

INSPECTION REPORT

CONYERS SCHOOL

Yarm

LEA area: Stockton-on-Tees

Unique reference number: 111730

Headteacher: Mr J P Morgan

Reporting inspector: Dr A R Beaver
20224

Dates of inspection: 7 - 11 January 2002

Inspection number: 195684

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of students:	11 to 18 years
Gender of students:	Mixed
School address:	Green Lane Yarm Stockton-on-Tees
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr T A Shovlin
Date of previous inspection:	21 April 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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19443	Nancy Walker	Lay inspector		How high are standards? b) Students' attitudes, values and personal development How well does the school care for its students? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
22695	Raymond Cardinal	Team inspector	Sociology	
10561	Angela Fraser	Team inspector	Biology Physics	
11969	John Hardy	Team inspector	Business education	
1769	Michael Holohan	Team inspector	Psychology	
27416	Thomas Howard	Team inspector	Mathematics	
20913	Nicholas McKemey	Team inspector	Art	
20380	Neville Pinkney	Team inspector	Chemistry	
8672	Michael Roberts	Team inspector	Information technology Geography	
5851	Miles Robottom	Team inspector	Health and social care	
3731	William Robson	Team inspector and Sixth form co-ordinator	English	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to students? Special educational needs
31838	Martyn Williams	Team inspector	French	

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Conyers School is attended by students who live in the small town of Yarm, surrounding villages and a rapidly expanding private housing estate, at Ingleby Barwick. The socio-economic profile of the intake is above average. The school is comprehensive and provides for 1353 girls and boys aged 11 to 18 years, of whom 1127 are in Years 7 to 11. There are approximately equal numbers of girls and boys in Years 7 to 11, but the proportions in year groups vary, with more boys in Years 7 and 8 and more girls in Years 9 to 11. The school is bigger than most other secondary schools. The school's popularity and more people living near to it have raised numbers by 153 students since the last inspection in 1997. Fewer students than is typical joined or left the school other than at the usual ages of 11, 16 or above. Four per cent of students come from minority ethnic backgrounds, mainly Pakistani and Indian. Few speak English as an additional language. The percentage of students who are known to be eligible for free school meals is below the national average. The percentage of students identified by the school as having special educational needs is below the national average, and the percentage with statements of special need is well below average. These students have a wide range of needs, including some with physical impairment. When students join the school at age 11, their levels of attainment span the full range, but are usually above average, overall.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Conyers is a very good school. Standards are consistently well above average at all ages. Students make impressive progress and achieve very well. Very effective leadership and management provide education of very good quality. Some boys do not achieve as well as they could at age 16. Teaching is generally good and much is very good. The school gives very good value for money.

What the school does well

- Standards attained by students are well above average at all ages.
- Very good leadership and management provide students with education of very good quality.
- Teaching is good and much is very good, enabling students to learn successfully and make impressive progress.
- Students have very positive attitudes to their work, they behave very well, and relationships are excellent.
- Initiatives to improve the quality of education that students receive are imaginative and extend their learning very well.
- The school has improved considerably since the last inspection.

What could be improved

- Standards attained by some boys in GCSE examinations.
- Accommodation, to include a performance and assembly hall.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Since the last inspection in 1997, the school has continued to improve very well. The standards attained by students have further improved, and results have been consistently well above average in National Curriculum tests in Year 9 and in GCSE examinations and A level. This rising trend in performance has been above the national trend and, overall, students have made such impressive progress because of the very good quality of education that they receive. A key issue of the last inspection was to improve the quality of teaching. This has been achieved very well and teaching is now good overall, with much that is of very good quality. Very good progress has been made on other issues. Effective training has made subject leaders more efficient; their documentation is good, and they now assist students' progress very well. Management at all levels now evaluates the work of the school very well and takes action, as necessary. Students' spiritual development is better provided for, although not all students can take part in an act of worship every day, partly because the school lacks an assembly hall. Impressive improvement has been made in provision for information and communication technology, but some students do not receive their full entitlement to the subject in Years 10 and 11. Annual reports for parents have been substantially changed and are now much more informative. Most parents indicate that

they are satisfied with their quality. Homework is now set regularly and usually provides good opportunities to extend students' learning. Students' work is usually marked well and much provides helpful advice on how to improve. Recent additional funding to extend educational provision for talented students and those who have difficulty in making the most of their educational opportunities is used very well. Leadership of the headteacher, staff and governors is very good and shows very good capacity to improve, even further, on the impressive standards that are being achieved.

STANDARDS

The table below shows the standards achieved by students at the end of Year 11 and sixth form students at the end of Year 13 based on average point scores in GCSE and A-level/AS-level examinations.

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			Similar+ schools
	1999	2000	2001	2001
GCSE examinations	A	A	A	A
A-levels/AS-levels	A	A	A	

Key

very high A*

well above average A

above average B

average C

below average D

well below average E

very low E*

+Reference to similar schools is to those schools which contain a similar proportion of students who claim entitlement to free school meals. This is considered to be a valid indicator by which to compare schools with students of similar backgrounds. Reference to all schools indicates all secondary schools across the country. There are no similar school comparisons at A level.

Girls and boys of very varied academic potential and ethnic background achieve very well in National Curriculum tests in Year 9. Results are consistently well above the average of all schools and of similar+ schools. Standards were well maintained in 2001 in the three subjects tested, English, mathematics and science.

By the end of Year 11, students regularly attain standards in GCSE examinations which are well above the average of all schools and similar schools. In 2001, GCSE examination results were, as usual, well above national standards, including the attainment of five or more GCSE grades A* to C. All students, including those with special educational needs, attained at least five GCSE grades A* to G in 2000 and 2001, an impressive performance, achieved only by five per cent of schools in the country. Students make impressive progress during Years 10 and 11. Those from minority ethnic backgrounds progress very well and usually achieve highly. Girls have achieved very well to attain higher standards than boys, to a greater extent than is typical nationally in some recent years, including 2001. Standards attained in GCSE mathematics, art, drama, physical education and geography examinations were very strong in 2001. In 2000 and 2001, students did not attain as well in design and technology and music as they did in their other subjects.

In work seen during the inspection, students in all year groups achieved very well. In English, students use all subject skills well and, in particular, listen and respond very well to each other's views. In mathematics, students of all levels of competence work at a standard higher than that which might reasonably be expected. They talk about the process of their work well, and written work is accurate and well presented. In science, students understand scientific principles well and apply these accurately and systematically in their work. One in four students study three sciences in Years 10 and 11 and achieve equally well in all of these.

The rising trends of results in Year 9 National Curriculum tests and in GCSE examinations have been above the national trends over five years. The school sets itself challenging targets to achieve in GCSE examinations. These targets are well informed by the data available, set with precision and usually achieved.

In the sixth form, students attained well above average A level results in 2001. Attainment has been very strong in all recent years. The proportion of A and B grades attained at A level is consistently well above

national standards. Students usually achieve higher standards than those that might reasonably be expected from their earlier GCSE examination results, and show considerable added value in their performance at A level as a result of the very good progress that they make. For example, in 2001, students achieved very well at A level in English literature, German, art, history, biology and French. In English language, the value added to students' achievements was below expectations, and results were below the national average. At AS level, Year 12 students attained very good results in 2001. Almost all students passed the examination and over half the grades attained were A or B, enabling them to proceed to A level with confidence. They achieved particularly well in biology, geography, English literature, psychology and information and communication technology. However, they did not achieve, on average, as well as might have been expected in history or product design. Students usually achieve well in the two advanced vocational (AVCE) courses in business and health and social care. Results in health and social care were well above average in 2001. Too few students took the Advanced-Supplementary examinations in 2000 to draw meaningful national comparisons.

Overall, students achieve very well and make very good progress throughout the school.

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Students have very positive attitudes to school and to work.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. Students behave very well and act responsibly throughout the school.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships among students and between students and teachers are excellent. Students are sensible and have a mature outlook.
Attendance	Well above average. Unauthorised absence is well below average.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of students:	Years 7 – 9	Years 10 – 11	Years 12 – 13
Quality of teaching	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.

The school meets the different needs of students very well. Teaching is good, overall, and much is very good at all ages, particularly in the sixth form. It enables students to learn successfully and make very good progress so that they attain well above average standards at all ages. All students learn successfully, including those of very differing levels of competence, those from minority ethnic backgrounds and those with special educational needs. Teachers are skilled at adapting their work for the respective learning needs of girls and boys, but boys do not always achieve as well as they could. English, mathematics and science are taught well. The teaching of literacy is good in English and satisfactory in other subjects. Numeracy is taught well in mathematics, but the teaching of it in other subjects is not yet well enough co-ordinated. Teachers expect students to work hard and achieve highly - and they do - and often inspire them with interest in the subject so that they extend their knowledge and increase their understanding very well. The teaching produces very good work across the curriculum. The teaching of art is of a particularly high standard. No subject teaching is weak.

Students learn effectively from the teaching that they receive. They work hard, concentrate in class, have confidence in their teachers and make very good progress. Excellent relationships support students' learning very well.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good. There is an extensive curriculum and students have a very good range of extra-curricular opportunities.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Very good. Students are well supported to follow the regular curriculum. All achieve very well in GCSE examinations.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	The few students at a basic stage in learning English are well supported to extend their command of the language.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Provision for students' moral and social development is very good. Their cultural development is good and extends to a wide range of cultures; experience of the visual arts is a particular strength. Provision for spiritual development is satisfactory.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school cares well for its students. All age groups are supported to achieve very well.

Links with primary schools are very good, supporting students' progress very well. Some students in Years 10 and 11 do not receive their full entitlement to information and communication technology. Not all students, including those in the sixth form, have the opportunity to take part in a daily act of collective worship every day.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good. Very effective in maintaining high standards and providing a very good standard of educational provision. Leadership is not complacent about the high standards achieved and has ensured much improvement since the last inspection.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Very well. Governors monitor and evaluate the work of the school closely. They work hard with the headteacher to ensure that resources are used effectively.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Very good. Close monitoring of standards and educational provision takes place. Strengths and weaknesses are identified and support provided where necessary.
The strategic use of resources	Very good. Funds are managed very well and used very effectively to enhance the quality of education to the benefit of students.

Substantial improvements in accommodation and learning resources have taken place, but the absence of an assembly hall restricts the regularity of a daily act of collective worship and makes the curriculum in physical education difficult to manage. The school provides a very good quality of education for the income it receives.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The school expects their children to work hard and achieve their best. Their children make good progress. Their children like school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The school working more closely with them. More information about how their children are getting on. Homework.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school helps their children to become mature and responsible. • The quality of teaching. 	
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The inspection team fully agrees with parents' positive views. Inspectors cannot, however, fully endorse the criticisms of some parents. The school does work as closely as is reasonable with parents. It consults them - for example, by questionnaire and individual contact with senior staff at parents' meetings. It provides a regular newsletter and a substantial majority of parents are confident to approach the school with concerns and consider that these are suitably dealt with. Parents are well informed of their children's progress through improved annual and interim reports. Consultative

meetings with teachers are informative and parents acknowledge that teachers know their children well, although time for discussion is short. Homework is usually set regularly and generally extends students' learning well.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form comprises 226 students. It is of above average size and larger than at the time of the last inspection in 1997. There are more girls than boys on roll in Years 12 and 13. Fewer students than is typical come from minority ethnic backgrounds, but in similar proportion to that of the main school. The number of those eligible for free meals is below average. The number of students continuing in education at age 16 is well above average; most continue into the sixth form and follow AS and A level courses. A small minority take advanced vocational (AVCE) courses. Students have an extensive choice of advanced courses to which they are admitted, if, in the school's view, they can benefit from following them.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The sixth form meets students' needs very well. It enables them to achieve highly, maintaining standards of attainment which are consistently well above the national average. Students have mature and very positive attitudes, work hard and make the most of their opportunities. Teaching is very good overall, and some is excellent. Leadership and management are very good, providing students with a very good, and cost-effective, quality of education.

Strengths

- Standards attained in examinations are consistently well above the national average.
- Teaching is very good overall, and some is excellent, ensuring that students gain knowledge and extend their understanding and skills effectively.
- Relationships are excellent. Students have mature and responsible attitudes and make the most of their opportunities.
- Leadership and management provide a very good quality of education cost-effectively.
- The personal guidance and support that students receive are of very good quality.

What could be improved

- The numbers of books and printed resources relevant to subject courses in the library to support students' opportunities for independent work and research.
- The curriculum for careers education and individual support for students in choosing careers.

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

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

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

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	Good. Teaching is good and students extend their subject skills very well. They achieve above average standards in examinations.
Chemistry	Good. Teaching is very good, because teachers have high expectations of students who confidently develop independent learning skills and achieve well. Standards are above average.
Biology	Very good. Very good teaching gives students the confidence to learn and achieve very highly. Standards are well above average.
Physics	Good. Standards are above average. Very good teaching enables students to achieve, at least, good standards. Talented students achieve exceptionally well.

Business studies	Good. Good teaching enables students to make good progress and attain above average standards.
Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Information technology	Good. Teaching is consistently good. Students achieve well and standards are above the national average.
Health and social care	Good. Standards are above average. Teaching is good, but expertise is restricted to units in food technology. Students have confidence to work independently and achieve well.
Art	Excellent. Excellent teaching inspires students to extend their knowledge and skills very well and achieve highly. Attainment at A level was outstanding in 2001.
Geography	Very good. Students achieve very well and standards are usually well above average. Teaching is very good.
Sociology	Very good. Standards are above average and talented students achieve exceptionally well. Teaching is very good, with the result that students have very positive attitudes and want to learn.
Psychology	Good. Consistently good teaching enables students to learn successfully. The first students to take AS examinations attained well and had the knowledge and skills to continue to A level with confidence.
English	Good. Standards in English literature are very high; those in English language are close to the national average. Teaching is good overall, and very good in English literature, enabling students to achieve exceptionally well in that subject.
French	Good. Standards are above average. Good teaching enables students to achieve well.

The OFSTED criteria for choice of subjects are: the inclusion of English, mathematics, science, and vocational courses; a span of curriculum areas; the school's range of provision; strong and weak subjects; take-up; different levels of courses, if applicable; inspection of courses not provided on site; inspection expertise available.

Other courses were sampled. Teaching was at least good, and some was very good, for example, in Year 12 German and history lessons, enabling students to prepare very well for imminent examinations. Results and the standards seen in lessons are generally above average. Relationships among students and teachers are exceptionally good and very supportive of learning, as seen, for example, in a Year 13 economics lesson.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Students are provided with clear information about courses and induction to the sixth form. They receive very good personal support and guidance. The targets set for them are monitored regularly in almost all subjects. Guidance for higher education is good, but careers education and support are insufficient.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Leadership and management are very effective, providing students with a very good, and cost-effective, quality of education. Teaching is closely monitored and very good. Students have equal access to courses and achieve very well.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Teachers are accessible to help them to overcome difficulties with their work.Courses are available which suit their talents and aspirations.Teaching is effective and challenges them to do well.They were helped to settle into the sixth form and meet work requirements well.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Careers guidance.Information on how well they are doing on their courses.The range of activities and courses beyond their main subjects.Advice on what courses to take in the sixth form.The school listening to their views more.

Inspectors fully endorse students' positive views. They do not agree with most of the criticisms of a minority of students. Students are kept informed of their progress by regular review of targets in most subjects, and the vast majority consider that teachers make themselves available and accessible to give advice. AS courses give only restricted time for other activities, but the curriculum provides general studies and recreation, and a very good range of extra-curricular activities is also available. The school provides informative descriptions and personal advice on courses for students and parents, but the choice must, ultimately, be that of each individual student. The vast majority of students consider that they are following the right courses. Students can express their views through the school council and directly to the head of sixth form. Inspectors agree with students that not enough careers education is provided, and that there is insufficient access to individual guidance on career choices.

COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

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

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Standards attained by students are well above average at all ages.

1. Students attain standards in their work which are well above the national average at all ages. Effective leadership and management ensure good teaching and much that is very good; very positive attitudes to work enable students at all levels of competence to achieve very well. In Year 9 National Curriculum tests in English, mathematics and science in 2001 and all recent years, students attained standards that were well above the national average. The rising trend in average points attained in the tests has been higher than the national upward trend over the last five years.
2. In GCSE examinations, standards were well above average in 2001 and have been consistently at this level. Students' attainment of five or more GCSE A* to C grades was well above average in 2001, and has regularly maintained this level. Attainment of five or more A* to G grades in GCSE examinations was very high in comparison with all schools, and among the highest five per cent of schools in the country. No student of any level of competence in the school attained a lower standard than this in 2001, including students with very different special educational needs. Students from minority ethnic backgrounds, some of whom were at an early stage in learning English when they joined the school, attain standards well in line with those of others. The overall average point score attained was well above average in 2001, and has been consistently at this level. The trend in the rising average point score attained in GCSE examinations has been above the national trend for the last five years.
3. Students achieve a very good rate of progress throughout the school. For example, in Years 10 and 11, students' rate of progress (measured by comparing their standard of attainment in National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9 in 1999 with their attainment in GCSE examinations in 2001) was very high, and among the five per cent highest achieving schools in the country on this measure. This is a very impressive result.
4. The school's performance, measured against that of similar schools (those providing for students of similar socio-economic backgrounds to those of Conyers students) was well above average in 2001, both in Year 9 National Curriculum tests and in GCSE examinations. Many students have relatively advantaged backgrounds, with the result that the school's results are measured against more demanding criteria, but performance still compares very favourably with this type of school.
5. Girls and boys attain standards well ahead of those attained by girls and boys, nationally. On average, girls achieve especially well in GCSE examinations, well ahead of boys, although many boys also attain high standards. The school has worked very hard to analyse results and much valuable staff training has been given to developing methods to raise the attainment of boys. Although in some years there has been little difference in the attainment of girls and boys in GCSE examinations, in 2001, the difference was considerably above that which applied nationally. The good work done to raise boys' attainment has had a positive effect, but it has had equal impact on raising the attainment of girls even further.

Very good leadership and management provide students with education of very good quality.

6. The headteacher's leadership is very skilful, effective and good humoured. Parents, governors and staff have confidence in him. He and his colleagues in the leadership group enable and encourage staff to evaluate their own performance to find ways to improve even further on the very good quality of education which they provide for students. The leadership group is a very effective team among whom relationships are open, frank and self-critical. Positive attitudes among the school's leadership are reflected in the good teamwork seen elsewhere across the school in most subject departments and all year teams, who work very well together to the benefit of students. Although standards attained across the school are well above average at all ages, there is no complacency among the school's leaders and managers - at all levels of responsibility. All want to improve further on the very good quality of education that students receive, even where quality can be

- judged excellent, as in art.
7. The leadership group's encouragement and support for all to be critically self-evaluative ensures confidence and high morale among staff. These characteristics lead to improved performance. Teachers have confidence in themselves, because the headteacher and his senior colleagues are open and willing to listen to concerns and innovative ideas. Communication between the leadership and all staff is very good. A result of open discussion and a constant search for improvement has been the maintenance of standards which are well above average at all ages. Sustaining high standards is particularly challenging and only possible because the headteacher and senior and middle managers embrace change constructively. They give practical support and direction to innovation so that constructive change is recognised as a valuable part of school life. Other staff respond by exploiting the opportunities available very well and get things done. For example, recent developments have much improved and extended the quality of accommodation; opportunities to provide more for gifted and talented students have been enthusiastically taken up. Staff at all levels of responsibility manage change very well. Teachers and other staff respond very well to the leadership that they receive from the headteacher and recognise that change is well managed and implemented effectively to enhance performance, as in the much improved provision and use of information and communication technology across the school.
 8. Effective systems to monitor and evaluate the work of the school support the confidence that leadership provides for staff to be self-critical. These systems help to ensure that students receive a very good education. The leadership group is well aware of the quality of teaching and standards of students' work, because of extensive observation of lessons by these senior managers themselves and, increasingly, by subject team leaders. The nationally required system of performance management has been made part of existing, effective practice and is now used to monitor and evaluate teaching. Teachers' needs for training are rapidly identified and responded to by a highly effective and supportive system. An effect of the improved monitoring and evaluation of lessons since the inspection in 1997 has been a substantial improvement in the quality of teaching. Governors contribute well to the process of evaluation by their system by which each person in turn acts as a "governor of the month". The process attaches a different governor to the school each month, enabling him or her to observe lessons and other activities and discuss issues with staff. All governors receive a report on the findings. Managers closely analyse data, showing performance of the school and of individual students, and act on this to help raise performance. For example, senior staff have identified underachieving students in Year 11 and are monitoring their progress carefully, providing them with individual support to raise their standards. Individual students report positively on the support that they are receiving.
 9. School planning for improvement is a very strong aspect of management. The plan identifies the right priorities, for example, the quality of teaching and learning. The means of evaluating progress are made very clear and enable the headteacher and governors to judge annual performance well. Funding is effectively linked to identified priorities and used very well. Data is assembled carefully to inform planning over three years, recognising, for example, the imminent rise and subsequent fall in the school roll. The written statement of planned improvement is a useful working document, informative but concise, although limited to the time-scale of a single year.
 10. Overall, leadership and management at all levels have maintained standards of attainment which have been consistently well above average for all age groups. The school has become even more popular with parents and has increased in size. It has undergone major changes with substantial improvements to accommodation and facilities. Change has been managed very well, to the benefit of all students.

Teaching is good and much is very good, enabling students to learn successfully and make impressive progress.

11. The vast majority of lessons seen across Years 7 to 11 were of, at least, good quality. One in three were very good or excellent. Overall the quality of teaching is good and much work is very good, enabling students to learn successfully and make very good progress. Students of wide-ranging competence, those with special educational needs and those from minority ethnic backgrounds all learn successfully from the teaching that they receive, so that they attain very well in tests and examinations.

12. An outstanding feature of teaching is the high expectations that teachers have of students that they will work hard and achieve highly, and they do. For example, in a vibrant Year 9 French lesson for students taking two foreign languages, the teacher's high expectations that students should use French actively and independently encouraged them to extend their skills in the language very well. In an excellent Year 7 religious education lesson on rites of passage, illustrated by Hindu weddings, the teacher made the experience of the lesson dramatic, captivating students' interest so well that they responded strongly to high expectations for their own work on the subject. Teachers expect students to work hard and at a good pace and they do so in very many of the lessons seen.
13. Teachers manage their classes very well. Relationships between teachers and students are excellent overall, enabling most classes to be very effective working partnerships, in which students learn successfully and make very good progress. For example, Year 7 students in a lesson in information and communication technology were very well managed by the teacher, enabling them to produce questionnaires of good quality on healthy eating in the time available. Students were motivated to work hard and achieve well by the use of credits. The teacher of a very good Year 9 lesson to develop skills in basketball managed the class very well. This very well structured lesson involved, progressively, individual work, followed by work in pairs and then in groups to develop essential skills. As a result, all members of the class of very varied competence in the subject progressed well. Students respect teachers, recognise their subject knowledge, listen to them, and accept their management of lessons.
14. Teachers use a good range of methods in their work. They demonstrate the skills of the subject very well to enable students to understand fully what to aim for. In art, for example, teachers give confident, skilled and very clear demonstrations and explanations of how to use materials and apply techniques. In Year 10, students learned how to apply different materials to surfaces to give varied effects as a result of teachers' clear demonstrations of the techniques involved. The teacher of a Year 9 class demonstrated stippling technique very well, enabling students to produce convincing images themselves in the short time available. Teachers use questions effectively and challenge students' understanding well, extending their learning. Their explanations are usually very clear and to the point. They are very well aware of methods to help boys to learn effectively. For example, girls and boys are sometimes seated in pairs and work well together in this situation. Some classes are organised for girls or boys separately. Teachers ensure that boys' attention is retained - for example, by work that is tightly structured, enabling them to work effectively to short-term tasks. The methods which teachers are using to improve boys' learning have helped to raise girls' achievements even further, and girls attain standards that are well above the average of all girls, nationally.
15. Teachers have very good knowledge of their subjects. This enables them to plan lessons so that students of all levels of competence make the progress that they should. Any difficulties in understanding are overcome by teachers' clear explanations. Few teachers have timetables that require them to teach outside the subjects for which they are specially qualified; those who do often manage subject content exceptionally well. For example, some teaching of French by a non-specialist in the subject is outstanding. In a Year 9 science lesson on the topic of conversion of one form of energy into another, the teacher's subject knowledge extended students' learning well. The result was that students attained well above average standards in consolidating their understanding of the topic.
16. Resources are used well to help students to learn. For example, the teacher of a Year 9 mathematics class used computers effectively in an activity in which students extended their knowledge of the subject and their use of computers equally well. A Year 10 German lesson, in which a computer program was used, enabled students to work at their own level in learning the subject.
17. Teachers generally set homework regularly. This usually extends students' work in class effectively through well-chosen tasks, as they themselves recognise.
18. In general, teaching is of, at least, consistently good quality. Much is of high quality, enabling students to learn and to achieve impressive standards at all ages. Parents are right to recognise

teaching as a strength of the school.

Students have very positive attitudes to their work, they behave very well, and relationships are excellent.

19. Students have very positive attitudes to their work. They work hard in class in all subjects and concentrate on the work which teachers provide. As a result they learn successfully, extending their subject knowledge and understanding well in lessons. For example, in a Year 11 English lesson, in which students were required to discuss the text of the novel, *Our Love Now*, all did so without embarrassment, and with considerable maturity, irrespective of their levels of competence in the subject. The result was that their understanding increased considerably. Similarly, in a Year 11 mathematics lesson in which the ideas of Pythagoras were applied to multiple triangles and situations in real life, students responded very well to the challenge of the work. As a result of their enthusiastic response, average attainers were able to achieve highly and work at a level higher than might reasonably have been expected. In art, for example, at all ages, individual students' intense concentration enables them to produce thoughtful and imaginative work of high quality. Overall, students' very positive attitudes to learning contribute greatly to the very good standards that they achieve.
20. The behaviour of students in classrooms is very good. They listen to teachers and to each other, almost always in a considerate and mature manner. As a result, learning is supported very well by partnerships between teachers and students that are apparent in lessons. Good order and a strong sense of purpose are evident in lessons throughout the school. Supporting very good behaviour in lessons are excellent relationships between students and teachers and among students themselves. Excellent relationships give students confidence to respond in class and show enthusiasm for learning without being inhibited by peers who might express cynicism for positive responses to the learning which teachers intend. Girls behave with remarkable confidence in classrooms and, for example, respond freely and positively to teachers' questions, uninhibited because the vast majority of boys behave well and accept that the key purpose of school is to learn with others and to be successful.
21. Students behave very well out of lessons. They move about the school sensibly and behave responsibly in congested areas, showing respect for each other. They were very tolerant when waiting for a considerable time in a queue for sandwiches at lunchtime, for example. They are extremely courteous, considerate, polite and helpful to others. Both in and out of classrooms, mutual respect, regard and affection between students and teachers and among students themselves support very positive 'family' relationships across all age groups. Students' moral and social development is very good and the vast majority of parents are right to recognise that the school is helping their children to become mature and responsible. It is a mark of the excellent relationships and very good behaviour that no student has been permanently excluded for the last four years. The number of fixed term exclusions is well below average.

Initiatives to improve the quality of education that students receive are imaginative and extend their learning very well.

22. The school accepts change as part of the normal process of the life and work of the institution. Initiatives to extend the opportunities available to students are taken up and developed with vigour and a strong sense of purpose. For example, the school has had the opportunity, through the local authority, to lead an initiative to provide more directly for the needs of gifted and talented students, through the national Excellence in Cities programme. Developments are still at a relatively early stage, but already clear benefits are becoming apparent in the valuable extended experience which students are receiving. Initiatives undertaken are very well thought through. Departments have identified talented students in their subjects, and additional training of staff has taken place on how to respond to the needs of these students and manage the projects that are planned. Many projects to extend learning are now taking place or are planned for the current academic year. For example, in English, an initiative is exploring the extended use of independent learning for students in Year 10. In art, use of an artist in residence is intended to stretch students' imagination and ideas in the subject to enhance their work further. In physical education, opportunities for students to learn and evaluate their own and their peers' experience are planned - for example, by use of digital cameras to record and evaluate each other's performance. Evaluation of all initiatives is planned through, for example, qualitative measures such as interviewing individual students about their perceptions of the initiatives that they

experience, as well as through analysis of quantitative data - for example, measuring academic performance at the highest levels in examinations.

23. Another initiative which is proving very successful is Excellence Challenge, mainly led by sixth formers, but also including students in other years. This too has resulted in some impressive projects. For example, all students in Year 7 tutor groups were interviewed to establish what they thought their preferred styles of learning were. This led to photographs of all students with their preferences in learning listed below their pictures. Every teacher now has this information so that it informs their practice in teaching, enabling them to respond directly to students' learning needs. Many exciting and entertaining competitions, games and puzzles have been provided for students to stretch their thinking. Visits have also extended students' experience well.
24. A further initiative has enabled the school to appoint a learning mentor to support students who have difficulty in making the most of their educational opportunities. Individual students are now targeted for support if their attendance is significantly below the school's average. Counselling provides students with the support they need to come to school, in some cases. In the last academic year, several students were supported to attend and they attained five or more GCSE grades, when few or none had been anticipated. This excellent initiative recognises that each individual student is of equal value and should be helped to make the most of the valuable opportunities which the school provides.
25. The school embraces and guides change after careful consideration of all implications. The key criterion which is applied is that change should benefit students directly. There is no complacency.

The school has improved considerably since the last inspection.

26. The school's improvement has been impressive, since its last inspection five years ago. An outstanding feature has been the high level of consistency in maintaining standards, which have been well above the average of all schools and of schools containing students of similar backgrounds. Students progress extremely well in all years, although some boys could attain higher standards in GCSE examinations. The quality of education provided has been very good. Above all, teaching has improved considerably and is now good, with much that is of very good. A few lessons are excellent.
27. Very good progress has been made in managing the key issues raised by the last inspection. Training of staff has been carefully linked to needs identified by monitoring and evaluation of classroom practice and it has enabled teachers to be more effective in their work with students with very different needs. Improved opportunities for training of staff have been recently recognized by the school's achievement in becoming an Investor in People. Students' spiritual development is better provided for, but the opportunity of an act of worship for all students every day is lacking, partly because the school lacks an assembly hall. Improvement in providing for students' use of information and communication technology has been impressive. Many more modern computers and other equipment are available throughout the school, including an extensive facility in the library-resource centre. Departments enable students to use the equipment regularly, and teachers have enhanced their skills considerably by further training. Annual reports for parents have been substantially improved and are now much more informative for parents, who indicate that they are satisfied with their quality. Homework is set regularly and usually provides good opportunities to extend students' learning.
28. Since the last inspection, the school has made the most of the opportunity to improve accommodation. Its overall quality is now good, and some areas are very good and supportive to learning. Students respect the quality of the accommodation that they have. The poor quality, temporary accommodation which continues to be used at present is scheduled to be discontinued after the anticipated rise and fall in the school roll. Further additional funding, for example, to extend educational provision for talented students and for those who have difficulty making the most of their educational opportunities, is being used very well. Headteacher, staff and governors show the determination and commitment necessary to improve, even further, on the impressive standards that are currently achieved.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Standards attained by some boys in GCSE examinations.

29. Boys do not usually attain as highly as girls in GCSE examinations. In Year 9 National Curriculum tests, girls do better than boys in English, but not to an extent beyond the national difference in performance of girls and boys. In mathematics and science, boys are often slightly ahead of girls. The differences in performance are unremarkable, by national comparisons, at the end of Year 9. In GCSE examinations in some years, the difference between the attainments of girls and boys is unremarkable, but in other years, the gap in performance is considerably greater than that which applies nationally. This, for example, was the case in 2001.
30. The school has recognised the disparity in the attainments of the two sexes and has done a great deal to raise the attainment of boys. Considerable staff training has been directed to this issue. Data showing performance in examinations is collated and analysed closely and all subject departments have the necessary information to enable them to adapt their practice to improve boys' attainment. A range of teaching methods is used to support raising boys' achievement. For example, seating arrangements with boys and girls together are used in many lessons; paired work often involves a girl and a boy working together. Teachers organise work for boys so that they have a very clear structure to their work, helping them to achieve specific objectives. During the inspection, girls were especially confident and responsive in class, but in many classes boys were equally engaged.
31. In spite of the very good work done to assist boys' learning, GCSE examination results in 2001 revealed a wider gap in performance than ever. However, although boys' performance was above that of boys nationally, the performance by girls was, proportionately, even higher. The work done to extend boys' performance has supported improvement of both sexes, but especially that of girls.
32. The school's initiatives to raise boys' attainment have been directed mostly at Years 7 to 9. Students who have experienced different teaching practices and classroom organisation have now entered Year 10, and the school will soon be able to observe the outcomes of these initiatives in Year 11. The school should persevere with its worthwhile efforts to raise boys' attainment, and judge the outcomes, particularly those in GCSE examinations in 2003.

Accommodation to include a performance and assembly hall.

33. The school's accommodation has greatly improved in recent years. The overall quality is good and many areas are now of very good quality. The base for students with special educational needs provides excellent accommodation. The design and technology department, for example, which has had difficulty in co-ordinating work across the different aspects of the subject because accommodation has been physically separate, has now the opportunity of using more centralised accommodation of very good quality. This provides the opportunity for the closer co-ordination of work across the different elements of the subject.
34. However, the school lacks a performance and assembly hall. This has adverse effects on the curriculum, the management of work and school organisation and restricts opportunities for the school to assemble together for, for example, daily acts of collective worship. Although the school has a gymnasium and a sports hall, they are not designed to provide for the particular needs that are met by an assembly hall. A hall would provide more extensive curricular and extra-curricular opportunities for drama and productions. The school mounts regular public performances, large-scale productions and musical activities - the most recent being *Oklahoma*. However, the gymnasium lacks the necessary stage and back-stage facilities of a performance hall, usually to be found in a school of this size, creating unnecessary organisational difficulties. Daily assemblies for year groups in the gymnasium cause organisational and managerial difficulties, because apparatus for physical education has to be packed away and replaced after assemblies. The blocked, sprung floor has to be covered by plastic sheeting to protect it against damage, but constant daily use for assemblies is likely to have an adverse effect, and the costs of replacement of a sprung floor may prove prohibitive. Students have the opportunity for an act of collective worship once each week, as the gymnasium provides space for one seated year group only.

Therefore, the school is unable to comply with the requirement for all students to have the opportunity for an act of collective worship each day. The school should do what it can

to extend its much-improved accommodation further, by the addition of a performance and assembly hall.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

35. In order for the school to improve its standards and provision even further, governors and management should:

Main school

- (1) Further improve the attainment of boys, especially in GCSE examinations, by continuing to use rigorously the good practice that has resulted from the school's research and training. Continue to analyse data to show girls' and boys' performance. Encourage subject departments to adapt their methods of teaching and coverage of the curriculum to support boys' attainment further.

(See paragraphs: 29 – 32. This issue is recognised in the school's own improvement planning.)

- (2) Extend accommodation by the addition of a performance and assembly hall, by use of all appropriate, available means.

(See paragraphs: 33 and 34.)

Sixth form

- (1) Extend students' opportunities for independent work and research by increasing the numbers of books and printed resources relevant to subject courses in the library and the facilities and accommodation for housing these.

(See paragraphs: 86, 140, 146)

- (2) Increase students' knowledge and confidence in choosing a career by providing a more extensive curriculum for careers education and the opportunity for every student to have personal guidance in choice of career pathways.

(See paragraphs: 72, 77)

In addition to the key issues above, the school should consider including in its action plan the following issue relating to another weakness:

- Provide a daily act of worship for sixth form students. *(See paragraphs: 64)*

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	49
	Sixth form	66
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		45

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

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

Number	2	14	24	9	0	0	0
Percentage	4	29	49	18	0	0	0

Sixth form

Number	3	26	33	3	1	0	0
Percentage	5	39	50	5	2	0	0

The percentage for the sixth form does not total 100 because of rounding. The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching. Care should be taken when interpreting the percentages for Years 7 – 11 and for the sixth form, as each sixth form lesson represents more than one percentage point, and each lesson for Years 7 – 11 represents two percentage points.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of students on the school's roll	1127	226
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	37	0

Special educational needs

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	10	1
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	126	1

English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	19

Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	23
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	28

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	6.1
National comparative data	8.1

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.1
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2001	95	106	201

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	85	85	86
	Girls	101	93	96
	Total	186	178	182
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	93 (85)	89 (87)	91 (84)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	64 (48)	67 (71)	58 (51)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	77	89	84
	Girls	96	93	97
	Total	173	182	181
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	86 (84)	91 (84)	89 (82)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	46 (41)	66 (70)	57 (49)
	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)

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	2001	107	102	209

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	60	107	107
	Girls	84	102	102
	Total	144	209	209
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	69 (65)	100 (99)	100 (100)
	National	48 (47)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	52 (51)
	National	39 (38.4)

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	2001	103	131	234

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	17.8	25.7	22.5 (21)	4.8	2.8	3.9 (5.1)
National	17.8	18.6	18.2 (17.9)	2.6	2.9	2.7 (2.7)

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number in their final year of studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	11	82
	National		80

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	5
Black – other	0
Indian	7
Pakistani	16
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	2
White	1304
Any other minority ethnic group	19

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	5	0
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	79.85
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.9

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	21
Total aggregate hours worked per week	603

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	75
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y13

Key Stage 3	26.6
Key Stage 4	22.2

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000-2001
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	£
Total income	3,324,934
Total expenditure	3,281,333
Expenditure per student	2,474
Balance brought forward from previous year	39,681
Balance carried forward to next year	83,282

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	11.6
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	18.9

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

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1363
Number of questionnaires returned	337

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	36	56	6	2	0
My child is making good progress in school.	37	60	2	0	2
Behaviour in the school is good.	23	61	8	2	6
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	20	60	13	5	2
The teaching is good.	23	64	3	1	9
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	22	53	16	5	3
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	40	45	7	4	4
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	48	47	4	0	2
The school works closely with parents.	20	49	23	3	6
The school is well led and managed.	31	50	7	2	11
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	30	60	5	1	5
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	25	48	10	5	13

Other issues raised by parents

Parents are generally very supportive of the school and have no major concerns.

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

36. Students' attainment on entry to sixth form courses differs, but all have attained GCSE grade C or higher in the subjects that they study. Most students who join AS courses have attained GCSE grade B in their choice of AS subject. Very few students drop out of the courses that they choose to follow, after the first few weeks of the autumn term.
37. In 2001, students attained well above average A level results. The rising trend in results in all recent years has been in line with the national trend, but at a higher level than the average national standard. The percentages of A and B grades and pass grades (A to E) that students have attained at A level have been well above national standards during the last three years. Usually girls' and boys' attainment is similar, but in 2001, the gap in performance was marked, with girls doing much better than boys. The reasons for the difference have not yet been fully explained. Students from minority ethnic backgrounds attain, at least, the standards that they should, and often more highly. Students with special educational needs receive sensitive provision and achieve very well. The school is not required to set overall targets for results in examinations, but it uses data very well and assesses the value added to students' attainments from their sixth form courses very well.
38. Year 12 students attained very good results in the first AS level examinations in 2001. Almost all students passed the examination and over half the grades attained were A or B, enabling them to proceed to A level with confidence. They achieved particularly well in biology, geography, English literature, psychology and information and communication technology. However, they did not achieve, on average, as well as might have been expected, from their results in GCSE examinations in history or product design.
39. Too few students took the last Advanced-Supplementary examinations in 2000 to draw meaningful national comparisons, but most candidates at least passed the examination.
40. Students usually apply the skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology effectively in their work, when given the opportunity. However, the school does not currently offer examinations in these subjects and is sensibly waiting for national practice in assessment of these skills to be fully resolved.
41. Students have regularly attained well in the two advanced vocational courses, which, until recently, have been advanced GNVQ. For example, results in health and social care were well above average in 2001. Currently, few students are following the new Advanced Vocational Certificate courses in business and health and social care, but these few are achieving above average standards according to the evidence of work seen during the inspection.
42. Students usually achieve higher A level standards than might reasonably be expected from their earlier results in GCSE examinations. Their performance shows considerable added value between GCSE and A level. They achieve very well because teachers have high expectations of students, who respond very well to the challenges with which they are presented. Students' attitudes to their work are very positive because they have confidence in their teachers; as a result, they make very good progress. In 2001, students achieved very well in A level English literature, German, art, history, biology and French. However, in English language, the value added to students' achievements was below that expected, and the result was below the national average. Achievement of the few students in music was also below expectations.
43. In work seen during the inspection, overall, standards in AS, A and AVCE courses were what might reasonably have been expected from students' previous attainment in GCSE examinations, at this stage in their courses. Standards in lessons and students' work were outstanding in art and very good in biology, English literature, geography and mathematics. Good standards were seen in other subjects, including the AS and A level courses in psychology, a new subject to the

school. In English language, students were achieving average standards, because the quality of some teaching and the attitudes of some students did not match the very good performance seen in all work in English literature. Overall, students extend their subject knowledge and understanding very well. They apply analytical skills effectively in their work and research with confidence and skill. They are very skilful in applying practical techniques, as, for example in art. They listen with understanding to teachers and their peers, record information concisely and use it effectively. The recall and application of knowledge and skills learned previously by Year 12 students, during the week of the inspection immediately before AS examinations, were most impressive. They exemplified students' high level of thinking and understanding in response to the high expectations of teachers.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

44. Students' attitudes to their studies and towards the school in general are very good. Although their courses are challenging and require considerable commitment in time and effort, students persevere and the vast majority complete their courses and are successful. Year 13 students have such a positive experience of learning that almost all aim to continue their studies into higher education. Students work very well independently and take responsibility for their own learning without the need for high levels of supervision.
45. Students behave very well in class and in their common rooms. They act sensibly and responsibly and provide good role models for younger students around the school. No sixth form student has been excluded from the school since the last inspection.
46. Students' personal development is very good. They respond very well when given responsibility. For example, the head boy and head girl organise and lead the year groups of the student council. Year 12 students surveyed Year 7 students for their views of the best methods to help them to learn most effectively, and produced class profiles to help teachers to get to know their students better. Fifteen sixth form students behave very responsibly as paid lunchtime supervisors for an hour each day and build excellent relationships with the younger students in the school.
47. Relationships among students of all ages, and relationships between sixth formers and teachers are excellent. For example, students involved with Excellence Challenge, an opportunity arising from the school's participation in the Excellence in Cities initiative, make an excellent contribution to extending worthwhile experiences to all students across the school. Students hold their teachers in high regard, particularly because of their competence and knowledge of their subjects. Some comment that, 'My teachers are my friends'. As a result, students work very well together in lessons, sharing and exploring ideas, and they are not reluctant to ask for help if they need it, as they freely acknowledge. Such positive relationships support learning very well and enable students to be very successful, consistently attaining well above average standards in examinations.
48. Students recognise that regular attendance is essential to gaining success in examinations and, consequently, they achieve above average rates of attendance. They are habitually punctual at the start of lessons.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

49. Teaching is very good, overall. Twenty-nine of the 66 lessons seen were very good or excellent. Very few lessons were of less than good quality, although one, uncharacteristic, lesson seen was unsatisfactory because work did not involve students enough in learning for them to make the progress that they should. In general, teaching enables students of all levels of competence and ethnic background to learn successfully. Students with special educational needs are taught with care and sensitivity and achieve very well as a result. Students have much confidence in their teachers and this contributes considerably to the good progress that they make. The quality of teaching contributes greatly to the impressive achievements of higher attainers, as in sociology and physics, for example. Although students do very well in sociology, because of very good teaching, the course is allotted one lesson fewer than other subjects and, therefore, students

receive proportionately less teaching and individual support from teachers. A consequence is that some lower attaining students do not always achieve as well as they could in this subject. Overall, a result of very good teaching is that students achieve very well and attain the standards to be expected from their earlier GCSE examination results, and often more highly. Teaching enables both girls and boys to learn successfully, although in 2001, girls attained higher standards than boys, overall. There is no apparent difference in the quality of teaching that they receive or in the excellent relationships with teachers which apply across the school.

50. The key skills of communication, numeracy and use of information and communication technology are taught adequately within subject courses, overall. Students do not take examinations in key skills. They learn to speak confidently and to the point in class in all subjects. They usually write competently and accurately, but more opportunity to write at length in psychology would support progress at A level in this subject. Numeracy is taught well in mathematics, but more teaching of mathematics, to extend provision for students who do not take mathematics, at least to AS level, is needed if all students are to do as well as possible in physics. Numerical skills are not taught extensively enough in health and social care. The inspection immediately preceded AS examinations, and teachers were very skilled in supporting student's consolidation of earlier learning, making revision very effective and challenging.
51. Teaching is characterised, above all, by the high expectations that teachers have of students. They expect that students will respond well to challenging work, and they do. They expect students to work hard and concentrate in lessons, and they do. High expectations influence students greatly and enable them to be effective and successful learners. For example, the teacher of a biology lesson for Year 12 and 13 students, revising cell membranes before the AS examinations, challenged students' understanding very well by using examples which were unfamiliar to them. Students were expected to explain results and discuss features of the complex structure of plants. They responded with confidence and extended their understanding very well. Lessons in which students were being helped to consolidate their AS work in revision were very good examples of teachers' skills in effectively extending students' learning; they helped students to analyse and evaluate earlier work, greatly extending their understanding and skills.
52. Teachers' knowledge of their subjects is very good. It enables them to plan lessons and to make them experiences which extend students' learning. They often inspire students with interest in the subject. They make learning stimulating, encouraging students to increase their knowledge and understanding very well. In a Year 12 lesson on Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poetry, the teacher's knowledge drew insights from the students, consolidating their understanding of imagery very well. Some students were helped to perceive that the imagery relating to a kiss on the hand of a woman writer, not only indicated her purity, but also expressed appreciation of her literary talent. Teachers have very good knowledge of what students need to do to attain well in examinations and this contributes considerably to their chances of success. By illustrating how words are formed, the teacher of a Year 12 German lesson enabled students to understand very well how that language is structured; he also helped them to understand how to apply the requirements of the course in their work, because of his own comprehensive knowledge of the subject and the examination. All proved very helpful to the students.
53. Students often have the opportunity of working with a measure of independence in lessons. They gain greatly from these worthwhile experiences and learn from them. For example, Year 13 students were organised to work in two groups in a very good mathematics lesson to manage two different investigations to determine a coefficient of friction in mechanics. The students responded by applying their knowledge and understanding extremely well to the investigation, and so learned a great deal. However, the restricted range of books available in the library to extend students' subject reading, beyond that of standard textbooks, is unhelpful. Teachers, given better resources, could set additional reading and research for students to do independently and this would benefit their understanding. In general, teachers expect students to have the commitment to study out of lessons and they provide them with a good range of subject work to do at home, or in private study time in school. Students generally come well prepared for lessons from their studies at home.
54. The learning resources which are available are usually used effectively by teachers. Teachers of

geography use presentations in powerpoint very effectively; the CDs produced by this department for students' use at home are an excellent resource and provide impressive support for students. Although students are, in general, competent users of computers and other information and communication technology, they are not always prompted to use this enough by teachers in business, physics, chemistry or biology, for example. However, in other subjects, teachers enable students to extend their learning with computers very well, as in art. They use

the school's network very well to provide additional ideas and guidance for students, as in the analysis of examination questions in Year 12 history.

55. Excellent relationships, apparent in many lessons, give students confidence in their teachers' guidance and knowledge. Sensitive issues from real-life situations are dealt with well in Year 13 health and social care, because positive relationships enable discussion to take place freely. In a Year 12 mathematics lesson in which students found techniques for solving and changing techniques in algebra very challenging, positive relationships supported open discussion among teacher and students well. They tackled questions together as a team, greatly to the benefit of students' learning, resulting in attainment of a very high standard.
56. In general, teachers use the extensive data on performance provided by the school well to plan curricular priorities, and to support and guide students individually. An exception is mathematics, where assessment of performance could be used more regularly and systematically to guide and support students' progress.
57. Overall, the very good quality of teaching inspires a very positive response from students.

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

58. The sixth form curriculum provides a very good range of subjects at AS, A level and Advanced Certificate of Vocational Education (AVCE) courses. Students can choose combinations from 22 AS and A level subjects, in addition to AVCE courses in business education and health and social care. The requirements of Curriculum 2000 have been implemented successfully and have resulted in students following a broader range of subjects than previously. The curriculum is well planned to allow students to follow a coherent programme of study from Year 12 to Year 13. For example, most students follow four AS courses in Year 12. In Year 13, most progress to the study of at least three of these subjects at A level, although several students continue to study four. A few are able to finish studying one AS level course at the end of Year 12 and begin another in Year 13. The school does not offer vocational courses at intermediate level, but students who would benefit from such courses are given good advice and support in Year 11 to enable them to transfer to local colleges if this is likely to be to their benefit. The school has responded well to local circumstances and students' requests for specific courses. For example, the introduction of AS and A level English language has encouraged more boys to study English. More recently, students requested the opportunity to study physical education and psychology in the sixth form and these subjects are now popular courses at AS and A level. Film studies has also been introduced this year, to widen students' choices further.
59. The sixth form curriculum meets the needs of students of wide-ranging abilities and talents very well. The range of ability of students who enter the sixth form is similar to that of the main school. As part of its initiative to support gifted and talented students, the mathematics department is participating in research to make talented sixth form mathematicians more independent learners. Sixth form students with special educational needs are supported with sensitivity and this enables them to participate fully in their chosen subjects.
60. General studies and a programme of personal, social and health education further extend students' experiences. These courses are taught once every two weeks but were not timetabled during the week of the inspection. They cover a wide range of topics, including, for example, drugs awareness and sexual health problems. Careers education is organised as part of these courses. There are an appropriate number of lessons to help students to understand procedures for applying to university but there is insufficient focus on opportunities for employment at ages 17 or

18. The key skills (of communication, use of number and information and communication technology) are also made part of this programme. The school has run a pilot course towards accreditation in key skills but students were unable to complete portfolios to gain qualifications in the available time. Most students successfully develop the skills that they need to cope with their courses, through advice and support from subject teachers and the general studies programme. For example, students develop their skills in use of information and communication technology and information research well. They make full use of computer facilities and the library to support their work in all subjects. However, a few students find it difficult to cope with aspects of the A level physics course and would benefit from additional support to extend their mathematical skills further. Each Wednesday afternoon, students have good opportunities to participate in recreational physical education and games. The general studies programme ensures that statutory requirements for religious education are met. However, the school does not meet requirements for a daily act of collective worship in the sixth form.
61. A very good range of extra-curricular activities further enriches the curriculum. For example, numerous visits are arranged to universities for lectures and open days. There are exchange visits to France and Germany for students of modern foreign languages. Geography and biology students make residential field trips to Cranedale, while English and theatre studies students often participate in theatre visits. There is a thriving Young Enterprise group involved in a variety of projects, and several students participate in the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme. Work experience is available for students who need it as part of their course, as in health and social care. Each year, several physics students work with industry and higher education as part of the Engineering Education scheme and find the experience stimulating and motivating. Other students have ample opportunity to arrange work experience placements for themselves if they wish, and receive support from teachers to do this when needed.
62. All students are encouraged to contribute to the school and local community and many do so. Students with an interest in teaching spend Wednesday afternoons in primary schools, helping teachers and working with children. For example, an Excellence Challenge group works with the co-ordinator for the Excellence in Cities initiative for 'gifted and talented' students. As part of this initiative they organise puzzles and competitions for students after school. They publicise the achievements of talented students in the local newspaper. They have recently analysed the learning styles of Year 7 students and have shared this information with teachers so that the latter can meet students' learning preferences more effectively.
63. The school's provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall.
64. The school has improved its provision for students' spiritual development. It is now satisfactory. The school cannot meet the statutory requirement for a daily act of collective worship as it lacks appropriate accommodation. Once a week, each year group meets together for a broadly Christian assembly. The school fulfils the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus for religious education through a compulsory AS general studies examination for all students. All staff have received training in how to raise students' spiritual awareness. In consequence, each department has identified opportunities to support spiritual development. There is, however, no systematic approach across the whole curriculum so that students receive a differing quality of experience, but which is at least adequate.
65. Provision for students' moral and social development is very good. The school stresses in its aims that students and staff are equally valued. Moral development is supported across the curriculum through discussions of various issues. For example, students consider European integration in modern languages and genetic modification in the sciences. Students themselves provide good role models for younger students. They take the initiative in running the year groups of the school council. They take the lead in raising significant funds for local and national charities. Some students take the opportunity to work as lunchtime supervisors or as cleaners in the school, enabling them to gain part-time employment but allowing the school to monitor and control the number of hours that they work.
66. Cultural development, through the breadth of the curriculum and extra-curricular opportunities, especially for the arts, is good overall. Understanding of cultural diversity is especially well

provided through art, history, geography, modern foreign languages and English. Strong links with schools in Ghana and Tanzania broaden students' horizons. Preparation for the implications of life within an ethnically diverse society is less well developed, but a range of visitors such as a Japanese kite-maker and representatives of various groups of asylum seekers have provided positive and enlightening experiences.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

Assessment

67. The school has very effective procedures for assessing students' attainment and progress. In all subjects, assessment, verification and moderation procedures carefully follow examination boards' requirements, so that students are well prepared for public examinations. Students' rate of progress is tracked carefully and reviewed regularly in most subjects. Commercially produced data on the school's performance in different subjects is generally used effectively to measure how well students are achieving relative to their earlier performance in GCSE examinations and in their comparative performances across all subjects. In mathematics, however, assessment is not used systematically enough to track the performance of individuals against target grades. Students have regular meetings with personal tutors and subject teachers so that the individual needs identified by assessment can be discussed and addressed.
68. Progress is clearly reported to students and parents (or others who need to know) through good written records and consultative evenings. Appropriate targets to be achieved are set for every student. Increased support and guidance are provided for those students in need. An increased challenge is provided for others. Where necessary, planning the coverage of courses and the focus of teaching are adapted to students' needs, in the light of findings. Results are analysed carefully and appropriate action taken so that, in most subjects, outcomes of public examination are consistently well above average.

Advice, support and guidance

69. Students in the sixth form receive very good educational and personal support and guidance - and this is a significant strength of the school.
70. Form tutors stay with their form groups as far as possible from the time that students join the school at age 11, until they leave at age 18. As a result, tutors know their students' needs very well and build excellent relationships with them. Students have great confidence in their tutors and teachers and know that if they need extra help with their work or personal support, these will be given willingly and knowledgeably. Students are given individual interviews at least once every three weeks to discuss their progress and any areas in which they need to improve. Any concerns or worries which students might have are also discussed and recorded and good advice is given in a sensitive and caring manner.
71. The school's procedures to induct students into the sixth form, including information evenings on subjects and individual interviews, enable them to be well aware of the requirements of the courses they choose to follow. There is also good guidance on opportunities in higher education, for example, through visits from university representatives. The personal and social education programme provides much support on the procedures for application to higher education. Students receive a good amount of help in preparing their personal statements as part of their application to universities.
72. There is too little advice for students on career opportunities at the end of their education or after degree courses. For instance, although there is a range of commercial material available to students, there are no individual interviews in school providing vocational guidance. The onus is placed too much on students to seek such individual guidance elsewhere. The course in personal, social and health education involves only four lessons on careers education throughout the two years of the sixth form.
73. The supportive and caring environment of the school helps to ensure that students' health and safety are high priorities. For example, risk-assessments of the school premises are regularly carried out and any remedial action needed is swiftly identified and taken. Thorough risk assessments are also carried out before students are taken on educational visits out of school. In addition, students' safety in lessons is treated as a priority and teachers ensure that essential procedures are strictly adhered to, such as the wearing of safety goggles in the science laboratories.

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

74. The majority of students and parents have very positive views of the school and what it provides. In discussion with inspectors and through views expressed in a questionnaire completed for the inspection, students showed particular appreciation of the readiness of teachers to offer individual academic and personal help to them, of the quality of teaching they receive, and of the range of courses available to them. Most recognise that they receive good support to settle into the sixth form and meet work requirements. They say: 'There is mutual respect among students and teachers', and, 'There are few downsides to school'. They find work challenging and interesting and they are pleased with what the school does to encourage them to do their best. They appreciate the encouragement that they receive to study and research topics independently.
75. Most students are satisfied with the help they get in preparing for higher education. However, most think that they do not get enough information or personal guidance about careers or employment opportunities after the sixth form or at the end of university or college courses. A minority of students are unhappy with the activities on offer outside their main subjects, the information they get about their progress, and the advice that they receive on which subjects to follow in the sixth form. Some students also feel that the school does not respond or listen to their views enough.
76. Inspectors fully agree with the positive views expressed by students. They do not agree with many of the negative views of a minority. For example, students receive regular reviews of their academic targets in most subjects, and thorough written reports on their progress. AS and A level subjects provide little time for courses outside these main subjects, but students have opportunities for general studies, recreation, and a very good range of extra-curricular activities. Most recognise that a very high level of personal and individual guidance from staff is provided. The school provides informative descriptions and personal advice when sixth form courses are being considered in Year 11, but the choice must, ultimately, be that of each individual student. The vast majority of students consider that they are following the right courses. Students have the opportunity to express their views through the school council, or directly to the head of sixth form.
77. However, inspectors fully agree with students' concerns about the amount and quality of careers guidance provided for them. The school expects too much of students to find out about career pathways. Individual interviews to help and guide students' choices of vocational opportunities and requirements are lacking. The school recognises that the situation requires improvement.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

Leadership and management

78. The leadership and management of the sixth form by headteacher, leadership group and governors are very effective. Students receive a very good, and cost-effective, quality of education. Teaching is closely monitored, of very good quality and has improved considerably since the last inspection, because of the efforts of management at all levels. Students have equal access to courses, achieve very well and attain standards which are well above average. The head and deputy head of the sixth form provide effective leadership of the tutorial team and manage individual support and monitoring of students' performance. Overall, very effective leadership and management ensure that students' attainment is consistently well above average and that they are well supported to achieve their best.
79. Governors have no specific committee to consider sixth form matters. However, they monitor and review progress and performance of the sixth form closely, along with those of the main school. Their 'governor of the month' system, which involves a different governor in monitoring lessons and subject performance at first hand, enables them to inform themselves of standards in the sixth form, and gives them personal insights to supplement the headteacher's thorough reports. Governors do not meet the statutory requirement for a daily act of worship daily, partly because the school lacks adequate accommodation to enable this to take place.

80. Most of the thirteen subjects inspected in depth in this inspection are very well led. Subject leadership gives very clear educational direction to the work of departments. It has improved significantly since the last inspection. Subject team leaders are increasingly taking on responsibility for the monitoring of teaching, as part of the effective implementation of performance management. They ensure that standards in their subjects are well above average.
81. Monitoring and evaluation of outcomes are part of the practice of management. Teaching has been regularly observed, along with that in the main school, by the headteacher and the respective deputy headteachers who have responsibility for the line management of subject departments. (Latterly, the national system of performance management has led to the more direct inclusion of subject team leaders in the process of monitoring of teaching.) When teachers have required further training, management has been active in providing this; teaching is very good in the sixth form, and much improved since the last inspection. Planning for change and improvement is very good. The school improvement plan identifies priorities well. For example, the quality of teaching and learning has remained a high priority. Success criteria are clear and precise and enable headteacher and governors to measure improvement on an annual basis with accuracy. Data is carefully assembled to inform decisions in planning for the coming three years, when the numbers of students attending the school are expected to rise and then fall to present levels. The sixth form is recognised as a distinct element in planning and the school recognises the impact that new funding arrangements will have on future provision and practice. Overall, the plan is a very useful working document, although specific targets are restricted to the timescale of a single year.
82. Funding for the sixth form is cost-effective. The precise amount allocated to students is spent on them, despite the additional costs incurred by the wider range of AS courses. Additional funds have been used very well to improve accommodation substantially, and funds for Excellence Challenge have enabled students to develop valuable initiatives to benefit the school community considerably.
83. The school achieves very good value in its provision for sixth form students, and in the results that they gain, from the income that it receives. For example, the school's academic performance compares very well with schools' nationally. Much of its work and provision provide a very good learning challenge for all students. Opportunities for consultation are provided for parents and students, for the latter, for example, through the school council; some students want more opportunity to express views, but most are satisfied with the provision that they receive.

Resources

84. Teachers are very well matched to subject needs. Almost all teachers teach subjects in the sixth form for which they are specially qualified. Where teachers do not have a specific higher qualification in the subjects they teach, their interest and experience more than compensate. In consequence, students are very well prepared for examinations and to continue into higher education. There is an appropriate number of suitably trained support staff, who are deployed very well to meet specific needs of sixth formers. The induction of new staff is very effective, enabling them to play a full part in the work of the school and focusing their expertise efficiently to meet sixth form students' needs. For all staff, training needs are very well served, and the provision of training has helped to improve the quality of teaching in the sixth form considerably. The school is already a provider of initial teacher training for two universities, clear evidence of the high quality of its provision. It has very recently gained recognition as an Investor in People.
85. Accommodation for advanced courses followed by sixth form students is good, overall, and much improved since the last inspection in 1997. Some accommodation exclusively used by sixth formers is cramped for the numbers involved, particularly the common room on the first floor. The ground floor study room is not properly equipped for such a purpose and is consequently not regularly used as such by students. Although there is an area in the library for students to use for private study, this is inadequate in size, particularly when main school classes take up space. Additional spaces for private study in the hatted accommodation are of poor quality.
86. Resources for learning are good overall. Departments are well equipped with suitable textbooks and background materials. Very good use is made of links with local industry and colleges.

Frequent visits to arts, science and business exhibitions and exchange visits to other countries enrich the experience of sixth form students. Major improvement in provision of information and communication technology provides wider opportunities for research. Many departments have their own computer suites and interactive whiteboards, linked to the Internet, providing immediate access to information during lessons to the benefit of students. Some departments have placed information and research links on the school's Internet site for students to use. The geography department has produced its own CDs which provide very good revision and research topics for students following AS and A level courses. The library has a suite of computers which are available to classes or individuals providing a valuable asset for research. However, the number and quality of books and other printed materials that are provided in the library are inadequate to support the needs of sixth form students for research in their subject courses. This is evident, for example, in psychology and sociology. There are insufficient texts to support the considerable individual research requirements of the AS and A level chemistry courses. This inadequacy is recognised by the school and there is a target date for improvement, within the year.

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

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

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

GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	1	100	62	0	15	1.0	1.5
Sociology	1	100	63	0	7	1.0	1.2

GCE A level and AVCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	27	81	87	41	43	5.3	5.8
Chemistry	24	96	90	54	43	6.7	5.9
Biology	35	91	88	66	34	6.9	5.5
Physics	13	100	88	38	40	5.9	5.7
Business studies	10	100	92	40	32	6.0	5.5
Computing	12	100	86	33	23	5.8	4.6
Health and social care	4	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	16.5	10.8
Art	14	100	96	86	46	9.1	6.6
Geography	24	100	92	38	38	6.6	5.7
Sociology	39	87	86	51	35	6.5	5.3
English language	26	85	91	15	30	4.3	5.3
English literature	11	100	95	73	37	8.6	5.9
French	4	100	89	50	38	7.0	5.6

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

The main focus was on single mathematics at A and AS levels. The inspection took place immediately prior to module tests, and much effective consolidation was seen of students' prior learning. Further mathematics was also sampled. In further mathematics, very few students follow the course and usually achieve in line with what could reasonably be expected from their GCSE levels of attainment.

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- A level results in 2001 and recent years have been at or above national averages;
- The high quality of mathematical rigour in students' work;
- Teaching is good and much is very good.

Areas for improvement

- A more analytical system of assessment to inform students' learning and progress towards their target grades;
- Standards achieved by boys.

87. At A level in 2001, students gained results in line with the national average. This has continued the declining trend, observed over the previous three years, in which results moved from being well above the national average to being in line with the national average. Analysis of students' individual performance indicated that, for only a few, results were below expectation. Year 12 AS results in 2001 were impressive, with over half the students attaining grades A or B, enabling them to progress to A level with confidence. The most successful students continued onto the A level course in Year 13. At both A and AS levels, competent students achieve very well. Girls have performed significantly better than boys in A level examinations. There is no evidence of differences in the achievements of students from minority ethnic backgrounds compared with those of others.
88. The standard of A level work seen in lessons and students' books is very good. All students work fluently, showing well-expanded answers with accurate mathematical presentation. They use clear diagrams to develop their mechanics and trigonometric solutions. Year 13 students developed very good understanding of centres of mass and equilibrium during a practical investigation; small groups of students produced differing methods to solve the task and were able to use their observations in the following lesson in theory. A Year 13 group, revising for a module examination in pure mathematics, showed good understanding and facility with techniques of integration and differentiation and calculation of the equation of the normal at a point on a curve. However, some students made careless, elementary mistakes, with poor use of units and formulae in some answers completed as homework.
89. Year 12 students, revising for AS module tests, had very good understanding of the topics that they had covered. One group was able to solve, mentally, equations involving the laws of logarithms. They worked successfully with surds, calculus and trigonometrical equations. Another group gained understanding and competence when solving quadratic inequalities using the 'completing the square' technique.
90. A significant feature of the work of students in both years was the mathematical rigour with which they carried out and presented their work. This indicated very good attitudes toward their work and a genuine respect for the subject.
91. Students with special educational needs and those from minority ethnic backgrounds make good progress, in line with others on the course. For example, a student with an informative individual education plan was provided with help from an additional support teacher and short-term specific targets, which ensured equality of opportunity for this student, ensuring achievement was in line with that of others.

92. Teaching is good with some very good features. The high quality of teachers' subject knowledge ensures insightful development of concepts. Excellent student-teacher relationships in class provide a comfortable learning environment, in which students feel confident to share ideas or seek help. For example, in a Year 12 lesson exploring techniques for simplifying complex terms, students contributed equally with the teacher to the running commentary, suggesting the next stage in developing a solution. Students experience a rich variety of teaching styles which add interest and often fun to the process of learning. The interest and involvement sustained by students help maintain the pace and challenge which is a feature of all lessons. Calculators and computers have become integral tools within the department and are used well. Teachers make very good use of overhead projectors and the new interactive whiteboard. By Year 13, students fully accept responsibility for their own progress. Marking of students' work is thorough, with helpful comments; worked solutions are provided when requested. However, the progress of students is not formally tracked against their target grades and, for many students, any shortfall in attainment only becomes evident after mock examination papers are attempted.
93. The department is well managed. It is well supported by all teachers with posts of responsibility, providing a team dedicated to achieving high standards for all students. The department is fully staffed by well-qualified and skilled teachers. Since the last inspection the quality of teaching and the range of teaching styles used have improved. New courses have been introduced and syllabuses have been chosen to give the best opportunities to students. In order to provide students with information, with which they can control their learning, there is a need for the department to develop a more formalised system for assessing students' progress against target grades. There is a need also to raise the attainment of boys in comparison with that of girls.

Chemistry

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

Strengths

- Results are above average;
- Students have very good knowledge and understanding of the subject and apply these confidently in their work;
- Teaching is very good;
- Students' independent learning skills are well developed;
- The subject is very well led and resources are generally good.

Areas for improvement

- The quality and range of books, periodicals and journals in the library are insufficient to support students' independent learning fully;
- Students are not directed to use computers enough;
- Closer links with industry and environmental agencies are needed to make learning more relevant to the practical world.

94. A level results in 2001 were above the national average and were well above average in 2000. In 2001, nearly all students gained a grade. The proportion of students gaining A and B grades was well above average. Girls performed better than boys, although the latter attained in line with boys nationally. In relation to their GCSE examination grades, most students achieved slightly better than expected. In the 2001 AS level examinations for Year 12 students, all passed, and more than two-thirds gained A or B grades. Students were well equipped to continue to the A level course and few decided not to proceed. In relation to their previous GCSE examination grades, the vast majority of students achieved at least as well as could be expected. Standards have improved since the last inspection.
95. The standards of work of current students are well above average. Students in Year 13 are achieving very well. They have good knowledge and understanding of current topics, and they have very secure general knowledge of the subject. They discuss their work with confidence and clarity, and are adept in applying their knowledge to new situations. In one lesson, they effectively drew on their knowledge of redox reactions and the electrochemical series to propose

explanations of observations derived from a series of experiments on the rusting of iron. They have particularly good understanding of organic chemistry and how complex molecules can be engineered to meet required specifications.

96. Students in Year 12 have adjusted well to the increased demands of sixth form work. After initial guidance, they have become skilled in making their own notes, supplementing material from lessons with additional material from a variety of sources. They are now competent and careful practical workers. They have good knowledge of atomic structures and bonding and accurately carry out calculations involving mass spectra, enthalpy changes and reacting quantities. In one class, they effectively drew on their knowledge of catalysts, from GCSE work, to develop ideas on the use and design of catalytic converters in motor vehicles. They discuss their work with confidence and have good knowledge of the topics that they have covered.
97. The quality of teaching overall is very good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge. They are confident when explaining the subject. They pose clear questions to assess students' understanding and are flexible in handling questions from students on new topics. Lessons are well planned. Teachers have high expectations and students respond well to the challenge. Teachers use a good range of methods. In one lesson, Year 12 students presented papers to the group on the advantages, disadvantages and usefulness of different fuels, generating a thoughtful discussion on alternative fuels for the future. Teachers make good use of practical lessons to question students about their observations and their interpretations, exploring, for example, the relationship between the structure of a range of alcohols and their enthalpies of combustion.
98. Students learn very well. They are enthusiastic about their work and respond very positively to the more informal tutorial style of teaching and the high demands made on them. They quickly become efficient independent learners. They show a mature approach to their work in individual research projects, using a good range of sources effectively. They show justifiable pride in work that they have completed. However, the current range of books and periodicals in the library is not fully adequate to supply the needs of students for work of this type. Students take full advantage of opportunities in lessons to discuss their work, seek guidance where necessary and develop their own ideas. The private study tasks set for students are sufficiently demanding and are marked well by teachers. Students learn much from the written and verbal comments provided.
99. The subject is very well led. The recent change of syllabus has had a positive effect and recruitment of students to the course has shown a marked upward trend. There are equal numbers of girls and boys on the current A level course. All teachers share a commitment to set and maintain high standards. A planned programme of student assessments is conducted throughout the courses. Target setting is well established and students are kept well informed of their progress towards their targets. The recent acquisition of a suite of computers for science has much improved resources. However, teachers have not identified when students should use computers and they do not use them enough. Some good links have been made with local universities to provide experience with equipment not normally available in schools, such as various spectroscopic instruments, and a few links with industry are being developed. More links are needed to enable students to understand more fully the subject's relevance and importance to modern society.

Biology

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

Strengths

- A level results are well above average; AS results were very good in 2001;
- Teachers have high expectations of students so that they learn very well;
- Students are highly motivated;
- Leadership and management inspire outstanding teamwork and commitment to raise students' attainment even further.

Areas for improvement

- Data of good quality is not used to guide individual students enough;
- Access to information and communication technology and its use have been insufficient until

recently.

100. A level standards are well above average. The team of teachers has invested time and effort to improve the quality and range of teaching and learning styles. Current work and discussions with students indicate that they know how to work independently, a significant factor in the very good improvement in standards achieved since the last inspection.
101. Students' attainment at A level in 2001 was well above average. In 2000, it was very high, compared with the national average. Attainment of A and B grades at A level is well above average year-on-year. In 2000, every student passed the examination. Very good reasons explain why a very few individuals did not reach a pass grade in 2001. Results of AS examinations in 2001 were very good. Almost all students achieved a pass grade, with three-quarters of them reaching the A or B grades. Progress and added value, shown by comparison of GCSE examination results with A and AS level outcomes, are very good. Attainment on entry is wide, because students are given free choice to follow the course; those at all levels of competence do well. A large majority choose to continue from AS to A level.
102. Students attain very good standards in lessons. These result from teachers' exceptionally high expectations and skilful use of subject knowledge to help students to communicate what they have learned. Year 13 students are expected to give clear explanations of complex chemical changes in photosynthesis - and they do so successfully. They become increasingly fluent in using technical language. Year 12 students reached very good standards in revising how the structures of cell membranes influence transport of materials, because teachers' expertise drew the best answers from them.
103. Students achieve very well. Outstanding relationships ensure that their personal development is high. Competent students make very good progress, sustaining high levels of motivation from their earlier experience of GCSE. Similarly, students of less competence achieve very well, because they benefit from the challenge of the group. In Year 12, for example, students with lower average GCSE examination scores are making very rapid progress in preparation for their first AS examination of the course. Their achievement results from teachers taking time to help them to build on earlier learning, correcting deficiencies in their background knowledge. Girls and boys contribute very well in lessons, where they are regularly encouraged to recall previous work to argue their case. Students from ethnic minority backgrounds are very well integrated. Individual students with special educational needs make very good progress because the teacher understands the specific difficulties involved very well, and very good additional help and guidance are provided.
104. Very good teaching ensures that learning is, equally, very good. Above all, teachers are outstanding communicators. They promote very good development of students' use of language, placing high demands on each individual to explain their learning clearly. A strong emphasis on discussion is effective because it gives time for students to seek clarification and correct errors in their thinking, giving them increased confidence. Teachers enable students to extend their learning beyond the immediate requirements of the course; their approach is very successful in helping students to apply their knowledge to less familiar contexts. Teachers' methods are varied, as seen in Year 12, when very good use of video deepened students' understanding of digestion. Students say that their high level of involvement in lessons helps their understanding and challenges them to recall and use earlier learning effectively. They learn to work more quickly, because lessons run at a very good pace and they respond positively to the rigorously timed targets placed on them. They take revision very seriously and are highly motivated to succeed, leaving lessons with a great sense of achievement, appreciative of the hard work of teachers in ensuring their understanding of the topic. Students maintain files of work very well. Very good practical work includes competent calculation, interpretations of graphical data and very well argued conclusions. However, students need more time to use the good skills that they have in information and communication technology - now that accommodation and resources have been upgraded.
105. Leadership and management are very good and the team of teachers aspires to even greater achievements for students. In this, they fully reflect the aims of the school and have achieved

impressive consistency in working effectively with students. Monitoring the progress of students is good, with clear targets for improvement each year. There is need for the team to use the valuable data available to guide individual students even further. In this respect, good practice is already evident in recent work with Year 12, where targets have been set after more rigorous reflection by students on their current strengths and weaknesses.

Physics

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

Strengths

- Results are average, despite difficulties experienced by individuals with the course;
- Students achieve well and some are extremely highly motivated;
- Teaching is very good and teachers have high expectations of students;
- Strong management has resulted in a cohesive team, highly committed to raising standards further;
- Talented students do very well.

Areas for improvement

- Support to develop the mathematical skills of those students who do not study advanced mathematics;
- More use of information and communication technology, now that equipment is available.

106. A level results are average and consistent performance has been maintained over four years. Numbers taking the examination are usually below 20 and marked differences in the range of students' competencies in the subject each year significantly influence outcomes for different year groups. The proportion attaining grades A and B has been consistently at least at the national average for the last four years, with half of the boys achieving grade A in 1999. In 2001, all students were successful in gaining a pass grade. Results of the 2001 AS course were very good, with half the students gaining A or B grades. Almost all students continue to A level. Standards have improved since the last inspection, when talented students were reported to do very well, as they still do.
107. Standards in lessons are above average and better than examination results indicate, because lower attaining students perform well as a result of very good support from teachers. Students clarify concepts well through very good discussion and explanations from teachers. For example, most students understood the mathematical principle governing the radius of curvature of particles in a Year 13 lesson, because the teacher successfully extended their learning from an earlier lesson. As a result, they were all successful in applying their learning to a good range of calculations. In Year 12, students competently presented a number of mathematical explanations to summarise the module on waves.
108. Achievement is good. Students who are highly competent show outstanding progress from GCSE, because they are highly motivated, and work at a very high mathematical level. Similarly, a number of lower attaining students rise to the challenge of the group to achieve commendable results, because teachers give them close support. However a few individuals find aspects of the course difficult and make less than expected progress by the end of Year 13, because they lack the necessary advanced mathematical skills; this adversely affects their performance, as in the module on mechanics. Although few girls take the subject, they achieve creditable results and are very well integrated in lessons. Very good relationships ensure that students' personal development is, equally, very good, and this supports their learning very well. Individual students with special educational needs make very good progress, because teachers understand the difficulties encountered very well. In-class support is very helpful. The few students from minority ethnic backgrounds are very well integrated; one Year 13 student achieves outstanding performance.
109. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers have very high expectations, ask probing questions and require students to present logical explanations to support their judgements. Teachers challenge students very well in discussion. This interests and motivates them to explore abstract ideas. For example, Year 13 students enjoyed a lively discussion about the motion of satellites. Highly competent students use mathematical solutions very readily to explain lines of force in gravitational fields, enriching discussion very well. Teachers are very good role models. Lessons begin very promptly and give students a tight structure for learning. They are expected to work at a fast pace, but are given time to reflect on their own work and to practise calculations independently of the teacher. Teachers use this time to monitor the progress of individuals and support them further. Resources are used very well to enrich students' experience; for example,

in a Year 13 lesson, a stimulating video on the history of electro-magnetism, enabled students to reflect on the magnitude of scientific discovery. Year 12 students gained very good experience of working to tight deadlines, as they prepared presentations for the rest of the class. In using the overhead projector, they improved their skills of presentation and communication well. Everyone is fully involved; girls and boys work very successfully together, because teachers effectively foster very good personal development.

110. The subject is very ably led. The team of teachers work consistently well with students, reflecting the aspirations of the whole school. Teachers monitor the progress of students well, setting clear targets for improvement each year. The team now needs to use annual targets to extend guidance for individual students further. Students who experience difficulty because they do not follow an advanced mathematics course have good personal support from class teachers, but lack tuition to resolve the difficulties that they encounter when using mathematics in the subject.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

Design and technology was sampled during the inspection. In A level design and technology, standards were above average in 2001 and well above in 2000. Most students obtained a grade in the AS product design course in 2001. Although few A or B grades were attained, students generally achieved standards in line with what might reasonably have been expected from their earlier GCSE examination results. One Year 12 lesson was seen in which students were achieving above average standards. Teaching was good and provided effective support for individual students.

BUSINESS

The focus was on AS and A level business studies. AVCE business and A level economics courses were also sampled. Students taking AVCE business attained below average standards in 2001, but achieved in line with what could be reasonably expected from their GCSE results. In 2000 and 1999, standards were well above average. One Year 13 lesson in AVCE business was seen in which students were attaining average standards; their attitudes to the subject and the quality of teaching were very good. In 2001, standards in A level economics were above average and are usually, at least, at this standard. At AS in 2001, almost all students passed the examination and two-thirds attained grades A or B, a performance enabling students to proceed to A level with confidence. One Year 13 lesson was seen in which learning was effective, because of good teaching and excellent relationships.

Business

Overall, provision in business studies (AS and A level courses) is **good**.

Strengths

- Students attain well and make good progress;
- Teachers have secure knowledge and enthusiasm for the subject;
- Relationships support learning well.

Areas for improvement

- Teachers do not always make students take enough responsibility for their learning;
- Students should use information and communication technology more.

111. In 2001, A level standards were above average. Results over three years show an upward trend, and indicate little difference between girls and boys. Most students passed the AS examination in 2001 and achieved the outcomes to be expected from their earlier GCSE examination results. No students currently taking the subject come from ethnic minority backgrounds, or have special educational needs. Although most students start AS courses having taken GCSE business studies, this is not a prerequisite. All students make good progress and build on their previous knowledge. Competent students in Year 13 show good analytical skills when involved in debate. They analyse case study material well, drawing out the main points and applying their understanding of the subject effectively. Year 12 students showed good levels of knowledge and understanding when considering past examination papers, identifying possible ways that a

company could improve its potential to avoid making a loss.

112. Teaching is good. Teachers give students many opportunities to apply their knowledge when tackling business problems and past-examination questions. For example, a Year 13 student responded to a question on autonomous work groups by defining the term correctly, and outlined the benefits to company and workforce from use of motivational theory. Year 12 students are often given the opportunity to work in small groups which effectively generate a good range of alternative solutions to business problems. An example of a dot-com company was used as a focus for theories of business development; this engaged all students fully and stimulated mature debate on the concept of growth in business. The teachers are specialists and have good knowledge of business and considerable enthusiasm for the subject. Relationships support learning well. However, at times, teachers' enthusiasm becomes over-directive, giving students insufficient opportunity to develop their understanding through independent study. Students benefit from teachers' notes of good quality. However, for the less well motivated, there is little incentive to carry out personal research and background reading.
113. Business is well organised and led, as part of the faculty of social science. Monitoring of teaching is carried out under performance management. Staff in the faculty work closely together, sharing ideas and evaluating materials used on the course well. Access to information and communication technology is good but underused. Resources for the subject are good.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Information technology

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

Strengths

- Results improved in 2001 and were well above average;
- Students have very secure subject skills, well applied in coursework;
- By Year 13, students' independent learning skills are very well developed;
- Teaching is good. Teachers' subject expertise stimulates discussion and gives very effective support in practical work;
- The subject is very well led;
- Computers are of good quality.

Areas for improvement

- A small minority of students is not well motivated and needs more direction;
- Computer-assisted learning requires more resources than are now available.

114. A level results in 2001 were well above average, having been average in the previous two years. The trend since 1998 has been upwards. All students passed the AS examination in 2001. One in three attained an A or B grade, enabling them to continue to A level with confidence. At A level, students consistently achieve well in line with what could reasonably be expected of them from their previous GCSE examination results. Their achievements at AS indicated very good added value in 2001.
115. Most students are currently achieving well and the standard of their work is above average. They enjoy the subject and its challenge and have no regrets about choosing it. They respond very well to the adult relationships which their teachers expect and establish. As a result, they have a mature approach to the level of independent work that is required for success in the practical elements of the subject. They work independently, with competence and confidence. With the considerable support that they receive from their teachers, they are making good progress and learning to manage their work well. They work co-operatively with their peers and provide each other with strong support in what is, clearly, a positive 'camaraderie of the computer room'. They have a high level of keyboard skills. They are very competent in applications of commercial software, and are learning successfully how to use more complex functions of that software to resolve problems in practical assignments.
116. Teaching is good. Lessons are planned effectively and are well adapted to meet students'

requests to review specific topics prior to examinations. The pace of lessons is brisk and activities are timed to sustain that pace and to generate interest. A high level of individual support, particularly during practical lessons, is given to all students but particularly to those who are experiencing specific difficulties. Practical assignments are planned with business-related themes well. The demands of Year 12 assignments are commercially realistic. They require students to make procedures for data entry straight forward for office staff to use, although the output requires complex use of software. The progress of practical work is monitored and students receive effective guidance on how its design or working may be improved. Teachers' expectations are high, and students' progress reflects this – as the quality of examination results indicates. Written assignments are marked thoroughly and students receive detailed feedback, often in the form of a group discussion, on the demands of the questions answered. In revision before examinations, teachers use their considerable expertise to guide students in their analysis of a question's demands and how these can be met to earn the highest marks. Teachers make themselves individually available to help students, particularly in the period before examinations.

117. Students' learning is good. They concentrate on their work and engage fully in lessons, developing further their skills, knowledge and understanding of the theory of the course. They are assisted by their teachers' high level of expertise in information and communication technology and their extensive knowledge of its commercial applications. Teachers' industrial and business experience is especially helpful to students. This was apparent in a Year 12 lesson on the management of information systems, in which students discussed how firms could continue operating in the event of a major power failure, and how to protect their data from the effects of a variety of possible disasters. The teacher added colour and reality to the lesson, by drawing on his own extensive industrial experience. Students use the Internet frequently, but selectively, for research purposes. A very small minority of students in Year 12 is not well motivated. This is reflected in their immature response to teachers and fellow students. The standard of their written work is below expectations and their behaviour in lessons is unhelpful.
118. Good teaching and learning arise from very good leadership of the subject. The subject co-ordinator, working through the school's working party for information and communication technology, has a clear vision for the way forward. He and his colleagues, including the technicians, work as an effective team to deliver the subject very successfully, sharing good practice through effective monitoring of teaching, and moderating students' work. Assessment procedures are very thorough and the data derived is used to identify potential underachievement of individuals and to set targets. The quality and quantity of computer resources are very good and support practical assignments very well. Further development of these resources for computer-assisted learning will be essential to cope with the anticipated increase in use. Improvement in provision of computers since the last inspection has been good.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

The first students completed AS courses in physical education in 2001 and achieved standards well in line with predictions from their earlier GCSE results. These students have continued to A level. Two lessons were seen: one Year 12 AS and one Year 13 A level. Teaching was good in both cases. Relationships were very good, supporting learning very well. Standards were a little higher in Year 12 than Year 13.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

The focus was on the AVCE course in health and social care.

Health and social care

Overall, the quality of provision in health and social care is **good**.

Strengths

- Teaching is good, well planned and relevant;
- Resources for learning are very good;

- Students' attitudes are very good;
- The quality of students' work in portfolios is high.

Areas for improvement

- Strategies to increase numbers and recruit boys;
- Provision for students to have a wider choice of course units;
- A more systematic approach to staff development and training to update skills.

119. Results in the advanced GNVQ course in 2000 and 2001 were well above average, with many distinctions. In 2001 results were average in the new single-award AVCE course. Standards seen during the inspection were above average in both years of this course.
120. In Year 13, students are making good progress and are achieving well. They reveal good understanding of issues in health and social care and can use appropriate legal vocabulary with fluency. They enjoy working independently and can use good research methods, employing information and communication technology well, in their work. For example, in one assignment they were required to interview staff in residential homes or primary schools, and carried this out confidently. They then evaluated their results efficiently. They co-operate well with each other and enjoy presenting their findings. Their key skills of communication and use of information and communication technology are well developed, but their numerical skills are neglected. They make good use of their work experience in their written tasks, and benefit from the excellent accommodation and very good textbooks available to them.
121. Students in Year 12 are making good progress, and marked assignments reveal that they are achieving above average grades. They enjoy working in groups and are able to grasp basic issues. They understand ethical and moral implications when discussing codes of practice for care-workers, and relate these well to their own experience. They can express themselves very well in speech and writing. Less competent students are able to make good progress because they can relate the materials to their own lives. Students have already developed sound study skills and produce good reports, using information and communication technology.
122. Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are well planned, but there is even more scope to challenge students and step up the pace of lessons because students are keen to be involved and to share their ideas. In Year 12, a successful lesson took place when students had full opportunity to use examples of discrimination, from disablement and ethnicity, arising from their own experience. Teachers encourage students to research topics, but should extend this further and allow the students themselves to present parts of the syllabus, for example, on the effect of the environment on health. Teachers assess work accurately, according to AVCE specifications, but need to explain the criteria and terminology in the documents more fully to students and parents - who also find these difficult to comprehend. Further examination practice is required. Teachers have not had sufficient training and updating to grasp fully the content and methodology of the new AVCE course and they require a planned programme of staff development to meet this challenge. The curriculum followed is restricted to those units based on food technology, so that students are not able to study all the units of the award. Further staff expertise in human biology and social science is required to enable the school to offer the full AVCE, as it used to do with the former GNVQ course.
123. Students reveal very good attitudes to the subject. Few leave the courses before completion, and they are very positive when interviewed about health and social care. Most view it as a valuable back-up to their future careers and also see it as relevant to their personal lives in areas such as healthy eating. All the students are girls, who consider that boys do not opt for the subject, because they are not made sufficiently aware of the wide career and higher education choices open to men in fields like medicine or dentistry. The school needs to make the subject equally accessible to both boys and girls.
124. The courses make a very good contribution to the development of students' key skills. Their folders show good extended written work, and very good use of information and communication technology, but insufficient evidence of numeracy. Health and social care also makes a substantial contribution to their awareness of social and moral issues, which they have to research in depth. The course content makes extensive reference to equal opportunities, disadvantage and the rights of patients, seen by many students as relevant to any career path.
125. Leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory, although line management is

currently under review. Students' work is moderated effectively, but teaching is not yet monitored enough. Considerable progress has been made since the last inspection in

accommodation, provision for information and communication technology and other learning resources. The main requirements for further development are to update staff by training, widen the curriculum on offer and overcome the gender imbalance.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The focus was on art, but music, theatre studies and the new course in film studies were also sampled. Too few students have taken AS and A level music in recent years to make meaningful national comparisons. One lesson was seen which provided for two students, one in Year 13 and one in Year 12. Good teaching enabled both to make satisfactory progress. Low numbers of students have followed AS and A level theatre studies in recent years. All students passed these examinations in 2001 and, generally, achieved results which could reasonably be expected from their earlier GCSE examination performance. One Year 13 A level lesson was seen in which good teaching enabled students to apply theoretical learning to practical work well. AS film studies began this year; it is popular with students, who have very positive attitudes towards the course. One Year 12 lesson was seen in which teaching was good and extended the learning of enthusiastic students well.

Art

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

Strengths

- Attainment is excellent, and very high by national standards;
- Students learn at a fast pace, and often independently or co-operatively;
- Highly committed teachers sensitively balance challenge and support for students and have high expectations of achievement;
- The curriculum is well suited to the students and integrates a complex range of materials and processes;
- The subject is led and managed with vision, passion and good judgement.

Areas for improvement

- The degree of sophistication of the aesthetic judgement applied in final pieces of coursework.

126. AS and A level courses in art are effectively meeting both the needs of students who are intending to progress to pre-degree courses in art and design and those who wish to study art in preparation for other careers. Students' attainment at A level was very high in 2001, continuing a five-year trend of improving results. AS results have matched this pattern of improvement, with over half the students gaining A grades in 2001. When compared with their GCSE examination record, A level candidates are achieving significantly better results than could reasonably be expected. Girls and boys are performing equally well in A and AS level art and almost all students are completing their courses.

127. Currently, students in both Years 12 and 13 are able to combine a wide range of visual materials, processes and techniques in increasingly sophisticated ways. Coursework routinely and effectively involves the use of information and communication technology for research and production. One student was refining the quality of his life drawing, with a drawing programme on computer. The quality of A level sketchbooks is exceptionally high, with a third of students achieving work of degree-level standard. All students exhibit rigour and creativity in the way they combine materials and processes in a multiplicity of multi-media products. This militates, at times, against some of the finer judgements which could be made by investigating the aesthetic properties of one area of media or practice. The large painting of urban perspectives demonstrates how this line of study can refine judgements in colour, form and texture. Much of the AS and A level work has a painterly quality - emphasising colour, tone and texture.

128. Teaching is challenging but supportive and teachers expend unusually high levels of time and energy in meeting the needs of students. Demanding tasks are set which students approach in

independent and, when appropriate, collaborative ways. In a Year 12 lesson, students used timed, mark-making tasks to explore the relationship between risk and judgement in drawing. The directed focus on techniques provides the starting point for individual study in both two and three dimensions. Students and teachers have high expectations of the pace of students'

learning, the depth of commitment required and the quality of outcome at both AS and A level. Students invariably resolve the challenges and difficulties and exploit the potential inherent in the projects that they take on. It is normal for students to work at least five hours more per week on art assignments than is laid down in the timetable for the subject.

129. There are no major differences in attainment or approach to learning by boys and girls but boys are particularly open to taking risks in mark making and the uses of media.
130. The art department is led and managed with outstanding vision and commitment to the progress and achievement of students. Materials are deployed effectively. Provision for use of information and communication technology is particularly good and excellent use is made of practising artists and of the local art school's facilities for life drawing. Considerable improvement has been made since the last inspection in standards and students' skills and enthusiasm to explore their own ideas which were weaknesses identified in 1997.

HUMANITIES

The focus was on geography, sociology and psychology, but history was also sampled.

A level results in history were well above average in 2001, and have varied from average to the higher standard in recent years. Students achieved exceptionally well from their earlier GCSE examination standards in 2001. AS results in 2001 were below expectations. One Year 12 lesson was seen in which students showed very good capacity to analyse the requirements of examination questions, with the help of very good teaching.

Geography

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

Strengths

- Results have been well above average in almost all recent years;
- Students achieve well; they have high levels of knowledge and understanding of the subject and apply these well in discussion;
- Teaching is very good. Teachers use subject knowledge very well to make lessons stimulating, challenging and enjoyable;
- Use of computers helps to develop students' independent learning skills well;
- The subject is very well led.

Areas for improvement

- Further use of assessment data to analyse the work of the department and of students;
- Reasons for the weaker performance of boys in 2001 and action to maintain the high levels of their performance in 2000 and earlier years.

131. A level results in 2001 sustained a high overall standard, with all students gaining a pass grade. Girls maintained the well above average standards of recent years in attaining A and B and A to E grades in 2001, but boys did less well at the A and B grade level. As a result of the 2001 examination, the relative performance of boys at A level has become a focus of attention in the department. At AS level, all passed the examination, and boys attained standards a little ahead of girls. Over three years, A level students have achieved very good added value from evidence of their earlier GCSE examination results.
132. The standards of work of current students are well above average. Year 13 students are building on the high level of success gained at AS level. They respond very positively to the supportive rapport that teachers have established and arrive prepared for challenging work, which they meet with a high level of sustained application. They are experienced at working independently and,

with a lot of individual support from their teachers, are learning to manage their work well. They use information and communication technology very confidently. In revising their detailed study of Nepal, Year 12 students used a CD presentation, created by teachers as an effective prompt for answering examination questions on the criteria that make Nepal an under-developed country. In doing this, students recalled information well and applied

it in a coherent way, which is a strong feature of their extensive written work. The content and structure of their folders are uniformly high among girls and boys alike.

133. The quality of teaching is very good and has a strong impact on students' learning and achievement. Lessons are planned very carefully to enable students to use the knowledge that they gain from homework, mostly structured enquiry through reading and reference to Internet sites. Year 13 students used American websites on the Internet effectively to track the course of individual tropical storms in the Caribbean and their effect on the countries over which they pass. Teachers have high expectations of their students and this is apparent in the searching nature of questions asked during lessons. Those expectations are nurtured by the commitment of the teachers, who check students' notes for accuracy and structure and support their teaching through the use of the impressive CDs that they devise. Written assignments are marked thoroughly and there is rigorous feedback to students, often in the form of a class discussion on the nature and demands of the questions answered. In lessons devoted to revision before examinations, teachers use their considerable expertise to guide students in their analysis of a question's demands and how those demands might be met, in order to earn the highest marks. The excellent AS level results of 2001 owe much to this skill. An integral component of these results is the high grades gained by students from coursework. To support them in this each student has a tutor for coursework who monitors an assignment's progress closely in regular meetings. The head of geography has an overview of this in lessons specifically for coursework and compares his assessments with those of the tutor, to ensure that all students achieve their best.
134. The quality of students' learning is generally very high. The relaxed style of teachers combined with their effective use of humour creates a mature environment in the classroom. Students respond very well to this. They concentrate on their work and engage fully in discussion. Students' enthusiasm for the subject, generated by the extensive knowledge and experience of teachers, is a feature of every lesson. As a result, they make very good progress. Students indicate that they chose to study the subject because of the interest generated by teachers in their earlier years; none have regrets about their choice.
135. The leadership of geography is excellent. Although standards are high, there is recognition that they can be improved and teachers are committed to achieve this, building on the team's past success. One of their initiatives is to raise the achievement of boys. There is a departmental policy designed to address the issue and, despite recent signs of success, its resolution is not assured and will require perseverance. Assessment of the work of individual students is thorough but is not centrally recorded. It is not informed rigorously enough by assessment of students' performance earlier in the school in fully judging all aspects of their work. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

Sociology

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

Strengths

- The achievements of higher attainers;
- The consistently high standard of teaching;
- Students' very positive attitudes.

Areas for improvement

- The time for lessons allocated to the subject;
- The provision of subject texts in the library;
- Students' evaluative skills.

136. A level results in 2001 were above average, average in 2000 and well above in 1999. More girls than boys take the subject and, over the last three years, girls have attained more highly overall. The proportion of students gaining A and B grades in 2000 was close to the national average but was well above the national average in 1999, with similar results in 2001. Among the results of higher attainers were one candidate in 1998 and one in 1999 who achieved at the very highest level and were placed among the five highest attaining individual candidates nationally. AS results in 2001 showed a high proportion of passes, with more than one third at grades A or B, and boys' performance was slightly better than girls'. The subject is the most popular one in the sixth form and a high proportion of students complete the courses. Students usually achieve well and add value in their subject performance in the sixth form, as judged by their overall profile of GCSE examination results compared with outcomes in the subject at A level. Higher attainers do especially well.
137. Standards in work seen during the inspection were above average. Students make very good gains in developing their knowledge and understanding of theory and terminology but their skills in critical assessment and evaluation are a relatively weaker area. In Year 12, they confidently used appropriate terminology in work revising the media. They accurately recalled the findings of particular sociologists. Students wrote conclusions to a model answer on the portrayal of negative stereotypes; they summarised points accurately, but not all reached well- reasoned conclusions. They explained different sociological perspectives effectively on the link between images in the media and behaviour. Higher attainers clearly defined the concept of "post-modern" and produced very well reasoned arguments to explain why current society characterises this. Lower attainers all use subject terminology, such as: 'norm', 'culture', 'socialise' and 'deviance', accurately in their writing.
138. In Year 13, students summarised the evidence for secularisation in society and recognised the limits of evidence available. For example, a less competent student commented, perceptively, on the reliability of statistics of attendance at church. Students are confident in describing different sociological perspectives on religion, but less confident in applying their knowledge to an assessment of the importance of religion in the modern world. They use their knowledge of Marxism well to explain exploitation in the under-developed world. In explaining the differences between theories about globalisation and its practical impact, a competent student cleverly contrasted the concept of development of a global culture with the idea of the spread of western culture.
139. Teaching is very good. The teacher's secure subject knowledge ensures that students' learning occurs within a clearly established sociological framework. In work on revision, students are constantly challenged to define terms and to recall the work of particular sociologists. They are then pressed to categorise these within particular traditions. The teacher's methods of breaking complex ideas down into smaller segments and presenting these on overhead projector transparencies contribute effectively to revision and other teaching. Lessons run at a challenging pace, covering topics in the detail required. Students are constantly challenged to define and re-define important concepts and terms. As a result, they learn effectively, with constant reinforcement. Students' attitudes to the subject are very positive and they feel involved. Teaching methods increase their confidence and this in turn enhances their productivity and rate of learning. Students are well supported to plan and organise their own learning from resources of high quality produced with key points presented to a common format. Written summaries of information from lessons are made available to students on the school's network to provide further consolidation and reinforcement of learning. Management of students is excellent and combines much support with high expectations of their performance in challenging discussions. Marking is thorough and critical in showing students where to improve. Assessment of homework and methods used in class are closely related to examination requirements and marking schemes, so that students constantly extend their understanding of how to produce answers which earn higher marks. Individual assessment of students is very effective in highlighting weaknesses in criticism and evaluation. However, in some instances, these skills need to be more explicitly taught.
140. Leadership is very good. Very effective planning and development ensure a very supportive and challenging climate for learning. This positively influences students to become enthusiastic and productive learners. The subject has become a very successful addition to the curriculum since

the last inspection. However, there is insufficient time allocated to the subject, restricting teachers from giving students as much individual support and attention as is needed, particularly by those of lower competence. Although the range of resources available in the department is very good, there are insufficient subject books available in the school library to support students' independent learning fully.

Psychology

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

Strengths

- Students currently in Year 13 achieved good results in their AS examinations in 2001;
- Both Year 12 and Year 13 students are making good progress in their knowledge of theory;
- Research methods are used well;
- Teaching is good and uses effective methods which result in successful learning;
- The subject managers provide strong and effective leadership which has successfully established the subject within the curriculum

Areas for improvement

- Provide further opportunities for students to undertake extended writing;
- Extend the stock of subject texts in the library to support students' independent research.

141. Psychology has only recently been established as a sixth form subject in the school and no students have yet fully completed their A level courses. However, the results from the first AS level examinations indicate that students are achieving well. Analysis of students' files, combined with observations of lessons, show that AS and A level students are currently attaining well. This is due to imaginative and well planned teaching combined with a clear sense of purpose in the management of the subject.
142. Year 13 students have a good understanding of the theoretical aspects of psychology and show themselves able to apply this knowledge to a range of practical situations. Case studies involving, for example, the identification of behavioural traits from film characters, are discussed with confidence and accuracy and show clear understanding. Students are competent in their collection and analysis of data, drawing conclusions which accurately reflect the evidence.
143. Year 12 students have made a good start to their course. They already have a good understanding of some of the theoretical elements and can define and demonstrate key concepts. Students' grasp of research methods is also good and statistics are handled confidently.
144. Teaching is good. Teachers, although not specialists in the subject, have worked hard to provide students with material that is both interesting and demanding. They are particularly skilled in providing students with opportunities to apply and consolidate their theoretical knowledge through a range of practical activities. Group discussion is well led and teachers create resources, such as workbooks on statistics, which provide students with a firm foundation. The strength of the relationships with the students is noteworthy and the pleasant working atmosphere in lessons is a significant factor in students' enjoyment of the subject. The careful and imaginative teaching was reflected in a session in which students were revising their understanding of autism. By downloading a range of material and creating case studies, the teacher required students to apply their knowledge in a diagnostic way. As a consequence, the revision lesson became a lively discussion and the students benefited both from their interpretation of data and consolidation of their theoretical understanding.
145. As a result of good teaching, students are enthusiastic about the subject and learn successfully. Although they differ in the amount of independent reading that they do, they use information and communication technology well. They participate in class discussions with confidence and put their arguments clearly and concisely. The motivation and interest of the students are shown by the very small numbers who discontinue the course and the significant proportion who have expressed an interest in continuing their study of psychology in higher education.
146. The two teachers who manage the subject provide strong leadership and have been successful in establishing psychology in the curriculum. Much thought has been given to the development of resources and significant investment has been committed to the provision of textbooks. However, there is a need to develop the stock of subject texts in the library further to support students' independent study. Effective systems are in place for monitoring students' progress. Consideration given to ensuring that students have qualifications in mathematics and science before entering the course is a significant element in explaining their good level of attainment.

Similarly, the provision of clear and detailed information about the demands of the course helps to ensure that students understand what is expected and do not discontinue the subject.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English language and English literature courses were observed and collectively reported in detail below. In modern foreign languages, the focus was on French, but work in German was also sampled. Entries in German in recent years have been too small to make meaningful comparison with national standards. One A and one AS level German lesson were observed. Teaching was good and very good, enabling the few students to achieve above average standards.

English

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

Strengths

- Students achieve very high standards in English literature;
- The quality of teaching is very good in English literature;
- Students develop an informed, mature and personal response to the literature that they read;
- Relationships between teachers and students are very good.

Areas for improvement

- In English language, the quality of teaching varies too much; monitoring is insufficient to ensure greater consistency in teaching methods;
- Less capable English language students are uncertain about how to organise and structure their response to texts.

147. A level results in English literature have been consistently above average. They improved further in 2001 and were very high, in comparison with national standards and have improved, overall, since the last inspection. More than half the students gained the highest grade and all gained at least a grade C. No boys took the examination. In recent years, more students have chosen to study English language, rather than literature, although a few study both subjects. Most students gain pass grades in English language, but the proportion gaining grades A and B was below average in 2000 and 2001. Girls did better than boys. In 2001, students achieved very good added value in English literature, from their standard in GCSE examinations, but results were below expectation in English language. Results in AS examinations in 2001 also show that Year 12 students did better in English literature than English language. Most students gained passes, but two thirds of students gained the highest grades in English literature while a quarter did so in English language.
148. The standard of work of current Year 13 students is very high in English literature. Students are achieving well in relation to their previous GCSE examination results. They deal confidently with difficult texts and have a good understanding of the historical and social context of the books they study. For example, all students read Marlowe's *Edward II* with understanding and were able to discuss the likely reaction of an Elizabethan audience to the portrayal of the king's homosexuality. They explored and analysed a scene from the play in small groups with enthusiasm and insight, supporting or challenging each other's views with direct reference to the text. They write coherent and critical essays in which they express mature, personal but well-informed views about their reading.
149. In English language, current standards of Year 13 students are close to the national average. Their achievement, in relation to their previous GCSE examination results, is satisfactory. Competent students have a very secure understanding of the way writers use language for effect and can express their ideas fluently. For example, one student wrote a detailed analysis of the use of the phrase, "barbecued alive", in some publicity from Amnesty International. By exploring, in depth, the different connotations of "barbecue" the student was able to highlight the emotive effect of the phrase. However, many students have insufficient knowledge of specialist vocabulary to develop real confidence in their discussions of texts to gain the highest grades. For example, in one lesson, they struggled to explain the basic difference between compound and complex sentences.

150. In Year 12, students of English literature are currently making very good progress from the work that they previously studied for GCSE. They annotate texts well and their secure knowledge of the social background to these helps them to discuss novels, such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, with greater understanding. The achievement of Year 12 English language students is satisfactory. Most are developing their skills of analysis, but many find it difficult to use specialist vocabulary and to structure their response to texts well enough.
151. The teaching of English is good overall. It is very good in English literature and satisfactory in English language. In the best lessons, teachers enable students to develop their own ideas. They emphasise the importance of making a personal response to literature by providing ample opportunities for discussion in pairs, groups and the whole class. However, they also ask incisive questions to challenge students further and build on their initial ideas. Teachers' sound knowledge allows them to provide students with sufficient information about the historical and social context of set books, enabling them to make an informed, mature response. Students respond very well to this approach, working hard and co-operatively with each other. They recognise teachers' knowledge and expertise, and mutual respect between students and teachers makes a significant contribution to students' learning in all lessons. Relationships are very good. In most lessons, teachers plan very well and use a good variety of teaching methods, including the effective use of homework. For example, a Year 12 class developed their understanding of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese* by preparing their views about the poetry before the lesson. Students then shared their ideas enthusiastically in small groups and with the whole class in discussion, before preparing overhead transparencies to represent the poet's use of imagery, in readiness for the next lesson. In contrast, teaching is occasionally unsatisfactory in language lessons. A lack of pace, with too much talk from teachers, leads to students showing some lack of enthusiasm for the subject at times. Students are less willing to research and prepare for class discussion than in literature. In some lessons and when teachers mark work, less competent students are given insufficient guidance about how to organise their ideas. For example, some Year 13 students found it difficult to recognise specific features of books written for children, because the teacher did not provide a sufficiently clear framework for the analysis. Most teachers mark students' work accurately and provide very helpful advice. Students make good use of this guidance and improve their work as a result. However, the advice is often less precise for students on the language course. Teachers miss opportunities to help less competent students to use specialist vocabulary more accurately and effectively.
152. Leadership and management of English in the sixth form are good. Courses are regularly reviewed and the head of department has scrutinised examination results to identify areas for improvement in students' work on the language course. Monitoring of teaching takes place, but recently the emphasis has been on the teaching of newly qualified staff. The lack of a consistent team to specialise in the teaching of English language has an adverse effect on the quality of teaching. There is insufficient focus on monitoring the teaching of English language to ensure more consistency in the teaching of this course.

French

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

Strengths

- Students use a good range and variety of language well;
- Teaching is good overall, and some is very good;
- Students learn well independently, especially with information and communication technology;
- The subject is very well led, contributing strongly to steadily rising standards.

Areas for improvement

- Students' pronunciation frequently lacks authentic intonation;
- Insufficient attention to accuracy in written work robs students needlessly of marks;
- Targets set for written work are not consistently supported by sharply focused examples.

153. In most recent years, too few students have taken the subject to draw meaningful national comparisons. However, students' results at A level have risen steadily since 1999 and have improved considerably since the last inspection. In 2000, all students obtained a pass grade and

the proportion attaining grades A or B was as expected. In 2001, all students obtained a pass grade and half of them attained grades A or B. Students' achievement of added value from their GCSE examination results has been satisfactory. All students passed the AS examination in 2001, and almost a third attained grades A or B. Once committed to the course, all of them completed it.

154. The evidence from work seen in lessons and in students' files shows that standards are currently above average. In Year 13, students converse effectively with teachers and with each other. In discussions, they competently exchange and justify opinions on a wide variety of topics, for example, European comic stereotypes and the sombre implications of Balkan politics. Authentic language encountered, for example, in television and Internet news reports is quickly re-used. A broad range of words and structures is employed with increasingly fluency. Despite the very good French they regularly hear from teachers, the French assistant and from recordings, students' accents generally lack the distinctive features of authentic intonation which are characteristic of work at the highest grades. Some of these features are beginning to show in the accents of students in Year 12, especially when engaged in tasks where they have to think quickly. When discussing measures to curb the impact of traffic on the environment, they used the language effectively. The less they thought about it, the better the quality of sound but, overall, English intonation prevailed. In the written work of both year groups, errors and omissions often mar otherwise good work, potentially compromising results. The breakdown of points achieved in the 2001 AS examination by some students shows that just a few more could have made a significant difference to results.
155. Teaching is good. Teachers are highly competent linguists who adapt work well to students' needs. Very good planning of work enables students to bridge the gap well between the GCSE course and the much higher demands of AS level. In consequence, students enthusiastically use French as the natural means of communication throughout lessons, benefiting from every moment. Students themselves maturely point out that the challenging work they undertake is presented with such variety that they develop confidence and competence in all linguistic skills. Grammatical points are well integrated into students' work, supporting accurate communication. Regular assessment and constructive feedback show students how to improve. Where targets are well illustrated, improvement is faster and students' own attention to detail is better. Teachers provide students with very good methods to research and apply their skills independently, using French for practical purposes. Files show that students are well used to locating and re-using authentic material from the Internet. Year 13 students, for example, were observed successfully tackling a difficult Reuters' news report in French about Taliban prisoners held in Pakistan. Their perseverance was typical of the very positive attitudes that all students have towards their studies.
156. Since the appointment of the present head of department, the proportion of A and B grades at A level has more than doubled each year. Critical analyses of examination results have helped sharpen the focus of teaching and learning. After significant staff changes in recent years, the present staff forms a well co-ordinated team, so that students have the benefit of a good range of expertise. A very good range of resources, particularly a computer suite, allows students to learn the most up-to-date and authentic French.