination board. Chemistry teachers' coursework marking is also very reliable. The examiners for the A Level geography coursework also reported that the students' investigations were of a very high standard. Teachers assess students' work in geography very thoroughly and constructively and students appreciate this. The support teachers give students in many subjects is a notable feature of their work; they give freely of their time to provide advice and guidance. In the pre-inspection questionnaire, over 80 per cent of students stated that they find teachers accessible for help if they have difficulties with their work.

Advice, support and guidance

76. The school has very good systems to care for students and to help them learn in a calm, relaxed and purposeful environment. Very good procedures are established for child protection and ensuring students' welfare. The senior teachers responsible for child protection have received training, and additional training is scheduled for all staff this year.

77. The school has adopted the local authority's health and safety policy, including its procedures for the safety of students on and off site during visits. Although good health and safety practice is supplemented by regular risk assessments, a number of health and safety

concerns were identified during the inspection and brought to the senior management team's attention. Additionally, registration procedures for Sixth Form students are not rigorous enough and, in an emergency, the number of students on site would not be known accurately.

78. It is surprising that 40 per cent of those who answered the pre-inspection questionnaire did not feel they received helpful and constructive advice about what they should do in the Sixth Form. Their comments were possibly influenced by their views on careers support overall (see below). In fact, guidance about AS and A Level courses is thorough and helpful. Students entering the Sixth Form from the lower school are very well prepared for the differences they will find in teaching and learning techniques, although they do not attend sample lessons at the end of Year 11. Students transferring from other schools are warmly received, and they settle quickly in their tutor groups and state that they feel very much at home.

79. The school provides students with very good educational and personal support and guidance. Subject tutors have very good knowledge of students' progress. They work hard to fulfil the expectation that all students will succeed in their studies, and obtain their desired places in higher education or employment. Form tutors have an overview of students' progress in all subjects, and provide regular and valuable tutorial sessions. Heads of year analyse termly grades and, if necessary, intervene through discussion with students and their parents. Students confidently speak to staff about academic or personal difficulties, and know that concerns will be sympathetically addressed. In the pre-inspection questionnaire, 40 per cent of students were uncertain of the quality of advice they might receive about personal problems. However, among the significant number of students who were interviewed by inspectors, many spoke highly of the Sixth Form pastoral team, so very little support for this criticism was found.

80. Provision for careers education is satisfactory overall. Year 11 students receive advice from the careers co-ordinator and the head of Sixth Form, designed to ease the transition from GCSE to the demands of advanced study. The well-equipped careers library (Self Access Learning Centre) contains a wide range of booklets, prospectuses, and videos about entry to the professions, opportunities during a gap year and university courses and application procedures. Few students take advantage of this quiet area for study.

81. The careers co-ordinator arranges regular workshops, which offer advice to students on a wide range of careers, but the take up for these sessions is not good. Students find the wealth of information in the careers library daunting and need further guidance on how best to use it. The best balance between 'Look it up yourself' and constructive guidance has not been achieved. Sixty per cent of those who returned the questionnaire did not feel they were well advised on what they should do after they leave school, and several commented that the careers library closes soon after lunch. The careers co-ordinator organises higher education conferences and subject departments support her work. Teachers give excellent advice to students applying to university; many departments, for example, provide mock interviews for students applying for Oxbridge entry.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT IN THE SIXTH FORM

Leadership and management

82. Leadership and management are very good. The headteacher's leadership has strengthened this effective Sixth Form, which has grown in the last five years. For example, she was instrumental in the school's being awarded Language College status in 1996, and the growth of this initiative has benefited students and pupils equally; the choice of languages is excellent. It has also involved the school in the community, as it supports evening language classes and French teaching in two local secondary and ten primary schools. The headteacher, strongly supported by the governing body, is also determined to reinforce the school's provision for the performing arts. The alterations and new building for this are almost complete.

83. Governors are proud and supportive of the Sixth Form. The governing body's strategy, that the school 'should be run so as to achieve the highest possible standards of academic, cultural and sporting excellence, whilst maintaining the distinctive character of the school', is reflected in practice. Governors receive detailed analysis of examination results, which they discuss carefully. They have debated and determined that all siblings can come to the school, specifically to nurture the family ethos. Governors fulfil their responsibilities very well, although they do not meet statutory requirements for religious education and the daily act of collective worship.

84. The headteacher and deputy head monitor the results of public examinations meticulously. They keenly evaluate how well students have done in the light of their GCSE grades and are fully aware of individuals who have not performed as expected. Through lesson observations and regular meetings with heads of departments, the headteacher and senior management team know the strengths of the teaching force well and areas needing attention. The match of teachers' qualifications and experience to the courses taught is very good.

85. The pastoral assistant head and the head of sixth lead very well. They, and the heads of Years 12 and 13 and the form tutors, go out of their way to make sure that day-to-day organisation is efficient. Their effective management style includes very good interpersonal skills, which generate excellent relationships. The administration and technical staff all contribute most effectively to the smooth and extremely efficient day-to-day running of the school. However, with the large number of A and AS groups, the science technicians are hard pressed to keep on top of their workload. Considering the size and complexity of the site, it is commendable that the caretaker and groundsmen keep the buildings and surrounding area looking attractive and welcoming, although the litter generated in the Sixth Form area is a problem.

86. Overall, heads of departments provide very good leadership. All mathematics teachers value the excellent quality of leadership in this large department of eleven, which functions extremely well. The new heads of English and business studies/economics have already established a positive atmosphere to improve the already high standards. Co-operation between the head of design and the head of food and textiles has improved since the last inspection but the image and teaching of the two AS/A Level design courses are not well blended. Eighteen instrumental teachers visit the school each week and provide almost 100 hours of tuition, many of which are in the Sixth Form.

87. The school's complex financing, in terms of the Dame Alice Owen Foundation funds, has recently been simplified by a High Court decision. Financial planning and administration are excellent and the principles of best value are applied meticulously. Spending on the Sixth Form is extremely well matched to income, and it supports a wide range of AS and A Level courses, an AVCE, and other language courses. The cost effectiveness of several Sixth Form courses is particularly good, for example in mathematics and the sciences, which have large numbers in several groups. The school makes very good use of its resources to support and improve Sixth Form provision.

88. Initial budgeting is the responsibility of the bursar and the deputy headteacher, but the governors' finance committee has a very good overview of the process, and systematically reviews all areas of expenditure. Other governors are adequately informed about the budgeting process and the effects of spending decisions, and are provided with budget updates. Plans for major expenditure, especially on buildings, are costed and set out for the next four years. Priorities for the Sixth Form are carefully considered in the context of the school as a whole, for example the need for more laboratories. A series of recent audits confirms the proper expenditure of all funds allocated to the school. The Sixth Form is highly cost effective.

Resources

89. The accommodation is good overall and in the Sixth Form block. The buildings, many of which were put up 30 years ago but designed to last for no more than 25, are costly to maintain. Accommodation is unsatisfactory in science, design and technology (including textiles and food) and art. Psychology lacks a permanent base. Too many science lessons take place out of specialist rooms. Laboratories are used all the time, which makes it difficult to service them properly. In a chemistry lesson, work could not be developed through a practical demonstration because the room was totally unsuitable for this. Unless more laboratories are provided, this problem will get worse as the popularity of science courses in the Sixth Form grows. The two recently refurbished biology laboratories are attractive and good for practical investigations and experiments.

90. Structural defects, lack of storage space and crowded working conditions mean the design and technology accommodation is unsatisfactory. The need to store students' work in teaching areas occupies much valuable teaching space and gives an untidy appearance. The uneven condition of the floor surface in one area is a health and safety risk. The lack of any computer aided design and manufacturing equipment places considerable restrictions on students' experience of modern industrial manufacturing practice, and limits the range of processes available to them in resistant materials. Good leadership and management have helped to mitigate the effects of unsatisfactory accommodation and resources on standards of work in design and technology.

91. Accommodation for physical education is very good both in the sports hall and, externally, on the field, the Astroturf all weather pitch and the hard courts. On the downside, the gymnasium is relatively small and isolated from the sports hall. Sometimes rooms for economics are used for discussion where a bank of computers separates the teacher from the students, which is not ideal accommodation. Language College money has funded the excellent language laboratories, which certainly contribute to the high standards of fluency and accuracy in several languages. Several areas have the technology for PowerPoint

presentations but lack enough computers. In physics for example, the course requires CD ROM access and frequent room changes are necessary to obtain this. Other computers around the school have been loaded with this software, but in a variety of ways, so that students cannot use them reliably. Many students comment that their home computers have more advanced software and speed than those at the school.

92. Technology resources in music, including a computer with Sibelius and a recently acquired minidisk player, are not developed well enough considering the large number of competent musicians with contemporary music skills. The library is well stocked in most subjects, particularly in the fiction section and history. With such large numbers taking several subjects, more copies of some essential books are needed, for example for English literature criticism. The librarian appreciates the importance of having a wide range of books both by, and about, people of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds; the present range is satisfactory. The school's Intranet site means that students can easily access relevant subject websites, which is good.

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

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

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2001

GCE AS Level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Taken by Year 13							
French	1	0	78	0	13	0	1.65
Mathematics	9	89	62	56	15	3.22	1.51
Music	3	0	84	100	29	1.00	2.41
Religious Studies	11	100	85	33	26	3.00	2.38
Taken by Year 12							
Art and design	21	100	83	86	23	4.3	2.3
Biology	53	100	52	79	2	4.3	0.79
Business Studies	32	100	76	47	12	3.4	1.7
Chemistry	55	98.2	43	69	5	4.02	0.77
Theatre Studies	13	100	N/A	23	N/A	3.3	N/A
Economics	33	100	73	61	22	3.8	1.94
English Literature	61	92	N/A	26	N/A	2.6	N/A
French	21	91	78	62	13	3.6	1.65
Geography	34	100	74	68	6	3.94	1.18
German	13	100	82	92	13	4.6	1.85
Government and Politics**	25	100	74	72	11	4.3	1.5
History	42	100	N/A	80	N/A	4.2	N/A
Mathematics	70	99	62	63	15	3.84	1.51
Music	7	100	N/A	63	N/A	3.5	N/A
Psychology**	33	100	74	94	11	4.78	1.5
Physics	35	100	52	74	4	4.17	0.9
Religious Studies	16	100	85	69	26	4.13	2.38
Resistant materials	15	86.5	N/A	20	N/A	2.3	N/A
Textiles	4	100	N/A	100	N/A	4.5	N/A

** Government and politics and psychology are included within a group of subjects called 'Other social studies'. The national data are for this group as a whole.

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
Art and design	16	100	96	63	46	8.13	6.57
Biology	53	96	88	72	34	7.74	5.25
Business Studies	14	100	92	71	32	7.43	5.50
Chemistry	60	97	90	67	43	7.77	5.90
Theatre Studies*	12	100	93	33	31	5.50	5.33
Economics	29	90	89	48	36	6.41	5.52
English Literature	60	100	95	43	37	6.57	5.91
French	11	91	89	73	38	7.27	5.59
Design and technology	13	100	91	23	30	5.38	5.38
Geography	13	100	92	54	38	7.23	5.74
German	11	100	91	27	40	5.64	5.81
Government and Politics**	32	100	87	34	34	6.06	5.30
History	41	95	88	39	35	6.49	5.45
Mathematics	87	98	87	74	43	8.14	5.80
Music	10	100	93	50	35	7.40	5.74
Psychology**	14	100	87	64	34	8.14	5.30
Physics	36	100	88	69	40	8.39	5.67
Religious studies	10	100	92	30	38	5.60	5.84
Spanish	1	100	89	100	39	10.00	5.70
Sports studies	20	100	92	55	25	6.70	5.09

** Government and politics and psychology are included within a group of subjects called 'Other social studies'. The national data are for this group as a whole.

*Theatre studies is included within a group of subjects called 'Communication Studies'. The national data are for this group as a whole.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

All subjects were studied in depth in this curriculum area.

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

Strengths:

- Consistently very high standards and results in the most popular Sixth Form subject.
- Very good, detailed organisation of the excellent range of courses offered.
- Excellent leadership of the department. Teachers' qualifications, knowledge and understanding, planning and management are excellent.
- Students' attitudes are excellent in both years. They really appreciate the very high demands made of them and the very constructive relationships they have with teachers.
- The very good, regular marking with additional helpful comments.

Areas for improvement:

- Encouraging students to make extended contributions in classes.
- Helping students to become better independent learners.
- More detailed analysis of results looking at different groups of students.

93. Mathematics is the most popular subject in the Sixth Form, with over 50 students in Year 13 and over 80 in Year 12. The department caters exceptionally well for students' interests by offering four different courses in each year group. These course combinations have been very carefully constructed and students much appreciate the helpful information they received about them in Year 11. Very able mathematicians choose the further mathematics course, which counts as two A Levels. Overall, students achieve highly. Retention rates are very high.

94. The percentage of students awarded A/B grades at A Level has always been very high; approximately twice the national average. The average points score, the highest ever in 2001, and the percentage of passes have also been very high, the latter never falling below 97 per cent in the last four years. Mathematics has had the school's best A Level results in three of the four past years. Girls have performed slightly better than boys over the last four years, in line with national trends. This is an improvement. The results in AS courses have been similarly successful. In 2001, all but one of 70 Year 12 AS students passed and 63 per cent attained A/B grades – an extremely high performance compared to the national picture. The average points score was more than two and a half times the national one.

95. Results in the further mathematics courses over the last four years have also been very high with a very large proportion of A/B grades. All further mathematics students attained grade A in last year's AS examination and similar results look likely this year. There are many very gifted students in both year groups and the department is fully aware of their capabilities. Last year over 100 students sat the National Senior Mathematics Challenge; two thirds obtained certificates, including nine gold. These were outstanding results. This Challenge provides considerable intellectual stimulus for these gifted students.

96. Teaching and learning are very good and present standards continue to be very high. Strengths are the teachers' excellent knowledge and understanding. They are absolutely clear about the requirements of each of the different courses. For example, in a Year 12 mechanics lesson, the teacher made very good reference to where the course was leading,

and to work which was to be completed in the following week. Teachers present their lessons with exceptional confidence; they show a very high command of the subject, and are able to deal very confidently with all the questions students pose. Students are very mature in the manner in which they ask questions, and this helps the development of many lessons.

97. Teachers help students in a very caring manner, building very strong and supportive rapport with their groups. Their lesson plans show how new work is built on what students already know. For example, in a lesson to learn about the use of normal distribution tables, the teacher very quickly revised the meaning and use of the various averages. When written work on examples is set, students start work immediately and work at a very high pace. Teachers sensibly interrupt at appropriate times to clarify points and mention further hints, which is very good practice.

98. Teachers' expectations of students are exceptionally high. Students are required to listen very carefully in lessons and to concentrate for long periods of time. Just occasionally, they are not given enough opportunities to provide detailed, extended answers in class. Teaching methods are mainly traditional and are strongly teacher directed. This does not encourage all students to become independent learners. Year 13 students recognise very clearly that mathematics does not necessarily lend itself to independent study, but appreciate that university mathematics courses will require these skills. However, in an active statistics lesson which considered the normal distribution, students were issued with personal white boards, which they used confidently. Students held up the boards with their answers and very good discussion took place.

99. Students write a considerable volume of notes, sometimes despite having a very clear grasp of the principles involved. They take great pride in the quality of presentation of their notes, and use them very well for reference. They organise their notes on different sections of the syllabuses very well. Teachers give students much encouragement. As a result students are keen, commit themselves to learning by total concentration, demonstrate exceptionally high levels of self-discipline and enjoy the subject. They achieve highly. They really appreciate the efforts and approaches taken by teachers, and state that 'the quality of teaching in mathematics is very good; teachers are readily available and make time to give us help'.

100. Students' basic mathematical skills are very strong in almost all cases; they are particularly competent in factorisation. In a good lesson on co-ordinate geometry, studying the equations of circles and curve sketching, students handled the expansion of brackets very well and most understood securely the factorisation of complicated expressions. The evidence from work seen in lessons and in students' folders shows very good progression: increasingly difficult examples are seen in written work. How students set out examples of everyday class work varies; some students do not clearly show when one example finishes and another one starts. However, the presentation of their written homework is generally of a very high standard.

101. Teachers mark work very regularly with sufficient detail to help students understand how they can improve. Longer-term assessment is very tightly planned; the department organises internal practice examinations and re-sit examinations well. Failure to reach a standard pass mark implies that students have to re-sit a similar practice examination. Students appreciate this very rigorous approach; several students even choose to take the re-sit examination, both to improve their performance and to gain even more examination practice.

102. Leadership and management are excellent. All teachers value the quality of leadership they receive and speak highly of the support, which is always available. They are very

enthusiastic and work extremely well together, showing an excellent team ethos and sharing ideas and resources. Examination results are analysed, but this process does not include enough value added calculations and analyses of results for specific groups of students. The cost effectiveness of the Sixth Form courses is very good as most groups have large numbers. Staffing is extremely strong, with eleven teachers delivering the Sixth Form courses; the match of teachers to the curriculum is excellent. Students use high quality textbooks.

103. A few Year 12 students, led by a very talented mathematician, run an extra-curricular club for younger pupils. Although only a very few attend it, mainly due to other commitments at lunchtime, a great deal of innovative mathematical thinking takes place. Students' praise for their teachers is a feature of the very strong relationships which have been built. They appreciate the teachers' dedication; their valuing of hard work and excellence; the way in which the teachers treat them as young and mature adults, and the demanding style of teaching which regularly challenges them. Students are thus very well served; they develop extremely mature attitudes to study and attain very highly.

Biology

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

Strengths:

- Standards of attainment are very high; and show an improving trend. Students are achieving very well at all levels of the ability range.
- Teaching is very good. The subject is very well led and resources are used well.
- Students are very positive. They work well and share ideas freely.

Areas for improvement:

- Further development of independent learning and the critical skills necessary to engage in effective scientific debate.

104. A Level results in 2001 were very high - 96 per cent of students passed, with 71 per cent attaining A/B grades. All students passed AS, with 79 per cent achieving A/B grades. All students completed these courses and the A Level results continued the trend of improvement since the last inspection. Female students outperformed male students at both A and AS Levels. With very few exceptions, performance at both levels was very good in relation to students' GCSE results. Since the last inspection, the number of students studying biology has nearly doubled.

105. Present standards of work are very high and in line with the latest examination results. In lessons seen, students made rapid progress as a result of effective and challenging teaching. Their folders show clear evidence of attention to factual detail and a well above average understanding of basic concepts. Year 13 students, who recently attended a residential field-course, have a very strong understanding of sampling techniques. They test their results using several statistical methods to demonstrate possible relationships, for example between distribution of plants and animals in relation to environmental variables such as light intensity and soil pH. Their written accounts showed excellent application of word processing and graphical ICT skills.

106. Year 13 students also have very good investigative skills, as was seen when they attempted to produce a reliable means of estimating sugar concentration using the Benedict's test. When faced with unexpected results, they were able to evaluate their experimental technique and suggest alternative methods of solving the problem.

107. Year 12 students have successfully completed the transition from GCSE to Sixth Form work. In a lesson discussing oxygen dissociation curves, students displayed good skills of prediction. They suggested how the haemoglobin in the blood of a high-altitude species, such as an Andean llama, might differ from that of low-altitude related species. Discussion with students who are planning their experimental coursework projects, showed they have a confident understanding of experimental design and an awareness of the need for accurate control of variables, as in the effect of light on the rate of leaf transpiration. However, not all students have developed sufficient lateral thinking skills. This was shown by the difficulty they had explaining why plants have to take in nutrients such as nitrate and magnesium ions in order to photosynthesise.

108. Teaching is very good overall and students learn very well as a result. They are attentive and talk and listen to one another maturely in discussions. During the inspection, teaching was at least good in every lesson. The principal features are: clear objectives, sound lesson planning, a brisk pace matched to students' abilities and a range of methods and approaches. In a Year 12 class studying nutrition, the teacher's good questions, complemented by the students' independent research work, ensured an effective advance in their GCSE knowledge of this topic. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and are able to introduce a commendable degree of breadth to their teaching. This widens students' knowledge and understanding. In Year 12, students mainly answer structured questions, but in Year 13 teachers specifically target essay writing and focus on developing their written communication skills.

109. Day-to-day marking and feedback are consistently very good. However, the majority of students are too reliant on their teachers, who do not give them enough opportunities for independent learning in lessons and homework. Students take pride in their work, as was shown by the very high standards of presentation and organisation of their folders. However, they need to develop a greater critical faculty if they are to engage in effective scientific debate.

110. The success of the department results from its very good leadership. Regular meetings ensure a commitment to maintain and build on the present very high standards, as confirmed by students' successes in the recent Biology Olympiad, and to develop a strong team ethos. The scheme of work for Year 12 provides a sound foundation for good teaching at AS Level. The examination board has praised recent developments in AS coursework assessment. The scheme of work for Year 13 is being up-dated. Two laboratories, re-furnished since the last inspection, now provide pleasant and effective teaching areas. Resources are good, particularly the new Flexicam microscope. The department can now offer PowerPoint presentations, which it does well. Lectures and the field-courses enrich the curriculum. Dedicated technical assistance ensures the teaching programme runs smoothly, despite the large numbers studying science.

Chemistry

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

Strengths:

- Well above average standards.
- Very good teaching and learning. Teachers have excellent knowledge, understanding and experience so they have introduced the new courses very well.
- Students achieve very well in relation to their prior attainment.

Areas for improvement:

- The limited amount of time for the head of department to monitor teaching.
- Too few laboratories to cope with the large number of students opting to study chemistry.

111. The number of students taking A Level increased from 38 in 2000 to 60 in 2001. There are currently four groups in Year 12 and five groups in Year 13. Students' average points score has been well above average for the last four years and all passed, except in 1999 and 2001. In 2001, 67 per cent of students attained A/B grades, which was well above average. Roughly the same number of male and female students studies chemistry, and they perform equally well. In AS in 2001, both the proportion of students who passed and the proportion obtaining the highest grades were well above average. Chemistry is a very cost effective subject in the Sixth Form. The number of students who have opted, for a variety of reasons, not to continue with chemistry in Year 13 is relatively low.

112. The standard of work seen is well above average. Students have very high levels of mathematics, which enable them to cope well with calculations. For example students in Year 13 had no difficulty in dealing with negative Standard Electrode Potentials when investigating redox reactions. By Year 13, students have very well developed laboratory skills. They used these skills very successfully to observe all the colour changes which occurred in some complex transition metal ion reactions. In another lesson, however, students too readily accepted unpredicted results rather than adjusting the conditions and repeating the experiment.

113. Students learn very well because the teachers ask them very effective and challenging questions. For example, in a Year 12 lesson students learnt very well how hydrogen bromide adds across a carbon-carbon double bond. A key feature of this lesson was the way the teacher elicited information from the students by careful questions and prompting. It is a testimony to the high quality of the teaching and calibre of the students that organic reaction mechanisms of this type can be understood so early in their course. Students have very complete notes from which to revise. These notes show a consistent approach by the teachers, with the correct amount of intervention.

114. Teaching is very good overall. The principal features are teachers' excellent knowledge and understanding, very good planning, and their skill in using a very wide range of methods and resources. They provide students with many opportunities to develop their basic skills of communication, numeracy, and ICT. The department makes good provision for the gifted students as they have opportunities to extend themselves through the open-ended nature of the coursework investigations. This year a small number of Year 13 students have been invited to participate in the Chemistry Olympiad, run by The Royal Society of Chemistry. The department awaits the results with interest.

115. When Year 13 students were using the idea of the electrochemical series to predict the most likely oxidation reaction between two competing reactions, some had difficulty because they had mixed up the method of working and sign conventions. The teacher very patiently explained to students individually how they might overcome their problems. By the end of the lesson the teacher's expert knowledge and flexible approach meant that all students had found one way of sorting out these reactions. Some of the more difficult concepts in chemistry are covered by this particular topic. In a similar lesson delivered by a different teacher, an attempt to support the work through practical demonstration was hampered because the room was totally unsuitable for practical work. Students achieve highly.

116. The laboratories are used all the time so it difficult to service them properly. Too many science lessons take place out of specialist rooms. Unless more laboratories are provided, this problem will get worse as the popularity of science courses in the Sixth Form grows. The students value the frequent end of topic tests, which the chemistry teachers use to support their learning.

117. Students show exceptionally high levels of interest. Excellent relationships with each other and their teachers lead to a very purposeful working atmosphere. Students achieve very well in terms of their prior attainment in GCSE. In 2001, 74 per cent who gained an A* grade at GCSE in 1999 obtained grade A at A Level. Of the students who had obtained an A* grade at GCSE in 2000 80 per cent obtained AS grade A.

118. The head of department has good leadership and management skills. He works closely with his colleagues and makes sure that the courses are well planned to meet examination board requirements. For these, all teachers have attended relevant syllabus courses and their coursework marking was very reliable. Teachers make good use of Hazcards but do not have sufficient written risk assessments for experiments and demonstrations. Chemistry teachers can justifiably feel proud of the work they do for their students.

Physics

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

Strengths:

- Very high standards in 2001.
- Teachers' excellent knowledge, experience, and understanding of the new courses.
- Very good teaching leading to very good learning.
- Experienced A Level teachers who have adapted well to the new courses.
- Students achieve results which are well above their prior attainment at GCSE.

Areas for improvement:

- Too little monitoring time for the head of department to check consistency in how topics are taught.
- Not enough testing; students do not receive regular feedback on their strengths and weaknesses.
- Too few computers and some of them do not run the CD- ROM based course smoothly.

119. The number of A Level physics students has remained fairly constant for the last four years at just over 30, but in Year 12 over 50 students are following the AS course. This is very encouraging given that there was a fall in the overall number of students joining the Sixth Form in 2001. Of the 36 students who started the course in Year 12, only five

students have not continued with the subject in Year 13. They have taken advantage of the new approach to Sixth Form studies to concentrate on subjects where they are likely to have the greatest success. There are currently four groups in Year 12 and three groups in Year 13.

120. The average A Level points score was well above average in 1998 to 2000 and even better in 2001 – very high. All students have passed since 1999. The percentage of A/B grades, 60 per cent, was well above average in 2001. AS results were also well above average. Significantly more male students study physics than female, which is disappointing given that there are two female teachers in the department who provide excellent role models. Teachers should consider ways of encouraging more girls to take physics. Male and female students perform equally well. Very few students have failed to complete the course. With such large numbers physics is a very cost effective subject.

121. The standard of work seen is well above average. Students cope extremely well with the required large number of calculations because many of them also study mathematics, and/or attained high GCSE grades. In learning about relative velocities, Year 12 students used their GCSE mathematical knowledge very well to decide whether two vehicles approaching each other would collide. Teachers ask challenging questions, which make students think about and discuss topics very carefully. In a lesson about induction motors, Year 13 students demonstrated well above expected knowledge of Lenz's Law, which enabled them to ask some very perceptive questions. It is not surprising that students do so well, since these discussions raise students' understanding to the highest level.

122. On many occasions teachers use a rather directed approach to ensure that students have a good set of notes from which to revise. However, prior to the note-taking, students have usually been given the opportunity to discuss, experiment, or watch a demonstration. Teachers thus provide students with a very good balance between the formal and informal. Students mostly have complete sets of notes. There is, however, some variation in the quality, which is particularly noticeable when two teachers cover the same work with different students.

123. Teaching is very good overall, and students learn very well. The quality of teaching is not consistently high, so it is essential that the head of department monitors and intervenes. Several students' concerns about the quality of one teacher's explanations were supported by inspection evidence. Students set high standards for themselves and, if they have not understood aspects of a lesson, they work hard, and seek help. Thus their standards remain high even when their enjoyment is less than it should be. Teachers overall have excellent knowledge and understanding and effectively plan to use a very wide range of methods and resources. Year 13 students learnt very well when considering the effect of increasing the current on a motor. A key feature of this lesson was the skilful way the teacher introduced the topic through an examination of various motors, led a discussion, and then gave a careful explanation of the principles involved.

124. Teachers provide students with many opportunities to develop their basic skills of communication, numeracy and ICT, and also make very good provision for the needs of the gifted students. They are given opportunities, as part of the coursework requirements, to research a topic and thus pursue their interests in both years. In Year 13 students take part in an Olympiad. Those students who perform well in the first paper move forward. Results from the second paper are the best ever; indeed one student is in the top fifteen nationally. The innovative A Level course requires the use of a CD ROM to support learning. Teachers do not always consider carefully enough the value and timing of this resource. Sometimes the CD ROM is used when a different approach would have covered the work more efficiently.

125. Students show exceptionally high levels of interest. Their independent learning skills are very well developed. A combination of very good teaching and students' excellent attitudes explains the success of the department. Students achieve very well in terms of their attainment in GCSE physics. In 2001, 71 per cent of students who had obtained an A* grade at GCSE in 1999 obtained a grade A at A Level. Achievement is even higher at AS Level. Of the students who had obtained an A* grade at GCSE in 2000, 77 per cent obtained a grade A at AS Level in 2001.

126. The head of department has sound leadership and management skills. He works closely with his colleagues so that the courses are well planned and the examination board requirements met. The teachers chose a syllabus which contains modern topics that are not usually included in traditional physics courses. The syllabus offers many opportunities for students to develop their independent learning skills. The CD ROM provides help for the independent learner and also contains considerable extension material. At present, the science department has too few computers to support this course and frequent room changes are necessary to obtain access. Other computers around the school have been loaded with this software, but in a variety of ways, so that students cannot use them reliably. Students enjoy this course but ways must be found to overcome these computing problems.

127. Although students do not like frequent tests, they understand their value and feel that they are not given enough of them; they want, and need, regular feedback of their strengths and weaknesses. Physics teachers give due attention to health and safety but they do not have written risk assessments for experiments or demonstrations. Although there are improvements to be made, this is a very successful department, which should be very proud of the work it does for its students.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

128. Design and technology resistant materials (product design) was studied in depth. Design and technology textiles was sampled. Standards of work in textiles are well above average. Very good teaching and students' high level of commitment have resulted in a combination of creative ideas and well made products. Design folios are compiled with detailed research and presented to a very high standard. The opportunity to experience industrial practices at first hand has resulted in students producing quality garments to their own designs. AS examination results in 2001 were well above average. Four students gained well above average AS results: two A and two B grades. The present Year 13 students are the first group to follow the A Level course. Unfortunately there is no Year 12 group to continue the undoubted success of this course. Students speak highly of the value they have derived from the course and all intend to study the subject in higher education.

Design and technology

Overall, the quality of provision in design and technology resistant materials (product design) is **good**.

Strengths:

- Good teaching has resulted in good relationships with students.
- Well-chosen projects enable students to combine good practical skills with imaginative design ideas.
- Above average standards of work.

Areas for improvement:

- Accommodation is unsatisfactory and has a detrimental effect on standards.
- Lack of appropriate resources, particularly for computer aided design and manufacture, limits students' experience of modern technological processes.

129. In 1998 the average A Level points score was above average. No students took the examination in 1999. In 2000 and 2001 the average points score was only average. The school disputed the below expected AS results in 2001. Only 60 per cent achieved their target minimum grade and the average points score was below average. This has resulted in a review of the curriculum to provide an examination course more closely matched to students' needs, aptitudes and aspirations.

130. Present standards of work are above average. Students' practical skills are good and supported by in-depth research and analysis, all of which is recorded in well-presented folios. Higher attaining students compile complex design briefs and write clear specifications. They are able to use two and three dimensional sketches and drawings to record and develop their ideas. One Year 12 student's sketchbook, for example, provides a valuable visual record of how her design ideas have evolved and developed; it served to clarify her thinking as she worked out the pivot mechanism for her project. Less successful design folders are characterised by lack of clear thinking in formulating design briefs, imprecise wording of specifications, and vaguely structured questions in questionnaires.

131. Teachers are knowledgeable and act effectively as consultants and facilitators. Teaching is good overall and students achieve well. Through good individual negotiation with teachers, students develop carefully chosen projects which provide them with sufficient challenge but which have a reasonable chance of a successful conclusion. There is a positive atmosphere in lessons. This is fostered by good working relationships and a high level of commitment from both teachers and students. Students make good use of the available ICT resources to improve both the content and presentation of their work. The lack of any computer aided design and manufacturing equipment, however, places considerable restriction on students' experience of modern industrial manufacturing practice, and limits the range of processes available to them.

132. The course has maintained its popularity and currently there are 15 students in Year 13 and ten in Year 12. The majority are male but there is an encouraging number of female students and both groups achieve equally well. Students have very positive views and are enthusiastic about the value of the course for future career development. Students enter the course with a variety of experience, including electronics, graphics and art, as well as those who have studied a short GCSE design course. This has presented organisation difficulties for teachers in their attempt to improve standards, but students are agreed that their positive GCSE experiences have enabled them to adjust readily to the resistant materials course.

133. Good leadership and management have helped to mitigate the effects of unsatisfactory accommodation and resources on standards of work. The course is well organised. Teachers know the students' strengths and weaknesses and give them good written and verbal guidance on the quality of their work and what they should do to improve. Structural defects, lack of storage space and crowded working conditions mean the accommodation is unsuitable. The need to store students' work in teaching areas occupies much valuable teaching space and gives an untidy appearance; students sometimes take large projects away for storage. The uneven condition of the floor surface in one area is a health and safety risk. Co-operation between the heads of both areas within design and technology has improved since the last inspection, but an opportunity is being missed at Sixth Form level to unify the image and teaching of the two A Level design courses.

BUSINESS

Both subjects studied in this curriculum area were studied in depth: A/AS Level business studies and AVCE business studies. Both are reported under the heading of business studies.

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

Strengths:

- Good teaching, together with well-organised courses and students' high Level of commitment, leads to high standards and well above average results.
- The knowledge and experience of teachers help students to relate topics to current industrial and business practice.

Areas for improvement:

- Procedures for monitoring the quality of teaching and sharing good practice.

134. A Level results in 2001 were well above average and in 1999 and 2000 they were very high. All candidates passed in 2001 and 71 per cent attained A/B grades. The average points score was well above average. Students achieve well. AS results in 2001 resulted in an average points score of 3.4, with over a third of candidates achieving above their target grade. Prior to the adoption of the AVCE, GNVQ results were good. Inspection evidence is that the new course will yield similar results.

135. Attainment in A Level lessons is well above average. Students have folders containing detailed and extensive notes from which to compile well-written case studies and portfolio work. Students relate their work to current business practice by visits to local industries, listening to visiting speakers or using their own experience of part time employment. Teachers use their background experience of the business world to enliven classroom discussion and set the work into a relevant context. For example, a well-taught Year 12 lesson helped students to demonstrate their understanding of quality control procedures gained from a recent visit to a chocolate manufacturing plant. Students understood the concept of 'workforce empowerment'. They discussed the possible conflict arising in a company which has a mission statement enshrining the concept, but which requires its workers to perform repetitive production-line tasks. Skilful handling of the discussion also brought students to an understanding of the ethical dimension of a company setting its own quality control targets.

136. Year 13 students, in a very well taught lesson, showed an impressive grasp of the problems facing the companies in the case studies they examined. Despite the short time available, they worked in small groups, analysed the situation, drafted a mission statement and prepared a brief presentation to the whole group. The mature discussion was managed skilfully by the teacher and conducted in a spirit of respect for everyone's views.

137. Higher attaining AVCE students' folders contain detailed research from a variety of sources, including the Internet. They draft and redraft written assignments and use good ICT skills to present their work well. Lower attaining pupils do not use computers confidently, which makes the process of redrafting time-consuming, and the content of some of their folders is less well organised.

138. Teaching and learning are good. Because lessons are planned thoroughly and their objectives are explained clearly, students have a clear sense of purpose in what they are expected to do. Teachers have high expectations and insist that students discuss topics using the right technical vocabulary. They expect and achieve a high level of maturity in debates. The most successful lessons seen used a range of teaching methods and involved students in a variety of activities designed to make them think, and to develop their capacity to work independently. Because students are attentive and diligent, there is a tendency in some lessons to adopt a didactic teaching style and rely on students' ability to make independent notes. During a Year 12 AVCE lesson, a good attempt to involve students more fully in their own learning, through a simulated training exercise, was less effective than it might have been because opportunities were missed to highlight the relevance of the activity.

139. Students have very positive views about the course and they are clear about its value to them in their intended careers. Many intend to pursue the subject in higher education. Their work is monitored thoroughly and they receive detailed information on their level of attainment and progress. Students are given good help and advice to support their specific individual needs. For example, careful monitoring of the work of a student absent for long periods because of illness helped to minimise the possible effect on his work. The recently appointed head of department provides a clear vision for the subject and leads a team of teachers committed to developing the already high standards of teaching and learning.

Economics

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

Strengths:

- Consistently above average results.
- Very knowledgeable teachers who prepare interesting and stimulating lessons which encourage students to learn on their own.
- Students' attitudes and motivation are very positive. Learning is very good; teachers ensure that students know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.
- The department is very well led.

Areas for improvement:

- A lack of formal monitoring of teaching and learning so that good practice is shared.
- Lessons do not always take place in suitable rooms.

140. Nearly 50 per cent of students attained A Level A/B grades in 2001, which was above average. All students passed AS and over 60 per cent attained A/B grades. Current students are attaining similar standards. About twice the number of male students choose

this subject. Students are well motivated. They apply economic principles to current issues and use terms accurately and confidently. Several Year 13 students have an outstanding grasp of economic theory. For example, they analysed macroeconomic variables and then suggested appropriate fiscal and monetary policies to achieve desirable outcomes. Present standards are high.

141. A minority of Year 13 students have not yet understood the important principles of cause and effect associated with economic decision-making, for example the effects of imposing import tariffs. However, teachers ensure that students' progress is monitored and evaluated and that additional support and guidance are always available. As a consequence, students know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. They achieve very well. Students apply key skills competently; communicate effectively in discussions and when giving presentations; apply mathematical concepts sensibly in their written work, and use ICT for research confidently.

142. Teaching and learning are very good overall. Teachers are very knowledgeable and prepare interesting and stimulating lessons, which encourage students to learn on their own. In an excellent Year 12 lesson about managing the economy, the teacher gave a very clear explanation of what the lesson was about and stimulated the class with effective questions such as: 'Think about the effects of industrial action', and 'What would happen if the exchange rate was devalued?' In a good Year 12 lesson on market failure, the teacher organised an imaginative role-play exercise on the Heathrow Airport Terminal 5 enquiry. Whilst the teacher could have intervened more, the students understood the key points of the topic well, such as that social costs include external and private ones. In another Year 12 lesson on externalities, a minority of students could not apply the principle of external costs to China's anti-pollution initiatives, although they managed to relate this principle to issues about the funding of school uniforms!

143. Relationships are excellent. Lessons are conducted in a friendly but purposeful manner and students are encouraged to offer their own opinions, to use the correct terms and to apply their general knowledge to tackle questions. In one very good Year 13 lesson, students argued the effects of a range of government policies. The economic scenario presented by the teacher for discussion produced this excellent response from a student, 'High money supply growth plus inflation – so there is a need to start with monetarist policies, for example monetary base control'. Students' confident use of difficult economic concepts and terms was clearly evident in discussions, for example 'Are we Monetarists or Keynesians?' and 'What about the sectoral balance?'

144. Leadership and management of the department are good. The recently appointed head of department is committed to raising the status and standards of the subject and is working effectively within the recently reorganised faculty to achieve this. Assessment is good and students are aware of what they are currently achieving and what they are expected to achieve. Gifted students attend the Adam Smith Institute and other related activities. A lack of formal monitoring of teaching and learning means that good practice is not always shared by teachers. Whilst resources are very good, including enough access to and use of computers, sometimes rooms are used for discussion where a bank of computers separates the teacher from the students. Overall, there has been good progress since the last inspection.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

No subjects are offered in this curriculum area.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

145. One full and two part lessons were observed in **sports studies**. Teaching was good, and students were keen to learn. In Year 13, female students analysing shot putting techniques had good understanding of anatomy and physiology, although their practical experience of the event was limited. Female students in Year 12, with little prior knowledge of hill walking, assembled the clothing and equipment they would require for an expedition and, with varying degrees of success, packed it in individual rucksacks. Male students in Years 12 and 13 demonstrated very good football skills, particularly when communicating and defending. In all lessons, relationships were relaxed and good humoured.

146. Sixth Form students have one lesson a week set aside for physical education, but as this happens at the same time as some of the extra language classes, not all students participate. Those following the physical education programme miss seven lessons in Year 12 to follow a spirituality course.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

No subjects are offered in this curriculum area.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

147. Music was studied in depth and a few lessons observed in **art and theatre studies**. A Level art results are consistently well above average. About 20 students take the course. Twenty-one students took AS in 2001 and 86 per cent attained A/B grades. In the Year 13 lesson observed, teachers' very good subject knowledge was evident and work shows that students develop high standards in a broad range of skills. They are confident and accurately evaluate their own work. They make good connections between their personal drawings and designs, and those of other artists.

148. A relatively small number of students, about ten on average, study theatre studies. A Level results in 2001 were average, an improvement since 1998. AS results were average; all students passed and 23 per cent attained A/B grades. In the one Year 13 lesson seen, standards were below average. Teaching is good. Though several of the seven students conveyed characterisation well in their scripted drama, and used gesture effectively, absence adversely affected the work of a few, so that their drama was much less convincing. Students attend the theatre regularly, both on their own and with the teacher, thereby extending their awareness of different theatrical genres and techniques. The accommodation is good.

MUSIC

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

Strengths:

- Well above average A Level results in 2000 and 2001.
- Students are good musicians and achieve well, particularly in performing. Many are highly motivated and committed.
- Very good teaching means that students learn very well.
- The well-organised department provides a wide range of extra-curricular activities, many of which are of outstanding quality.

Areas for improvement:

- As already identified by the department, the options within, and ICT resources for, A and AS Level are quite narrow. Music technology is underdeveloped.
- The lack of formal review and monitoring of lessons by the head of department.

149. Most students who study A and AS Level music are able musicians who attained very high standards in their GCSE and practical music examinations. A comparatively large numbers of students study music (16 in 2000 and 10 in 2001) - a strong feature of the department. Students achieve well. The music department has a very good record of A Level results. Half the A Level group attained A/B grades in 2001 and five out of seven AS students did. Female and male students do equally well. The school is maintaining the high standards reported at the time of the last inspection.

150. Present standards are high overall, with only a few students attaining slightly lower ones. The quality of instrumental performance is particularly strong and standards are well above the expectations of the AS and A Level specifications. Students play with very good technical control and musical understanding and the best performances, both solo and ensemble, are outstanding. Students' composition techniques reflect their good understanding of the styles being studied. They understand harmonic conventions well, such as cadences in Bach chorales. Students listen to music carefully, and correctly identify its key characteristics in different styles. Students in Year 12, for example, understand the features of Renaissance choral music and compared them thoughtfully with the style of choral music by later composers, such as Bruckner.

151. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Lessons have clear objectives and are well structured, allowing students to develop their own skills, knowledge and understanding in a carefully sequenced way. For example, after practising hearing and writing down melodies, Year 13 students then put the activity into the context of an examination-type question. Students in Year 12 learned the characteristics of Baroque contrapuntal music by studying music by Handel, before developing their own skills by adding a second contrapuntal part to music by Marcello. These and other lessons, for example one that investigated the differences between Mozart's and Schumann's piano music, reflected the teachers' excellent knowledge and experience of music. These they apply creatively so that students learn very well. Teachers and students regularly listen, perform and compose; theory is rarely taught separately. They often sing and play keyboards to support aural work and understand vocal music.

152. In all aspects of music, teachers consistently emphasise that students must listen carefully and with discrimination, and respond using the correct musical terms. Teachers have very high expectations and students' response is very mature; they concentrate hard to improve their work. ICT is not used enough, for example to develop students' aural skills at their own pace, as a valuable bank of sounds and as a means of producing high quality scores of their own compositions.

153. The range of extra-curricular activities provided, and the commitment of staff and students, are impressive; many of the groups achieve outstanding standards. The symphony orchestra (one of four orchestras) played extremely well, with enjoyment and precision, in a rehearsal of Tchaikovsky's 'Romeo and Juliet Overture'. One of the four main choirs practised Haydn's 'Nelson Mass', a study piece for A Level, with very good tone, diction and intonation. The largest of the three concert bands, involving over 60 pupils and students, gave a spirited and lively rendition of 'The girl from Ipanema'. A rehearsal of 'West Side Story' demonstrated the versatility and competence of singers and instrumentalists in managing a difficult score. Students spoke particularly enthusiastically about this event. A few students have organised musical activities for younger pupils. One Year 13 female student has organised an ensemble of clarinettists because there are so many of them that they cannot all play in the school groups. Another student runs a small singing group.

154. The department is well organised and managed. Teachers are fully committed to arranging and leading a wide range of extra-curricular activities. Students are most appreciative of the numerous music groups in school. These complement the work of the Saturday morning music school, mainly attended by younger pupils. Music makes a very strong and distinctive contribution to the life and ethos of the school. Many concerts are given each term. In 2001 Britten's 'Noyes Fludde' was performed with local primary school pupils, and the chamber orchestra and senior choir toured Normandy. The senior concert band has played in Belgium and the symphony orchestra in Italy.

155. Areas for development should be placed within the context of a department that currently provides very well for A Level and AS students. The department has already identified that it needs to review the current syllabus options taught, as the present range is narrow, and to reconsider offering music technology as well. The department also recognises that it has too few computers for students to work independently and efficiently on compositions and other tasks. Students also identified both of these issues as areas that should be developed.

156. The minimum target grades, set at the beginning of the AS course, do not take into account the detailed information the department has about students' musical capabilities and potential, so they are not challenging and relevant for all students. The school has a rolling programme of department reviews, but the head of department does not regularly observe lessons to note good practice and identify areas for improvement. The recently refurbished music block, created out of the old squash courts, is a significant improvement, although the soundproofing is not good enough. This makes many tasks, especially aural work, difficult.

HUMANITIES

Geography, government and politics, and history were studied in depth. A few lessons were observed in **religious education** and **psychology**.

157. One AS religious studies lesson and two non-examination spirituality classes were observed. In 2001 ten students attained average A Level results. (Performance was better in 1999 and 2000). AS results were high as seven of the 16 students gained grade A and all attained at least grade C. Teaching is good overall with some very good features. It is always lively, enthusiastic and well informed. Students' learning is helped by their excellent relationships with teachers so that they put forward their opinions confidently and teachers are quick to use them in discussion; for example in the AS lesson evaluating different scholars' views on the credibility of miracles.

158. The philosophy and ethics modules of the spirituality course provide an opportunity for students to reflect on and challenge their own ideas and feelings. Students find these lessons stimulating, but they only have seven of them, which is not enough to develop this important aspect of students' education and meet statutory requirements. As in Years 10 and 11, although successful examination courses have been introduced since the last inspection, little progress has been made in providing the required amount of time for religious education for all students.

159. The A Level points score for psychology, a subject introduced in 1996, is consistently high. The AS results in 2001 were most impressive; 94 per cent of the 33 students attained A/B grades. There are now two groups in each year. Students analyse data and research individual practical projects for coursework, some of which includes consideration of valuable ethical issues. Teaching was satisfactory in the Year 12 lesson. Filling in a questionnaire was a good way to address students' misconceptions about the new topic of eating disorders, but the worksheet work that followed was not stimulating. Without a regular teaching base, lessons are frequently held in unsuitable rooms and teachers have to carry materials around. In a Year 13 lesson on the ethical issues of animal experiments, four crisply introduced activities, cross referencing to other parts of the course, guidance on relevant websites, and helpful suggestions about study techniques, were all combined into a very good session.

GEOGRAPHY

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

Strengths:

- Very good teaching which guides students to well above average standards.
- A very committed teaching team, which shares its enthusiasm with students.
- Effective ways of giving students strong support.
- Lessons, which include a stimulating, range of well-resourced activities.

Areas for improvement:

- The limited use of ICT to collate and analyse geographical data.

160. Geography is a popular subject. In recent years an average of 25 students have taken A Level. In 2001, over 50 per cent attained A/B grades. Over 30 students followed the AS course and almost 70 per cent attained A/B grades. Only four have not continued in Year 13. There is a good balance of male and female students. The A Level points score for males

was better than that for females in 1999 and 2001; the opposite was the case in 1998 and 2000. Standards are well above average. The external examiner for the AS individual enquiry noted that the excellent coursework was based on valuable fieldwork with impressive use of ICT. The examiners for the A Level coursework also reported that the students' investigations were of a very high standard.

161. Present standards are well above average. They have improved since the last inspection. Students achieve very well. Year 12 students use a range of secondary sources to supplement first-hand observations, carried out during the field week in the Isle of Wight. One student is preparing a well-substantiated analysis of the possible effects of a rise in level of the River Yar. Students quickly grasp difficult concepts, as was seen in a Year 12 lesson on rivers' sediment budgets. In this case the teacher's plans for carefully stepped learning were an important ingredient, but students learn to study on their own and often share their research with the rest of the class. Groups of Year 13 students presented research they had done into factors causing spatial variation in the impact of landslides. In this lesson, however, and in another one where they described features of a river channel, students' oral skills were weak compared to their ability to research, and to display their findings on overhead transparencies.

162. Students have excellent note-taking skills. They have been taught to use the Internet very effectively, including university sites, and this type of enquiry forms the basis of many short homeworks which link into subsequent lessons. Students use ICT competently to present their work, but they are given limited opportunities to use it for data logging and collating and for analysing data. This is an area for development.

163. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers have a very good knowledge of, and an enthusiasm for, the subject, which they pass on to their students. One in three Year 13 students have applied to study geography at university and two have Oxbridge offers. Lessons are very well planned; aims are made clear at the start and teachers are careful to reinforce points to instil confidence. Much work is based on an enquiry approach. Before students embark on decision-making exercises, teachers make sure they have a sound understanding of the relevant processes and concepts and provide a range of well-selected, relevant case studies. In Year 13 classes, students evaluated alternative management strategies in different parts of the world susceptible to landslides. They had a secure grasp of the physical processes involved and, to illustrate the contributory factors and events which trigger landslides, they had access to a range of well-selected examples from Aberfan, Indonesia and Hong Kong.

164. Lessons move fast and contain a good variety of activities so students invariably concentrate well. Teachers use video clips and other visual aids most effectively and, on the blackboard, capture and summarise students' contributions to discussion very helpfully. A range of interesting teaching methods is used, for example, an examination marking scheme for students to mark and comment on each other's practice examination answers. Teachers assess students' work very thoroughly and constructively and students appreciate this. The support teachers give students is a notable feature of their work; they give freely of their time to provide advice and guidance. Mentors for coursework assignments also take responsibility for the student's overall progress in geography.

165. Students are very interested in geography; they are inquisitive and highly motivated and get down to work quickly. Their notes and files are very well organised. They enjoy the subject and all of their views about it are very positive. In debates, and when they answer questions, they voice their thoughts very confidently. The leadership and management of

the geography department, which has improved considerably since the last inspection, are very good. Standards have gone up. AS and A Level schemes of work have been well thought out as they are effectively linked to the good range of resources. Administration is very efficient and teachers monitor students' progress closely.

Government and politics

Overall, the quality of provision in government and politics is **very good**.

Strengths:

- High quality teaching, incorporating excellent knowledge, means that students are challenged to think deeply and encouraged to keep up-to-date with current political, social and economic events.
- Well above average A Level, and very high AS results in 2001.
- Students are enthusiastic and many study politics or related subjects at university.
- The many opportunities for students to display and practise their political skills in school and the wide range of library sources for their research.

Areas for improvement:

- Teachers do not meet often enough on a formal basis, in order to evaluate the success of lessons and to share resources.

166. A Level examination results were well above average in 2001, but, as numbers have increased over the last three years, results have dropped slightly. However, they were very high in the 2001 AS examinations; nearly three-quarters of students attained A/B grades, with over half of them attaining grade A. Students' achievement is very good. Present standards are well above average.

167. Students develop a very good understanding of the major concepts of the subject in Year 12. They assimilate new learning quickly and very effectively. They talk confidently and convincingly, for example, about the role of the judiciary and about the relationship between judicial, legislative and executive powers in the United Kingdom. Moreover, they use the subject's technical language accurately and extensively when they take part in intellectual discussions, for example about whether there is an inbuilt bias among judges. The quality of debate is already high in Year 12 and, because teachers encourage them to keep abreast of national and world news, students relate their studies to contemporary events.

168. In Year 13, students maintain their enthusiasm, continue to progress very well and begin to challenge the teachers' views. They show impressive understanding of the arguments for and against the United Kingdom joining the European Monetary Union. They are well aware, not only of the different views held by the major political parties, but also of the debates within parties about the Euro. Students enjoy expressing their views, which they do with aplomb, and they listen intently to each other's views. The quality of political debate in Year 13 is of a very high standard indeed and students justify their views with skill and verve.

169. The standard of students' written assignments is also high. Because they are required to write them once a fortnight and teachers give them extensive advice on how to improve, they write essays, which display very good research skills and a thorough understanding of contemporary political events. They are adept at making notes and can summarise key arguments very effectively.

170. The major strength of the department is the quality of teaching. Teachers have an excellent knowledge of the subject which students respect. Teachers work hard to involve

all students in what the subject has to offer. Questions are challenging and expectations are very high. Teachers give students the best possible advice on examination technique and they insist that students spend time each week considering the major political events which make up the news. On occasions, teachers are carried away by their love for the subject and talk a bit too much. However, teachers generally display a calm, relaxed yet nonetheless rigorous approach and treat their students most respectfully. Teachers recognise that students learn in a variety of ways and introduce group discussion, paired activities, student presentations and, on two days during the inspection, a referendum on whether the United Kingdom should join the European Monetary Union.

171. Students learn very well. In a very good Year 12 lesson on the British judiciary, the teacher's relentless questioning and use of up-to-date source material led to students making impressive progress in understanding why many political commentators believe the judiciary does not reflect the diversity of the society in which it operates. Furthermore, students analysed a recent article from the Economist in a most sophisticated fashion during a thought-provoking Year 13 lesson. There was a vibrant atmosphere in the classroom; students were fully intrigued by the subject matter and they discussed the views of politicians on the Euro in a manner which would not have been out of place in a university union. Teaching is very good overall.

172. Leadership and management in the department are very good. A particularly strong feature is teachers' professional development, which ensures that students are thoroughly prepared for the examinations and for the rigours of university study. Because a week is a long time in politics and because the department places emphasis on current events, teachers work hard to provide their students with resources which are not in textbooks. They organise a variety of activities, visits to Russia and the Czech Republic, debates in school, and outside speakers, to provide opportunities for students to learn outside the classroom. Students pay tribute to the efforts of their teachers and relationships are, therefore, excellent. Teachers are now looking at ways of evaluating the performance of the department on a more formal basis. The department is well placed for further success.

HISTORY

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

Strengths:

- Well above average A Level results for the past three years. In AS results in 2001, 80 per cent of students attained A/B grades.
- Very good teaching with excellent subject knowledge. Teachers promote very high levels of challenge and intellectual debate.
- Very articulate students who write high quality essays and interpret source material in a most sophisticated fashion.
- Excellent leadership of the department.

Areas for improvement:

- Unsatisfactory accommodation because the subject has no permanent base and uses temporary classrooms.

173. History is the most popular humanities subject. The numbers choosing it are increasing and retention rates from Year 12 to Year 13 are very high. Although boys perform slightly better than girls, the percentage of students attaining A/B grades has been well above average since 1998. Moreover, last year's AS Level results were outstanding; more than 50 per cent of students attained grade A. Students achieve very well.

174. With very good teaching and a curriculum which builds so well on work in the main school, standards of work seen continue to be high. Students receive an impressive grounding in how historians work. They acquire high level interpretation skills for GCSE and therefore thrive on the extra challenge in the Sixth Form. They recognise how they can learn in different ways and benefit from the new schemes of work, which particularly emphasise analysis. They are adept at questioning source material and make convincing comments on the reliability, usefulness and, in some cases, plausibility of a variety of documentation, on Anglo-Irish relations in the nineteenth century for example.

175. Students in Year 12 already use historical terminology accurately, naturally and in context: they gave arguments on the performance of the Weimar Republic and its relative stability in the early 1930s in a most articulate fashion. Furthermore, they enjoy the cut and thrust of historical debate; present their views with confidence yet diplomacy, and always support their arguments with well-founded reasons. They are not afraid to challenge the teachers' or each other's views.

176. Students' written work is also well above average and they make notes very effectively. Because teachers mark work in depth and because they offer sound advice on how to improve, students' essay writing improves noticeably over the two years. Year 13 students produce extended writing of a first-year undergraduate quality. They understand the importance of an introduction to set the scene; give both sides of the argument; discuss the views of relevant historians, and come to conclusions after due consideration of all the evidence they have. Students make rapid progress in both years.

177. Teachers have an outstanding knowledge of their history, so they can both support and relentlessly challenge their students, who describe them as 'dynamic'. The high quality teaching is further characterised by a valuable variety of teaching methods and resources, which prepare students well for university study. During the inspection, teaching was very good in four out of five lessons. As teachers know their students well, they select just the right questions to ask in order to ensure that everyone is challenged realistically and effectively. Moreover, recognising that students often learn much from each other, they include paired work and group discussions regularly. The expectation of what students can achieve is outstandingly high and students respond with industry and a most mature approach.

178. Teachers encourage students to make inferences from increasingly difficult sources. In a very good Year 12 lesson on the impact of the 1930's worldwide depression, students thrived as they considered some quite complex numerical data, and came to reasoned views on the effects of the economic slump on Germany. Similarly, in a very good Year 12 lesson on the rise of Hitler, students used contemporary documents to research which, and the reasons why, different groups supported Hitler. The subsequent debate was of a very high standard. Students questioned the accuracy and the significance of some of the sources they had read. In addition to attendance at a variety of revision conferences, students benefit from the annual field trip to Berlin, where they visit the Reichstag and the Wannsee and SS museums.

179. The good improvements made since the last inspection, and the maintenance of high standards in teaching, learning and attainment, are the result of excellent management of the department. The head of department monitors the quality of teaching and how well and effectively students are learning and making progress. Priorities for the future are to develop a shared vision of how history should be taught. The department is, therefore, now looking at ways of extending its ICT provision and improving the appearance of the classrooms.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

180. English language and French were studied in depth. A few lessons and part lessons were observed in **German, Spanish and Japanese** but it was not possible to see any teaching of **Italian**. German is less popular than French but standards and the quality of teaching are very good. In 2001 40 per cent of eleven A Level students and over 90 per cent of thirteen AS students attained A/B grades. In a Year 13 German lesson the teaching was very good; the whole lesson was in German and students' attainment was very high as their pronunciation and fluency are excellent. They gave imaginative presentations on imaginary German political parties and their manifestos, and asked each other perceptive questions in accurate German. Spanish is gaining popularity. One lesson of Spanish was observed in Year 12. The standards students reach, their achievement and the quality of teaching are all good. Discussions with students following the beginners' Italian course showed that they enjoy this language and made very good progress. The five students learning Japanese for everyday conversation are very keen. They listened intently to tapes, but spoke very little, in the short session visited during the inspection.

English

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

Strengths:

- Above average standards in three of the last four years.
- Students' excellent attitudes, combined with teachers' extensive subject knowledge, lead to good understanding.
- Very good marking of work gives students detailed advice about how to improve.
- Very good extra-curricular opportunities.

Areas for improvement:

- Students are not always encouraged to think for themselves.
- Texts studied do not cover a wide enough range of cultures.
- The gap between work done in the main school and the Sixth Form. The GSCE texts do not prepare students well for A and AS courses.
- Students do not use ICT as much as they should.

181. A Level results in 2001 were above average: 44 per cent of the 60 students attained A/B grades and all passed. Results fluctuate over the years, but are predominantly above average. Results are considerably better for male students, though far more females study the subject. In 2001, results were comparable with other subjects in the school, but in the two previous years they were lower. AS results in 2001 were disappointing. Though many students attained high grades, a substantial number did not or were unclassified – a most unusual occurrence. As a result, a third of the students decided not to pursue the subject

for A Level. With a new head of department and attendance at several courses to determine the exact requirements of the specifications, teachers are now much more confident about what needs to be taught. They are also considering changing examination board for a syllabus which better matches the students' aptitudes and interests.

182. Standards are above average, but slightly better in Year 12. Male students' standards are above females' and they are more involved in the higher levels of discussion. Students, especially males and higher attaining females, are articulate and intellectually interested in extending their ideas, when they are encouraged so to do. A Year 12 group, comparing the language of two extracts from 'Jane Eyre' and 'Thornbirds', made perceptive suggestions about the sentimental and romanticised language of the latter. Students use technical terms with increasing assurance over the two years; 'bathos' was introduced to a Year 12 group and used with assurance in Year 13.

183. Students know their set texts well and select appropriate quotations. They read aloud very well, with convincing expression. The many higher attainers comment effectively on style and appreciate how Jane Austen creates humour in 'Emma' and 'Pride and Prejudice', which is a difficult technique to analyse. Lower attaining students struggle to compare unseen poetry, and do not focus on the detail of language in their analysis. Though they identified that clichés had been used in the poem, 'Winter', they did not explain exactly what made some expressions sound clichéd.

184. Students write well, both under timed conditions and at greater length, and many produce perceptive, well-structured and convincing arguments. They have very good literacy skills, but do not use computers enough, either for research or to present their work. Students show a good knowledge of critical opinion, and teachers regularly give them good quality handouts to extend their awareness. The library supports this area of study, but it has too few critical works for the large number of students studying English literature.

185. Many, but not all, students read extensively around their texts; one girl has read all of Jane Austen's novels. In another group, none had read any of Thomas Hardy's novels. Many also show good knowledge and experience of the theatre. These areas of independent learning and developing a broad spectrum of reading are good, but could be better. They are exposed to too few texts reflecting the multi-cultural nature of society. Also, the choice of some examination texts at GCSE, for example, 'Of Mice and Men' and 'An Inspector Calls', is too limited for this calibre of student. The department plans to study more challenging GCSE texts in future and also intends to introduce a booklet which will strengthen the link between GCSE and Sixth Form work. Students do, however, take part in many extra-curricular activities, such as study days, theatre visits and debating societies, all of which help to develop their all-round knowledge.

186. Students start the courses with above average standards, which they maintain, and their achievement is reasonable. Most attain or exceed the minimum target grades set by the school, but these are somewhat low for many students in their English. Teaching and learning are good overall. Some is very good and some is satisfactory, so the quality is uneven. Too little monitoring of teaching and learning takes place to establish what works well and to spread good practice. In the best lessons, pupils develop good understanding at a rapid pace because they are totally involved in the content of the lesson, and they show excellent interest and enthusiasm. In other lessons, though pupils join in discussion and take notes vigorously, learning is too teacher directed, so students are not actively engaged in independent learning.

187. Teachers' very good knowledge is conveyed clearly, often with humour, so that students deepen their understanding. For example, wide knowledge of and enthusiasm for Shakespeare helped students to understand the murder scene in 'Othello' clearly. Teachers plan non-class work well. Often students prepare work for discussion, so the pace of lessons and students' involvement are heightened. Teachers mark work thoroughly, with very good advice on how it can be improved, so that students are clear about their own strengths and weaknesses. They appreciate this and all of them enjoy the course. A pleasant atmosphere prevails in lessons as students feel encouraged to air their views freely.

188. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good. Above average standards have been maintained. Opportunities for oral work, which were said to be lacking, are now frequent. Leadership and management are good. Leadership is very good but management systems, such as regular monitoring and full programmes of study, are not yet in place. The new head of department has already established a positive and happy atmosphere where teachers and students are working together to improve the already high standards.

French

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

Strengths:

- Above average standards in both years. Students make very good progress. Their speaking and listening skills are impressive.
- Very good teaching with some excellent lessons conducted entirely in French.
- Excellent relationships generated by many highly motivated students.

Areas for improvement:

- The use of a wider range of materials and activities in a few lessons when the course book is the main resource.

189. In 1999 and 2001 A Level results were above average; in 1998 and 2000, they were average. In 2001 over 73 per cent of A Level students and over 60 per cent of AS students attained A/B grades. Present A Level and NVQ Level 2 standards are high and students achieve very well. In the last three years, the number of students taking French in the Sixth Form has fluctuated. The subject is increasing in popularity; over 30 Year 12 students are taking AS Level French.

190. There is little difference between male and female attainments, and students of different levels of competency achieve their potential. Many above average students speak French outstandingly well. In a Year 13 lesson on the topic of working life, students took real pleasure in saying what they would do if they won the lottery. They used a variety of tenses in the future, fluently and accurately, some at almost native speaker level. Relationships were excellent. Both students and teachers commented humorously on their views of wealth and riches. This relaxed atmosphere gave students the confidence to express themselves freely and at length. This confidence was built up by careful lesson planning which gave frequent practice of key language.

191. As a result of very well integrated listening practice by the teacher's effective use of the language laboratories, students develop good listening skills. In a lesson they showed very good understanding of tape-recorded personal statements of how people would spend their wealth. In speaking they played the roles of different members of a family working as a group and confidently expressed different points of view. All lessons observed were conducted exclusively in French, by teachers who are themselves fluent speakers. This provides

excellent models for the students and challenges them with the expectation that they will have to listen very carefully.

192. In a lesson on the topic of smoking, with the theme 'should we punish smokers?', students used a very wide range of correct adjectives to express their points of view. They readily understood their teacher's formal and colloquial language, and also enjoyed the occasional word of French slang! This happened because the teacher had planned many good opportunities for students to practise a broad range of language, at a good pace. Year 12 students build very well on their prior attainment at GCSE. They develop a broader range of concepts, topics and verb tenses. In a lesson on the media – TV, radio, and the press – students used some subjunctive tenses well and gave their personal opinions fluently and without prompting. They made good progress in discussing more abstract topics, such as 'we see everything but learn little', with well-argued opinions.

193. Students' written work in both years shows that they also make very good progress in developing longer compositions on a broad range of topics. They write accurately about themes such as political leadership and use the correct register of language for business advertising and communication. The range of tenses and verbs they use is usually accurate although a few students, even in Year 13, confuse different past tenses and make some basic errors. Most, however, develop good translation skills, expressing themselves increasingly less literally and more naturally. Their work is usually well presented and teachers are imaginative in their choice of tasks that they plan. In work on television and the media, for example, students wrote with obvious pleasure about The Simpsons and Fawley Towers!

194. In Year 12 some students extend their GCSE French by studying NVQ Level 2. This more business orientated approach appeals to those who wish to continue, but not specialise, in French. Students' standards and achievement are usually very good. In a role play set at Charles de Gaulle Airport, for example, students asked at least six or seven accurate questions in relation to passenger baggage and security checks. They recorded their answers in the language laboratory and worked co-operatively. Their confident answers and good pronunciation resulted from very carefully planned activities by the teacher, and materials that provided clear visual support.

195. Sixth Form teaching overall is very good. Some is excellent. Using French throughout their lessons, teachers maintain consistently high expectations. By marking work carefully and setting future targets, they help students learn from their mistakes. Students are given plenty of practice for the examinations. Lessons are well planned with clear aims and closely linked to schemes of work. Good use is made of the department's resources and equipment to develop students' independent learning skills. In a few lessons, however, there is overemphasis on the use of the course book, and this sometimes limits the range of activities that students are offered.

196. Teachers benefit from a range of recently developed policies and schemes of work. These provide clear and effective guidance. Very good leadership is improving still further the department's work. An excellent feature of the Sixth Form course is the large number of students who take part in the French exchange programme. This significantly raises their speaking competence and confidence, and their knowledge of contemporary French society and culture. Since the last inspection, increased funding, as a result of Language College status, has resulted in a broader range of French courses in the Sixth Form, combined with very good allocations of staffing, equipment, resourcing and provision of accommodation.