

INSPECTION REPORT

WESTFIELD COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Watford

LEA area: Hertfordshire

Unique reference number: 117532

Headteacher: Jan Spavin

Reporting inspector: Brian Evans
1049

Dates of inspection: 21-25 January 2002

Inspection number: 196696

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 to 18 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr C Miller
Date of previous inspection:	May 1997

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9736	John Brasier	<i>Lay inspector</i>		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?
27407	Bill Stoneham	<i>Team inspector</i>	Sixth Form vocational courses.	Sixth Form co-ordinator.
10759	Lynn Bappa	<i>Team inspector</i>	Equal opportunities.	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to students?
1085	John Laver	<i>Team inspector</i>	History.	
1578	Maureen Sinclair	<i>Team inspector</i>	Information and communication technology; Sixth Form information technology.	
15051	Lynne Kaufmann	<i>Team inspector</i>	Design and technology; Sixth Form health and social care.	
18261	Anthony Hill	<i>Team inspector</i>	Art; Special educational needs.	
19113 5	Derek Ebbage	<i>Team inspector</i>	Mathematics; Sixth Form mathematics.	
27585	Ken Hounslow	<i>Team inspector</i>	Science.	
23413	Robert Allen	<i>Team inspector</i>	English; Drama; Sixth Form English.	
27082	Jeffrey Henshall	<i>Team inspector</i>	Modern foreign languages.	
4372	Ralph Fordham	<i>Team inspector</i>	Religious education.	
30743	Neil Cowell	<i>Team inspector</i>	Geography.	
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REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	1
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Pupils' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM	11
PART B: COMMENTARY	
HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?	14
The school's results and pupils' achievements	
Students' attitudes, values and personal development	
HOW WELL ARE PUPILS AND STUDENTS TAUGHT?	17
HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO PUPILS AND STUDENTS?	19
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?	22
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?	23
HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?	24
WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	27
PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	28
PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4	34
PART E: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM	58

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Westfield Community is a mixed comprehensive school, which serves a culturally diverse area of Watford. It has 797 students' aged 11 to 16 and 100 students in the Sixth Form, which is smaller than the average comprehensive school. Students' attainments when they join the school are below average in Year 7 but the level of attainment on entry varies considerably from year to year. The overall entry profile for students entered for national tests in Year 9 and GCSE in Year 11 in 2001 was well below average. The percentage of students identified as having special educational needs is broadly in line with the national average and the proportion with statements of special educational needs is above the national average. A high proportion of students, a third, speak English as an additional language. One in every five students on the school roll is known to be eligible for free school meals. This is above the national average. Just over half of the students are from minority ethnic groups. They include significant proportions of students from the Asian sub-continent, Africa and the Caribbean. A significant number of students enter and leave the school during their secondary career.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Strong effective leadership by the head, supported well by a strong team of senior staff, is gradually improving students' achievement and attainment in the context of a school that four years ago had an unfavourable image in the local community. The school is now effectively promoting good behaviour and positive attitudes and relationships. It is beginning to see the benefits of this approach in the standards achieved by students. Improved teaching has led to better attitudes to learning. The school gives satisfactory value for money.

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

- Strong leadership from the headteacher has created a good environment for learning.
- Work related courses in Years 10 and 11 motivate disaffected pupils and are a significant factor in the raised morale of all students and staff.
- Good support for teachers' professional development is raising teaching standards.
- The school's literacy strategy is effective and is leading to higher achievement.
- Careers education and guidance are very good.
- The library and resources centre is very well integrated into the curriculum.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

- Teachers' understanding of how students learn.
- Provision of information and communication technology (ICT) in all subjects.
- Attendance.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in May 1997. Good progress has been made in relation to the key issues identified in the last report, especially in the way the school sets out to meet all students' needs. Literacy strategies have been effective in raising language skills and most students achieve better than expected in English in Years 7 to 9. Under the skilful leadership of the headteacher, good progress has been made in improving the quality of teaching and in clarifying the roles of heads of subject. Attitudes to learning are good and behaviour has improved significantly since the last inspection. Performance management and the use of assessment data on student performance are developing well within a well-structured improvement plan. Nationally, recruitment and retention of teaching staff continue to present a barrier to raising achievement. In response, senior managers have developed a very good staff training programme for students and teachers new to the school. The school was fully staffed during the week of the inspection. Appropriate work-related courses have been introduced into Years 10 and 11 following a major curriculum review. The school does not meet requirements for a daily act of collective worship or for religious education in Years 10 and 11. Suitable accommodation is provided for teaching and supporting students with special educational needs.

STANDARDS

The table below shows the standards achieved at the end of Year 11 based on GCSE examinations.

Performance in:	compared with				Key <i>well above average</i> A <i>above average</i> B <i>average</i> C <i>below average</i> D <i>well below average</i> E
	all schools			similar schools	
	1999	2000	2001	2001	
GCSE examinations	E	E	E	B	
A-Levels/AS-Levels	E	E	E*	N/A	

Students' results in Year 9 national tests in 2001 were well below average in English, mathematics and science. Results were below average in English for similar schools, well below average for mathematics and very low for science. Boys achieve much the same results compared with boys' national average for their age group as girls do compared with theirs but with variations from year to year. However, improvements in national tests by the end of Year 9 over the past six years have been above the national trend. In standards seen during the inspection, students are achieving higher standards than those indicated by the 2001 English tests because teaching and learning has improved and because of the positive impact of an effective literacy strategy. Students' mathematical skills are improving. Students achieve well in art, design and technology, history, and physical education in Years 7 to 9. Unsatisfactory progress is made by students in geography and religious education in all years.

The average points score for students entered for GCSE examinations has been well below average over the past four years. In 2001, the GCSE average point score per student was average when compared with similar schools. The trend in the school's averages between 1996 and 2000 was below the national trend. The impact of difficulties in recruiting some specialist staff was a significant factor as to why the school did not reach its challenging targets for the proportion of students achieving GCSE grades A*-C. Girls attained twice as many grades A*-C than boys. Standards are well below expectations and achievement is unsatisfactory in geography and religious education. Overall, students of all abilities are making above average progress in all years. Improvements in staffing and in teaching are recent and have not yet had their full impact on standards. In Years 10 and 11, students

achieve well in English and make satisfactory progress in most other subjects. Information and communication technology (ICT) skills develop well in ICT lessons and are close to the average for students' ages but students do not have enough opportunities to apply these skills in many subjects. In all years, students with special educational needs make good progress. Students for whom English is an additional language (EAL) and students from ethnic minority groups achieve well. In the Sixth Form, results gained by students entered for two or more A Levels or AS equivalents have been consistently well below average and very low in 2001. Few students attain A or B grades. However, inspection evidence shows that the current A and AS students are achieving higher standards and in A Level English are much nearer the average. Overall, students on GNVQ Advanced and Intermediate courses attained results that were below average in 2001. However, this is in the context of most A, AS and GNVQ students beginning courses with very modest GCSE grades.

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Good. Students respond well and are generally enthusiastic about the school. Improved behaviour is having a significant impact on students' achievement.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good. There are occasional lapses but most students are amenable and courteous to each other and to adults. Staff and pupils work well together in dealing effectively with any incidences of oppressive behaviour, sexism and racism.
Personal development and relationships	Satisfactory. Students of all levels of attainment mix well and respect each other's views. Relationships among students and between teachers and students are good. There are not enough opportunities for students to take responsibility.
Attendance	Attendance is in line with the national average. Unauthorised absence is higher than the national average.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of students:	Years 7 – 9	Years 10 – 11	Years 12 - 13
Quality of teaching	Good	Good	Satisfactory

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

Teaching is better than in the previous inspection because senior staff have worked hard with staff to improve teaching and learning in all years. Teaching is a developing strength in spite of recent difficulties the school has experienced in recruiting specialist staff. Overall, it is good in Years 7 to 11. The improvement in behaviour, in and out of the classroom, has had a positive impact on both the quality of teaching and of students' attitudes to learning. Teaching is very good in English because teachers have a good understanding of how students learn. In most subjects, the main weakness is students' retention of what they have learned over a longer period of time. Classroom management is good in most lessons; for example, all teachers begin lessons by making their objectives clear to students, plan the main lesson activity well and finish by reviewing students' learning. As a result, the majority of students make at least satisfactory gains in their knowledge, understanding and skills during lessons. Support for students with special educational needs is good. Provision for gifted and talented students is satisfactory. The teaching of literacy is well organised, includes a variety of approaches and support for students' needs is based on sound assessment data. The

teaching of numeracy is generally good, although there is some inconsistency between subjects in applying students' numerical skills. The same is true for students' ICT skills. Support for students with EAL and for ethnic minority students is good because resources and staffing are used efficiently.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Satisfactory. The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 has been enhanced by the development of work-related courses. Information and communication technology (ICT) provision does not meet National Curriculum requirements in all subjects. There is no daily act of collective worship and provision for religious education in Years 10 and 11 is unsatisfactory.
Provision for students with special educational needs	Good. Provision promotes educational inclusion. There is a good partnership between support staff and teachers.
Provision for students with English as an additional language	Good. Leadership in this area is very good. There is much good practice and staffing is deployed efficiently. There are good specialist resources for those students learning to write English. Effective use is made of the library resource centre to support learning.
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSC) is good. Students' personal development is enhanced by a good personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme.
How well the school cares for its students	Good. Students are valued and good relationships are fostered. Guidance for students is good. Procedures for assessment are very good and teachers are beginning to use data effectively to monitor and support students' progress.

There is a good range of extra-curricular activities. Close and useful links exist with the local community. Procedures for child protection are good. Attention to health and safety is satisfactory. Parents believe that the school is improving and is making stronger links with them. Careers education and guidance are very good.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Good. The headteacher provides very good leadership in the school. She has established a strong team of senior managers who are working well with all staff to provide a good quality of education for students of all levels of attainment. The effectiveness of middle managers is satisfactory overall but varies from very good to unsatisfactory.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Satisfactory. Governors are slowly developing their roles in monitoring the school's performance. However, statutory requirements are not met in all subjects.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good. Senior managers evaluate and regularly analyse achievement across all aspects of the school. The results provide the basis for strategic development plans and priorities for improvement in the school's curricular provision.
The strategic use of resources	Good. Specific grants are being used appropriately and well. 'Best value' principles are applied to academic success and spending.

The school approaches the difficulties in appointing suitably qualified staff imaginatively but the situation is affecting standards and achievement of many pupils. Learning resources are adequate. Accommodation has improved significantly since the last inspection but the accommodation for business education in the Sixth Form is inadequate.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

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

Inspection findings support parents' positive views about the school. Inspectors found inconsistencies in the setting of homework between subjects and between teachers. The pastoral staff work closely with parents. Written reports on progress are at least satisfactory and often good. Teachers, including the headteacher and senior staff, are easy to approach. Parents believe that behaviour has improved significantly in the school over the past four years.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The Sixth Form currently has about 100 students on roll and there are significantly more students in Year 12 than in Year 13, principally because many students take one-year vocational courses. Typically, around a half of Year 11 students join the Sixth Form annually; very few students join the Sixth Form from other schools. The school operates a policy of flexible and open access to the Sixth Form and is keen to include everyone. This is reflected in the recent changes that have been made to the Post 16 curriculum, which have been specifically designed to make courses more relevant to the type of students who enter the Sixth Form. Some students embark on Sixth Form work having only achieved very modest results in their GCSE examinations. To cater for the diverse nature of its intake, a realistic curriculum has been developed, but the opportunities for out of lesson activities, and for students to seek responsibility, are limited. Numbers opting for vocational courses are growing and the school's development planning for improving the range of vocational courses is detailed and thorough.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

At present the Sixth Form provision is satisfactory overall, though it is unsatisfactory in some key areas. There are some positive aspects: the quality of teaching is good, the commitment to social inclusion is strong and the taught curriculum has been extensively revised to make it more relevant. The cost effectiveness of the Sixth Form is satisfactory and the majority of students feel secure and appreciate the opportunities that are made available. The management of this part of the school's activities has recently been extensively revised and the present head of Sixth Form and his deputy have a good vision on how further improvements might be secured. Their development planning is detailed. At present, however, the management of the Sixth Form is satisfactory simply because improvement plans have only recently been compiled and there has been insufficient time for the plans to be implemented. No tangible outcomes are identifiable at this stage. Some aspects of the Post 16 provision are unsatisfactory. Assessment and monitoring procedures are unsatisfactory. Arrangements for PSHE are unsatisfactory, the students are highly critical of the provision made for the teaching of key skills, and too much time is wasted in morning registration periods. Some of the accommodation, especially for some vocational subjects, is poor and adversely affects standards of work.

STRENGTHS

- Attendance at Post 16 lessons is good and course retention rates are excellent.
- The students are very supportive of the Sixth Form and appreciate the opportunities being offered.
- The Sixth Form is a harmonious community in which the students feel valued.
- The recent and continuing adjustments to the curriculum are meeting the needs of individual students more adequately.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

- Provision for PSHE, the teaching of key skills and the use of morning form time. In order for standards to rise further, these areas should all be critically reviewed.
- The accommodation for some aspects of vocational education, especially business education and health and social care, is poor. For standards to rise, specialist accommodation is needed.
- Assessment data are not used rigorously enough to monitor the performance of each individual student.
- Students are not encouraged to develop skills as independent learners.

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. Teachers have very good knowledge and understanding; the overall planning of the course is very detailed. Students are managed well.
Business Vocational	Good. Excellent course retention rates help students to make progress.
ICT	Satisfactory. In lessons where teaching is good, students learn well. Learning is further helped by the good relationships that exist between teachers and students.
Health and Social Care	Satisfactory. The quality of teaching is helping all students to develop their independent learning skills.
English	Good. Teaching is usually good or very good: standards are average. The monitoring and the amount of written work are not rigorous enough.

Work in some other Sixth Form subjects was sampled during the inspection. In all other lessons seen, teaching was always at least satisfactory. In most subjects of the Sixth Form curriculum the quality of teaching is helping students make progress.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	The quality of careers education and guidance is good, but the monitoring and assessment of the performance of each individual student are unsatisfactory. Performance data are not used with sufficient rigour and consistency as part of a strategy to improve standards.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the Sixth Form	The leadership and management of the Sixth Form are satisfactory. Management staff are newly appointed and their planning for improvements is very good. Too little time has elapsed for any assessment of how effective planning has been.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the Sixth Form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The encouragement and challenged offered by teachers in lessons. • The levels of support teachers offer to students outside lesson times. • The friendly and harmonious spirit that has been created. • The choice of subjects that are on offer. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The quality of support and guidance designed to improve individual attainment. • The quality of careers advice and guidance. • The opportunities Sixth Formers have for expressing their own views and ideas about the school.

Seventy-four students responded to the questionnaire; many other formal and informal discussions took place with students during the inspection week. The team shares the students' views of the strengths of the Sixth Form and also concurs with their views about what could be improved. The view of the team is that the students are correct in highlighting the quality assessment and monitoring of progress as an area for improvement, but the quality of careers education and guidance that is offered is satisfactory.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

1. Overall, the attainment of students who were entered for the Year 9 national tests and GCSE examinations in 2001 was well below average. However, in Years 7 and 8 the profile of ability is higher, and is skewed more towards the average. The attainment profile of all years changes over time because a significant number of students enter or leave the school during their secondary school career.

2. In 2001, the attainment of students in National Curriculum tests at the age of 14 was well below average in English and mathematics. Results in science national tests in 2001 were in the lowest five per cent of schools nationally. In English, average points scores per student compared with similar schools were below average; in mathematics, they were well below average and in science very low. However, during the period 1996-2001, the school's average score for all three subjects was above the national trend. The 2001 test results show that overall standards are improving by the end of Year 9 despite severe staffing difficulties. Results in mathematics showed significant gains from 2000. Overall, most students performed better than expected in Year 9 given their test results in Year 6 at primary school. Inspection evidence shows that standards are now higher in Years 7 to 9 as a result of the improvements in the quality of teaching.

3. Inspection evidence shows that standards by the end of Year 9 are:

- * well below average in mathematics, science, geography;
- * below average in art, design and technology, history, music, religious education;
- * average in English, drama, ICT, modern foreign languages, physical education.

4. Students in Years 7 to 9 achieve:

- * well in English, drama, art, design and technology, ICT, modern foreign languages, physical education;
- * satisfactorily in mathematics, science, history, music and religious education;
- * unsatisfactorily in geography.

5. The proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE A*-C grades in 2001 was well below both the national average compared with the average of a group of schools where the candidates all had similar results in the Year 9 tests in 1999. Girls entered for GCSE German, French and design and technology performed significantly better than in their other subjects; they performed significantly worse in history, art and science. Boys performed significantly better in English and mathematics than in their other subjects and worse in art design and technology and science. The proportion of students achieving one or more GCSE grades A* to G was close to the average and much better than expected in relation to their Year 9 national test results. Students' GCSE average points score was above average in comparison with schools with similar Year 9 scores. The overall trend in the school's averages between 1996 and 2001 was below that nationally. In 2001, the school exceeded its target for the proportion of students achieving 1 or more A*-G, fell well below the target for 5 or more A*-C and came very close to meeting the target for the average GCSE point score.

6. In English language and English literature, GCSE results were well below average in 2001 and show a small downward trend. However, inspection evidence shows standards are now much nearer the average and students are making good progress. Teaching has improved significantly and literacy levels are rising because of the success of the school's literacy and behaviour strategies, particularly among boys. In mathematics, GCSE results are well below average but rose in 2001 and have improved since the last inspection. Science GCSE results were well below average in 2001 and have fallen over the past three years. This decline has been in part due to difficulties in recruiting science teachers but also because leadership and management of the subject have not been consistent or sustained over this period. The school missed its overall GCSE targets for 2001 but inspection evidence indicates that improvements in teaching and learning will enable students of all ability levels to achieve higher grades in 2002.

7. Inspection evidence shows that standards in GCSE subjects are:

- * well below average in mathematics, science, art, geography;
- * below average in English, design and technology, modern foreign languages, music, physical education and religious education;
- * average in history and ICT.

8. Students achieve:

- * well in mathematics, drama, history, modern foreign languages;
- * satisfactorily in English, art, design and technology, science, geography, ICT, music, physical education and religious education.

9. The senior management team is raising standards by implementing sound strategies for improving the quality of teaching and learning in all years. They have also worked hard to implement an effective inclusion policy and work towards meeting the needs of all groups of students. Their initial priorities of improving behaviour and developing teachers' classroom management skills have led to much better attitudes to learning and higher achievement. Students make unsatisfactory progress in geography in Years 7 to 9 because there is not enough focus on geographical concepts. In many subjects, students do not remember earlier work well enough and this has a significant impact on their overall achievement.

10. The arrangements introduced for supporting students' literacy skills are very good and are generally consistently applied in all subject areas. However, many students enter the school with very low literacy skills. Senior staff give an appropriately high priority to meeting individual needs, particularly in reading and writing. They use assessment data well to monitor progress and support groups of students. However, low literacy levels continue to be a barrier for many students in striving for higher test results and GCSE grades. Skills in numeracy are below average but improving because of the school's involvement as a pilot school for the National Numeracy Strategy. ICT standards are patchy. Students have access to the Internet and make good use of the computer facilities in their own time. However, a number of subjects are in the early stages of integrating ICT into their planning. For example in science, students do not have the opportunity to see how a computer can be used to directly collect information from experiments through sensors.

11. The planning and implementation of inclusive education for most students are good. Students with special educational needs make good progress in lessons. In lessons where statemented students are withdrawn for one-to-one support with learning support assistants or teachers, they make at least good progress with reading, often improving their reading age by one year in six months. This progress is often accelerated by the use of a commercial independent learning programme, using computers that enable them to develop their keyboard skills further. The progress of students with special educational needs is currently

being tracked through an effective newly designed assessment system. The well-focused information and the clear charting of progress in literacy skills will assist all teachers to improve their awareness of the nature of, and provision for, students with special educational needs. Individual education plans (IEPs) incorporated in the assessment system sharpen the response to the needs of students.

12. The high proportion of students for whom EAL make good progress because their needs are met well. Subject teachers have well-produced specialised material to cater for these students' needs.

13. Gifted and talented students are well served by the school. Higher attainers are identified early in their school career and achieve well. Departments identify students who are gifted and talented and set them targets which are written into their diaries. High attainers work hard, show keen interest and achieve well. In mathematics and science, for example, high attainers are set extension work and participate in events such as the 'physics challenge'. The wide range of extra-curricular activities involves a high proportion of students and provides them with excellent opportunities to develop their talents in the fields of music, drama and physical education.

Sixth Form

14. GCE A Level results have been well below average in recent years and were very low in 2001. Many students find the A/AS courses difficult because they start from a base of a B or C grade in their GCSE examination in the subject chosen. The proportion of students achieving the higher A and B grades in 2001 A/AS examinations was very low. Overall, the proportion of grades A-E achieved was lower than in 2000.

15. In the reported subjects and courses, students are achieving in line with expectations based on target grades derived from students' GCSE performance. In September 2000, the AS Level was introduced as a separate intermediate qualification leading the GCE Advanced Level (A2). A number of students were under pressure to cope with the heavier workload of studying more subjects than previously and this adversely affected pass levels in some subjects.

16. In September 2000, all GNVQ Advanced courses were renamed Advanced Vocational Certificates in Education (AVCE) or Vocational A-Levels. They parallel changes in the GCE A Level. Standards in both one year GNVQ (intermediate) and two-year AVCE courses are below average but levels of achievement are generally satisfactory because most have only modest GCSE results.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

17. Attitudes, values and behaviour are good. Students' personal development is satisfactory and relationships generally are very good. This is a substantial improvement upon the last inspection and it has a positive effect on student's achievements.

18. Students enjoy school. They are enthusiastic in lessons. They speak highly of their teachers and other adults. They are keen to get down to work and show a genuine interest in their lessons, especially in answering questions. These positive attitudes are the result of the calm but firm application of the behaviour policy, the brisk and appropriate pace and

challenge in most lessons and by the enthusiasm of the teachers themselves. Many students take part in sport or other activities and there are many choices in the lunch-hour for them to choose from. Students who have special educational needs show interest in their work and are keen to learn.

19. Behaviour is good. Around the school students move calmly and cheerfully. They are polite to adults and to each other. They are proud of their school and the recent improvements and keep the school tidy and in good condition. There is virtually no abuse of property and buildings, apart from the occasional graffiti. Students behave well at lunchtime and talk to each other sociably. Behaviour on the playground is very good and there is responsible use of the library and recreation facilities for senior students. Oppressive behaviour occasionally occurs, as evidenced by the record of exclusions, but this occurs at a very low level. There is however a high incidence of temporary exclusions, partly due to a number of students whose self-control is undeveloped, and partly due to the use of exclusion as a short sharp shock to try to force a change in attitude. The strength of this approach lies in the meeting between senior staff and parents on the return to school and the joint behaviour plan that is drawn up between them.

20. Relationships are very good. Teachers know their students well and enjoy working with them. Students work very amicably together.

21. Personal development is satisfactory. There are limited opportunities for students to take responsibility, whether planning some fund raising for charity or representing their class's views on the School Council. Students act effectively as librarians.

22. Attendance is unsatisfactory and is little changed over the last inspection. It is well below average. Unauthorised absence is well above average. Students who joined the school later than the normal time of entry exhibit a poorer level of attendance. This reflects their poorer attendance record prior to entry. Registration is efficient. There is some lateness. Lessons start on time.

Sixth Form

23. In the Sixth Form, attitudes are satisfactory overall. They are often good, but some of the younger students have an immature and unsatisfactory approach to their lessons that militates against constructive and creative dialogue with their tutors. The overall development of personal and learning skills is satisfactory. Relationships are very good, both between staff and students and between students. Personal development is satisfactory, some students responding well to the opportunities available, but others being less active. Attendance in the Sixth Form is satisfactory.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

24. Teaching is a developing strength and makes a positive contribution to effective learning and to the standards achieved. Overall, teaching is good in Years 7 to 11. Teaching was satisfactory or better in 98 per cent of the lessons seen, good or better in 66 per cent, very good or excellent in 21 per cent and two per cent unsatisfactory. This represents a significant improvement since the last inspection two years ago when 20 per cent of lessons seen were considered to be less than satisfactory and the most serious weakness identified was teachers' low expectations. A much higher proportion of students is now making satisfactory or better progress in spite of the major difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff over the past three years. The improved quality of teaching and learning is recognised by the parents.

25. In the last two years, the headteacher and senior management team have placed a high priority on improving behaviour in classrooms and around the school. The improvement in behaviour has had a major impact on both the quality of teaching and students' attitudes to learning. A key element has been a strong framework for monitoring and supporting good classroom practice. For example, all teachers begin lessons by making their objectives for the lesson clear to students and most, but not all, end by reviewing students' learning at the end of the lesson. The impact of these initiatives is apparent in students' improved attitudes to learning.

26. Teachers benefit from a very good professional development programme that has focused on improving the quality of teaching. National test and GCSE results over the past three years confirm that many pupils are achieving better than expected given their attainment on entry to the school. The impact of teaching on learning in lessons is good. However, in many subjects achievement is often not as high as it should be because students do not retain their knowledge and understanding over time. They thus have difficulty when asked to apply these to new contexts later in their school career. For example, scientific skills learnt in Year 7 have to be taught afresh in Year 10. The school improvement plan recognises that the next focus in developing teaching and learning is for teachers to concentrate on raising achievement through a greater understanding of how students learn. This will need a greater emphasis on techniques that encourage them to learn independently. This priority will build on current strengths, viz.,

- * the clear vision of the head; very good staff development programme for teachers;
- * the developing assessment programme to monitor pupils' progress;
- * increasing parental and community support; very good careers guidance; and
- * an imaginative approach to meeting students' social and educational needs.

27. Inspection evidence indicates that there is now a good environment for learning in the classroom and in the school generally. The library and resource centre provides a very good back-up service for teachers and helps to develop students' research skills. There have been significant improvements since the last inspection especially in the school's inclusive approach. In most subjects, basic language and numeracy skills are taught well. Work-related courses in Years 10 and 11 enable motivate students to learn more effectively in all their subjects. Small groups who have well-structured work-related and work experience programme for part of the week – mainly disaffected boys – show a greater maturity and have a greater sense of purpose in their learning. Visits to work projects confirmed the high quality of support students are given in their time out of school. The learning and achievement of all pupils are benefiting from these arrangements because the school is calmer and management of behaviour is now focused more on rewards than on sanctions.

28. Teaching is good overall in Years 7 to 11 in English, drama, mathematics, science, art, design and technology, history, ICT, modern foreign languages and physical education. It is satisfactory in music and religious education. However, there are weaknesses. Teachers do not consistently use methods that actively involve students in the lesson. In some classrooms, this lack of variety in teaching approach is related to a lack of appropriate materials and practical resources, which limits the development of independent investigation skills. ICT is well taught in specific ICT lessons where the specialists provide challenging and well-designed activities that enable students to be actively involved and develop a wider understanding of the different applications. In many other subjects, the use of ICT is still limited as a teaching tool. In many classrooms there needs to be a greater emphasis on speaking and reading. From an examination of students' work in the school and in the light of students' poor achievement, it is judged that learning is unsatisfactory in geography. Many tasks are uninspiring and boring. However, the geography teaching observed during the inspection was satisfactory.

29. Homework is used effectively in a few subjects to support students' learning. Overall, it

is set satisfactorily but there are inconsistencies between teachers and between subjects. Marking of students' work is also sometimes good but again there is some inconsistency in practice. In some subjects, such as mathematics, modern foreign languages and English, marking is conscientiously and regularly completed but such good practice is not widespread across all subjects.

30. Students with special educational needs benefit from good teaching. Subject teachers know students well from the good information supplied by the curriculum support department. They note them in lesson plans and devise strategies for responding to their individual needs, under the guidance of the special education needs co-ordinator. Those who are withdrawn for 1:1 support from a learning support assistant or support teacher, make good progress in literacy skills. Through supported reading, spelling sessions and textual decoding lessons, they learn word attack and comprehension skills that improve their reading age. This enhances their self-confidence and eases their access to the wider National Curriculum. Students who are statemented for reasons of emotional and behavioural difficulties, benefit from group work on 'anger management' and personal counselling, as appropriate. Students on the 'tracking sheet' are given IEPs or individual behaviour plans that set out termly targets for them to achieve, which are then reviewed and re-set as appropriate. Targets tend to be too general, but the format of the plans is under review and target setting will improve under the guidelines of the new Code of Practice. The information contained in these plans is used well by teachers to focus on those students who have particular special educational needs in their classes. This enables students to progress at the same rate as others in the majority of lessons.

31. The teaching of numeracy and mathematical understanding is generally good, although there are inconsistencies within the department and across the school. Some subject teachers are more effective in developing these basic skills. In mathematics, lessons have been positively influenced by the National Numeracy Strategy with activities that have built on earlier work in middle and primary schools. The good lesson activities ensured that students were well motivated and helped to develop their basic skills.

32. Students with English as an additional language develop good learning skills and they have good access to all schemes of work. Good leadership from the senior member of staff, skilful guidance for subject teachers and the availability of specialised texts where appropriate underpins the good practice in the school.

Sixth Form

33. The overall standard of teaching in the Sixth Form is satisfactory. In English, mathematics and health and social care, teaching is good; it is satisfactory in business education and in ICT. It was satisfactory in other Sixth Form subjects sampled. In the 24 lessons and other work observed, just over half of the teaching was good. In the best practice, lessons are planned well and teachers use their subject knowledge well to motivate students to explore their knowledge and understanding further. There was one unsatisfactory and one poor lesson. The major weaknesses in the teaching are an overall lack of emphasis on literacy and numeracy. On occasions, too much teacher-directed activity in a lesson stifles students' motivation and does not inspire them to work through their own hypotheses and ideas.

34. Provision for the teaching of key skills is unsatisfactory. Provision in subject areas varies. In English, communication skills are developed through discussions. Number skills are developed in mathematics. However, opportunities to develop key skills in most subject areas are not well signposted, and co-ordination is not effective.

HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO

STUDENTS?

35. The quality and range of learning opportunities are good for all age groups. The curriculum is broad and balanced and provides a relevant curriculum experience for all students. Statutory requirements are not fully met, however, because there is insufficient time allocated for religious education for students in Years 7, 8 and 9. In Year 7, the curriculum is enriched with extra sessions on the creative arts whilst in Year 9 students study dance. In Years 8 and 9, students currently have the additional opportunity to study two foreign languages. However, there are plans to limit this opportunity to the most able so that average and below-average students do not have to cope with two languages in the limited curriculum time available.

36. The 'Discovery' programme in Year 7 consists of lessons in English, geography, history and religious education. Lessons in these subjects are taught by the same teacher, thus allowing the youngest students in the school to benefit from a more primary-style experience. This enables them to build up their levels of confidence and develop their literacy skills in a secure and known environment. Students and parents value the course and speak very highly of it. However, the school does not have focused strategies to ensure that history, geography and religious education are covered in sufficient depth within a structure that clearly offers many benefits to the students.

37. In Years 10 and 11, students study the National Curriculum and religious education. A broad range of subjects is offered and statutory requirements are met. A particular strength of the curriculum and of the school is the work-related learning option for about 40 disaffected or less able students. It provides students with a relevant school curriculum for four days a week and a work placement for the additional day. This imaginative programme, introduced just over a year ago, is already having a beneficial impact on the behaviour of students in the group and the number of referrals for bad behaviour has decreased significantly. Local employers, who provide the work placements, view the course positively and meet regularly with the school. The course also provides very good coverage of key skills in ICT and opportunities to study courses from the National Skills Profile, such as car mechanics, first aid or health and social care, or National Vocational Qualifications. Students clearly benefit from this course, the planning for which is excellent. This scheme has clear success criteria. These include improved attendance at school, improved attainment in schoolwork and an evaluation of where students move to after the scheme. This programme is socially inclusive and this has been acknowledged by the most recent award of £15,000 from a government agency to help finance it.

38. All students have PSHE as part of their curriculum. The provision for this is good and fully reflects the ethos and values of the school. It makes a good contribution to students' personal development. This is taught within the 'Discovery' programme in Year 7 and separately in Years 8 and 9. Within Years 10 and 11, it is taught within humanities GCSE and looks, in depth over two years at, for example, citizenship, health issues and the environment. There is thus a coherent path of study from Years 7 to 11. It allows for the inclusion of citizenship studies in the 2002 curriculum and the eventual inclusion of the short course GCSE in citizenship studies.

39. The provision for students with special educational needs is good. The nature of the funding for statemented students, whether earmarked for students with statements, or provided to fulfil the 'additional hours' of support set out in statements of special educational need, makes it difficult for the special educational needs co-ordinator to deploy the support staff she employs with the allocated money from the local education authority. Nonetheless, the special educational needs co-ordinator works hard with her committed and capable support staff, to ensure that the best provision is made under the requirements set by the funding. Subject teachers, tutors and pastoral staff play an important role in this provision,

although links between subject departments and the curriculum support department need strengthening, to underpin that provision as a whole school accomplishment. A 'student profile' has been introduced by the special educational needs co-ordinator, which gives staff information on students who are not on the 'tracking sheet', but who nonetheless have needs that require attention. Such needs may be medical, behavioural or learning, which might impede their progress, but which are not of sufficient severity to require action other than the passing of information to the staff who teach t

40. The provision for statemented students is good. The special educational needs co-ordinator has been trained in the use of the revised Code of Practice and is improving the provision using the guidance in it. Individual education plans (IEPs) are under review and a new format is being set up to ensure that targets for improvement are discussed with students and parents to ensure that they are realistic and achievable and can be easily monitored two or three times a year. Support staff are targeted primarily on students who have statements of special educational need, but also on those with earmarked student funding and those who are supported through the local social services department or the school hospital service funding. This support is effective both in classes and where students are withdrawn. Students, staff and parents value the provision.

41. The provision made for careers education and guidance is very good. The programme is well planned and suitably geared to preparing students for the next stage of their lives. The highlight of work undertaken in Years 7 to 9 is a careers conference; this event took place during the week of the inspection. All Year 9 students participated and the conference featured some 18 speakers from a host of local firms. The planning for the day was excellent and students were offered high quality, accurate advice. The programme in Years 10 and 11 has many strengths. All students undertake work experience in Year 10 and this event is well planned. Students are given good advice about the pathways that exist Post 16, including information about courses offered by the local further education college. Another key strength is the development of a work related learning programme. Although no vocational options are offered in the curriculum for students in Years 10 and 11, a significant minority of students who lack confidence, or who are disaffected, are offered very good opportunities to spend part of the school week gaining relevant work experience in local firms. Students benefit from the course by gaining greater maturity, attending more regularly and achieving higher standards. This programme is socially inclusive and its success has been acknowledged by the recent award of £15,000 from a Government agency to help finance the work.

42. The community makes a major contribution to students' learning. Funding of community projects has brought to the school an all weather pitch, much improved library facilities, including a suite of computers, a range of laptop computers for design technology and a bank of electronic keyboards in the music department. The lifelong learning courses that take place in the school have done much to raise its status in the community, and students' learning is enhanced by the opportunity to join in these classes. Students from primary schools study a range of topics as part of the community facility, and students' attainment benefits from summer literacy courses and similar courses designed for the whole family. The community facilities are also used by Caribbean, Asian, Chinese and Italian groups. The school is now running holiday play schemes and a Young Asian Woman's group. Businesses help with work related learning and work experience. Volunteers from the school help in the after-school club and at the multiracial centre. The impact of these features on students' learning is very good.

43. Overall, the provision for the students' SMSC development is good. The provision for the students' spiritual development is good and has improved significantly since the last inspection. The 'Values and Beliefs' programme makes a strong contribution through the school assemblies. For example, in a Year 8 assembly students were encouraged to reflect on the value of time and how they should use it. However, the statutory requirements for a daily act of corporate worship are still not being met. The form tutor periods make little contribution to the 'Values and Beliefs' programme and provide few opportunities for students to reflect on spiritual issues. Some subjects contribute very strongly to the students' spiritual development. In religious education, students are assisted in considering and responding to questions about the meaning of life and nature, and value of society. For example a Year 7 class was asked to reflect on the influence that Buddhism on people's lives today. In English, the students consider spiritual issues in great literature and the intangible in poetry. In music, students reflect on how music can establish mood and provoke feelings. The vocal repertoire deals with human feelings of love and care for others. Other subjects also take opportunities to heighten students' spiritual awareness. For example, in a geography lesson the students showed appreciation of the awe and power of earth processes when studying the effects of a current volcanic eruption in the Congo.

44. The school makes a good contribution to the moral development of the students. In all subjects students are encouraged to distinguish between right and wrong by good classroom practice and insistence on the school's behaviour code. In addition, many subjects take opportunities to involve students in discussing topics that raise moral issues. The PSHE programme covers topics such as human rights, citizenship, use of alcohol and drugs, the assemblies are also often concerned with such topics. The library has a very good collection of materials on issues such as euthanasia, abortion and current affairs, such as the impact of terrorist atrocities on society. In English students are given opportunities to express their convictions in discussions and written work. In drama lessons they examine moral issues through improvisation and role-play. In religious education there are good opportunities to respond to areas of morality using students' knowledge and understanding of religious and ethical issues to make reasoned and informed judgements. In music moral issues can be raised through the study of cultural influences on music. For example a Year 10 student composed and performed a song on the theme of slavery. In ICT lessons students cover such topics as the social consequences of the development of computer-use. Modern languages' schemes cover moral issues surrounding citizenship and make comparison with other European countries. In art there is work on environmental pollution and the moral issues raised by the work of modern artists.

45. Provision for social development is good. There is an extensive programme of extra-curricular activities that provide opportunities for social inter-action and teamwork. Through membership of the school council students learn about the workings of democracy and participation in community life. Similarly, working as school librarians provides an opportunity for students to take responsibility. The strongest contribution comes from the classroom where in all subjects the students are encouraged to work collaboratively in pairs and groups. Typical examples of this are in drama, where students work together investigating personal relationships, and in music where students share keyboards and help each other in their performance work. In the PSHE programme, citizenship is a major topic through which students learn about our society and the workings of democracy. Students are encouraged to engage in fund raising for good causes through such events as the 'dress your best day'. The school's community choir gives regular concerts in old peoples' homes and local community centres.

46. Provision for cultural development is good with many subjects making a strong contribution. There is excellent work in religious education, where the students study the six major world religions and the cultures that support them. The students are actively encouraged to discuss and evaluate issues arising from their studies. The school library

provides a wide range of resources with a multi-cultural reference. For example there are storybooks from the Islamic foundation and good coverage of ethnic minority writers. The teaching staff provide good role models for different ethnic groups, with teachers from Asia, Africa, Australia and the West Indies. This enables staff to draw from a rich cultural background in their teaching. An example of this was seen in a modern languages lesson where a Togolese teacher spoke about the influence of French culture in Africa and other parts of the world. The textiles room has very good cultural displays featuring China, India and Scotland. In food technology the culture and cuisine projects focus on France and other European countries as well as Asian countries. In music students listen to great examples of European music as well as music from India. Students are encouraged to draw upon and celebrate the culture of their own communities; for example in a lunchtime concert a student sang a folk song in Urdu, demonstrating all the characteristics of the ethnic style. English and drama feature a range of cultures in the subject material with an emphasis on great literature and plays; this is supported by theatre visits for students and by writers coming into school.

Sixth Form

47. Curriculum arrangements in the Sixth Form are satisfactory. The curriculum is in a state of flux with the school reviewing and revising its provision to ensure that what is offered provides realistically for the needs of its students. Development planning is thorough and the school has a clear vision about how the curriculum should develop. Students do attend regular assemblies that offer some opportunities for SMSC development, but arrangements for religious education, an issue raised in the previous inspection report, still have not been satisfactorily addressed.

48. Following a sequence of disappointing examination results on A Level courses, the school has extended its curriculum. An emphasis is now placed on vocational subjects offering good opportunities for all students. These changes are also consistent with the school's status as a technology school as well as more accurately meeting the desired objective of encouraging the development of life-long learning.

49. Good provision is made for careers education and guidance, though the students were critical of what is offered. Arrangements for personal and social education and the teaching of key skills are unsatisfactory. Much time is also lost through unsatisfactory registration periods. The school acknowledge these deficiencies and are reviewing procedures to establish how improvements can be secured.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

50. The quality of pastoral care remains high, as it was at the last inspection, but procedures for achieving good behaviour have improved, as have assessment procedures. The school provides a safe environment with good supervision at the start and end of the day and at break times.

51. Arrangements for child protection are good. All new staff are trained in child protection as part of their induction procedure. Staff are aware of those few children in care, and are vigilant about the children on the at risk register. Arrangements for the welfare of students are good, the details of those with special health problems being provided to those who need to know. There are sufficient first-aiders in the school. All the expected safety precautions, such as fire drills are in place. There are regular safety inspections which are recorded and progressed.

52. Students' personal development is well supported by highly effective pastoral management. Tutors and heads of year normally remain with students from Years 7 to 11. Personal support plans are devised for students needing extra support, usually in conjunction with their parents, and these are subject to a regular review. The support system works very well, with heads of year knowing their students well and able to talk about their priorities for development. A confidential counselling service is available and the inclusion worker takes a special interest in students who find it difficult to conform to requirements of behaviour and attitude. He is skilled at developing friendly relationships that lead to improvements in self-esteem and self control and has the confidence of staff and students. Plans are going forward to involve tutors in motivating students academically and a pilot scheme is about to commence. There is also a project underway to incorporate other community agencies into the school team that supports challenging students. Youth and community personnel provide a good service and are available to talk with students during the lunch hour.

53. There are good procedures for promoting attendance. There are rewards for those with perfect attendance. Attendance records are analysed to provide data for heads of year and form tutors to act upon, and attendance is the principal concern of assistant heads of year.

54. There are very good procedures for promoting good behaviour. The school's behaviour policy is a model of clarity while being very comprehensive. It is accompanied in the staff handbook by detailed advice in handling common occurrences. The behaviour procedures are observed by all staff and this consistency is a key to its success. Good behaviour is also promoted by the very good relationships in the school. Students are treated as adult individuals and valued as people. Lapses from good behaviour are recorded and thoroughly analysed to give each layer of management the information it requires. Students are very clear about what is required of them and what will happen if they do not conform.

Sixth Form

55. The advice, support and guidance for students are satisfactory. The procedures for encouraging attendance are good; the individual attendance at classes is scrutinised by the Head of Department and he initiates action to encourage any non-attenders.

Assessment

56. The procedures for assessing students' attainment and progress are very good and much improved since the last inspection. This is due to the development of a computer-based system with massive analytical power, the potential of which is as yet only partly realised. It is currently being used to track the progress of students and forecast their future achievements. The information is available in a wide array of formats that meet the needs of all levels of management. Information is entered half-termly, based on National Curriculum Levels, together with the results of all nationally based assessments.

57. The use of assessment information to guide curricular planning is satisfactory. It is very good in English and mathematics, good in art, design technology and modern languages, but unsatisfactory in geography and religious and physical education.

58. The procedures for supporting students' academic progress are in the process of development and are currently good, particularly in mathematics. Students are generally aware of their principal targets and are encouraged to develop their own personal targets of a more general nature.

Sixth Form

59. In the Sixth Form the procedures for assessing students' attainment and progress are unsatisfactory as they are not yet included in the main analytical programme. At present they depend on an informal system of assessments and targets, which is not rigorously applied and is not centrally recorded. Likewise the procedures for supporting students' academic progress are similarly flawed because of the informality of the system. Assessment information is satisfactorily used to guide curricular planning. In particular it is well used to decide the most appropriate courses for those entering the Sixth Form. Similarly the diagnosis of and provision for individual learning needs are satisfactory, but the need for improvement is recognised, and work is in progress to produce better information, particularly for new entrants. Students on inappropriate courses are not always identified soon enough.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

60. There have been some valuable new initiatives to involve parents in the work of the school since the last inspection, such as the formation of the Westfield Family Association and all the community activities. The majority of parents think highly of the work of the school but are more critical of the links with parents. The information provided is good and there is a good partnership between parents and the school.

61. Those who attended the parents' meeting were unanimous in supporting the school, but of the 321 parents who completed the questionnaire, around one in five were critical of three factors: the amount of homework; the information provided on a student's progress; and the way the school works closely with parents. Parents particularly liked the fact that their children were expected to work hard, that they made good progress, that the school was approachable and well managed, and that there is a wide range of activities outside lessons. The inspection team supports the positive comments, finds that homework is generally good, although there are some weaknesses in provision. However, inspection evidence indicates that reports to parents on progress and communication with parents generally are good overall. Many parents commented favourably on the headteacher's weekly newsletter.

62. Sixth Form students are generally pleased with the school's provision. The accessibility of teachers was strongly appreciated. They were less impressed with careers advice and the assessment of their work and the implications for their progress. The inspection team supports the favourable comments, is not in agreement about careers education, supports the criticisms about assessment and agrees that there is room for improvement in the quality of advice available, although overall this aspect is satisfactory.

63. Information for parents is good. They receive a well-written and informative annual report, and there is a good prospectus. Good information is also provided on GCSE and Sixth Form choices, which are accompanied by special evenings. End-of-year reports are factual, clear and have precise information about levels of attainment. There are clear targets for improvement. Annual reviews for students with special educational needs are well attended by parents, who appreciate the information provided.

64. Parents make a good contribution to children's learning at the school. The Westfield

Family Association primarily discusses school affairs but also raises money. All meetings include a talk on an educational topic specific to the school. Governors and the senior management team and the community are represented at meetings. Attendance at school events is good. Parents support trips and sporting fixtures and get involved whenever it is felt that a parent can assist in solving a problem. Tutors and senior staff make a point of involving parents in good news, usually by telephone.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

65. The leadership and management of the school by the head teacher and key staff are very good. The headteacher has been able to steer the school by taking positive, purposeful and effective action to bring about many improvements. She enjoys the trust of the governing body and is ably assisted by the senior management team. She leads effectively and communicates a clear sense of purpose and educational direction to all members of staff. The senior management team has established key priorities for action. By making behaviour, attendance, teaching and learning the main priorities, the head has focused staff on the need to raise standards. The impetus for improvement in standards is now provided through target setting and extensive monitoring by senior staff. There is good delegation throughout the school. In Years 7 to 11, management is very good in English, drama, mathematics, art, modern foreign languages, and good in design and technology, history, music and physical education. It is satisfactory in ICT. Management is unsatisfactory in geography because plans for improvement do not address the need to raise standards and achievement levels. Management in science is sound but has not been consistent or sustained over the past few years. In religious education, the shortage of specialist staff is a concern and the school recognises the need to improve leadership in this area of the curriculum. The school has made good improvements on issues identified the last inspection report, especially by improving student behaviour and the quality of teaching.

66. The school has a clear set of achievable aims and values. There is a very strong commitment to social inclusion, and to raising students' attainment throughout the school. The quality of leadership and management in learning support is good. This is effective in promoting a caring and positive environment where students feel secure. The team play a key role in the development of inclusion practice and this permeates the school.

67. Positive relationships exist between the governing body and the senior management team. The governors are well aware of their roles and responsibilities and are at early stage of developing these more fully. The mechanisms for the appraisal of the head teacher are in place and effective. Governors receive reports from the finance manager which enable them to fulfil their overall responsibility for the school's financial arrangements.

68. The monitoring, evaluation and development of teaching are very good. All senior staff and middle managers monitor performance. Self-evaluation underpins this development and there is a clear recognition by all staff of the need for this. The staff, including the senior management team, are on a clearly defined and managed programme of professional development. The quality of support for newly qualified teachers and those new to the school is very good and is valued by participants. The coherent in-service training provision links school and staff development needs. The school's strategy for appraisal and performance management is effective and links well with the professional development programme. Careful monitoring and sharing of good practice have led to a significant improvement in teaching. In addition, the school has a good understanding of its strengths and weaknesses, and those aspects requiring further support. The school recognise in its improvement plan that there is a continuing priority needed on teaching and learning.

69. The school development plan is an effective working document. It is well costed,

identifies areas of weakness and provides positive ways of rectifying them. The school has developed a good database and is in the process of developing its use to raise achievement. The analysis of comparative assessment data is well used by senior staff and middle managers. For example, regular monitoring of the progress made by students for whom EAL shows that many achieve standards above that expected for their age.

70. Financial management, in support of the school's priorities is very good. The allocation of funds is well targeted at the priorities stated in the school development plan. There are no significant outstanding issues from the last audit report. The administration uses appropriate systems for financial management. The school applies the principles of best value well. Overall, the school provides satisfactory value for money.

71. Because of difficulties of staffing recruitment the match of teachers to the needs of the curriculum is not wholly satisfactory as, for example, in geography and religious education. However, the school does have a clearly defined policy for recruitment and this has led to the school being fully staffed in spite of large annual staff turnover. The school sees recruitment as a clear and continuing priority. The school is active in its support and use of initial teacher training institutions and many beginning teachers have gone on to substantive posts on the school staff. The school is successfully involved in the graduate teacher programme.

72. Support staff have equal access to staff development sessions. A positive staff development initiative is a focus group that works through a range of issues where teaching style is explored and scrutinised. This group is open to all staff and offers a structured calendar of events to respond to teachers' needs and development of their skills. Most topics arise from issues in teaching identified through the monitoring process. A good example of an agenda item during the inspection was a local adviser who led a session on 'questioning skills'. The session was well attended by a range of teachers from different subject backgrounds including the head and deputy responsible for staff development. It concluded with a range of positive practical strategies for the classroom, in particular for students who have English as an additional language. The school has made a further innovative move by introducing an effective administrative manager/leader of support staff who will monitor the way the school uses support staff. At present there is a shortfall in technical support staff in design and technology and ICT.

73. The well qualified and experienced special education needs co-ordinator leads a team of committed support staff who work hard to improve the social and learning skills of students who have special educational needs. A system of tracking the progress of students with special educational needs meets the requirements of the revised Code of Practice. There are good working relationships with feeder primary schools, with the nearby student referral unit and with external agencies. There is no specific clerical support and this is placing increasing pressure on her administrative skills as the importance of inclusion is realised in practice. Teachers' awareness of students with special educational needs, links between subject departments and the curriculum support department are not strong enough.

74. Accommodation is greatly improved since the previous inspection. Refurbishment has made a big difference to the morale of the children and improved the school's image with parents and the wider community. The library continues to be a welcoming and effective learning environment. Provision for students with special educational needs is now good

apart for the need for an interview space. Geography now has specialist teaching rooms. Apart from some limitations in art, physical education and drama, accommodation is satisfactory or good for all subjects. Sixth Form accommodation is satisfactory except for business studies.

75. Overall, resources are satisfactory although good in a few areas such as the provision for students with special needs and music. The library resource centre is a stimulating learning environment that provides structured learning opportunities for a wide range of subjects including ICT. Resources in design and technology are unsatisfactory.

Sixth Form

Leadership and management

76. The leadership and management provided in the Sixth Form are satisfactory. The management structure has recently been reviewed and changed and new staff are in position. Their development planning is good and a clear educational direction has already been established that suitably reflects the school's general aims and values, including a commitment to equality of opportunity. Insufficient time has elapsed, however, for new policies to have had an impact on standards.

77. One significant change that has been made concerns the curriculum. There is an acceptance that hitherto the curriculum offered Post 16 has not adequately met the needs of the students and many have gained disappointing results as a consequence. The present curriculum is more geared to offering vocational options that are deemed more relevant to the school's students. Further additions are planned to the vocational curriculum, but a significant obstacle facing the school is the quality of accommodation. There is already a lack of specialist accommodation for subjects such as business studies and health and social care, which is having an adverse impact on standards. For standards to rise further the arrangements for monitoring each student's performance need to be improved. Though much assessment data is collected, the setting of minimum target grades and regularly measuring performance against such targets is at an early stage of development. The use of assessment data as management tool lacks rigour.

78. The Sixth Form is expanding and this growth has presented problems for the school. Some innovative ideas have been proposed to meet the challenges. Senior staff also plan well for continued growth. The Sixth Form is cost-effective but in some areas standards are lower than expected.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

79. In order to raise standards further, the headteacher, governors and staff should:

- ****Improve the quality of teaching and improve students' learning skills by making sure that teachers:**
(Paragraphs: 26, 85, 100, 104, 115, 133, 158, 160, 193)
 - * highlight the link between teaching and learning in their lesson planning;
 - * continue to explore strategies for raising the achievement of boys and girls;
 - * use methods which enable all students to learn effectively;
 - * challenge and inspire students, expecting the most from them, so as to deepen their knowledge and understanding.

- ****Improve the opportunities for students to use ICT in the curriculum by:**
(Paragraphs: 10, 28, 88, 114, 118, 135, 153-163)
 - * improving teachers' personal ICT skills with a programme of training in the use of ICT in their subjects;
 - * analysing schemes of work in all subjects for appropriate opportunities to use ICT;
 - * monitoring the impact of the programme through the evaluation of teaching and learning and performance management.

- **Improve attendance by:**
(Paragraphs 22, 53)
 - * continuing to implement strategies in the school development plan.

- **The school also needs to address the following issues:**
(Paragraphs 35, 188-197)
 - * meet the requirement for a daily act of collective worship;
 - * meet the requirements of the locally Agreed Syllabus in religious education.

Sixth Form

- ****Improve provision for personal, health and social education, the teaching of key skills and the use of morning form time are all unsatisfactory.**
(Paragraphs 47- 49)

- **Improve accommodation for business education and health and social care.**
(Paragraphs 214, 230)

- ****Monitor assessment data on the performance of individual students rigorously.**
(Paragraph 59)

- **Offer more opportunities to students to encourage them to develop skills as independent learners.**
(Paragraphs 207,212, 220, 228)

**** Already identified in the school's development plan and Post 16 development plan.**

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7-11	132
	Sixth Form	24
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	4	24	60	42	2	0	0
Percentage	3	18	45	32	2	0	0

Sixth Form

Number	0	3	13	6	1	1	0
Percentage	0	13	54	25	4	4	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll

	Y7–Y11	Sixth Form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	797	100
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals		

Special educational needs

	Y7–Y11	Sixth Form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	22	4
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	344	0

English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	348

Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	60
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	42

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	10.9
National comparative data	8.2

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	1.7
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year:	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	60	61	121

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	14	26	18
	Girls	31	27	21
	Total	45	53	39
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	School	38 (60)	44 (39)	32 (35)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 6 or above	School	17 (15)	23 (14)	3 (1)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	21	23	18
	Girls	38	26	21
	Total	59	49	39
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	School	50 (46)	41 (44)	33 (28)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 6 or above	School	15 (17)	18 (15)	7 (8)
	National	31 (31)	42 (39)	33 (29)

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year:	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	60	72	132

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	11	51	53
	Girls	13	63	68
	Total	24	114	121
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	18 (31)	86 (85)	92 (89)
	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	27.9
	National	39.0

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

Vocational qualifications	Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	37
	National	
		84
		N/A

Attainment at the end of the Sixth Form

	Year	Male	Female	All
Number of candidates aged 16,17 and 18 on roll in January of latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A/AS/Advanced GNVQ/VCE examinations	2001	32	53	85

		For candidates entered for GCE A/AS/Advanced GNVQ/VCE examinations		
		Male	Female	All
School	Number of candidates	15	13	28
	Average point per candidate	7.2	6.9	7.1
National	Average point per candidate	16.9	18	17.5

Year 13 only

		For candidates entered for GCE A/AS examinations			For candidates entered for Advanced GNVQ/VCE examinations		
		Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	Number of candidates	15	13	28	0	0	0
	Average point score per candidate	7.2	6.9	7.1	0	0	0
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.9	17.4	9.8	11.4	10.6

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	16
Black – African heritage	19
Black – other	7
Indian	27
Pakistani	342
Bangladeshi	1
Chinese	1
White	342
Any other minority ethnic group	5

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	2	0
Black – African heritage	1	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	5	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	135	4
Other minority ethnic groups	7	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)	51.5
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.1

Education support staff:

Y7–Y13

Total number of education support staff	23
Total aggregate hours worked per week	501

Deployment of teachers:

Y7–Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	72.7
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Average teaching group size:

Y7–Y11

Key Stage 3	24
Key Stage 4	21

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000/2001
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	£
Total income	2,823,228.00
Total expenditure	2,871,318.00
Expenditure per pupil	3,459.00
Balance brought forward from previous year	187,967.00
Balance carried forward to next year	139,877.00

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	24.35
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	36.8
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	1
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	4

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out
Number of questionnaires returned

830
321

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	35	52	9	2	2
My child is making good progress in school.	32	58	7	1	2
Behaviour in the school is good.	31	49	13	2	5
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	25	45	21	6	3
The teaching is good.	27	59	6	1	7
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	22	48	21	7	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	43	43	6	4	4
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	55	40	3	1	1
The school works closely with parents.	28	42	20	4	6
The school is well led and managed.	43	41	7	3	6
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	31	53	9	2	5
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	34	52	3	2	9

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

ENGLISH

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

Strengths:

- Students achieve well in relation to their prior attainment, and the rate of improvement is particularly strong in Year 7.
- Teaching is very good, with teachers sharing their high expectations with their students.
- Students learn well and have good self-knowledge of their learning.
- The subject is led and managed very well.

Areas for improvement:

- The promotion of literacy in the weekly reading time is not systematically organised and supported with resources.
- Applications of ICT are not integrated into the English curriculum.

81. Results in national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2001 were well below the national average, and below average when compared with similar schools. In the GCSE examinations in 2001, the proportion of students achieving the higher grades A*-C was below average. Inspection evidence shows that standards have significantly improved in all years. Attainment remains below average in the present Years 10 and 11, while it is average overall in Years 7 to 9. A major reason for the improvements in students' achievement is the very good teaching. As a result, particularly in Years 7 to 9, students are more confident and effective learners. Another significant influence is the Year 7 'Discovery' course which combines English and humanities subjects and results in an enhancement of written and spoken language work.

82. Students' speaking and listening skills are good in Years 7 to 9. Students listen to their teachers and to each other carefully, respectfully and often analytically. In a Year 7 lesson, students successfully structured their responses to the teachers' questions. They exhibited a well-developed confidence and poise, which showed high motivation and enhanced the quality of their learning. In Years 8 and 9, students are attentive in listening, and still confident - if impulsive and less careful in speaking. In Years 10 and 11, there is more hesitation and less confidence. A Year 11 group, for example, found discussing guilt, blame and responsibility in a play a challenge: expression tends to be simplistic and informal. While some students listen and express themselves competently, the majority show below average skills in handling language.

83. In reading, attainment in Years 7 to 9 is in line with what might be expected of students of their ages. Students in a Year 7 lesson summarised significant points from a text and showed above average analytical skills. Reading is generally accurate and with expression in Years 7 to 9, showing understanding and awareness of the author's purpose. However, even the most accurate readers often get pace and timing wrong, and read so fast that they are difficult to understand - particularly those for whom English is an additional language. In Years 10 and 11, where a number of students have less positive attitudes to literature, understanding is below average, and reading aloud is often hesitant and lacking in expression. In the study of a play, students were slow to see the important issues under consideration, and had to rely upon their teacher to take them further.

84. Some lively examples of writing were seen from students in Years 7, 8 and 9. Higher attaining students produce technically accurate work which is interesting to read. Sentence structures are beginning to have greater complexity, and words are chosen from an increasingly extensive repertoire. Students who attain at an average level for the school write extensive narratives which are well structured and punctuated, showing evidence of skills which correspond with national expectations. The minority of students who perform at a lower level can still produce well-sequenced continuous writing, although their vocabulary is more limited. Spelling and punctuation are sometimes inaccurate, and presentation untidy. Generally, those of above average and average levels of attainment have well-formed, positioned and joined handwriting. In Years 10 and 11, attainment overall is below average. In their approach to literacy texts, students tend to narrate rather than analyse. In imaginative composition, language is handled competently by the higher attainers, though without the flair to be expected at this level. Expression is often clear and careful, but unsophisticated, with words often used as in speech. Technically, writing is accurate in the main, but there are often simple and obvious mistakes, such as the omission of full stops and capitals for proper names, or spelling mistakes such as "comming", or "tounge", or "solider".

85. Teachers have high expectations which are communicated through the sharing of objectives at the beginning of each lesson, and through the shared evaluation which reviews progress towards them at the end. These expectations are also implicit in teachers' questioning techniques, which show clearly what is expected without giving easy answers, thus enhancing learning and driving progress. Students respond very well, eagerly, readily and analytically in Years 7 to 9. The skills of independent learning, however, are less well developed in Year 10 and 11, where a small amount of unacceptable behaviour indicates some students' alienation. There is no doubt, nevertheless, that most enjoy English, and this increases their capacity to learn. Behaviour is usually at least good. In response to the very good teaching, students work hard and make good progress when this is measured against their attainment on entry into the school. Students with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language make similar progress: they work hard, teachers provide well for their needs, and receive appropriate additional support.

86. Students' achievements are celebrated by praise and in the displays of work on classroom or corridor walls. Marking is thorough and detailed, with some analysis and target setting, although there is not enough checking back to see whether advice had been taken. Teachers have good subject knowledge, and they like and know their students well, setting appropriate work for differing levels of attainment. Formal assessment of progress is regular, detailed and thorough, and the analysis of results is well used in judging past performance and in planning future provision. English teachers are enthusiasts for their subject and their students, and this is a strength of the school.

87. The subject is very well led and managed. There is a clear vision and perception of the priorities for the subject and the school. The subject team are well integrated and thoroughly committed to the continuous improvement of standards, and this has recently been recognised by the local education authority in designating the department as a leading example among the nearly 80 secondary schools for which it has responsibility. The written documentation for the subject gives clear guidance to teachers and the subject curriculum is well structured and comprehensive. However, ICT plays a very limited role in supporting students' progress, partly because there are no computers in English classrooms.

88. English makes a very strong contribution to students' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development, through the consideration of spiritual issues in the beauty of great literature and in students' own compositions, in the discussion of moral and social issues in writing or in class, in the wide range of cultures included in the studies of literature, and in the ways in which students are encouraged to extend their own cultures through speaking, reading and writing.

English as an additional language

89. Provision for students with EAL is good. The co-ordinator has set priorities for the use of available resources which meet students' needs. As a result, most students develop a good control of English. They make good progress in learning the language and achieve well in their tests and examinations. The data compiled by the department and passed to subject departments on students' attainment in English are updated regularly and include helpful detail. Support for newly arrived students with very little or no English is provided very early in their school career. Many subject teachers have specialised material to cater for students' needs. Good training is provided for teachers to ensure that the English spoken by both teachers and students in lessons is always clear enough to be understood by all. Leadership and management of this aspect of learning in school are good.

Literacy

90. The provision for the promotion of literacy throughout the school is good. The library and resource centre provides very comprehensive support, offering accommodation for whole class lessons, group and individual study, and a good fiction and non-fiction book collection, together with videos and information technology resources. Computers are easily available. The librarian is very active in giving support to departments in providing information resources and her own input into lessons. There is very active promotion of reading for pleasure through a variety of carefully selected and promoted books. In departments, the implications for the development of students' literacy are spelt out in schemes of work. Specialist subject vocabularies in the form of key words are well used, and in many departments students are encouraged to have group and class discussions, though individual presentations are rare. The marking of technical errors, however, is inconsistent.

91. Literacy is well promoted in students' first year in the school by the 'Discovery' programme. The devotion of a half hour period every week throughout the school to reading in form tutor groups is also a useful support to literacy - but its application from class to class is inconsistent and unplanned. Only some form tutors have a stock of books to lend to students, and there is not a reserve of books from which students may borrow in every room. Nor is there a systematic policy to promote reading in this period as, for example, paired reading or developmental reading records.

Drama

92. Overall, the quality of provision is good.

Strengths:

- Students are well motivated and attain well.
- Teaching is very good, with high expectations of attainment and behaviour.
- The subject is very well managed.
- It provides good support for literacy - particularly speaking and listening - throughout the school.
- It promotes students' confidence and personal development.

Areas for improvement:

- Accommodation is insufficient and makes it necessary for drama to be taught in ordinary classrooms.
- Lighting and sound systems are inadequate.

93. In 2001, nearly two-thirds of candidates entered for the GCSE examination attained grades A*-C. These results compare well with national averages. In Years to 9, students show good levels of concentration and involvement in their work. They collaborate in their groups in a mature manner and in a Year 8 lesson students demonstrated different possible approaches to making a televised advertisement. In Years 10 and 11, where a considerable number choose drama in the options scheme, attainment is in line with national standards. Students develop a good understanding of a number of dramatic strategies. Their responses to teachers' questions and their evaluations of each other's performances show a very sensitive awareness of how effects can be achieved. They show good confidence, and sometimes take risks in performance that are above what might be expected at this stage. Performance skills are often very good, although skills of organisation in response to the demands of an examination are at an average level.

94. Students' learning and progress are very good. From a hesitant start, they approach the subject with very good motivation which is met by a shared enthusiasm from their teachers, who provide them with a framework and objectives which show them the way to go and the targets towards which they should work. Teaching is always good, usually very good, and sometimes excellent. There are high expectations of both attainment and behaviour. Lesson objectives and activities are made clear to students in advance, and their progress towards these objectives is clearly evaluated at the ends of lessons. This is a shared activity to which students make a considerable contribution, and this enhances the quality of their self-knowledge of their learning.

95. Leadership and management are very good. Non-specialist drama teachers contribute effectively to the teaching but the expertise of the one drama specialist is thinly spread and mainly focused on the examination classes. There is a well-structured programme of study in all years and the drama handbook provides excellent guidance for teachers. There is good extra-curricular provision in clubs for various age groups and in activities out of school. There is good liaison with a local theatre which enhances students' experience and learning.

96. The drama studio is the only specialist space, and some teaching has to take place in ordinary classrooms with problems of inadequate space and unsuitable furniture. The lighting system controls in the drama studio are not well placed, and if the teacher has to

operate them she must go into a cubicle out of sight of her class. There is at present no operative sound system. There are not enough flexible resources, such as sticks, cloaks and masks. These shortcomings, however, do not have a seriously damaging effect upon students' learning, largely as a result of good teaching.

97. Drama makes a very strong contribution to students' social and moral education through the collaborative work on controversial topics that is undertaken. This also provides good development to their spiritual education, through the examination of principles and beliefs and the mutual respect which is shown. Cultural development is also very well promoted through the close study of this aspect of the human cultural heritage. Literacy is well supported through the experience provided to students of a variety of ways of handling language. The strongest influence which drama has upon the life of students is upon their personal development. There is a culture of mutual encouragement in the approach to the subject which provides students with the courage to express themselves independently and often courageously, and this meets a strong need in a large number of them.

MATHEMATICS

98. Overall, the provision for mathematics is good.

Strengths:

- There has been a gradual improvement in attainment.
- The quality of teaching is now good overall, an improvement from the last inspection.
- Relationships between teachers and students are very good, leading to good attitudes to learning mathematics and higher achievement.
- Assessment and monitoring of students' progress are very good.
- There is a very good team of teachers.

Areas for improvement:

- Students do not show enough working in their written work.
- Information and communication technology is not used enough.

99. Results in the 2001 national tests at the end of Year 9 showed an improvement over 2000 but remained well below the average. Test results in mathematics have been below those in English but above those in science over the last few years. The department has added value to students' attainment when results are compared with students' attainment on entry to the school. There has been a significant improvement in GCSE results since the last inspection. Although overall results in GCSE examinations were well below average in 2001, individual students' grades in mathematics were above the average for their other school subjects. In 2000, both girls and boys performed well below average. A high proportion of students achieved better than expected grades in when compared to their attainment on entry to the school.

100. When students join the school in Year 7, they have below average mathematical skills. There has been an improvement in the students' average point score in mathematics on entry over the last few years. The courses in Year 7 and Year 8 have been carefully structured to build on the students' skills, and good planning has introduced new ideas and methods of teaching as recommended in the National Numeracy Strategy. Students' appreciation of mathematical processes is good. Students in Year 7 deal well with probability; they understand theoretical probability and relative frequencies. They use tally marks with confidence, and are intrigued with estimating the number of balls in a bag. Lower ability students are slow to learn about different types of angles. Students in Year 8 calculate percentages of quantities, but a few are unclear about the actual methods to be used. In

Year 9, higher ability students expand brackets confidently, and understand how to expand quadratic functions. Other higher ability students calculate areas and volumes by considering maximum and minimum values of given lengths. They show a good appreciation of the principles involved. Students with special educational needs or EAL learn well when supported by both their teacher and learning support assistants. However, the allocation of learning support assistants does not give continuity to learning. Levels of achievement are being enhanced by the introduction of quick 'starter' sessions at the beginning of lessons which help students develop mental arithmetic skills.

101. In mathematics, students are set from year 7. Following national tests at the end of Year 9, students are placed in groups based upon their mathematical ability in Year 10 and Year 11. Teachers present work which is well matched to students' abilities and good learning opportunities take place. Students in Year 11 have a reasonable understanding of the simplification of algebraic expressions, although some students have problems with calculations involving negative numbers. Higher ability students in Year 11 have secure knowledge when using positive and negative powers. Their understanding of the new work that is introduced is good. Lower ability students in Year 10 design an ultimate bedroom, but their lack of knowledge of the metric system and how to use scale hinders progress. In a good lesson on probability in Year 10, students calculate probabilities and understand how probabilities change when cards are removed from a pack. Progress towards the GCSE examination is hindered by a large number of absences from classes.

102. Teaching is good overall. Nearly all teaching is satisfactory or better and three in every five lessons are good or very good. Teachers' knowledge and understanding are very good. This is shown in many lessons by the way in which teachers explain the principles of mathematics and the confidence with which they handle students' questions. The teaching of the basic skill of numeracy is good, and much thought and planning have been given to introducing new methods to stimulate students' learning. For example, students are asked to use the ideas presented in the television programme Countdown. Lesson plans have a standard format, with the best plans showing time constraints. Good detail is seen, and teachers note any students with special educational needs or who require special help. Students for whom EAL receive good support and achieve well. Teachers set high standards, up to which students are expected to live.

103. There is a good drive in most lessons to push forward students' learning; interruptions by teachers are appropriate and add to the pace of lessons. This is especially useful when written tasks for students are kept short and time constraints are given in which to finish the set work. When students in Year 8 are learning about percentages, the teacher sets written work that must be completed in five minutes; he gives a further deadline when 30 seconds remain. However, occasionally, teachers set a written task but continue to talk while students could be working quietly. Teachers control students well, which leads to lessons in which students concentrate well and are keen to learn mathematics. Students are keen to demonstrate their mathematical knowledge by working at the front of classes on the board. They show confidence but can be further encouraged to explain exactly how they approach problems. The teachers use classroom aids to enhance students' learning. Practical tasks, such as using home made cards to match given percentages and using counters in envelopes, enhance students' learning. The use of new technologies is unsatisfactory. Key words are displayed in classrooms; these are not always referred to enough by teachers.

104. Teachers use time well, with most lessons starting promptly. Support staff for students with special educational needs is thinly spread, and there is a lack of continuity of help. Students' exercise books show above average presentation. Sometimes, not enough emphasis is placed on setting out all the working in a problem. Marking is very good and many helpful comments are made. Homework is set at the end of most lessons, but the evidence recorded in students' planners is spasmodic. Teachers can improve students'

learning even more by giving summaries of what has been learnt at the end of each lesson. Teachers know students very well and show great care and patience in their classroom practice. However, the improvement in the quality of teaching has not yet resulted in a significant improvement in results in external examinations. Students' knowledge and understanding gained in lessons is not retained over a longer period.

105. Students' attitudes to their learning are good. They are keen to learn mathematics and concentrate well in lessons. When teachers are talking, students listen carefully and always follow instructions. They settle quickly in classes and show enthusiasm for their mathematics. Students remain interested in their mathematics throughout lessons, even when lessons are of greater than average length; for example, students in Year 8 study probability and continue to concentrate well for over one and a half hours. Behaviour is good. Students know the expectations of teachers and show very good respect in the lessons. They are committed to learning mathematics and show good levels of self-discipline. Generally, students work very well in pairs. In a Year 7 lesson, good collaborative working is seen in groups, and the groups then share their conclusions to construct a class summary.

106. The head of department of mathematics was appointed to the post from September 1999. She has tremendous drive, and is a very good teacher. In these early days, she gives excellent leadership in the philosophy, educational priorities, teaching, discipline within the department, relationships with students, long-term strategic planning and administration. She works extremely hard, and motivates her team of teachers very well indeed. Priorities for development of the subject which will improve further the attainment of students in mathematics are not clear. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good in many areas especially the quality of teaching; as yet, there has not been a significant improvement in attainment. With a strong team of teachers, the department serves students well and has a very high capacity to improve further.

Numeracy

107. A numeracy policy for the whole school is not yet in place, but many initiatives have been taken within the mathematics department. These are proving to be successful. A member of the department's staff has been allocated responsibility for the introduction of numeracy, and the curriculum in Years 7, 8 and 9 has already been significantly revised in line with the National Numeracy Strategy. Short 'starter' sessions are seen often; sometimes these are aligned to the main topic for the lesson and sometimes they cover separate topics. In Year 8, students work quietly in pairs to discuss conversions between the metric and imperial systems of measurement. In a lesson to Year 7 students, the 'starter' involves a very active discussion on the nets of cubes, before the teacher moves onto consider probability. Students' numeracy skills seen in mathematics lessons are below average, but are improving due to the teachers' awareness and changes in teaching techniques.

108. The school was designated a pilot school for the National Numeracy Strategy in September 2000. A joint working group with literacy exists. The mathematics department has given in-service training to all members of staff at the school. The department's schemes of work have been sent by the local education authority (LEA) to all other secondary schools, some of who have adopted them for their own use. Cross- curricular discussion has taken place and this is still an area of development for the school.

109. In science, line graphs are used but are of low quality. Low numeracy skills inhibit students' development as they are below the national average. In design and technology, there are good examples of cutting and measuring, but some confusion exists between millimetres, as used in construction and allied trades, and centimetres, as used in mathematics and science. Weighing and measuring are completed well during practical work in Food Technology, leading to very successful end products. The head of department leads by example in the use of numeracy. Data are collected and computers are used to produce graphs. Numeracy skills are satisfactory in information technology where students complete spreadsheets. There is no policy for supporting or developing numeracy in history, but the department uses excellent graphs to show changes in population. Year 10 students compare the proportion of the population who died in the Plague, but lower ability students experience some difficulties with this. The geography department has produced skills booklets of high quality, following discussions with the mathematics department about approaches to numeracy. The department uses a wide range of graphical techniques, and offers more opportunities to use numeracy than is normal. Students cope with any numeracy required and teachers support them well.

110. In art and design, there is a clear numeracy policy and teachers know where numeracy is to be used. The department is very aware of the links with numeracy when considering geometric tessellations, volume and space. In music, students count beats effectively. There is not much evidence of statistics or graph work in physical education. Numeracy links are highlighted in schemes of work in modern foreign languages. There are examples in surveys, where students use bar and pie charts. Conversions to euros, journey times, use of the 24-hour clock, calculations of bills in other currencies, conversions of clothes and shoe sizes are all undertaken using the target language. Good numeracy practice is undertaken with special educational needs students who develop a sensible awareness.

SCIENCE

111. Overall, the quality of provision in science is good.

Strengths:

- Good teaching enables students to learn more effectively.
- Improvement in standards since the last inspection.
- Resources and accommodation are good.

Areas for improvement:

- Standards at both key stages.
- Leadership of the department.
- Target setting.

112. Students enter the school with attainment which is well below average. Results in national tests at the end of Year 9 remain well below average when compared with all schools and with similar schools. However, they do represent an improvement over the last two years. Results in 2001 for science were similar to those in mathematics but significantly lower than those in English. Overall, students do not achieve the results in science that might be expected based on their attainment at age 11.

113. GCSE results were well below average and below average when compared with similar schools. Few students achieve the highest GCSE grades. The proportion of students who take the double award course falls well below the national average. Results from the double award course have fallen steadily over the last three years. Initially results were just below average and now they are well below average. Students achieved GCSE

grades in 2001 at the level expected based on their attainment at the end of Year 9. Achievement in science for students at the end of Year 11 is similar to that in both English and mathematics. Results vary from year to year but there is no significant difference in the performance of boys and girls.

114. Most students have well below average literacy and numeracy skills, which inhibit their attainment in this subject. Their explanations of scientific principles are at best superficial. They cannot apply their knowledge well. Students have great difficulty with calculations, which are required for both their terminal examination and their coursework. High absenteeism results in students having an incomplete set of notes from which to revise. Teachers make some provision for gifted and talented students through extension work matched to their needs but do not provide a programme designed for the needs of these gifted students throughout their period in school. Students with special educational needs and those with EAL achieve well. A key feature for the good progress of these students is the fact that teacher and support assistant work well together. Most teachers use the technical language of the subject well and improve the students' literacy skills by the use of key words. Students' standards in ICT are unsatisfactory despite having access to a newly equipped computer room. Teachers are not confident in their use of data-logging equipment and do not give students enough opportunities to use it.

115. Overall the quality of teaching is good. It is a credit to the teachers in this department, dealing with some difficult students, that no unsatisfactory lessons were seen during the inspection. The quality of teaching has improved considerably since the last inspection. This hard working team of teachers can be justifiably proud of the work they do to improve students' learning. Next, teachers must try to find ways to improve students' long term learning so that the good work in the classroom can be translated in to better results. There is no significant difference in the quality of teaching for students of different ages. Teachers are confident in their use of video, demonstrations and experiments all of which enable students to learn well. Teachers manage the students well in the classroom so that most have every opportunity to learn. Clear objectives are set for every lesson. Teachers use a wide range of methods and resources to achieve these objectives. Most teachers make use of the recently equipped computer room. Students retrieve information from the modeling software whilst at the same time developing their ICT skills. Teachers mark students' work regularly, although the quality of marking is variable particularly in respect of the use of scientifically supportive comments. Teachers do not give a high enough priority to the level/grade students are working at when they share test data with them. Students lack awareness of what they must do to improve their work.

116. Overall, students learn well. In a Year 7 lesson, students made good progress in their learning about the difference between chemical and physical changes. A key feature of this lesson was the way the teacher stressed the need for students to use the correct technical language. In a Year 8 lesson on the formation of rocks, students achieved well because the teacher gave students the opportunity to improve their literacy skills through a note-taking exercise of information presented on video. Year 9 students have a good knowledge of the skeleton and of joints in the body. A Year 10 lesson on electrostatics began with an effective revision of earlier work before learning very well about how to wire an electric plug and the dangers of electricity. In a Year 11 lesson, students understood how light bends when it travels through different substances as part of their coursework investigations. Most students were at different stages of their investigation and were consequently working on different tasks. Through the teacher's skill and the students' cooperation a purposeful working atmosphere was created. A key factor to the good learning is the way teachers use such a wide range of methods and resources to capture the students' interest.

117. The quality of students' written work indicates that their attitudes to high academic achievement are only satisfactory. Little attempts have been made to complete or make up

for missed work. Students work well together carrying out experiments and move responsibly around the laboratory to collect materials and equipment. They mostly follow their teachers' instructions to wear safety glasses and consequently work safely. Behaviour is mostly very good. Students generally have respect for others, which they demonstrate by putting up their hands to answer questions. Sometimes students spoil otherwise worthwhile answers by calling out. They have good relationships with their teachers and each other. When talking to each other and their teacher they are courteous and polite.

118. The GCSE course which is offered at the moment is the most suitable for these students. Frequent staff changes have had an adverse effect on standards. It is only recently that the department has been fully staffed. The present head of department provides sound leadership but there is still much to improve. Since his appointment many improvements have been made particularly in respect of schemes of work. It is essential now that the department has a sustained period of dynamic and consistent leadership. This will be necessary if the good practice in the classroom is to bring about an improvement in standards. The head of department should be given opportunity to study best practice in other schools, which use the same GCSE course more successfully. A key improvement to be made is to get students to show more interest in science by opting to take the double award course. It is vital for the head of department to set very clear guidelines for his team of teachers about how best this can be achieved. The technician team is efficient and supportive and makes an important contribution to the work of the department. ICT requirements of the science curriculum depend on the purchase of additional sensors and interfaces. The department gives due attention to health and safety. Some written risk assessments for experiments exist. It is necessary to identify in all schemes of work risk assessments, ICT and SMSC opportunities.

119. Overall, the department has made good improvement since the last inspection. Teaching is much better and has led to higher student achievement. Schemes of work are in place. Students' behaviour is much better. However, standards are not high enough.

ART AND DESIGN

120. The provision for art is good.

Strengths:

- Good teaching uses very good knowledge and understanding of the subject and sets appropriately high standards in the department.
- Very good leadership and management enable the subject to maintain a good pace of improvement over the past two years.
- The positive attitude of students and the very good relationships in lessons help to build and sustain a pleasant, but purposeful environment for learning.

Areas for improvement:

- The use of computers for digital imaging and manipulation, along with further training for staff to support computer art.
- Resources for printmaking and pottery.
- Use of the well-resourced photographic darkroom.

121. Standards in work and lessons seen during the inspection are generally below average but there is sound evidence of standards rising to national expectations in Years 7 and 8. This results from good and often very good teaching, and more particularly from the impact that the improved curriculum is having on the culture of the department. The department has been through a very unstable period of time and GCSE examination results

in recent years have been well below average because of the lack of staff and curriculum stability.

122. The head of department, now in his third year at the school, and his recently qualified colleague have worked hard to turn an unsuccessful department around. They have succeeded in raising achievement in Years 7 and 8 to a level close to national expectations. They have also worked to raise the achievement level of examination candidates. Their high expectations are exemplified by the evidence on display, in portfolios of work and in lessons. Standards of drawing and painting are close to national standards overall, with some very high achievements amongst the more able students. There is a need to focus down on the most talented students, ensuring that they are able to research and develop their work across the media range and in the depth their talent requires. Lessons are generally characterised by good behaviour and a clear commitment to work. Students enjoy lessons, work hard and respect the advice and encouragement of their well-informed teachers. Pottery has been re-introduced on a sound basic skills foundation and other three-dimensional work is now moving into large-scale with constructions. Some of these are intended for use in drama presentations organised within the combined faculty of art, drama, music and physical education. The department is poorly resourced for digital art, and the use of computers and digital cameras has yet to be developed. A well-resourced photographic darkroom remains unused, although the department is exploring ways of utilising it with older students.

123. Students arrive at the school with varied and generally poorly developed basic skills and knowledge of art. In Year 7 they are given a sound grounding in the basic skills of line, tone, texture, colour and form, using references to the work of important artists as they work. They also learn to form and join clay and construct wire and papier-mâché models. In one lesson of combined arts, students blended oil pastel colours well in their theatre designs, with some working freely and boldly in very atmospheric chalk drawings. By the end of Year 8, they design robot heads and are able to layer and model papier-mâché to strengthen their constructions and add facial details. More able students quickly learn to build machine parts to form robotic features. Students at the end of Year 9 have not benefited from the revised curriculum that earlier years have and their work does not show the same level of brushwork and modelling skills that can be seen in Years 7 and 8. Nonetheless, more able students produce colourful and well-planned compositions to a high standard. They learn about painters such as O'Keefe, Manet, van Gogh, Rousseau, Liechtenstein and others. Effective use is made of sketchbooks in Years 7 to 9, with students required to make notes on their work and the artists they study. This is a part of the new curriculum and teaching initiatives in the department, and is resulting in the more informed development of students' work, giving a good grounding to those who may wish to opt for GCSE art in Year 10. For the majority of students in Year 10, clay lessons have been few and they have not learned the required skills to cast or form clay effectively. The lack of small tools and the problem of storing, re-cycling and firing clay have led to many recent disappointments. The newly arrived, well-qualified technician is working hard to re-organise the ceramics room. The head of department is building on his craft skills to improve the use of ceramics in the curriculum. An improvement in standards can be seen in pottery lessons in Year 7.

124. Students develop their observational and research skills in creating pastiche compositions from several styles and periods of painting. They use their knowledge of perspective in developing work from Canaletto's Venetian paintings. More able students use the principles of Surrealist painting to produce powerful, personal statements in their work, endeavouring to convey adolescent feelings of containment and confusion, often through mixed media. Many of the Asian girls show patience and skill in their colour studies of repeating patterns, in the style of Islamic tile designers. Their work reveals skills that have been well developed in lessons. The recent disappointing GCSE results will be turned round effectively, if the present standard of their work is maintained in improved and enlarged

portfolios. Students whose first language is not English benefit from the very good support of translators and trained support staff; they make the same good progress as others in their class. Those who have special educational needs are well known to teachers and their needs are met effectively through the additional focus on them, enabling them to make good progress in lessons.

125. The quality of teaching is good and often very good; on occasion it is excellent. Teachers have a very good knowledge and understanding of their subject areas and are keen to further develop their skills and understanding as they teach. They are very good motivators of students, challenging them effectively. They plan and prepare well for lessons ensuring that they get off to a good start with a short introduction and recap of the work in hand. Some practical introductions are particularly effective, using the skills of the teacher in demonstrating techniques to be used. The firm approach they have to teaching is particularly noticeable in Years 7 to 9, where there are high expectations of good behaviour. The encouragement to students to become independent learners shows its benefit in Years 10 and 11, where the attitudes of students are positive and behaviour very good. Their management of students is generally very good, although lack of experience in dealing with challenging behaviour in Year 9, leads to the occasional lesson in which unsatisfactory behaviour slows the pace of progress down. Teaching is generally relaxed, but purposeful and well paced. This enables a very good teaching environment to be set up, in which students make good and often very good progress. Teachers use the specialist vocabulary of art well and students learn to use it, explaining their work confidently to visitors. Sometimes the end of a lesson is untidy and not enough thought is given to ways of bringing students together in a practical, evaluative way, when they can reflect on the progress made in the lesson.

126. The head of art is a very good leader and is clear in his aim to raise standards in the department. He has made many improvements since he arrived to take over a faltering department. Although the effect of his leadership has yet to feed through to examination standards, he has made a very good start in laying the foundations for rapid improvement in the early years. He has re-built the curriculum and produced a very good handbook for the department, which includes clear policies to guide the contribution made by the subject to standards of literacy and numeracy. The work of the department is monitored well and the progress made by students is efficiently tracked, using National Curriculum Levels. The use of these levels as a benchmark is new to the subject and there is a need to compare and moderate students' work against work in other schools, if they are to become an effective assessment tool. Students in Years 7, 8 and 9 do not benefit from visits to galleries and museums and there is currently no use made of visiting artists to extend the curriculum. Very good use is made of the work of female artists and the department is planning to extend its references to the work of artists in multi-cultural Britain and in Asia. The accommodation for art is good with excellent levels of natural light and good use of foyer display space. Many stools have been damaged and some are unsafe. There is a need to review the use of the ceramics room and the photographic darkroom. The darkroom is unused at present and the ceramics room is badly organised. There are no adequate computer facilities for art, although one is currently on order.

127. The department has made a satisfactory improvement since the last inspection and has rapidly improved over the past two years. It is well placed to improve further in future years.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths:

- Good teaching has improved students' learning skills and their achievement.
- High quality practical work.
- Effective use of numeracy and literacy in designing and making.
- Development of module booklets to give consistency to teaching.
- Student management.

Areas for development:

- Links with primary schools so planning at Year 7 builds on students' past experience.
- Higher-level ICT skills.

129. Standards of work measured by teacher assessment in 2001 at the end of Year 9 are above national expectations. Inspection evidence identified this level was generous and students are working more in line with standards expected at their age. Standards of work by the end of Year 11 in 2001 fell from the previous year to below average. In 2000, results were average. The 2001 group of students had many problems including attendance and were badly affected by the department's staffing difficulties. These issues reflected on the lower quality of the practical work and the completion of the course work folios. Results overall were below average; the best results were achieved in food technology. Inspection evidence indicates that an improvement in staffing and greater consistency in grading students' work is improving overall results and standards.

130. The school makes an effective analysis of students and their potential difficulties within the curriculum, including those with special educational needs and students for whom English is an additional language. Both groups of students reach good standards in practical work in Years 7 to 9 but their literacy skills are weak when answering questions or completing research. Students identified as more able work together at a higher level than their peers. In Years 10 and 11, standards are satisfactory. In all cases teachers plan to meet students' needs specifically by using identified student's individual education plans. Inclusion strategies in the department are strong.

131. In Years 7 to 9 progress is good. During Years 7 to 9 students learn a range of skills and techniques that allow them to cut, shape and join materials such as wood, metal, fabric, acrylic and experiment with ingredients in the designing and making of food products. For example, students used snips, a hacksaw and emery paper to shape steel to design and make a coat hook for a room at home. Students were very proud of their product and many different backing plate designs were used to make the product individual, such as a star and a heart. Students used pop rivets with confidence to attach their hook to the back plate. Good quality hooks made by previous groups were on display in a cabinet in the corridor. This display gives all students a good opportunity to form an opinion on the work of others, when they evaluate their own work. All students were proud of what they produce. Emphasis on correct measuring became very clear when the holes in the hook did not quite match with the back plate. This was used by the teacher to emphasise the importance of accuracy, and students were shown how to put it right. Using folders to record and store background information on designing contributes to the skills and manipulation of materials, but students are not sure of the exact function of some of the materials they use. For example although there was good quality practical as Year 8 worked on their pastry product,

they were not sure of the function of ingredients used. Module folders also make a useful contribution to improving all students' presentation. The modules contain a range of guides for writing and key words so students build a good recognition of technical vocabulary in the subject.

132. In Years 10 and 11 standards are broadly average in work seen. Students select their examination course from their materials experiences in Years 7 to 9 including food, graphics, resistant materials and textiles. Good advice on choices is available for students and their parents. Teachers retain high quality portfolios from previous years to help students see what they must do in order to achieve a high grade at GCSE. For example in textiles, a fashion design portfolio from Year 11 last year is inspiring students to push their designing to a new and improved level. Graphics and food are popular courses. Drawing skills are a key feature of teaching because they relate to all areas of technology. In Year 10 students built effectively on their previous knowledge of drawing an ellipse and constructing a triangle to begin to think about Plano metric designs. Recall in the session was very good as students discussed the tools they needed to use and terms that are important in drawing techniques. There was a real 'feel good factor' in the learning because students were being challenged, supported and succeeding.

133. Attitudes are good across the department. Students enjoy the well-planned modules of work that help them to produce high quality products. Behaviour is generally well managed but some students in Year 9 are immature in their attitude to class work, especially when they are given tasks that require them to take personal responsibility for their learning. This minority spoil the good atmosphere of the classroom and prevent their peers from learning. However, personal development is very good because students are given the opportunity to work in teams for example, in organising and cleaning their workspace at the end of food lessons. Students are highly responsive to health and safety issues with good attention to the use of personal protective equipment, for example when using heavy machinery.

134. Teaching is good overall with elements of very good teaching. In all lessons, teachers' good subject knowledge, and in some cases industrial experience, are skilfully transmitted through lively explanations and skilled demonstrations that inspire progress. Effective principles of designing and making are reinforced in each module of work imparting skills, knowledge and understanding to help progress. Basic skills are taught well. Students regularly build up a bank of key technical words and use basic numeracy to good effect to help with calculations such as keeping a recipe balanced, or using a marking gauge when working on lap joints. In Years 7 and 8 students struggle with the use of millimetres, the convention for designing and making, because there is little emphasis on the need to use finer measurements in mathematics where centimetres is the main unit of measurement. Teachers maintain an effective record of students progress through modules of work and students know the National Curriculum Level they have reached. At present students do not understand their level because teachers do not use the level content with students therefore missing the opportunity for personal motivation, by knowing exactly what to do to improve. In Years 10 and 11 teachers make effective use of the examination board marking criteria to inform students of what they need to do to improve their marks. Most take advantage of this information but often too late to make major changes.

135. Department leadership is good. It is youthful and dynamic with enthusiasm and drive that has permeated across the whole technology team. The vast experience of an ex-head of department has been retained on a part time basis to build up the skills and confidence of staff in the department. The newly formed team bring a wealth of different cultural backgrounds, experience from industry and a particularly positive team spirit that is having an impact on learning at all levels. The industrious departmental technician works very hard to service not only design and technology but also the fast expanding ICT department; this is an impossible task. He suffers the frustration of being unable to give support for fundamental

activities such as preparing cutting lists for practical resistant materials lessons. The department handbook is a clear succinct document but there is no delegation of responsibility to the team so that all policies can be monitored. The department development plan has good synthesis with the schools technology status. There is very good commitment to raise standards through strengthening the use of ICT as a tool for learning and this is illustrated by the industrial visit in two weeks to investigate the progress of ICT computer aided design and manufacture into food, graphics, resistant materials and textiles.

136. Improvement from the previous inspection is good because all issues have been put right apart from the potentially dangerous flooring in the resistant materials area.

GEOGRAPHY

137. Overall, the quality of provision in geography is satisfactory.

Strengths:

- Teachers relate well to their students and manage behaviour skilfully.
- Literacy skills development is good.

Areas for development:

- GCSE examination results are too low.
- Students do not learn enough basic geography in Years 7, 8 and 9.
- The highest attaining students are not given challenging enough work.
- Insufficient provision is made for the use of ICT.

138. The GCSE results in 2001 were average overall but well below average for students achieving the higher grades. GCSE results are poorer than at the last inspection in 1997. Girls attain higher than boys. By the end of Year 9, teacher assessment indicates that less than half attain the nationally expected standard although at this stage the attainment of both boys' and girls is similar. Inspection evidence shows standards for two thirds of students are lower than that expected.

139. Teaching is satisfactory. Management of students is good. Questioning is used effectively but students do not remember their earlier work well enough. In many lessons, teachers talk for too much of the time. This gives less opportunity for students to consolidate their learning. There is an over emphasis on note taking and copying without students' understanding of text, diagrams and maps. Some tasks are too easy and waste learning time. Homework tasks are varied and support and add to classwork. Marking of work does not focus enough on telling students how well they are doing and what to do to improve. Assessment opportunities are now incorporated in each unit of work. Opportunities for constructing graphs of different types and interpreting data using a wide range of graphical techniques develop geographical skills and improve numeracy. Students do not use geographical terms often enough in their oral work. Well-planned tasks develop literacy through reading and structured extended writing. Good displays in specialist rooms enhance learning but do not celebrate achievement by showing good work. In Years 10 and 11, teachers do not focus enough on GCSE assessment requirements particularly the requirements for higher grades. They are handicapped by the inadequate subject knowledge which students have at the start of the GCSE course in Year 10. Lower attaining students including those with special educational needs are well supported so that they have access to the same curriculum as other students. Tasks are not sufficiently challenging for gifted and talented students.

140. Learning is unsatisfactory because students do not learn enough geography in Years

7 to 9. This has been caused partly by staffing changes and partly because not enough geography is being included in the courses planned for these years. Students have very low levels of knowledge and understanding of geography when they first come to the school. Students following a humanities foundation course in Year 7 develop satisfactory mapwork skills and understand basic facts about service industries and their impact on the local landscape. However, the work does not sufficiently challenge higher attainers. In a Year 8 lesson, students understood some of the location factors in the siting of football stadiums. They compared Watford's First Division stadium with that of a Premier stadium in the north of England. However, the teaching does not focus enough on the geographical concepts and terminology of urban re-development. Students do not begin a study of physical geography until Year 9. They understand that the earth's surface is constantly changing. They can explain only in general terms some of the forces that shape the land. They are confused about sedimentary and igneous rocks. Higher attaining students know that volcanic rock is igneous and know the term 'metamorphic'. Students answer questions willingly. Boys and girls participate equally. Many students do not remember earlier work well enough and need practice to develop this.

141. GCSE classwork is carefully organised and shows good effort. Progress is slow and standards too low because students in Year 10 and 11 have to be taught work which should have been mastered earlier. Fieldwork at the local shopping mall shows students can collect and analyse survey data and some use ICT to present their work and generate graphs. Only a limited range of graphical and mapping techniques is used.

142. By Year 11, students have made sound progress but most work lacks the depth and detail of study required to achieve the higher grades at GCSE. Opportunities to extend study and practice and analyse examination answers as a routine part of classwork for each topic are needed to raise standards. Too much teacher-directed work, as in the very sound London urban fieldwork, results in work which does not show the development expected from students of this age. Students do not draw sufficiently on a range of geographical sources to set their survey in the context of geographical theory or to relate what they find to geographical models and textbook examples. They use an inadequate range of subject vocabulary.

143. Staff share a commitment to improving students' achievement but management of the subject is unsatisfactory because standards are not high enough. There has been little improvement since the previous inspection.

HISTORY

144. Overall, the quality of provision in history is good.

Strengths:

- Good leadership and management of an improving subject.
- Good teaching overall, leading to good learning by many students.
- Positive attitudes of many students, contributing to their progress.
- Rising standards in Years 10 and 11.

Areas for development:

- The match of work for more able students.
- The history content of the Year 7 'Discovery' programme.
- The use of ICT as a teaching and learning tool.

145. Standards of students by the end of Year 9 are below the expectations of similarly aged students nationally in knowledge and understanding and the development of historical skills. This reinforces the judgement of teacher assessments in 2001 and the previous two years, which showed attainment skewed more towards the lower rather than higher levels of attainment. There is now less of a gap in attainment between boys and girls than there was before. The current standards represent satisfactory achievement for most students, who joined the school with below average attainment. Students with special educational needs also achieve satisfactorily, although some higher attainers do not reach their full potential. Students in Year 7 joined the school with standards in history that were at or just below national expectations and attain levels of knowledge and understanding in line with the expectations for 12 year olds. They achieve well.

146. In 2001 the proportion of students attaining an A*-C grade in GCSE history was well below average, as in the previous two years. However, students in the current Year 11 attain average standards of knowledge and understanding and levels of historical skills. This represents good achievement for most students, and is due not only to the change in composition of teaching groups, but also to the fact that students now study a more appropriate syllabus and benefit from a more stable teaching staff. Girls achieve slightly better than boys, whilst students with special educational needs and those for whom EAL make good progress in their learning, mostly due to teachers providing a good match of tasks and resources. In all year groups there are no significant differences in attainment between students of different ethnic origins.

147. By the end of Year 9, the majority of students make satisfactory progress in developing their knowledge and understanding of a range of topics, although the learning of some lower-attainers is restricted by poor literacy skills. Year 7 students develop good research skills, for example when investigating the topic of castles and power, using a range of resources, including the Internet. Older students learn how to analyse a historical source such as a painting of Henry VIII for its message as well as its content, although less able students tend to take sources at face value. Students studying social and economic history increase their empathetic understanding of topics such as child labour in industrial mills and begin to appreciate how attitudes either change or stay the same over time. Most become more adept at investigating cause and consequence, as for example when considering why a particular mill became successful.

148. Students in Years 10 and 11 make good progress in developing their knowledge and understanding of the development of medicine across time, for example by comparing medical practices in Ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome. They also increase their understanding of the significance of medical contributions made by individuals like Galen and

Ambrose Pare. Those studying the modern world make good gains in their knowledge and understanding of developments such as civil rights in America. They also increase their ability to evaluate sources of historical evidence, although low attainers find it difficult to judge the reliability and usefulness of sources in context.

149. The overall quality of teaching in history is good, although it is more consistently good for Year 10 and 11 students than for younger ones. The good teaching leads to good learning, and no unsatisfactory lessons were observed during the inspection. Teachers in all age groups exercise good classroom management, quickly getting students on task and retaining their concentration throughout the lesson. This control is reinforced by the practice of setting briskly timed tasks, which succeed in making students work productively and in meeting the objectives of lessons. This was a feature of a Year 10 lesson on the history of medicine in which students were comparing the impact of the Black Death with the seventeenth century plague. They analysed some challenging sources over a short space of time, whilst the teacher posed brisk, challenging questions which resulted in a focused response from motivated students. In the best lessons, teachers match the tasks and resources well to the ability levels of students, thereby ensuring that they all make good gains in learning, as was seen in a Year 7 research lesson on castles. In this lesson students with special educational needs were given more accessible texts, and more able students were set more challenging tasks. As a consequence, all students made good gains in understanding. Teachers provide good feedback on how well students are doing, and how they can improve further: in a Year 11 lesson students were being prepared for their coursework on China, and the teacher made it clear how they could reach specific levels of attainment. This clear guidance motivates the students to try hard to improve the quality of their work. Students enjoy many of these activities and most have a positive attitude towards their learning, evident in the care they take over good presentation, although some less able students, whilst keen to respond to direct questioning, find it difficult to sustain a debate.

150. Where aspects of teaching are less effective, teachers do not take enough account of the needs of more able students, who in consequence make no better than satisfactory progress. Too long is spent in some lessons in asking students basic comprehension questions about sources, and opportunities are missed to challenge more able students on issues to do with reliability, usefulness, and other higher-level skills of source analysis. This occurred in a Year 8 lesson on the causes of the English Civil War in which more able students were not given the opportunity to consider the significance of different causes.

151. Leadership and management in history are good, and contribute to an improving department and rising standards at GCSE. There is now more effective monitoring of teaching and standards, and the analysis and use of data to set targets is developing. The department is beginning to focus on developing literacy and research skills, and this is having a good impact upon standards, particularly in increasing students' awareness of key historical vocabulary. The use of information technology, whilst increasing, is still relatively undeveloped. Although the 'Discovery' programme in Year 7 has many positive features, particularly in developing research skills, there is sometimes too much emphasis on process at the expense of content. This was evident in a lesson about castles in which the teacher taught relevant skills of summarising the key content in sources, but used non-historical material which could not add to students' historical understanding.

152. Standards of students at the end of Year 9 are below average, as they were at the time of the previous inspection. However, the standards of 16 year-olds have improved. Significantly, the overall quality of teaching has also improved. Therefore there has been good progress overall in history since the previous inspection.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

153. Overall, the quality of provision in ICT is satisfactory.

Strengths:

- Students make good progress because they have positive attitudes to the subject.
- Students' results in the GCSE Information Technology examination are higher than predicted by their attainment on entry into the school.
- Good teaching with high expectations for behaviour and work.

Areas for development:

- Assessment in Years 7 to 9.
- Students' awareness of what they need to do to improve their work.
- Students' application of their ICT skills across all subjects.

154. In 2001, teachers' assessment of students' attainment in the national tests at the end of Year 9 showed that standards were average, although no one reached the very highest level. Students enter the school with below average ICT skills. The ICT results, therefore, indicate that good progress has been made during the first three years in secondary school, especially by the girls.

155. This pattern of good progress continues into Years 10 and 11. Although the proportion of A*-C passes in the 2001 GCSE examination were slightly below average, students had made good progress when compared to prior attainment. They obtained better results in ICT than in most of their other subjects and there is no significant difference between the performance of girls and boys. The short course presents a similar picture.

156. The inspection shows that standards at the end of Year 9 are in line with national expectations. Teachers have clear aims and students learn easily in a well-organised learning environment. Basic skills are understood well. By the end of Year 9, students produce well prepared newsletters that combine text and graphics. Students access the Internet very well and the library resource centre provides good opportunities for them to do so. Students develop their on-line search skills through the good use of search engines. They seek information from CD-ROM and web encyclopaedias. Students have a sound understanding of modelling using spreadsheets but their understanding of the use of variables in prediction is less secure. They can create and use databases. Much of this work reinforces numeracy skills. Some work on sensing, measurement and control is done in design and technology. For example, Year 8 write programs to control traffic lights. It is noteworthy that attainment appears to be rising quickly, with the current Year 7 students successfully completing work that was also being done by Year 9 classes.

157. Year 11 GCSE students are reaching average standards. Most students can design information systems. They plan to use an appropriate range of software tools but are less proficient when evaluating their ideas against performance criteria or comparing the relative advantages of different aspects of particular applications. Nevertheless, the quality of the coursework is good overall, reflecting the students desire to succeed and the teachers strong and effective focus on this part of the syllabus. Year 10 students make good progress compared to their earlier learning. They quickly extend their knowledge of a range of ICT activities such as mail merge. Students with special educational needs are motivated by the practical tasks and good teacher support and understanding of their problems. Progress is good and girls and boys perform equally well.

158. Overall, teaching is good. Teachers know their subject well. They are good at on-going assessment during the lesson and in responding to the students' needs, thereby promoting achievement. There is good verbal advice, although the wider use of guidance sheets for particular software packages would have increased independent learning. Teachers could then have spent more time with individual students, an important point when many classes in this practical subject are large. Teachers use technical language frequently and ensure that students focus on these key words by putting them on the chalkboard. This benefits those who have English as an additional language. Lesson planning is good, with a structured approach to the delivery of the subject. However, these plans did not always result in the activities that were supposed to stretch the more able; sometimes this was due to a lack of time as most classes only have one weekly lesson of 50 minutes. Relationships are good and a sense of mutual respect permeates lessons. Teachers implement high standards for work and behaviour and students respond accordingly. Marking and the prompt return of work are sometimes unsatisfactory although there are sometimes genuine difficulties as some teachers have thirteen different classes a week and see over three hundred students.

159. Students' response to ICT is good. They like the lessons and try hard. Many students use the computers during the lunch hour and after school. They appreciate the willingness of the staff to run these facilities, as well as the coursework sessions on Saturday mornings and in the holidays.

160. There is not a fully integrated and comprehensive delivery of ICT across the curriculum and provision is unsatisfactory overall. The effectiveness of ICT in other subjects is variable, with some departments, for example, history at an early stage of incorporating IT into the scheme of work. Others, such as design and technology are restricted because of the lack of updated software. Limited access to computers and a lack of training have limited the ability of teachers to use ICT as a tool to improve the teaching of their subject and to enhance students' ICT capability. Senior management has already identified the delivery of ICT across the curriculum as a priority for development and appropriate action taken.

161. The management of the ICT department is satisfactory. A new head of department has been in post for a year. GCSE courses have been extended and successful arrangements to improve results introduced; this year's GCSE results were average for the A* - C grades. The new appointee has had a number of roles and there has been varied progress in the implementation of all aspects of ICT. The ICT curriculum is currently being reviewed. This is important in order to ensure that the school is delivering the type of high level experiences that befit its newly acquired status as a technology school; for example, Intranet that will enable e-mail to be used extensively or equipment such as scanners and digital cameras.

162. The head of department has made progress in rewriting the schemes of work for Years 7 to 9 but assessment is not matched against National Curriculum Levels. The monitoring of teaching and learning is not fully developed. There is no formal moderation of students' work. There is not yet a fully completed departmental handbook with a range of management information such as an audit of staff skills and a profile of their training needs.

163. The school has made good progress in raising students' achievement since the last inspection. Networks have been extended and further improvements are planned. All Year 10 students are entered for the GCSE examination. Students with special educational needs make good progress and new computers, including laptops, are on order. This will bring the computer - student ratio to above the national average, in contrast to the current situation where it is slightly below.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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

Strengths:

- The quality of teaching.
- The achievement of students at GCSE, compared with their attainment at the end of Year 9.

Areas for improvement:

- Raising of standards at GCSE in relation to national averages.
- More formal integration of ICT into the curriculum.
- More formal monitoring and evaluation of teaching.

165. At GCSE, the proportion of grades A*-C is well below average in French and German. Between 1998-2000, French has showed an improvement but suffered a decline in 2001, mainly through staffing difficulties, lack of continuity of teaching, and a weaker cohort. German has improved steadily over the past four years. In 1999, standards in Urdu were well above average but have fallen to slightly below average in 2001. In 2001, well over half of students performed better in French than expected, based on their achievements at the end of Year 9. The proportion was slightly less in German. Many students achieved better GCSE grades in French and German than in their other subjects. In all languages girls performed better than boys. Teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 show an improvement in attainment over the last three years, with just over half of the students achieving at or above national expectations. Girls again perform better than boys.

166. In the work seen in the school, students in the present Year 7 are making good progress in French in assimilating and retaining language patterns and grammatical concepts. Lower and average attainers, including those with special educational needs, are progressing well in listening and reading, but experience difficulty with accurate sentence construction in speaking and writing. In Year 8, higher attainers are producing accurate written work at the expected level in both their first and second choice language. Other students are less confident, but are comfortable with short sentences. Lower attainers especially experience difficulty in adapting language patterns, consequently their achievement at the expected level is less consistent. In the present Year 9 some higher attainers are using the past tense with confidence and working towards achievement above national expectations in all four skills. Middle and lower attainers are competent in listening and speaking, but weaker in reading and writing. They are generally coping well with grammatical patterns, thanks to constant reinforcement but lower attainers especially are not able to sustain consistency in longer and more challenging work. The setting from halfway through Year 8 enables lower-attaining students and those with special educational needs to consolidate their skills with challenging work at an appropriate level. In such a Year 9 lesson students working in groups of three were required to use dictionaries to find and write up words which would fit into three categories. After doing an example, placing the words in the correct column, they organised the distribution of tasks in a way which suited them. A group of faster workers, for instance, each took a category and assumed responsibility for filling in their column; others appointed a scribe, while the other two looked up the words, dictated and spelt them out to the scribe. The activity effectively developed research skills, reinforcing spelling, pronunciation, and the sequence of letters of the alphabet. These were further enhanced when a representative of each group reported and wrote up their findings on the flipchart.

167. In Year 11, performance in all skills is improving owing to the emphasis on examination techniques and ways of achieving higher levels, especially in speaking and writing. Higher attainers are achieving above expectations in preparation for written coursework, despite some problems with past tense construction in homework. Intense grammar revision is helping accuracy and quality of writing and speech. Lower and average students are tending to perform below national expectations, as many mistakes of grammar, such as past tenses, verb endings and adjective agreements, are the result of failing to check work before handing it in. The repetitiveness and restricted range of their finished products hamper efforts to achieve at higher levels. Overall performance is below average but a significant proportion of students are on course to achieve above expectations compared to their attainment at the end of Year 9.

168. The quality of teaching in well over half of the lessons was good or better and no lessons were unsatisfactory. There is a strong emphasis on the acquisition of language patterns and awareness of grammar to provide a firm basis for accurate communication. This teaching of basic literacy skills is applied effectively and does not disturb the balance in the use of the foreign language in the classroom. All teachers have a profound knowledge of the language and a high standard of fluency, and including two who have only been in the school for two weeks. Teaching has its strongest impact when teachers know the needs of their students well, set an appropriate pace at the start of the lesson, and have high expectations of their performance and behaviour. The best lessons are well planned, recall prior knowledge, and include a variety of timed extension activities, covering different skills and using varied media including overhead projection, "cut-and-paste" and mini-whiteboards. In a Year 11 German lesson, a group containing students with a wide range of attainment, were recalling prior knowledge of the constructions expressing likes and dislikes, and applying them to free-time activities. The teacher then extended these into consideration of the word-order phenomenon in German of 'verb second idea'. Varied activities covering all four skills reinforced sentence patterns. In the GCSE higher level Year 11 French group, students working on the same topic were recalling phrases of time used to express the frequency of free-time activities. The teacher emphasised the importance of linking similar phrases and being aware of whether they referred to past, present or future. She invited each student to offer a complex sentence, denoting a usual activity which was being changed (e.g. normally I ... on Tuesday, but this week...), as an example of how to work towards higher grades in speaking and writing. The quality of sentences was very good, containing a mixture of tenses, and students were almost competing with each other to offer the best one.

169. Teachers take care to involve as many students as possible in class exchanges, and most are eager to participate, and work well together. In a Year 8 mixed-ability Spanish lesson, the teacher introduced new items of vocabulary and construction in the topic of parts of the body. All students were actively involved in listening, repeating, practising in pairs, and especially in a challenging taped listening exercise which required good skill at sifting information. Use of games and allowing students the option to answer the listening exercise in Spanish or English maintained motivation throughout. Only occasionally is the impact of a lesson lost when students need to be recalled to attention, which sometimes occurs if the pace and timing is too slack. Homework is appropriate and is used effectively to consolidate work done in class or to prepare for a subsequent lesson. Marking is frequent and thorough, and effective feedback is given to students, suggesting ways of improving performance and working towards higher achievement.

170. The curriculum meets statutory requirements, and offers all students the opportunity to experience a second language, with a choice of German, Spanish or Urdu in Year 8. ICT is not yet formally integrated into the curriculum, owing to limited access to the central facilities. Teachers take every opportunity to allow students to experience ICT through their foreign language, and have already set up an e-mail link with an overseas school, but they cannot guarantee regular access in lesson time. Because of the changes in staffing and the

disruption to the continuity of teaching, the range of extra-curricular activities has declined, but now that the situation is more stable, a programme of trips and visits is under development.

171. The department is well led and managed. The new head of department, appointed last September, is providing clear educational direction, and is well supported by a committed team. Schemes of work are very detailed, and are constantly updated. There is a good match of staff to the demands of the curriculum, and the present stability should help to improve student performance overall. At present the department is conducting the monitoring and evaluation of teaching on an informal basis, and consistently sharing good practice. A more regular and formal system needs to be established to tie in to the school-wide performance management programme.

172. In the last inspection report the department received adverse criticism on up to twenty aspects concerning teaching and progress of students, as well as the lack of continuity, stability and leadership. All these criticisms have now been addressed and resolved.

MUSIC

173. Overall, the quality of provision in music is satisfactory.

Strengths:

- Class singing.
- Management of students.
- Extra-curricular activities such as the lunchtime concerts.
- Good leadership and management.

Areas for improvement:

- Standards of attainment.
- Systematic teaching of notation and keyboard performance skills.
- Matching of tasks to students' needs and previous attainment.

174. The number of students entering for GCSE music in 2001 and recent years is too small for national comparisons to be made or for meaningful comment on trends. In the work seen in Years 7 to 9 standards of attainment are below average. Students play and control keyboards but their performances lack fluency and use of fingering systems. Notation skills are weak with students over-reliant on letter names. Singing standards are closer to national expectations. Class singing shows good tonal quality and secure intonation with students enjoying the work and singing enthusiastically. The students' compositions show progress through the three years, from question and answer phrases in Year 7 to the exploration of scales and harmonic devices in Year 9. Students listen well and verbal responses show knowledge and understanding of such features as structure and sequence. In the work seen in Years 10 and 11 standards of attainment are below average. The majority of the students have not had the benefit of specialist instrumental lessons before starting the course and this makes it difficult for them to achieve high performance standards. Keyboard work generally lacks fluency and the better performances tend to be vocal. Most compositions are created and recorded aurally; although there are some good ideas the compositions lack structure and development. In their listening work, the students respond well orally when appraising music but have difficulty in writing down their response.

Students with special needs or for whom EAL make satisfactory progress and do as well as can be expected. There are no significant differences in the performance of boys and girls or students of differing ethnic groups. Overall taking into account the standards on entry to the school and at the start of Year 1,0 the students achieve satisfactorily.

175. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory in all years. The teachers have good knowledge of their subject and plan lessons well with a good balance of activities. The management and control of students are good. Discipline is firm but not oppressive and results in productive working and good concentration during the students' learning. It also facilitates good independent working with students trusted to work alone, often without direct supervision. The teachers give students a high level of individual attention during the practical work and this means that tasks can be adapted to match students' previous attainment. However, in spite of this, giving all the students the same tasks sometimes results in students struggling with a task that is too challenging for them. The teachers use good questioning techniques to revise and consolidate the students' knowledge. The teaching of notation and basic keyboard techniques needs to be more systematic and more carefully graded. Singing is well taught with a good choice of repertoire that appeals to the interests of the students. Music contributes to the literacy development of the students through a very good emphasis on key words in lessons, supported by very effective wall displays in the main rooms. However there is insufficient marking of written work by teachers in which corrections could be made and written comments given to provide for the students a record of progress and suggestions for improvement. Students are given information about their progress verbally though during group and paired work. Students with special needs and those for whom EAL make good progress in lessons and are very well integrated into all the activities. In paired work, they are often significantly helped by their partners. The use of ICT is severely restricted by the lack of equipment and software.

176. The students have a good attitude to music; they take the work seriously and behave well, working with enjoyment. The students enjoy good relationships, for example they collaborate well and share keyboards happily. Extra-curricular activities such as the community choir and the lunchtime concerts are well supported.

177. The curriculum provision is good. A particularly effective feature is the extra enrichment given in Year 7 through the additional sessions for combined arts. Music makes a strong contribution to the SMSC development of the students; an example of this is the way in which students are encouraged to perform music from their own ethnic culture, in class and at the lunchtime concerts. The department has good procedures for assessment and in Years 7 to 9 these are linked to National Curriculum Levels. Students are encouraged to evaluate their own work and set targets for improvement. However at present insufficient use is made of this information for curriculum planning and detailed analysis is lacking. The department's classrooms are generally well equipped apart from the lack of computers but the instrumental teaching is severely hampered by a lack of instruments, which means that students have to share. The department's documentation is very comprehensive and well organized; the schemes of work are generally well structured. The leadership and management of the subject are good and the department works hard to reflect the school's aims in its work.

178. There has been a good level of improvement since the last inspection. The quality of students' learning has improved significantly. Students' attitudes and behaviour have improved as a result of improvements in the quality of teaching. Great progress has been made in the management of students and in raising standards of discipline. Schemes of work have been improved to take account of the importance of singing and assessment now meets statutory requirements at the end of Year 9.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

179. Overall, the quality of provision in physical education is satisfactory.

Strengths:

- The good range of teaching methods ensures good learning.
- Positive relationships between staff and students which motivates students of all abilities.
- A good range of after-school activities that provide opportunities for many students to extend their knowledge and skills.

Areas for improvement:

- Standards of attainment for students of all abilities but especially the most able students.
- Target-setting so that all students are aware of how they can improve their performance.
- The time allocated to physical education for students at Key Stage 4 which at the moment is not sufficient for appropriate coverage in depth of the national curriculum.
- The use of ICT in the curriculum.
- Participation of girls in after school activities.

180. By the end of Year 9, teacher assessments in 2001 indicate standards that are significantly below average. However, inspection evidence indicates that standards are close to average in most areas of the physical education curriculum. Many students apply the techniques, skills and the competition rules to several aspects of the curriculum, including basketball, hockey and swimming. In basketball, students had sound receiving and handling skills. In hockey, students in a Year 7 group who had not played hockey before had sound basic stick and control skills. Students in a Year 8 swimming lesson demonstrated sound technique in front crawl. The ability of students at the end of Year 9 to observe and analyse performance is still developing but where it does occur it is contributing to their improvement in performance, especially in some swimming lessons.

181. GCSE results for 2001 were below average for A* - C grades but many students entered for the examination achieved better grades than in their other GCSE subjects. Results have improved over the last two years. Evidence from coursework indicates a very good understanding of the physiology and anatomy units and an ability to apply this knowledge to work on health-related fitness. Students in a GCSE practical lesson on swimming had a good understanding of what constitutes effective stroke technique but most unable to translate this into good practice. In a GCSE dance lesson, a Year 10 group had a sound understanding of how different levels in their movement can convey a range of images and many had a good knowledge and understanding of some of the appropriate terminology. However, the quality of their movement overall was below average. GCSE results for dance were below average. Attainment overall for non-GCSE students by the end of Year 11 is below national expectation. In both badminton and volleyball, although a significant minority of students were above national expectation, most students displayed below average basic skills linked to both control and accuracy. Lack of appropriate facilities for these activities is partly responsible for this.

182. Overall, the achievement of students in lessons observed in Years 7 to 9 is good. In a good netball lesson the students improved the quality of their passing and receiving skills and developed their appreciation of the importance of movement off the ball to create space. In a basketball lesson students improved significantly in passing, receiving and shooting skills. At Key Stage 4 achievement in lessons for most students is also good. In a volleyball lesson, students of below average ability made good progress in developing their basic shots and applying to a controlled game situation. GCSE students made good progress in developing their technique in swimming although they were not clear how this would relate to their

practical assessment for the GCSE examination. In several lessons across all year groups, the progress of more able students is often unsatisfactory because they are not extended. There is very little use of ICT even in the GCSE course. There is a satisfactory and developing range of extra-curricular activities and fixtures with other schools, where there are opportunities for students to extend and develop their skills. However, student participation rates, especially for girls, are disappointing.

183. Students' attitudes to learning are good. Most are enthusiastic, well behaved, and co-operative, demonstrating a real enjoyment of the subject. They are generally attentive and are able to sustain concentration throughout the lesson. Relationships between students and between students and staff are usually very positive and this is a significant factor in the progress made in many lessons. There are very few opportunities for students to take responsibility and to undertake different roles such as coach or official. Non-participants were not consistently engaged in lessons.

184. The quality of teaching is good overall and is never unsatisfactory. In the good lessons a secure knowledge of the subject is regularly conveyed to students through perceptive observation of performance, appropriate intervention and good teacher directed question and answer sessions. Thorough planning, incorporating varied teaching strategies and an appropriate sequence of activities involving both individual and collaborative learning are also features of these lessons, and discipline and class management are good. In those lessons that were satisfactory, planning was not specific or detailed enough, and the range and type of activities was not appropriate, particularly with respect to extending the most able students. Assessment of performance during lessons by teachers is regularly used to enhance teaching of the whole group but individual students are only rarely set clear targets for improvement. Observation and evaluation by students to help improve performance are still developing and are not consistently applied. The recording of assessment using specific criteria linked to schemes of work and involving students to set their own targets is still being developed. The assessment of GCSE theory work is consistent but is not providing enough useful information for students to improve. The good teaching and the influence of a more stable staffing situation together with a determination by the department to focus on more effective use of assessment are beginning to raise standards. This can be most clearly seen in Years 7 to 9.

185. Although the curriculum meets statutory requirements students are not experiencing any gymnastic activity during Years 7 – 9. There is a satisfactory range of activities at Years 10 and 11 but the time allocated is not sufficient to meet the demands of the National Curriculum in appropriate depth while at the same time retaining the necessary breadth. This is not providing a good preparation for Post 16 leisure activities.

186. Management of the department is good and a new head of department is beginning to provide a clear educational direction for the department for the next few years and to involve all members of the department in the development of the department. The day-to-day organisation of the department is very good. All members of the department are committed, are very generous with their time and are good role models. The departmental handbook clearly identifies most policies and procedures although it is still in many instances a statement of intent rather than a reflection of working practice. There are regular departmental meetings although they do not reflect an appropriate focus on teaching and learning and curriculum development. The head of department is beginning to monitor the teaching and learning in the department but there are very few opportunities for the department to share good practice and for this to affect the overall quality of teaching in

different activities. The department's role within the faculty of physical and creative education is unclear although there is a significant and very impressive contribution from dance to the quality of the extra curricular work in the faculty. Indoor accommodation is unsatisfactory and restricts both balance and choice in the curriculum as well as the quality of some outcomes.

187. Progress since the last inspection is satisfactory. The behaviour of students is now good overall and there is now no unsatisfactory teaching but there is still very little opportunity for students to develop planning and evaluation skills. Opportunities for students to develop both an understanding of the importance of health related fitness and to develop personal fitness are not being consistently presented. Lack of curriculum time in Years 10 and 11 is still limiting standards.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

188. Overall, the quality of provision in religious education is unsatisfactory.

Strengths:

- Teaching is always satisfactory and mostly good.
- Student management is good.
- Contributions towards the SMSC development of students is satisfactory.

Areas for improvement:

- The use of assessment data to inform the planning of new work.
- Target-setting to support students' learning and raise achievement.
- Recruitment of specialist staff.
- Requirements of the locally Agreed Syllabus in Years 7 to 9 are not met.

189. Standards are below expectations by the end of Year 9 and Year 11. In lessons and work seen during the inspection, attainment in Years 7 to 9 is lower than expected levels. There are some good examples of students developing their knowledge and understanding of religious language, principles and concepts such as the importance of pilgrimage customs and symbols. Students generally make sense of what they study and can relate it to their experiences of life. In Year 7, students were able to understand the importance of meditation and reflection during a study of Buddhist principles. Through a very well directed exercise by the teacher, students explored their feelings and attitudes towards meditation and were able to reflect upon their personal views of life. In Year 8, students examined the importance of rules and their practical implication. They were able to develop values through a study of topics such as respect for parents, animal rights and the use of the earth's resources. Good links were made between religious and world values. In another lesson, students of the Muslim faith described their experiences of living by the five pillars of Islam. This well planned and teacher-initiated discussion enabled students to relate important religious principles to their everyday experiences of life. In Year 9, students understood the importance of symbols relating to Christian baptism through a good question and answer session led by the teacher. All students, including those with special educational needs, make satisfactory progress. The use of key words, technical language and good discussion work were useful aids to improve students' writing and speaking skills. Overall, learning is satisfactory.

190. In lessons and work seen in Years 10 and 11, attainment is lower than expected levels. The lack of specialist teachers is an important factor that contributes to this situation. A review of students' work in Year 10 showed that, although students did demonstrate a sound knowledge and understanding of the beliefs of Christianity and Islam, their work did not show sufficient depth necessary for GCSE examination work. Students did link religious principles found in the Ten Commandments to their everyday experiences. Through a study of the themes of resurrection and afterlife from Christian and Muslim viewpoints, they were

able to make links between them. However, their production of balanced arguments was rather limited. In Year 11, students demonstrated a sound knowledge and understanding of the role of angels in the Christian and Islamic traditions. They were challenged, through a well-directed discussion, to use the information they had gained to make judgements about the existence of angels. They also explored their personal beliefs, showing a clear respect for the views of other students of different religious backgrounds and traditions. Overall, learning is satisfactory.

191. There are no significant differences in the standards achieved by students of different gender or ethnic background. Students with special educational needs, those with English as an additional language and those who are gifted or talented make satisfactory progress.

192. Overall, students' attitudes to learning are good. They behave very well, are generally well motivated and apply themselves to the work. They collaborate very well with each other and work at a productive pace. The relationship between teachers and students is good, and teachers support individuals both academically and personally. Student behaviour makes a significant contribution to student achievement and progress.

193. Teaching is at least satisfactory and in some cases good in spite of the fact that there are no specialist staff. The teaching tends to be rather didactic, but some opportunities for reflection were observed. Planning is good, and this assisted students to focus on information learnt in previous lessons. Lesson aims were shared with students in most cases. Teachers use questions well to review previous work and check current learning. They use a suitable range of styles such as discussions, good question and answer sessions, appropriate use of worksheets video and text material that helps students to concentrate. Resources are well used, especially worksheets. These enable students with different needs to learn appropriately. Teachers manage student behaviour well, providing good opportunities for students to learn. The use of homework is usually used to help students to reflect on what they learn in class. Teachers had clear expectations of students and these contributed to student achievement. Assessment of students' work is generally satisfactory although the use of more helpful comments would enable students to know what is expected of them. The procedures provide a basis for assessing what students know and understand. However, assessment is not used effectively to plan new work. Detailed targets are not set so it is difficult for teachers to assess students' progress over time. As a result, students are unclear about the standards they are reaching and what they need to do to improve. This is recognised as an area for development.

194. The curriculum in Years 7 to 9 is inadequate to fulfil the requirements of the Hertfordshire LEA Agreed Syllabus. The subject is taught as part of the humanities department and consists of blocks of time with significant gaps before the next topic is studied. This raises important questions about how the department ensures continuity throughout the year and across the years. The schemes of work are appropriate and are linked to the fundamental aims of the syllabus designed to assist students both to learn about and learn from religion. However, the limited amount of time and the inadequate content means that students do not receive their full entitlement to religious education. The requirements of the Agreed Syllabus are not met. This was also the case at the last inspection and is now a matter of serious concern.

195. The subject does make a significant contribution to the SMSC development of students, and provides opportunities for students to explore world issues of justice, relationships and personal beliefs. In lessons, the teaching encourages students to explore their personal views about religious and moral issues. The work that students do on the major world religions necessitates discussion about the cultures that support them, thus helping students to prepare for life in a multi-faith and multi-cultural society.

196. The management of the department is recognised as an area for development. There is, currently no departmental manager and only one teacher has any qualification in the subject. The head of the humanities faculty is currently responsible for the organisation of the department. This provides important leadership at this time whilst the school looks to employ specialist staff. Plans for the future development of the department need to be more specific and targeted towards the particular needs of the subject. Documentation is satisfactory but not yet fully developed. The development of an effective system for the monitoring of students' progress is an important priority. Accommodation is satisfactory. The subject does not have a specific base from which to operate. This causes difficulties in the sharing of limited resources and the ability to create displays celebrating students' work.

197. Since the last inspection, standards have improved slightly in both key stages, but there is still some way to go to reach a satisfactory position. Improvements have been made in planning and in the schemes of work, but the limited amount of time and content in Years 7 to 9 is still a matter of concern. The assessment procedures have improved, although the use of assessment to inform curriculum planning and the provision of targets for students need to be tackled. There has been significant improvement in the contribution religious education now makes to the SMSC development of students. Overall, the improvements since the last inspection have assisted the subject to move forward, but overall improvement since the last inspection is unsatisfactory.

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

198. In the inspection, five 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.

199. 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
Chemistry	1	0	43	0	5	0	0.77
Mathematics	4	0	62	0	15	0	1.51
Other Social Studies	1	100	74	0	11	1.00	1.47

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	1	100	87	0	43	6.00	5.80
Biology	2	50	88	0	34	2.00	5.25
Chemistry	2	100	90	0	43	5.00	5.90
Computer Studies	11	91	86	0	23	3.64	4.62
Other Languages	4	100	93	75	56	8.50	6.84
Other Social Studies	1	100	87	0	34	2.00	5.30
Art and design	4	100	96	0	46	2.50	6.57
History	8	50	88	0	35	2.00	5.45
English	11	36	95	0	37	0.91	5.91
Physics	3	67	88	0	40	3.33	5.67
Religious Studies	7	86	92	14	38	4.29	5.84
Sociology	7	14	86	0	35	0.57	5.32
Sports/PE Studies	4	50	92	0	25	2.00	5.09

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

Mathematics

200. Overall, the quality of provision is good.

Strengths:

- Teachers' knowledge and understanding of mathematics.
- The detailed planning of the schemes of work for the new AS course.
- The respect and appreciation shown by students for their teachers.
- The quality of day-to-day marking.

Areas for improvement:

- Agreement about entry qualifications to the course.
- Encourage students to make extended contributions in lessons and become more independent learners.
- The use of ICT.

201. Results at A Level over the past few years have been well below average. Only small numbers of students have been entered for A-Level examinations and this makes comparisons with national data unreliable. However, no students have managed to achieve the higher A-B grades over the last four years. The pass rate for grades A-E has also been low. In 2001, one student was entered and passed at a low grade. The results in the AS Level examinations have also been very low. In 2000, two students were entered and one passed at a lower grade. In 2001, four students were entered and none passed. In light of these results, the school has not offered this option this year.

202. The inspection thus covered the AS Level course. There has been a significant increase in numbers of students joining the course, and 12 students are enrolled. The school policy is to allow students who have achieved a C pass at either Higher or Intermediate tier at General Certificate of Secondary Education Level to join the AS course. This means that there will be some students who will find the course very difficult. The policy requires further discussion. Half of the students on the AS course have achieved only a C pass at GCSE, some at Intermediate Level. The department is considering methods of providing learning opportunities after the end of the GCSE course to ensure that students have a good understanding and knowledge all parts of the higher tier syllabus. Retention on the course is very good with all students who joined still studying.

203. Overall, the attainment of the present group of students is below average. In the pure mathematics part of the course, students study functions. They understand the basic definitions, which are well explained by the teacher using a good range of examples. The expansion of ideas is good. When written work is set, students manipulate figures reasonably competently, but have forgotten a lot of basic GCSE work. In the next lesson, the teacher revises well what has been learnt on this topic and considers the problems which the students found with mappings. The teacher changes her original lesson plan and has devised match cards of functions and their respective graphs. The teacher talks with confidence about the mathematics and keeps the pace high. Students move to individual tables and work very purposefully on the practical tasks. Knowledge and understanding of functions are below average. A few students find real difficulties, but are assisted by the teacher in a very helpful manner. Key words are well used. By the end of the lesson, good progress has been made and the students are able to plot the graph of a complex function.

204. In the statistics part of the course, students are set a problem from a GCSE past paper. The students have only just started the statistics course and the first few chapters are revision of the GCSE statistics course, which was not studied in Year 11. Students know about cumulative frequency and basic calculations are easily completed. Students complete graphs and use them efficiently to find the median and inter-quartile ranges. The teacher interrupts at an appropriate time to hold up the graphs that two students have drawn; the differences in the graphs are discussed and some very useful points are made by the teacher. Students understand grouped data and class boundaries and these concepts are developed well in class discussions.

205. The evidence of work in students' folders shows satisfactory progress over time. Notes and worked examples are interspersed. Written work is well organised. Very useful checklists have been provided by the head of department of mathematics on which both students and teachers write to establish what has been covered in the course. This enables teachers to check regularly on students' progress. There is some useful rough work by students prior to setting out an answer in full detail. Teachers use handouts which contain explanations of principles and worked examples; these assist the students' learning and understanding. Students experience difficulties with more advanced examples which require the solution of quadratic equations. The difference of two squares is not confidently used. Lower attainers do not recognise straight-line equations. The quality of marking is very good with extended comments made by teachers. Teachers annotate work and complete examples in students' files where students are having difficulty. Teachers also comment on the setting out of questions. Students are very clear about predicted grades for this summer and understand what they should do improve.

206. The quality of teaching is good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and show confidence in the way in which they explain problems. When students require help with examples, teachers immediately and accurately explain the answers to their questions. Teachers consider different methods of presenting new ideas; in one lesson, match cards are used to help in the understanding of the relationships between functions and their graphs. The level of challenge in lessons is high, and teachers realise that, considering the calibre of students on the course, there is much pressure to use every available minute of teaching time. Teachers intervene well in lessons; for example, when written work is set, students are given time deadlines, and teachers interrupt to check on understanding and to push students' learning forward at a faster pace.

207. Teaching methods are mainly traditional with strong direction from the teachers; lessons consist of recaps of previous work followed by an explanation of new concepts. Teachers explain worked examples well and students then practise using exercises from the textbook. Students thus have few opportunities to become independent learners. The students' response in classes is good, and full attention is given to their teachers, as students are keen to make good progress in their mathematical learning. They show good enthusiasm and try very hard to understand the mathematics presented. Students do not contribute extended responses in question and answer sessions. Assignments encourage the revision of the mathematical topics already covered. Mathematical vocabulary is well used by teachers and explanations are generally clear and pitched at the correct pace. Teachers build a strong rapport with their groups and discussions take place at an adult level. Teachers share an interest in their students' personal development and form very good relationships, which are used to develop personal and learning skills.

208. Leadership and management of the Sixth Form courses are good. The planning of the new AS Level has been completed exceptionally well. The use of information and communications technology is still underdeveloped but the department is planning to purchase graphical calculators. About half of the students on the AS Level course plan to move onto A-Level next year. Teachers need to establish ways in which students can

become more responsible for their own learning, but students claim that, considering their overall workload, they have little time for research in mathematics. The students are mature, young adults who speak freely about their studies in mathematics and are very complimentary about their teachers.

BUSINESS

Business education

209. Overall, the quality of provision is good.

Strengths:

- The development planning for the department is good.
- Good assessment procedures have been developed.
- Course retention rates are excellent.

Areas for Improvement:

- The accommodation offered is poor and does not offer a suitable environment for the teaching of business education.
- Students' literacy skills and use of number are not developed enough.
- Specialist staff teaching the more theoretical aspects of the course.

210. The department offers two business courses. Firstly, there is a one-year GNVQ Intermediate course and, secondly, there is a two-year AVCE course (previously known as Advanced GNVQ). Both courses are new and students will sit their final examinations for the first time this coming summer.

211. For present GNVQ (I) students in Year 12, standards of work are below average, though some students can produce work that is above this standard but do not do so with consistency. For many students their oral work is of a better standard than their written work, which tends to be too descriptive and superficial. Standards also suffer because some members of the group, especially the male students, lack motivation and they attend some lessons inadequately prepared. Another problem is that these students do not always meet deadlines for their work. Advanced vocational certificates in education (AVCE) students in years 12 and 13 are similarly recording standards that are below average, though a minority of students are recording standards that are above this level. The main factors serving to depress standards are the quality of written work and understanding of the more theoretical aspects of the course, especially where economics analysis is required. Few students convincingly understand price and income elasticity of demand for example. Although the standards recorded by the majority of students is below average, many have only modest GCSE results. Most students are achieving well and many are doing better than was forecast when they started their courses.

212. The overall quality of teaching is satisfactory and in some lessons it is good. One lesson seen was well below the standard expected. In the better lessons all students are helped to learn by the strategies and techniques used by their teachers. Where teaching is good, staff plan well and have very good subject knowledge which is used to enliven lessons. Very good assessment techniques are used to help the students to improve; staff show high levels of commitment and are keen to help each student individually. Where teaching is less good, lessons are too teacher focussed and students are not presented with challenges that are sufficiently taxing. The pace of such lessons is slow and learning suffers as a consequence. Occasionally theoretical issues are not covered with sufficient accuracy or in sufficient depth and the provision for key skills requires refining. The use of ICT is good. Much work is word processed to a very good standard and students use ICT to generate

graphs and to undertake research using the Internet. In contrast, the emphasis placed on literacy and the use of number is less strong. More emphasis needs to be placed on these two concepts in lessons.

213. Good teaching was seen in a Year 12 GNVQ (I) lesson on customer care. Each student did a short presentation on customer care based on case studies they had undertaken. The teacher sensitively encouraged the students to undertake self-evaluation, before asking for peer evaluation. The teacher then added her own constructive comments. This structured sequence of constructive criticism helped to motivate the students and clearly showed them how their presentations might be improved. Learning in this lesson was good.

214. Business education is a new department having only been established at the start of the previous academic year. The member of staff running the department is young and comparatively inexperienced, but is keen and dynamic and has made a very good start. Indeed, good schemes of work have been developed, a good department development plan has been written, very good assessment techniques have been established and teaching is monitored. The quality of management is already good, with a clear capacity for further improvement. One area that has developed well is the department's contribution to extra-curricular activities. For example, the school recently won a business game hosted by the Watford Enterprise Agency. This was quite an achievement as the school was competing against other schools with long established business departments. However, the department is handicapped by factors which, though outside its direct control, severely impact on standards. The quality of accommodation for business education is poor and well below the standard seen in most other schools. The staff are itinerant and there are no rooms in the school that are suitably equipped to offer the students a business-type environment in which to work. Standards suffer because research opportunities are denied. Access to ICT equipment is also limited. Staffing also presents an issue. Though the staff are keen and enthusiastic, only the head of department is a specialist. Non-specialists are teaching some aspects of theory and the level of the students' theoretical understanding of some key elements of the course is below the expected standard.

Information and communication technology (ICT)

215. The overall quality of provision is satisfactory.

Strengths:

- Students make good progress and obtain results that are better than their prior attainment would have indicated.
- Teaching in Year 13 is good.
- There is strong support for coursework.
- Relationships between teachers and students are good.

Areas for improvement:

- The marking of work and more rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning.
- An increased focus on the more active involvement of students in their own learning.
- Partnership with industry needs developing.
- Students are insufficiently involved in research that would enhance their wider understanding of ICT, especially the moral, social, economic and political implications.

216. The overall results of the 2001 GCE A - Level examination were below average. Students did not obtain the highest grades although a higher percentage passed. GCE A Level result in 2001 were significantly below average for grades A and B. Indeed, no candidates gained these high grades. Standards were above average, however, for grades A-E. This pattern of results is similar to that of previous years. The school's analysis of their prior attainment levels indicates good learning and progress, especially by boys. Students did better in this subject than in most of the other subjects they took. All but two of the thirteen students who took the Intermediate GNVQ passed with just over half obtaining a merit grade. Nevertheless, a scrutiny of students' previous academic records indicates that many made good or very good progress in this course. In 2000 all four candidates passed the AS Information Technology examination. In 2001, two-thirds passed although higher grades were obtained.

217. The attainment of the current Year 13 ICT is broadly similar. Year 13 students engage in thoughtful discussion about the importance of written policies and risk analysis for ICT operations. This class benefits from the teacher's good subject knowledge and ability to ensure that they are involved in thinking for themselves. Students carefully plan their project work and have a secure overview of the areas to be covered, reflecting the teacher's strong focus on a rigorous approach. They know about the importance of the user interface and could refer to the advanced features of the data base software such as working with multiple tables. Year 12 A Level students are beginning to understand how to devise a project using a spreadsheet package, although a few are finding some aspects difficult. Not all have studied an examination course in Year 11 and find the transition to a level work hard. On occasions, standards would have been higher if there had been greater attention to detail, as when the functions of the systems manager were being described. The evaluation of projects and problems sometimes lacks depth.

218. The standard of the work of the GNVQ Intermediate students is also satisfactory. They have extended their level of skills in the main areas of ICT. They use the computer to word process, enter and manipulate data and answer simple 'What if' questions. Their assignments and tasks increase their awareness of the world of work and business activity.

219. Students in all the ICT Sixth Form courses make good progress compared to their academic attainment in the main school. Very high standards for coursework are set and students work hard to increase understanding. As marks for coursework play a major part in students' final grade this effort significantly contributes to their final result. Good relationships between teachers and students, and the small size of many of the classes, promote learning that is often good. For example, a teacher in a small Year 13 A Level class was able to challenge all the students to think deeply about the implications of disasters such as September 11th for ICT security. The students responded well and their learning was enhanced.

220. All the teaching of the A Level Year 13 course was good. Students benefit from the teachers' good knowledge of the subject. They are interested in examples of current commercial ICT practices. Overall, the teaching in the Sixth Form was satisfactory. Good notes produced by teachers are most helpful to students, such as those on project design. The focused approach to coursework and the teachers' willingness to see students in the lunch hours, after school and in school holidays is appreciated by students and helps to raise achievement. Good continuous assessment in class increased understanding. Satisfactory teaching would have been better if more students had been given greater opportunities to be more actively involved in the learning process. In some classes, there is insufficient time to confirm and extend learning at the end of the lesson. Marking is sometimes unsatisfactory and the return of work to the students slow.

221. Information and communication technology (ICT) is a popular option and not many students give up their Sixth Form courses. Nearly half of the Year 13 students hope to continue to study ICT or a related subject at higher education. Students approach their work with maturity and a responsible attitude and good relationships between staff and teachers creates a positive working environment.

222. The head of department has been in post for one year. Leadership of ICT is satisfactory. Results and student uptake have risen since the last inspection. However, rigorous monitoring strategies for teaching and learning have not yet been fully introduced. Students are not encouraged to research independently and present their findings. Industry partnerships are weak. Provision for the ICT key skills course is unsatisfactory. There are no computers solely for Sixth Form use and students often have to spend time looking for a spare one.

Health and social Care

GNVQ Health and Social Care

223. Provision for Health and Social Care is satisfactory.

Strengths:

- Teaching which facilitates independence through active learning opportunities.
- The gender balance of the course members and small groups allows students to work together well.
- The use and application of students' prior knowledge.
- The input from the learning resources manager and the range of library resources is good.

Areas for development:

- The accommodation for the subject.
- Limited opportunities for primary research.
- Access to ICT and resources within taught lesson time to develop independent learning and student responsibility.
- Students' commitment to regular attendance.

224. Since 2000 Health and Social Care has been the only GNVQ subject taught at Foundation Level, with an option for Intermediate Level. This innovation caters for students who have more difficulties with learning and have achieved at the lower grades in GCSE; therefore giving good equality of opportunity for less able students to stay on at school. The school's failure to analyse results by gender, or cultural background, misses the opportunity to highlight specific needs of these two populations. Overall, course results in 2001 were below average because many schools enter a broader range of higher ability students for this type of course. Since health and social care was introduced in 1999, the 2001 results are the first to record a drop out rate: this is minimal, representing one student at each level. Since 1999 all students have achieved a pass rate at Intermediate Level in health and social care. In 2000 when the Foundation course was introduced a single student gained a partial award. The results in 2001 represent 50 per cent improvement in merits but an overall reduction in pass rates at Intermediate Level. There is an improvement in the Foundation result with six out of eight students gaining a pass. Taking account of students' GCSE grades at the start of the course this represents good value added to their learning although standards overall were below average.

225. Inspection evidence shows that standards remain below average for current students in both courses. There is a good balance of male and female students on the course. Students demonstrate an improving understanding of difficult concepts, such as health care planning and the roles of voluntary and professional workers in the health related community. Students learn to debate factors effecting health and well being, to understand risks to health and decide on measures to evaluate an individual's health. Using this background they demonstrate planning and scheduling skills, for a health care plan that identifies and monitors realistic targets for improvement.

226. Teaching Intermediate and Foundation health and social care being together has introduced an element of healthy competition that promotes stimulating discussion and feedback. This challenges all students to raise their standards of speaking, listening and decision-making. They benefit from time in class devoted to guided research and intense discussion which opens their minds and develops lateral thinking skills that lead to clearer understanding and knowledge; this was demonstrated by the brainstorm led by an Intermediate student. Small group work is promoting personal growth and confidence for students on the course. During their earlier school career they have lacked confidence. Some students still find class discussion quite intimidating but students with weak reading and comprehension have developed the confidence to take an active part in reading aloud, discussion and even heated debate. However students have few opportunities to develop primary research. One student with a parent and sisters in nursing is able to do this type of action research at home. Secondary research is very effective through the library resource centre.

227. Teaching is good. Teachers use their personal knowledge, challenging case studies and explicit course guidance to plan lively and interesting lessons. The combination of very good photocopied writing frames and charts, with well-chosen resources and challenging questions are in place to consolidate new learning. The teaching takes full account of students with special learning needs and those with English as a second language. Good one-to-one discussions with students enable them to build up a background knowledge to improve their extended answers to questions. For example, they can put into place a health care plan that takes account of physical, intellectual, emotional and social needs. Key skills are used to give students the ability to apply number skills when they consider issues such as data about topical issues in the health service. Basic computer skills are used for presentation of information through word processing, the use of the Internet to search for information on topics such as environmental health and spreadsheets to input and manipulate data. The group uses the LRC network but they do not have easy access to computers at the point of need, in the GNVQ room. Teachers work closely with the tutor librarian in the library resource centre. Wide ranges of well chosen and useful reference books meet the course content and the students' learning needs. They also use periodicals, broadsheet newspapers and CD- ROMS that reflect health and social issues of the day. Students' access to these high quality resources improves their research and knowledge.

228. Overall, learning is satisfactory. It is not as good as the teaching because students are starting from a low base and take time to build up their confidence, knowledge and understanding. They also have the challenge of improving their basic literacy and numeracy skills to cope with the mature requirement to handle data and a wider range of reading during the course. Students find that independent learning, research and personal evaluation are challenging and sophisticated skills that take time to practice and learn.

229. Students' attitudes to GNVQ are good. Students perceive the value of the course as a good life skill. Many students reported that their families were interested in the work they were doing in health and social care. Inclusion is a strong element of thinking and planning in GNVQ course. For example, peers had confidence to report a student who was in school but absent from lessons, so that the teacher could investigate. The teacher showed skill and

ingenuity in dealing with absence in such a way that the individual was drawn back into the group successfully. Students' personal development is a positive feature of the course, discussions are enjoyable and all students are encouraged to offer personal examples to illustrate discussions, so everyone can offer something, this builds up self-esteem and confidence.

230. The success of this course results from the subject being well managed within the constraints of poor accommodation and a lack of visits or visitors to enhance primary research. The subject is taught by a partnership between two teachers supported by the tutor librarian. This collaboration enriches learning and gives flexibility to the teaching. There is good rapport between the course teachers and the key skills staff which helps to embed basic skills and develop strategies for life long learning.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English

231. Provision for English is satisfactory.

Strengths:

- Students make good progress compared with their earlier levels of attainment.
- Teaching is usually good or better, and teachers work hard to provide appropriate lessons.
- The subject is led and managed well.

Areas for development:

- Monitoring of teaching.
- Not enough formal written work is set and monitoring procedures are not rigorous.

232. Standards achieved in the 2001 A Level examinations were very low in comparison with national averages. This represents a considerable decline from previous years, particularly 2000, when with a much larger entry, standards corresponded broadly with the national average. The school attributes this to the difference in the two cohorts and a loss of specialist teaching time due to staff absence. The pattern is usually that students achieve satisfactorily, in line with the GCSE grades achieved at the end of Year 11.

233. Inspection evidence from the current Years 12 and 13 indicates that standards are in line with the national average. Retention rates are good. Students in Year 12 are beginning to use a critical vocabulary confidently, and to explore issues in literature analytically. All responses contained an element of personal judgement, backed up by quotations or references to texts. In both year groups, examples were seen from higher attaining students of a good quality of thought, with mature insight supported by well ordered argument. Expression is generally accurate, although in some cases there is room for a broadening of vocabulary and the increased flexibility in the use of language that can only come from more practice. In discussions in class, the majority show underdeveloped communication skills. In each class, most allow themselves to be swamped by a small number of highly vocal students, and - make little contribution, whatever the teacher's efforts. Much of what students have to say is underdeveloped, hesitant and not confident, and even the livelier contributions are informal and unsophisticated. Standards of writing are no more than average, and essays are both rarer and shorter than in many Sixth Forms. Nevertheless, texts are well known, and there is good awareness of the issues involved.

234. The achievement of students is satisfactory overall. They follow teachers' advice carefully and approach the subject positively. They collaborate well in groups and pairs. Confidence increases with greater familiarity with the texts and with literacy approaches: students in Year 13 had produced their own sonnets which were enjoyable, lively pieces, showing good understanding of rhyme and structure, even if there was little knowledge of metre. The success of this exercise was largely the result of their own enthusiasm, which together with the good teaching and the good relationships in the Sixth Form, makes a strong contribution to the progress made.

235. The teaching of English is always good and often very good. Teachers plan carefully and choose the subject or the treatment of the lessons in attempts to engage the students' interest and participation. These often succeed in overcoming the lack of confidence and reluctance of some students, but it is sometimes hard work. One of the best aspects of teachers' approaches is their clear and open enthusiasm, both for the texts studied and for their students, whom they know well and with whom they share an ambition to succeed. Their preparation, their styles and their methods are very likely to be the principal influence in a considerable improvement in attainment at the ends of 2002 and 2003. Marking is careful and thorough, but pieces of formal writing are not set sufficiently frequently, nor is what is done kept in an organised way.

236. English is well led and managed. The head of department has a good overview of the department and a very good vision of the priorities for the subject and the school. However, there is little monitoring of teaching and students' work outcomes in A Level English Sixth Form. Resources are good, and accommodation is well used. The library is a very good resource in supporting students' learning. Teaching is shared by well qualified and experienced teachers, all of whom are committed to continuous improvement.