

INSPECTION REPORT

DOVER GRAMMAR SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

Frith Road, Dover

LEA area: Kent

Unique reference number: 118806

Headteacher: Mrs J Bell

Reporting inspector: Mrs J Greenfield
7070

Dates of inspection: 24th – 27th September 2001

Inspection number: 197295

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Grammar
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 to 18
Gender of pupils:	Girls
School address:	Dover Grammar School for Girls Frith Road Dover Kent
Postcode:	CT16 2PZ
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Reverend John Philpott
Date of previous inspection:	2 nd – 5 th December 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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7070	Mrs J Greenfield	Registered inspector	Special educational needs	The school's results and pupils' achievements How well are pupils taught? How well is the school led and managed?
14756	Mr J Lovell	Lay inspector		How well does the school care for its pupils? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
20709	Mr D MacIldowie	Team inspector	English English as an additional language	Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development Pupils' spiritual, moral social and cultural development
3643	Mr D Jones	Team inspector	Mathematics Equal opportunities	
4617	Mrs R Fox	Team inspector	French German	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
31685	Mrs V Girling	Team inspector	Art and design	
23188	Mrs V Maunder	Team inspector	Biology Physics	
20247	Mr R Parry	Team inspector	Geography	
23016	Mr T Morrison	Team inspector	History	

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Dover Grammar School for Girls, which is situated close to the centre of the port of Dover, is smaller than similar schools nationally. The school has increased in size since the last inspection and now has 710 pupils on roll, of whom 133 are in the sixth form. As a selective school, it receives pupils from a large number of primary schools in the area who are in the top 26 per cent or so of the ability range. Pupils' attainment on entry is above average. The ability of the intake upon entry is slightly lower than that of most grammar schools, with fewer of the highest attaining pupils than usually found in such schools. Six pupils have special educational needs, which as a proportion of the school population is well below average. No pupil has a statement of special educational need. The school serves an area that is predominantly working class and a number of pupils come from homes that are relatively disadvantaged, both socially and economically. Around three per cent of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is well below the national average. The proportion of pupils having English as an additional language is low and none is in the early stage of learning English.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Dover Grammar School for Girls is a good school, with many very good features. Its strengths far outweigh any weaknesses. It is very well led and managed. The school's ethos, which effectively promotes academic excellence and personal fulfilment, enables pupils to attain very high standards in national tests and public examinations. Pupils are enthusiastic about their work, keen to learn and to take advantage of the opportunities provided for them. They work hard and through the good quality of most of the teaching make good progress and achieve well. The combination of these factors ensures that the school gives good value for money.

What the school does well

- Standards in national tests and public examinations are very high and pupils do very well by the time they leave school taking account of their earlier attainment.
- The good quality of much of the teaching and the systematic monitoring, assessment and support provided for them ensure that pupils make good progress.
- Pupils' interest and enthusiasm for their work, together with their excellent behaviour, create a positive climate for learning.
- The headteacher, with the strong support of senior staff and the governing body, leads and manages the school very well and provides a clear sense of focus to school improvement and the achievement of high standards.
- The school's aims of academic excellence and personal fulfilment, including its strong sense of community, provide a challenging environment in which pupils are helped to grow and mature into responsible young adults.

What could be improved

- The less capable pupils do not always receive sufficient support in lessons.
- Information and communication technology (ICT), although improved since the last inspection, is not used enough to extend and enhance pupils' learning across the curriculum.
- The provision for enhancing pupils' spiritual awareness is not as effective as the provision for other aspects of their personal development.
- The personal and social education programme does not contribute to pupils' personal development as effectively as it might.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Since its last inspection in December 1996, the school has improved its performance in the national tests and public examinations at a faster rate than that found nationally, particularly in the proportion of pupils achieving the higher grades and levels. The quality of teaching has improved considerably, with much more that is good or very good and no teaching that is less than satisfactory. Teachers use a wider range of teaching approaches and involve pupils much more in their learning, although in some lessons this is not always as successful with the less capable pupils as with average and higher attaining pupils. The provision for information and communication technology (ICT) has been extended and more time is now allocated for teaching ICT skills. ICT is not used enough to support learning across many subjects. Additional support staff have been appointed to underpin learning in ICT, the library and the administration of first aid. Overall, the school has made good progress since the last inspection.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1998	1999	2000	2000
GCSE examinations	A*	A*	A*	B
A-levels/AS-levels	A*	A*	A*	

Key	
very high	A*
well above average	A
above average	B
average	C
below average	D
well below average	E
very low	E*

The school attains very high standards in national tests and public examinations when compared with maintained schools nationally and its performance places it in the top five per cent of schools nationally. Since the last inspection in 1996, the test and examinations results have improved at a faster rate than the national trend, particularly in the proportion of pupils achieving the highest levels and grades. Throughout the school, the majority of pupils achieve well in relation to their earlier attainment. In 2001, the school gained a School Achievement Award in recognition of the improvement in its performance over the past three years. Pupils' performance in the Key Stage 3 tests in 2000 was very high in relation to schools nationally. In relation to similar schools, their performance overall was average, with the results in English better than those in mathematics and science. Pupils' current work shows that there is very little difference between these three subjects and that they are achieving higher standards than might be expected in view of their earlier attainment. The unconfirmed test results for 2001 show some improvement over those for 2000.

The GCSE results have consistently been very high for the past few years, with the rate of improvement from year to year faster than the national trend. The results in 2001 show an improvement over those for 2000. The school has set itself appropriate targets for raising standards further. The strongest subjects in 2000, with results that were significantly better than the national averages, were English language, English literature, mathematics, geography, French and German. The weakest subject was business/economics. From the work seen during the inspection, the school is maintaining its high standards.

The A-level examination results have improved every year since the last inspection and over the past few years have been very high in comparison with the national figures. The strongest subjects in 2000 were English, art and design, business studies/economics, French, geography and general studies. The weakest subject was history. The results overall in 2001 are broadly similar to those in 2000 although some subjects have improved their performance quite considerably, for example business studies/economics, chemistry, physics, sports studies and sociology, and other subjects have done marginally less well. From the work seen, standards are high in English, mathematics and art. History remains weaker than other subjects.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils are very proud of their school and they have a positive attitude towards their studies. During their time at school, they develop into very capable independent learners.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Pupils' behaviour throughout the school is excellent. They are courteous and polite to one another and to adults.
Personal development and relationships	Pupils work together very well, in lessons and other school activities. They are confident in expressing ideas and opinions, and respect each other's point of view. Many of them take an active part in the day-to-day life of the school and accept responsibility with alacrity. There is a very good sense of community and shared endeavour.
Attendance	Attendance is well above the national average for secondary schools, and the rate of unauthorised absence is below it.

Pupils value the support they receive from their teachers. Their attitudes and behaviour in lessons are extremely positive. They respond very well to the school's ethos, which encourages them to take responsibility for themselves and their actions. Pupils show a great deal of respect for one another and to adults. The number of exclusions is low.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

The quality of teaching has improved considerably since the last inspection. No teaching is less than satisfactory and in just over four out of five lessons, it is good and often very good. Some of the teaching in the sixth form in English, mathematics and art is excellent. The overall good quality of the teaching, which meets the needs of most students well, is one of the main reasons why pupils make good progress. There is very little difference in the quality of teaching between the two key stages and the sixth form or between different subjects. Teachers use their very good subject knowledge to provide challenging and worthwhile tasks and activities to engage the pupils' interest and enable them to learn effectively, although they do not always ensure that the needs of less capable pupils are always met. Teachers expect much of their pupils, in both the quality of their work and their response. Pupils show considerable interest and enthusiasm for their work and are keen to learn. They respond well to the rigour and challenge of the teaching. The teaching of English, mathematics and science at both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 is predominantly good, as is the teaching of the basic skills of literacy and numeracy.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum is broad and balanced. The school provides a wealth of curricular and other opportunities for students and extra-curricular provision is good. Not enough time is allocated to religious education in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form to cover the requirements of the agreed syllabus.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	The very small numbers of pupils with special educational needs receive good support and are fully integrated into the school community.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	The very small number of pupils with English as an additional language are included in all aspects of school life and receive good support. In a few lessons, they are not encouraged to contribute sufficiently.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Overall provision for pupils' personal development is very good, with excellent opportunities for them to develop their social skills and to take responsibility from an early age. The school makes very good provision for their moral and cultural development but places insufficient emphasis on their spiritual development, either in assemblies or through the curriculum.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school is a civilised community. There is a very strong commitment to pupils' achievements and welfare, and very good systems to support them. Pupils' progress is systematically and carefully monitored. Procedures for ensuring the health and safety of pupils, including child protection arrangements, are effective.

Whole-school assemblies on four days of the week are an important feature in the life of the school but they do not always comply with the requirement for a daily act of collective worship. The personal and social education programme does not contribute to pupils' personal development as well as it might, especially at Key Stage 4. The school's links with parents are satisfactory, but more could be done to improve the content of the annual reports to parents through identifying more clearly what pupils need to do to improve their work.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher, effectively supported by senior staff, leads and manages the school very well and has a very clear vision of what sort of school it should be. There is good delegation to staff with management responsibilities and a shared commitment by all staff to improvement and the achievement of high standards.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors have a very good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and play a strong role in determining its direction. With the exception of ensuring a daily act of collective worship and that the provision for religious education at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form meets requirements, the governing body fulfils its statutory responsibilities well.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Systems for monitoring and reviewing the work of the school, including its own performance and the quality of teaching and its impact on learning, are robust. The thorough analysis of data and the careful monitoring of progress enable staff to track the performance of individual and groups of pupils effectively.
The strategic use of resources	The school uses its resources well for the benefit of the pupils and to meet its identified priorities. Financial planning and administration are good, and expenditure is closely linked to the priorities in the school's strategic plan. The school is making good use of new technologies.

Staff are deployed effectively to make best use of their expertise. Accommodation is adequate for the teaching of most subjects but in some, for example design and technology, art and physical education, limitations of space restrict the curriculum. Resources to support learning and the curriculum are satisfactory although not extensive, but are improving. Suitable procedures are in place to ensure that the school obtains best value for money from its expenditure, enabling it to provide good value for money.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school's high expectations and the standards achieved by the pupils. • The good progress their children make at school. • The good quality of the teaching. • Their children like school. • The school helps pupils to become more mature and responsible. • The good standards of behaviour. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The way the school works with parents and how it responds to their problems and concerns. • To be provided with more information on how well their children are doing. • The homework arrangements.

Most parents are pleased with the school and the education it provides. Inspectors support the positive views expressed by parents. The school enables most pupils to make good progress, although some of the less capable pupils do not always receive sufficient support. Inspectors found no evidence to support parents' views about the way the school works with parents: indeed, they found numerous examples where the school actively involves parents where there are concerns. The school keeps parents informed through regular newsletters, pupils' planners, consultation evenings and reports, and a large number of pupils and their parents receive letters of commendation for good work from the headteacher. Inspectors find that the annual reports are generally informative, but do not identify clearly enough the areas that their child needs to improve so that parents can provide more effective support. Parents' views about homework are mixed. Some feel too much is given, others too little, or that it is inconsistent. Inspectors find that most of the homework set is generally challenging and appropriate for pupils in a selective school.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form in this smaller than average-sized grammar school has 133 students and is increasing in size. There are very few minority ethnic students in the sixth form, and none is in the early stages of English fluency. The sixth form provides a wide range of A-level and AS courses and, through arrangements with two other local secondary schools, students are able to follow other courses, including vocational courses. About four out of five pupils in Year 11 continue into the sixth form. A small number of boys from the nearby boys' grammar school also attend lessons at the school. The GCSE examination results at 16 are very high in relation to schools nationally and above average when compared with similar schools. Consequently, all students embark on a two-year programme leading to A-level, taking four or more subjects.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The sixth form is successful and cost effective. Students work very hard and achieve very good results. The sixth form caters well for its students through the wide range of courses that are offered, the stimulating and challenging environment in which they develop as mature and responsible young adults, and the support that is provided for their academic and personal development. The teaching in nearly every subject is good and it is very good in art. The main strengths and areas that could be improved in the sixth form are:

Strengths

- Students achieve above average results overall, and are attaining high standards in English, mathematics, and art.
- Students make good progress as a result of enthusiastic and challenging teaching.
- Students have very positive attitudes to their studies, work very hard, and have developed considerable skills in planning and organising their own learning.
- Students play a significant role in the work and life of the school and in the wider community.
- Leadership and management of the sixth form are good, with a strong emphasis on supporting students' academic and personal development.

What could be improved

- Standards in history are not as high as those in other subjects.
- The marking of students' work does not give enough guidance on what they need to do to improve.
- The provision for religious education, to ensure that statutory requirements are met.

Further areas for improvement are included in curriculum area reports.

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

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

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

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	Good. Results in 2000 were above average and have improved in 2001 with a high proportion of students gaining grades A and B. Students are achieving well in relation to their attainment on entry into the course as a result of the good quality of much of the teaching.
Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Biology	Good. Results were above average in 2000 and are improving, providing at least satisfactory value added from GCSE. Students are achieving well as a result of the teaching, which is generally good. However, marking is not rigorous enough.
Physics	Good. Standards are improving as a result of strong leadership, more stable staffing, and the introduction of a new course which is better suited to the needs of present students. The marking of work is too variable.
Art	Very good. Examination results have been well above average and are set to be maintained. Students achieve well in relation to their GCSE results. Staff have strong subject knowledge and the teaching is very good, with some excellent features.
Geography	Good. Standards at A-level in 2000 were well above average for all schools and above average for similar schools. Students achieve highly because teaching is consistently good overall. However, there are not enough written comments on students' work.
History	Satisfactory. Results were below average in 2000 and not as good in 2001, although higher in the previous two years. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, but assessment is uneven. The higher order skills of analysis and synthesis are insufficiently developed.
English	Good. This is an increasingly popular subject in which students gain grades that are above those expected from their GCSE results. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and high expectations. Students work together very well and learn from each other very effectively, particularly in Year 13.
French	Good. Results were well above average in 2000 and although the A-level results dropped in 2001, AS level results were very good. Teaching and learning are good overall although achievement is currently only satisfactory because less capable students are not getting enough feedback and support to enable them to cope effectively as the work becomes more challenging.
German	Good. Although results have been below average for the higher grades for the past three years, there are signs that they are improving. Teaching and learning are good. As in French, achievement is only satisfactory at present because not enough is being done to ensure that less capable students keep up with the demands of the course.

In other subjects, work was sampled. Teaching is predominantly good, and some very good teaching occurs in theatre studies, music, physical education and business studies/economics. These subjects are generally strong in the school.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Students receive very good personal support and guidance through their tutors and the head of sixth form. With guidance from staff, students set themselves clear and realistic targets. Their academic performance is monitored thoroughly and carefully on a systematic basis. Information about sixth form courses is good and they are well informed about career options and opportunities beyond school.
Aspect	Comment
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Leadership and management of the sixth form are good. A number of changes have been implemented recently, which are enhancing the school's sixth form provision. The performance of all groups of students is carefully analysed and evaluated, and effective steps taken to overcome any weaknesses. The systematic monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning are only in the early stages of development but are included as a specific focus in the next phase.

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 choice of courses allows them to follow a programme suited to their talents and career expectations. • They are well taught and challenged. • Teachers are accessible if they need additional help. • Their work is thoroughly assessed and helps them to improve it. • They are helped and encouraged to study and research topics independently. • They are well informed about their progress. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The way that the school listens and responds to their views. • Their induction into the sixth form. • The support that they receive when they have personal problems. • The range of worthwhile activities and enrichment courses.

The small number of responses to the students' questionnaire, undertaken in the term before the inspection, was more negative than the formal discussions inspectors held with over 80 students in Year 12 and Year 13. Current students are very positive about the sixth form and very proud to be identified with the school. They particularly value the range of opportunities it provides and the guidance and support they receive. Students in Year 12 found the new induction programme very helpful in adjusting to the different demands of sixth form work. Inspectors' judgements support the positive views expressed by students and recognise the many changes that have taken place since the relatively recent appointment of a new head of sixth form. The views expressed by current students indicate very clearly the positive way the school has responded to the concerns raised by previous students. Inspectors' judgements concur with the views of the students currently in the school.

COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

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

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Standards in national tests and public examinations are very high and pupils do very well by the time they leave school taking account of their earlier attainment.

1. The school attains very high standards in national tests and public examinations when compared with maintained schools nationally. Since the last inspection in 1996, the test and examinations results have improved at a faster rate than the national trend, particularly in the proportion of pupils achieving the highest levels and grades. In this respect, the school has made considerable progress in addressing one of the key issues identified in the last inspection report. In recognition of the improvement made in its performance since 1997, the school received a School Achievement Award earlier this year.
2. Pupils' attainment on entry to this selective school is above average. The results of the Key Stage 2 tests for the past two years indicate that their overall performance is very high in relation to maintained schools nationally. However, an analysis of the standardised tests undertaken by pupils when they transfer to the school indicates that their overall scores are lower than normally found for pupils entering a grammar school and there are comparatively fewer pupils who attain very highly. Their quantitative scores are slightly better than their verbal and non-verbal scores but not significantly so.
3. When compared with similar schools, the school's overall performance in the Key Stage 3 tests in 2000 was average, with pupils doing very much better in English than in mathematics and science. In English, the results were well above average for similar schools but were below average in mathematics and science. In these two subjects, the proportion of pupils attaining the higher Level 7 was below average in mathematics and well below average in science.
4. In the national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 in 2001, the results in English, mathematics and science were again very high in relation to the national average, maintaining the pattern of previous years. In all three subjects, there was an improvement in the proportion of pupils attaining the higher Level 7, especially in English and science. When compared with similar schools, the results in English were well above average, and similar to the results in 2000; were average in science, showing an improvement over the results in 2000; but remained below average in mathematics, although there was a slight increase in the average points score. In relation to similar schools, mathematics remains weaker than the other core subjects, but this was not reflected in the work seen during the inspection.
5. Assessments undertaken by teachers at the end of Key Stage 3 in 2001 indicate that standards in art, design and technology, geography, history, ICT, modern languages, music and physical education are well above the national averages, particularly at the higher levels. In all subjects other than physical education, all pupils attained at least Level 5 and nearly every pupil gained at least Level 6. In physical education, nearly every pupil attained Level 5 and three-fifths gained Level 6 or better.
6. Although only at the beginning of the academic year, work in lessons and in pupils' books across a range of subjects, including English, mathematics and science, indicates that these high standards are being maintained at Key Stage 3. Pupils make good progress during Key Stage 3, both in lessons and over time, and by the age of 14 are attaining above average standards, with a significant minority reaching higher standards than this. They are achieving well in relation to pupils in similar schools and in relation to their earlier attainment on entry to the school.
7. In the GCSE examinations in 2000, the results were very high when compared with maintained schools nationally and were above average when compared with similar schools. Since 1996, the trend in the school's average points score per pupil has risen at a faster rate than schools nationally. In the GCSE examinations in 2001, all pupils gained five or more grades A*-C, showing an improvement over the position in 2000. There was also an improvement in the average points score. In most subjects, all pupils gained grades A*-C and a greater proportion of pupils than in the

previous year attained the highest grades of A* and A. However, without national data it is not possible to determine how significant this improvement is.

8. From the work seen during the inspection, these high standards are being maintained. During Key Stage 4, pupils make better than expected progress and standards overall by the end of Key Stage 4, both in lessons and from the work undertaken over time, are well above average. Some of the most capable pupils are attaining very high standards in English, mathematics, science, art, information technology, French and music. Most pupils are achieving well in relation to their earlier performance in the Key Stage 3 tests at the age of 14.

9. The A-level examination results in 2000 were also very high in relation to the national average and the school has broadly maintained this position in 2001, although there was a slight drop in the average points score. The school's results have improved each year since the last inspection and the proportion of students achieving the highest grades of A and B has increased considerably. The majority of students are achieving well in relation to their performance in the GCSE examinations at the age of 16. Nearly every student entered for the A-level examinations gained pass grades and in many subjects a higher proportion than average gained the highest grades of A or B. The work seen during the inspection indicates that the school is maintaining its high standards.

The good quality of most of the teaching and the systematic monitoring, assessment and support provided for them ensure that pupils make good progress.

10. The good quality of most of the teaching makes a significant contribution to the high standards attained by pupils and is one of the main reasons why pupils make good progress. Teachers provide challenging tasks that meet the needs of the majority of pupils well. They have high expectations of what pupils will achieve and of their response in lessons. The school is clearly benefiting from the emphasis it has placed on developing the skills and understanding of staff about the ingredients of effective teaching and learning.

11. A second reason why pupils make good progress is the systematic way that the school tracks their progress from Year 7 to Year 13. The school has devised its own system called STEPS (Standard Total Examination Point Score), which aims to motivate and encourage pupils to raise their performance and make the maximum progress. Pupils themselves are familiar with the STEPS system and are able to use it effectively to monitor their own progress from year to year and to set themselves targets for improvement. Parents find the system helpful in motivating their daughters to work towards increasing their targets. The system also enables the school to track whether individual teaching groups are making the required progress to improve the school's overall performance and whether it is adding value. Staff monitor pupils' progress every half term and undertake two academic reviews each term to agree targets with individual pupils. Personal action plans are monitored by tutors and by the key stage managers. Swift action is taken when concerns are raised about individual pupils, relating either to their academic progress or to their personal development. Tutors are closely involved and, when appropriate, parents contacted. Pupils who do well receive a personal letter of commendation from the headteacher, who also writes to parents about their daughter's success. These systems ensure that pupils make effective progress as they move through the school.

12. The quality of teaching has improved considerably since the last inspection. No teaching is less than satisfactory and in just over four out of five lessons, it is good and often very good. Some of the teaching in the sixth form in English, mathematics and art is excellent and there are examples of very good teaching in English, science and ICT at Key Stage 3 and in mathematics, science and art at Key Stage 4. There is very little difference in the quality of teaching between the two key stages and the sixth form. Teachers use their very good subject knowledge to provide challenging and worthwhile tasks and activities to engage the pupils' interest and enable them to learn effectively, although they do not always ensure that the needs of less capable pupils are adequately catered for. Consequently, they struggle at times to understand. Planning is generally good, although the learning intentions of individual lessons are not always sufficiently explicit in the written plans. Teachers expect much of their pupils, in both the quality of their work and their response. Pupils are keen to learn in lessons, and take good responsibility for their work. The teaching of English, mathematics and science at both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 is predominantly good, as is the

teaching of the basic skills of literacy and numeracy. The teaching of personal and social education is not as strong as in other subjects, although it is never less than satisfactory.

13. Teachers manage their pupils very well and in most lessons maintain a good pace to ensure that pupils work productively. As pupils move through the school, they become increasingly more independent in organising and managing their own learning and sustain their concentration well. Most teachers give good encouragement to pupils and praise good work. They assess pupils' work thoroughly in the main, but marking is not always sufficiently diagnostic to help pupils improve their work. Homework is generally challenging and appropriate and is used effectively to support and enhance class work.

14. Pupils with special educational needs on the Code of Practice register receive appropriate support in lessons, and make good progress, as do the small number of pupils who speak English as an additional language. Occasionally, teachers do not encourage pupils with English as an additional language to take an active part in the lesson or involve them sufficiently. Such instances, however, are few in number and the majority contribute well. The school makes good provision for supporting its gifted and talented pupils. Five trained mentors support the 96 pupils included on the programme, which is in its second year. All staff have received in-service training on meeting the needs of these pupils and additional staff time is targeted specifically on providing additional support, for example in Oxbridge preparation.

Pupils' interest and enthusiasm for their work, together with their excellent behaviour, create a positive climate for learning.

15. A particularly strong feature is the interest and enthusiasm that pupils throughout the school have for their work. Their attitudes towards their studies are very good. This is clearly evident in their mature response in lessons, in the range of extra-curricular and other activities that they undertake, and in the lively way they contribute to discussions. Pupils respond well to the demanding activities presented by their teachers, persevering when tasks are more challenging, and almost all maintain a clear focus and involvement. They are highly motivated and settle to work very promptly, sustaining their concentration well during the long double lessons. Pupils work hard, well beyond the minimum requirements of their courses, and are prepared to think critically about what they do. Even when the teaching sometimes lacks spark and challenge, pupils remain cooperative and focused.

16. Pupils' behaviour in and around the school is excellent and makes a significant contribution to the way in which the school operates as an orderly and civilised community. They move around in a controlled, although sometimes in an understandably high spirited and enthusiastic, way, acting not from the constraint of rules but from a deep respect for their school and for what it stands. Relationships amongst pupils and between pupils and their teachers are extremely positive, indicating very strongly the extent of the respect they have for one another. Collaborative work is particularly strong and pupils are mutually supportive and encouraging, valuing each other's views and beliefs.

17. Pupils take pride in being a member of the school community and enjoy coming to school. They speak very highly of the support given to them by staff. They value the opportunities they are given to take responsibility for themselves and their actions, and the trust that is placed in them. Through their own efforts and the school's high expectations of their response, they are developing into very capable independent learners, well prepared for life and the next stage of learning when they leave school. The high levels of attendance and their positive attitudes enable them to make good gains in their learning and assist in the achievement of high standards.

The headteacher, with the strong support of senior staff and the governing body, leads and manages the school very well and provides a clear sense of focus to school improvement and the achievement of high standards.

18. The school is very well led and managed. The tone for this is set by the headteacher, who was appointed after the last inspection. She provides particularly strong, but supportive, leadership in the day-to-day work of the school and gives clear direction and focus to its longer-term development, building on the strengths identified in the last inspection. In this work, she is ably supported by her senior management team, and, in particular, by the two deputy headteachers who

have complementary skills. All the senior managers have clearly delegated areas of responsibility. Together they work well as a team, effectively contributing their own particular skills and expertise, and convey a corporate sense of purpose and a clear commitment to improving academic standards and the quality of provision in the school. They have a good capacity to reflect critically on all aspects of the school's work and a keen determination to implement changes to make improvements. The school improvement plan provides a context for the school's next stage of development and focuses on key areas that will improve standards and quality of provision. Its main weakness is the lack of sharp enough criteria for indicating success and sufficient reference on how the plan is to be monitored and evaluated.

19. The extremely positive ethos within the school, clearly reflected in the excellent standards of pupils' behaviour, their very good attitudes to work and the high quality of relationships between pupils themselves and with staff, permeates all aspects of school life. Since the last inspection, a climate of opinion has been created which is much more open to reflection and change, particularly in relation to improving and extending teaching and learning approaches and having higher expectations of what pupils are capable of achieving. Challenging targets for improvement are set and all have been met. This is reflected in the increased proportion of pupils and students gaining the highest grades in national tests and public examinations.

20. Staff with management responsibilities are clear about what is expected of them and their role in leading and managing developments in their respective areas. Since the last inspection, when it was identified as a weakness, the role of subject leaders in raising standards through improving the quality of teaching and learning, monitoring pupils' progress, and monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of provision, has been extended. These roles are now undertaken well in the main, although not all subject leaders undertake them as effectively as the majority. For example, in history, there is insufficient monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning, especially in the sixth form. The strong management and accountability link between senior and middle managers has been a powerful vehicle for effecting improvement. Monitoring and evaluation systems are systematic and purposeful. The monitoring of teaching and learning appropriately focuses on the dissemination of good practice as well as supporting staff whose practice is not as effective as that of others. There is a strong sense of teamwork throughout the school as teaching and non-teaching staff share their expertise and commitment for the good of the pupils.

21. The governors' knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses and areas for further development puts them in a strong position to support its work. They are fully committed to the school and are highly supportive of the headteacher, with whom they have a very good relationship. The governing body plays a full part in the school's strategic management and undertakes a key role in shaping its priorities and longer-term direction. Governors discharge their duties effectively for the most part through an appropriate structure of committees. However, they have not ensured that the school meets legal requirements with regard to a daily act of collective worship or in the provision for religious education at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. They undertake their monitoring role well and hold the school effectively to account for its performance, particularly its examination results. Their questioning helps to keep the school on its toes. Together with all the other partners, governors make a significant contribution to a community that reflects on what it is doing and evaluates all aspects of its life, so that it continues to improve.

The school's aims of academic excellence and personal fulfilment, including its strong sense of community, provide a challenging environment in which pupils are helped to grow and mature into responsible young adults.

22. The school is very successful in helping its pupils to grow and mature into responsible young adults. It does this through having high expectations of them, both academically and personally, and providing a challenging but supportive environment in which they can develop. The school's aims include a commitment to achieving academic excellence and to ensuring the all-round development of its pupils through personal fulfilment. These aims are achieved through much of its day-to-day practice. The emphasis within the school is one of personal responsibility and concern for others. Pupils respond very positively to the school's high expectations. The school is a very civilised community where all pupils are valued and encouraged to make the best contribution they can to its success. A strong moral dimension underpins school life and the school is successful in fostering values of honesty, fairness, and respect for the views and beliefs of others. Pupils from minority

ethnic backgrounds are fully involved in school activities, although occasionally they are more hesitant in contributing to discussion in lessons.

23. The curriculum provided by the school prepares pupils well for the next stage of education and for adult life. It is broad and balanced, particularly at Key Stage 3, and meets the needs of pupils well. All pupils have equal access to the curriculum and it is taught in a stimulating way to encourage high achievement. Many opportunities are available for pupils to work cooperatively in lessons and on projects, and to show initiative. All pupils take part in an induction course before entry to the school, in Year 9 in preparation for Key Stage 4 and in Year 11 on transfer to the sixth form. These programmes are valued by pupils as they help them to understand and prepare for the future demands that will be made on them.

24. The range and quality of the extra-curricular programme are good. Many pupils participate in a wide variety of lunchtime and after school activities, which include a wide range of musical, sporting and dramatic activities, clubs that have a specific subject or environmental focus, extra study and revision surgeries, outdoor activities, and many more. They are supplemented by numerous theatre and exhibition visits, field trips, foreign trips and visits, community service and personal challenge activities. Together, these activities enrich and enhance pupils' learning, giving them opportunities for undertaking significant responsibility and playing a leadership role, and make a powerful contribution to the development of their social skills and awareness. Overall, the school's provision for pupils' social development is excellent and makes a significant contribution to helping pupils become mature and responsible young adults.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

The less capable pupils do not always receive sufficient support in lessons.

25. Since the last inspection, the school has been successful in improving the provision for the average and higher attaining pupils, with the result that a much larger proportion than previously attain the highest grades in public examinations. This has come about through improvements in the quality of teaching and providing work that is more challenging, interesting and better matched to their needs. Teachers are also more aware of the pupils' targets and their levels of attainment. Despite these developments, the needs and difficulties of less capable pupils, within the context of a selective school, are not always recognised by staff or fully taken into account in the teaching, particularly in the level of support and guidance that they are given. This applies particularly, but not wholly, to less capable students in the sixth form. In lessons judged otherwise satisfactory or better, some of these pupils are not doing as well as they should. Many such pupils have greater difficulty in organising and managing their work effectively. They contribute less to discussions, respond infrequently to teachers' questions and are unwilling to acknowledge that they do not understand some of the work. Consequently, over time, they become passive learners. Not all teachers pay sufficient heed to their needs, check on an individual basis whether they understand the work or are experiencing difficulties, or bring them sufficiently into class discussion. The marking of work in many instances does not give sufficient guidance on what pupils need to do to improve or how their work can be better organised.

Information and communication technology (ICT), although improved since the last inspection, is not used sufficiently to extend and enhance pupils' learning across the curriculum.

26. The provision for ICT has improved since the last inspection, when it was identified as a key issue. The school has purchased additional computers and associated software and peripherals. A second computer room has been set up and is available for use by subject departments. Pupils have access to a number of computers in the library. The technical support is good. Staff have undertaken New Opportunities Fund (NOF) training and laptops are available for them to develop their skills and confidence in using ICT. More time is provided for the teaching of ICT as a discrete subject, which is enabling pupils to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding in a more systematic way. Pupils in Key Stage 3 are making good progress in their ICT lessons through the effectiveness of the teaching of the basic skills across all aspects of the subject and are attaining

above average standards. During Key Stage 4, pupils complete a GCSE short course in ICT and the school's results over the past three years have been well above the national average. Although these developments are very positive, there are too few opportunities in most subjects for pupils to use computers to support their learning. Teachers' planning makes insufficient reference to how ICT can be used to extend and enhance the curriculum. Some good use is made of ICT in design and technology, for example in a Year 10 class who were designing business cards as part of a project, and in the retrieval of information in a number of subjects. However, not enough use is made of applications that support the study of individual subjects as required by the National Curriculum programmes of study.

The provision for enhancing pupils' spiritual awareness is not as effective as the provision for other aspects of their personal development.

27. The school's provision for pupils' spiritual development is relatively weaker than its provision for their moral, social and cultural development. Currently, there is no policy to guide this aspect of the school's work, as the school believes that the policy should emerge from existing and developing practice. The production of an initial or draft policy, however, could help raise awareness and make the issue more explicit in the minds of all staff. Whole-school assemblies, which take place on four days of the week, are a very important feature of school life. They have a strong moral tone, provide a positive social and cultural experience but lack a consistent spiritual dimension, with missed opportunities for pupils to reflect on their own lives, values and beliefs. The tutor period on the remaining day, in which the theme of the week provides a focus for further thought, does not contribute sufficiently to enhancing pupils' spiritual development nor does it meet the requirements of an act of collective worship. Consequently, the school does not comply with the requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship. Elsewhere in the curriculum, other than in religious education, there are too few planned or overt opportunities for discussion on aspects of human existence to develop pupils' spiritual awareness and self-knowledge. The time allocated to religious education in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form is insufficient to cover the requirements of the agreed syllabus.

The personal and social education programme does not contribute to pupils' personal development as effectively as it might.

28. Many aspects of the work of the school contribute to, and influence, pupils' personal development, including the personal and social education programme. This programme, which is taught by a small number of staff, lacks coherence and a clear structure. Therefore, it does not make as strong a contribution to pupils' personal development as it could. The scheme of work identifies the topics to be covered in each year, including issues related to health, drugs and sex education, personal development, relationships, study skills and careers education and guidance. These are all worthwhile topics, but the programme does not have a clear rationale and contains insufficient information about the specific knowledge, skills and understanding to be developed in each year. This makes it difficult for staff to build systematically on pupils' previous experiences and to help them apply their developing skills in a wider range of contexts.

29. The organisation of the programme in Key Stage 4, which is timetabled with religious education and ICT and taught on a rotation basis from week to week, makes it difficult to ensure the systematic development of skills and continuity in pupils' learning. Because of this arrangement, the time allocated to personal and social education during the key stage is too low to ensure that important areas of their personal development are covered in sufficient depth.

30. The teaching of personal and social education in individual lessons is broadly satisfactory and occasionally good. Lessons are managed well and relationships are mostly good. Teachers give pupils opportunities to contribute their own ideas and views, which they do with confidence, but they are not always challenged to be more reflective and assess the impact that these may have on their own behaviour and practice, or to develop their skills of making informed choices. The most effective teaching, seen in a Year 7 lesson on developing study skills, was well planned and structured, enabling pupils to share strategies that they use themselves successfully. In general, however, the specific learning intentions of lessons are not identified clearly enough in the planning

or shared sufficiently with the pupils. Teaching approaches are too narrow, with an overemphasis on input from the teacher and on completing worksheets. In the lessons seen, there was no evidence that pupils use folders or books in a systematic way to record and store their work.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

31. The school needs to:

(1) support less capable pupils more effectively in lessons, by:

- improving planning to take account of their needs more effectively;
- providing them with additional advice and support, particularly in improving their organisational and learning skills;
- ensuring that they participate fully in discussions;
- assessing and marking their work more thoroughly to show them what they need to do to improve.

[Paras: 12; 25; 43; 82; 91; 109; 127; 128; 135]

(2) extend the use of ICT to support learning across the curriculum, by:

- ensuring that it features more often in departmental and lesson planning to meet subject specific requirements of the programmes of study;
- reviewing the use of the ICT rooms to ensure more effective use of them;
- increasing the range of resources available for the teaching of ICT as soon as funding allows;

[Paras: 26; 73; 117]

(3) place greater emphasis on enhancing pupils' spiritual awareness, by:

- providing training for staff to increase their understanding about this aspect of pupils' personal development;
- ensuring that departments have strategies in place to contribute to pupils' spiritual development;
- using assemblies, tutor time and personal and social education more effectively;
- meeting statutory requirements for a daily act of collective worship and religious education in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form.

[Paras: 21; 27; 47; 52; 64]

(4) improve the quality of the personal and social development programme, by:

- developing a coherent scheme of work that systematically develops pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding and helps them make informed choices;
- ensuring that teaching and learning approaches are more appropriately geared to helping pupils develop their skills in making informed choices about issues relevant to their lives;
- organising the time available for personal and social education more effectively;
- ensuring that pupils have a way of recording the work they undertake in a more systematic way.

[Paras: 12; 28; 29; 30]

Sixth form

(5) improve standards in history to the level of other subjects, by:

- developing a detailed scheme of work;
- increasing the intellectual rigour in some lessons, especially to challenge the higher attaining students;
- helping students to develop higher order skills of analysis and synthesis;
- using assessment more effectively to inform curriculum planning, teaching and pupils' learning;
- monitoring the effectiveness of teaching and learning more systematically.

[Paras: 20; 33; 34; 36; 37; 42; 44; 113-117]

(6) improve the quality and consistency of assessment, including marking, by:

- making it more diagnostic;
- giving students more guidance on what they need to do to improve;
- relating the assessments, including marking, more closely to A-level grades and standards;
- ensuring that annual reports to parents include more information on what students need to do to improve.

[Paras: 44; 54; 55; 81; 109; 116; 122; 135]

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7-11	50
	Sixth form	48
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		98

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 7-11							
Number	0	13	27	10	0	0	0
Percentage	0	26	54	20	0	0	0
Sixth form							
Number	3	11	26	8	0	0	0
Percentage	6	23	54	17	0	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	577	133
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	21	0

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	0	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	6	0

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	6

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	2
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	10

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	4.9
National comparative data	7.7

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.2
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2000	n/a	116	116

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Girls	116	116	113
	Total	116	116	113
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	100 (100)	100 (100)	97 (98)
	National	63 (63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	100 (97)	99 (98)	89 (85)
	National	28 (28)	42 (38)	30 (23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Girls	116	116	116
	Total	116	116	116
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	100 (100)	100 (100)	100 (100)
	National	62 (64)	66 (64)	62 (60)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	95 (100)	97 (95)	91 (90)
	National	31 (31)	39 (37)	29 (28)

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
	2000	n/a	84	84

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Girls	82	84	84
	Total	82	84	84
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	97.6 (98.8)	100 (100)	100 (100)
	National	47.4 (46.6)	90.6 (90.9)	95.6 (95.8)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	64.2 (62.5)
	National	38.4 (38.0)

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	n/a
	National	n/a

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

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	n/a	56	56

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	n/a	26.3	26.3 (24.8)	n/a	n/a	n/a
National		18	17.6 (17.9)	2.6	2.9	2.7

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

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

International Baccalaureate	Number	% success rate
Number entered for the International Baccalaureate Diploma and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all they studied	School	n/a
	National	n/a

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	2
Black – other	2
Indian	3
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	1
Chinese	3
White	696
Any other minority ethnic group	3

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	3	0
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	42.6
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.7

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	4.0
Total aggregate hours worked per week	134

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	78.1
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y13

Key Stage 3	23.9
Key Stage 4	22.2

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000/20001
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	£
Total income	1745356
Total expenditure	1721360
Expenditure per pupil	2484
Balance brought forward from previous year	146341
Balance carried forward to next year	170337

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	10.0
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	15.0

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	3
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	689
Number of questionnaires returned	279

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	37	50	8	4	1
My child is making good progress in school.	51	42	5	1	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	43	44	4	3	5
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	28	47	21	5	0
The teaching is good.	40	49	6	2	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	27	44	19	9	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	39	40	10	9	3
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	76	21	3	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	21	47	21	8	4
The school is well led and managed.	42	39	8	2	10
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	45	39	8	3	5
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	28	43	14	5	10

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

32. The school's performance overall in the A-level examinations in 2000 was very high in relation to the national average. When compared with all post-16 institutions, the results were well above average. The school has maintained its high performance in the 2001 examinations, although the average points score was marginally lower than that for 2000. The school's results have improved year-on-year since the last inspection, with a considerable increase in the proportion of students gaining the highest grades of A and B. In both 2000 and 2001, the results indicate that most students, and in particular the average and most capable, are making greater progress than their GCSE performance would suggest. The school has exceeded its own non-statutory target for improving the average points score in 2001. Retention and completion rates are very high. Very few students withdraw from courses during the sixth form and around nine out of ten students continue into higher education at the end of Year 13.

33. In 2000, nearly all students entered for the A-level examinations gained pass grades. Not all did so in biology, physics, history, sociology and general studies, but in all other subjects, there was a 100 per cent pass rate. The most successful subjects in 2000 were art and design, business studies/economics, English, French, geography, theatre studies and general studies. In these cases, the average points score for the subject was well above the national average and a much higher proportion of students than average gained the highest grades of A or B. The least successful subjects in 2000 were physics, sociology and history, which were below the national average figure for the average points score. In these three subjects, and also in German, the proportion of students gaining the highest grades of A or B was well below the national average and they did not achieve as well as their earlier GCSE results would suggest. When compared with similar schools, the results were above average in art, business studies/economics and French, and were broadly average in geography, English and general studies. They were below the average for similar schools in biology, chemistry, physics, sports science, history, sociology and German. In further mathematics, Spanish and Latin, the small number of entries makes national comparisons inappropriate, but the results in all three subjects were very high. The very small number of students who followed AS courses in Year 13 gained pass grades.

34. National figures are not yet available to enable clear judgements to be made about the A-level results in 2001. At grades A-E, most subjects maintained their 100 per cent pass rate. In biology, physics and sociology, there was an improvement in the percentage pass rate over 2000, but there was a decline in history, French and general studies. In mathematics, chemistry, physics, business studies/economics, sports studies, and particularly in sociology, there was an increase in the proportion of students gaining the highest grades of A and B. In the remaining subjects, there was a decrease in performance at the highest levels, particularly so in French. History remains the weakest subject and shows a decline from 2000 to 2001.

35. In the new AS examinations taken at the end of Year 12 in 2001, nearly all students attained grades A-E, with over a half gaining the higher grades of A and B. The most successful subjects were art and design and history, with all students gaining the highest grades of A and B. The results in history indicate that standards in this subject may be improving. The weakest subjects were mathematics (which reflected a situation found nationally) and psychology.

36. From the work seen during the inspection, which occurred at the beginning of the academic year, students are attaining above average standards overall, and in English, mathematics and art and design are attaining well above average standards. In most subjects, students have well developed research skills and a very good capacity for critical analysis and problem solving. Standards in history are broadly average, but below the standards found in other subjects. Although their subject knowledge is secure, students have not developed the higher order skills of analysis and synthesis sufficiently. Consequently, students in Year 13, particularly the higher attaining students, are achieving less well than their earlier results would suggest. In other subjects, through the challenge and thoroughness of the teaching and their very positive attitudes to work, most students,

especially the average and above average attaining students, are making at least satisfactory progress during their sixth form courses, broadly in line with their performance in the GCSE examinations at the age of 16. They make good progress in English, mathematics and art. Students are on course to meet the targets that they have set themselves. Some of the less capable students are making less progress than expected as they receive insufficient direct support and attention in some lessons. Consequently, they find some of the work difficult, lack confidence in contributing to discussions and lose concentration.

37. Students have very well developed skills of communication which enable them to cope well with the demands of their courses. They are particularly good at digesting and absorbing information and presenting findings coherently and, other than in history where there are some weaknesses in these areas, the majority have a good capacity to take and make notes and organise their work effectively. Students work very well together in a mutually supportive way to the benefit of everyone. Skills in the use of mathematics to support learning in their chosen subjects are above average. In one Year 12 geography lesson, students made very good use and application of statistical correlation methods. Students' skills in the use of ICT are satisfactory but not as well developed as their other skills. This is partly a result of the limited provision for ICT in the school until relatively recently. There has been a considerable investment in hardware and software and standards are now improving.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

38. All students in the sixth form have very positive attitudes towards the school and to their work. They are keen to succeed and they take an interest in other people's ideas. There is very full involvement in the life of the school and the wider community; for example, most Year 12 girls spend an afternoon each week at local primary schools, where they are much appreciated as classroom assistants. Many students do further community service through the Millennium Volunteers scheme, and some act as trained student counsellors, working with younger pupils in the school.

39. Their behaviour in lessons and around the school is excellent, providing a model for younger pupils to emulate. They arrive at lessons punctually and overall attendance is satisfactory. Relationships with teachers and one another are very positive and there is a strong sense of partnership in learning. In class discussions, for example in English and theatre studies, they show respect for differing viewpoints and collaborate very well in group work.

40. Through the School Council, they take responsibility and initiative: under their leadership, the school's pupils have raised large sums for Amnesty and other charities. They have shaped school policy to prevent bullying, and they show very good awareness of other people's feelings and needs. During the week of the inspection, a sixth former spoke to the whole school assembly and invited all pupils to contribute to a Book of Condolence that would be sent to the United States following the attack on the World Trade Centre. During their time in the sixth form, students develop the skills of independent study that will enable them to make a success of higher education and the world of work.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

41. The overall good quality of sixth form teaching is a significant factor in ensuring that the majority of students make good progress and achieve well in A-level and AS examinations. All of the teaching is at least satisfactory; over four-fifths is good or better; and just under a third is very good and occasionally excellent. Other than in history and ICT, where it is satisfactory, the teaching in other subjects is predominantly good. In art, the teaching is very good, which results in students producing work of high quality. There are examples of very good teaching in English, drama, mathematics, art, geography, music, physical education and business studies/economics, and some excellent teaching in English, mathematics and art. In these lessons, students make considerable gains in their learning. The characteristics of the most effective teaching and learning are varied. In a Year 12 further mathematics lesson and in a Year 12 theatre studies lesson, teachers built systematically on students' prior learning to introduce new concepts and ideas. The teacher's high level of subject expertise was used to good effect in directing a stream of questions to challenge students and make them think more critically in a Year 13 mathematics lesson. The use of targeted questioning in a Year 13 science lesson effectively probed students' understanding of current

theories on controlling plant growth. Some high quality feedback in a Year 12 geography lesson gave clear guidance to students on what they needed to do to improve.

42. A strong feature is the enthusiasm and commitment of teachers, together with the way they use their very good subject knowledge, to ensure that learning is purposeful, challenging and enjoyable. Students respond very well to their approaches, which are successful in maintaining their interest, attention and a high degree of involvement. Challenging, open-ended questions make intellectual demands on students in most lessons and are supplemented by clear explanations and helpful interventions, and, as the occasion requires, some direct teaching. Teachers structure work carefully, providing a variety of activities that enable students to learn effectively. In one Year 12 sports studies lesson on short-term and long-term memory, the teacher used highly relevant practical activities to reinforce theoretical concepts, enabling students to make good progress in increasing their understanding. Expectations throughout are generally high and nearly all lessons proceed at a challenging pace. Occasionally, lessons lack sufficient intellectual rigour, as for example in some history lessons, where the higher attaining students do not make as much progress as they should.

43. Students work productively and at a good pace in nearly all lessons. They are able to sustain their concentration well and have well developed skills of independent learning. Students in a Year 13 art lesson showed a high ability to take responsibility for directing and managing their own work. Students have a good capacity to read critically and follow their own lines of research. Some of their work shows evidence of independent research of high quality. Students have the necessary skills to cope with their courses and are appropriately prepared for learning beyond school. The majority of students contribute effectively in lessons and are confident in presenting their ideas and conclusions. Occasionally, students are not required to contribute enough in lessons and play too passive a role. This applies too often to less capable students, whose individual needs are not always identified or supported sufficiently in some subjects. Teachers manage their classes well. Relationships between teachers and students and students themselves are of a very high order, and ensure a productive and safe working environment for students to test out their thoughts and ideas. Students are good at supporting and helping one another, both in and out of lessons.

44. Staff and students are aware of their targets and for the most part understand how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. Most teachers give good feedback to students but this is not always recorded on their work. The quality of assessment, including marking, is variable, often good in mathematics, but sometimes inconsistent, for example in biology, physics and geography. In English, marking does not relate sufficiently to A-level or AS course criteria, which makes it more difficult for students to know how well they are doing. In history, assessment is not always used rigorously enough to inform planning and the next stage of students' learning. Homework is used effectively to support, reinforce and extend students' learning.

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

45. Curriculum provision in the sixth form is good. The courses offered, together with a number of enrichment activities, meet the needs of students and the school's aims well. The curriculum, with a choice of over twenty subjects at A and AS level, offers students a wide range of worthwhile opportunities. They include law and psychology, which are provided by means of a video conferencing link.

46. Planning in the majority of subject areas is good and students' individual programmes are carefully organised to ensure breadth and balance. Teachers know their students well and ensure that their needs are met effectively. Some study time is supervised and all students are allocated a small amount of time when they can leave the site to pursue personal interests.

47. The personal and social development programme is effective. A key skills course, including an ICT course in Year 12, and general studies in Year 13, contribute effectively to students' personal development. Higher attaining students are encouraged to follow courses such as further mathematics or to sit S papers in subjects such as French. There is some joint teaching with Dover Grammar School for Boys and effective arrangements with a local consortium of schools, which means that courses not offered in one school, such as vocational courses, can be provided in another. Religious education forms part of the general studies course in Year 13 and some specific

topics are covered in tutorial time in Year 12. The overall time allocated to religious education in the sixth form is insufficient and as a result, statutory requirements, an issue identified in the last report, are not met.

48. The school provides a wide range of extra-curricular activities, including the School Council, the Young Enterprise scheme, Young Engineers and visits to Brussels and Westminster. Students take part in a variety of musical activities such as concerts performed by the senior orchestra and choir, and also give freely of their time to encourage younger pupils by playing in the junior orchestra and supporting other musical activities such as the junior choir. They also participate in voluntary work within the community, for example, teaching French and Latin in neighbouring primary schools.

49. The provision of guidance about further and higher education opportunities and careers is good. Although students are encouraged to undertake 'work sampling' after their GCSE examinations, there is no provision of a work experience programme with the opportunity for students to prepare for and evaluate a specific work experience. Students are, however, involved in a key skills programme. This programme has been revised for this year to ensure that it meets the needs of students at the school more effectively and to enable the key skills to be applied in more challenging contexts. This, together with the extensive community service programme, gives most students the opportunity to work in a variety of situations, for example, in a local school as a classroom assistant.

50. Many of the elements of the careers and higher education programme are delivered by tutors as part of the personal and social education programme and focus on developing students' skills. The programme is supported by an enthusiastic and knowledgeable head of careers, who is readily available to students. The well-resourced library includes current and relevant information, which is readily accessible to all students, who are encouraged to use the Internet to further their research. Accommodation is good and suited to independent research and interviews.

51. The contribution of local schools to students' learning is very good. Local primary schools provide very good opportunities for students to undertake community service and they support the school's key skills programme, by providing students with the opportunity to apply key skills such as problem solving in real situations.

52. The provision for further developing students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is very good. The many students who study English literature have frequent opportunities to discuss and reflect on the values and beliefs of different people at different times. They consider the concept of redemption in *The Winter's Tale* and the nature of the human spirit in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Although the school does not fully meet the requirements to have a daily act of collective worship, whole-school assemblies provide regular opportunities for reflection on a range of moral issues, for example pride and prejudice. However, opportunities for developing students' spiritual awareness are not as well established or explicit as other aspects. The sixth form has a very strong moral framework, which is borne out by the students' excellent behaviour and concern for others. Students are strongly encouraged to take responsibility and show initiative, both in their own learning and in the school and local community. Their social development is actively encouraged in lessons, so that they are able to achieve an excellent level of co-operation, for example in rehearsing a play in theatre studies to perform to younger pupils. Through a very broad programme of extra-curricular activities, they are encouraged to appreciate their own cultural traditions and those of others.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

Assessment

53. Procedures for assessing and monitoring students' attainments and progress are very good. Performance data is carefully analysed by senior staff and the school uses a well-developed, internal, process called STEPS, which enables both students and staff to monitor students' academic progress on a systematic basis and to set clear targets. Students and their parents understand the system well. Academic monitoring is undertaken through individual student reviews twice each term and any problems that are identified are followed up with the students concerned. At the same time, commendations are given, in the form of individual letters from the headteacher to students and parents, for very good work and progress.

54. Individual departments assess students' work on a regular basis using a variety of procedures, including end of module tests, course work, assignments and practical work. The quality of the marking and assessment of some of the students' work lacks sufficient consistency, both across subjects and within departments. In many instances, the marking is not always sufficiently diagnostic, gives insufficient information on what students need to do to improve and is not always related enough to examination criteria and grades. This makes it more difficult for students to know how well they are doing.

55. Reports on students' attainments and progress are broadly satisfactory but contain insufficient information about students' attainment other than their estimated grade, how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. This makes it very difficult for parents to know how to help their daughter.

Advice, support and guidance

56. The educational and personal support and guidance given to students in the sixth form is very good. Students speak positively of the support that they receive and are confident that staff will listen to them and help them to resolve personal concerns and address issues relating to their work. Relationships between students and staff are very good, and students know they can approach any member of staff and will be listened to and any issues addressed sympathetically and supportively. The accessibility of tutors and the head of sixth form is a further significant strength in the personal support provided for students. The monitoring of students' personal development and the support provided benefits from very good informal sharing of information by teachers, tutors and the head of sixth form, combined with twice termly meetings between individual students and their tutors to review pastoral and academic progress and to set and review personal targets.

57. Helpful induction sessions are arranged for students entering the sixth form to introduce them to the learning styles and greater independence they will experience. Students receive very good advice about study techniques and guidance, such as that given to lower sixth form business education students in understanding the features needed for a good piece of coursework. As a consequence of this advice, together with continuous assessment, rigorous academic monitoring and reviews involving the students, they have a very good understanding of what targets they need to achieve to make good progress.

58. The school accurately records attendance of members of the sixth form and has implemented more robust procedures to monitor and improve attendance. It encourages all students to take responsibility for notifying the school when they are absent. The school has set itself a challenging target for improving sixth form attendance during the coming year, to 95 per cent from the current level of 91.5 per cent, and is working closely with students to achieve this target.

59. Guidance about careers and higher education opportunities is good. Students receive additional support from the Careers Service. The support provided by tutors and the head of careers, through specific advice and assistance, such as in completing personal profiles and UCCA forms, addresses the needs of all students and actively engages them in taking responsibility for action planning and making informed choices. The low level of funded Careers Service support provided last year (six days) has been increased in the current year to 18 days but this, together with the impact of the introduction of AS levels at the time of the year when external careers guidance is provided, means that the significant majority of students do not receive individual interviews and much of the external provision is delivered through group sessions and clinics. Tutors have been trained in teaching elements of the careers programmes through the personal and social education programme, in which the focus is on using resources to support research, the world of work and lifelong learning, decision making and action planning.

60. Arrangements for ensuring students' welfare and health and safety are good. Students know how to conduct themselves safely and can talk with confidence about safe practice in practical activities such as design and technology. Evacuation practices, checks of equipment and maintenance are carried out regularly and recorded. Regular inspections are made of the premises to identify any concerns and these are addressed. Faulty equipment is taken out of use until it is

repaired. A portfolio of risk assessments is being compiled and this is supported by reports of external specialists.

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

61. Parents' views of the sixth form are that, overall, provision is satisfactory. They express very positive views of the high expectations of the school and are pleased with the progress that students make and the quality of teaching. However, they express some concerns about the information that they receive about students' progress, the provision of homework, the range of extra-curricular activities and the closeness with which the school works with parents. Inspectors support the positive views of parents and judge that the information provided for parents is satisfactory, homework is used well to support students' learning and the school has an effective partnership with parents, which contributes to students' learning.

62. In discussions with current sixth form students during the inspection, it was clear that they have very good opinions of the sixth form and are very proud to be identified with the school. A little over one quarter of students in last year's sixth form responded to the students' questionnaire and expressed very positive views about the quality of teaching and the suitability of their sixth form course choices to their talents and aspirations. However, a minority of those responding to the questionnaire expressed concerns about some elements of sixth form provision, such as the help provided to enable them settle into the sixth form and the support that is available to assist them resolve personal problems. A significant minority expressed concerns that the school does not respond sufficiently to the views of students in the sixth form. The views expressed by the current sixth form, in some cases, reflect the way in which the school has responded to the concerns expressed by last year's sixth form. Sixth formers are fully involved in the community of the school and contribute to the student counselling team and in activities such as redecorating their own common room, which they see as benefiting not only themselves but also those who have yet to join the sixth form. Current students are generally very pleased with the support and advice that they receive and students in Year 12 have found the induction sessions very helpful in adjusting to the different learning styles experienced in the sixth form and the greater independence and self-reliance that is expected of them in their sixth form studies.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

Leadership and management

63. Leadership and management of the sixth form are good. The head of the sixth form has been in post for the past year and has implemented a number of changes that are having a beneficial effect on improving the quality of sixth form provision. Other changes, including the implementation of a more regular programme of monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning, are planned for the next phase of development. Students' views are canvassed more frequently and their comments carefully considered and taken into account. They have more opportunities to contribute to decisions that affect their studies in the sixth form, such as the content of the personal and social education programme. There is a clear focus on achieving academic excellence and an increasing emphasis on students' personal fulfilment. All staff, students and parents share the furtherance of these aims. There is a clear commitment to equal opportunity for all and relationships in the sixth form are of a high order.

64. Governors fulfil their responsibilities well in helping to shape the direction of the sixth form but they have not ensured that the provision for religious education and for a daily act of collective worship for students meet statutory requirements. They are well aware of the strengths and weaknesses in the sixth form and have welcomed the improvement in the staying-on rates.

65. Monitoring and evaluation procedures of the work of the sixth form are good and the school takes effective action to secure improvements, especially in raising standards. The school carefully analyses its performance data and uses it well to evaluate the effectiveness of its provision, especially in relation to subject performance in A-level and AS examinations. Where weaknesses are identified, senior managers take appropriate action to secure improvements. Targets are set for the sixth form as a whole. These include improvements in the average points score and a target of all students achieving at least three A-levels. In 2001, the school exceeded the average points score target and all but one student achieved three A-level passes. The school improvement plan identifies appropriate actions to support the achievement of the school's targets.

66. The school uses its resources well to support provision in the sixth form and its educational priorities are supported by careful financial management. Expenditure on the sixth form last year was slightly greater than the income it received but this situation does not appear to disadvantage other parts of the school significantly. Joint working arrangements with other schools are efficient and cost effective, and students from the schools involved benefit from access to a wider range of courses. The school currently has a considerable surplus but this money is appropriately earmarked for further building works to increase and improve the school's facilities. The principles of best value are applied satisfactorily to ensure that expenditure is cost-effective.

Resources

67. Staff are well qualified for the subjects they teach and there is a good match of subject expertise to the courses taught. This is shown to good effect in most lessons, where teachers' good subject knowledge is used effectively to provide a range of interesting and challenging activities for students to help them learn. Support staff, which have increased since the last inspection, are sufficient to meet the demands of the curriculum.

68. For the present numbers on roll, the sixth form accommodation is broadly satisfactory, but there are some deficiencies. The library provides a good focus for independent study and research and is well used by members of the sixth form. Whilst some of the classrooms are good, such as the new rooms for teaching some English lessons, the space available for teaching and storing materials and work in the art and design and technology areas is too small for some sixth form groups. Movement in these areas is restricted and art students often need to use the corridor and other areas for practical work. The impact of this unsatisfactory accommodation is that students are restricted in the size of pieces of work that they can produce, resources are limited by available storage space, and pieces of current work cannot be stored safely, with the consequence that project work may be accidentally damaged.

69. Resources for teaching and learning are satisfactory and have improved since the last inspection. Students have sufficient books for their use. Computers are available out of lesson time. The library is satisfactory and improving. Recent improvements in lesson presentation through computer-controlled white boards have been introduced into the school but have yet to make a significant impact on learning in the sixth form.

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

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

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2000.

2000 Data

GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Latin	1	100	n/a	100	n/a	4.0	n/a
Mathematics	1	100	56.0	0	10.6	1.0	1.2

2000 Data

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	18	100	88.7	56	43.0	6.6	5.9
Further Mathematics	3	100	n/a	67	n/a	6.7	n/a
Biology	22	91	88.3	41	33.8	5.6	5.3
Chemistry	14	100	89.5	43	42.4	6.6	5.9
Physics	10	90	88.5	20	40.8	5.0	5.7
Business Studies/Economics	7	100	87.5	71	37.2	7.7	5.3
Sport Studies	4	100	91.3	25	24.6	5.5	5.0
Art	9	100	95.8	89	44.1	8.7	6.4
Theatre Studies	4	100	98.8	75	35.8	8.0	6.5
Geography	16	100	92.3	56	37.5	6.9	5.7
History	13	85	88.9	23	34.4	4.5	5.4
Latin	1	100	94.6	100	59.1	8.0	7.1
Sociology	7	86	87.7	14	36.8	4.9	5.5
English	26	100	95.6	58	36.4	7.2	5.9
French	9	100	91.0	67	38.7	7.8	5.7
German	6	100	91.9	33	41.0	6.3	5.9
Spanish	1	100	90.1	100	40.5	10.0	5.8
General Studies	56	98	84.8	55	28.2	6.5	4.8

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

Mathematics

70. The focus was on mathematics, with some sampling of further mathematics. Standards on the further mathematics course are well above average and numbers have increased in Year 13 this year. Retention rates are high. In the two lessons seen, teachers' subject knowledge has a very positive impact on students' learning, as in a lesson on hyperbolic functions when the new work was closely related to earlier work with trigonometrical functions.

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

Strengths

- Standards are well above average and students are achieving well.
- Students' attitudes to their work are very good.
- Teachers' knowledge and understanding of their subject promotes students' learning well.

Areas for improvement

- Insufficient use is made of computers in the teaching of mathematics.
- Teachers' questioning does not promote discussion and learning enough.

71. The A-level examination results in 2000 for the proportion of students achieving grades A-E and the highest grades, A and B, were above average. In 2001, there was a rise in the proportion of students gaining the highest grades, approaching that of 1999, but without national figures, it is not possible to judge how significant the improvement is. The pattern of the last few years has changed following the introduction of the AS examinations as students re-assess their courses at the end of Year 12. Staffing difficulties last year affected standards. There is currently a smaller number of students in Year 13 than has been the case in the last four years.

72. Standards of work of current Year 13 students are well above average and above those indicated by the examination results in 2001. Students are achieving well in relation to their attainment at the start of the course. In statistics, students calculate accurately the product-moment correlation coefficient between two variables, and are able to draw the equation of the regression line of y on x . Students know the formulae for the expectation of a variable, and apply it to new distributions. The continuous dialogue between teacher and students has a good impact on learning and 'no stone is left unturned.' In a lesson to introduce integration by substitution, not all students were able to recall the basic double-angle formulae. Some errors were made in function of a function differentiation, \cos^3x , for example. Good use of question and answer by the teacher, and the students' ability to discuss their work together, resulted in very good learning by the end of the lesson. Year 12 students have made a good start to their course through their work on co-ordinate geometry in pure mathematics. In mechanics, students already solve simple problems involving connected particles. Their learning is excellent as the quality of the open-ended questions in the excellent teaching promotes effective discussion and understanding.

73. Teaching is good overall and students learn well as a result. No teaching is unsatisfactory and approximately one-third of the teaching is very good and sometimes excellent. The strength of the teaching lies in the teachers' very good subject knowledge, which is used effectively through quickly fired questions and different methods of working. Reference back to first principles is particularly helpful to students' learning, as in the solution of trigonometrical equations involving a range of solutions. There is not enough use of computers in this area of the curriculum to help teaching and learning. At present, whole-school demands restrict access to the school's equipment. Learning is most effective when discussion and students' contributions enable the lessons to move at a good pace. Homework is used well. Teachers' comments in their marking are helpful to students and particular difficulties are covered well in lessons. Assessment is good. The department is currently focusing on short tests of basic work on which new learning is based. In the lessons that are satisfactory overall, the planning does not always return to first principles and learning is inhibited

by a lack of rapid mental practice by way of emphasis and to clarify understanding. This sometimes leads to a lack of confidence in tackling new problems.

74. The good teaching and learning result from work in the subject that is led and managed well. There is a good commitment by the teachers in their work. They work well as a team. The option choices for students are good, allowing for an appropriate combination of modules. This allows an increasing number of students to study further mathematics.

SCIENCES

75. The focus was on biology and physics, but chemistry was also sampled. In chemistry, examination results were slightly above average in 2000 although students did not do as well as expected, considering their GCSE results. Unconfirmed results for 2001, however, show a considerable improvement with students doing much better than was expected in relation to their GCSE results. Retention rates are high. Two lessons were observed. In one, good teaching included a clear explanation of the electromagnetic spectrum, with students gaining an above average understanding of how atomic spectra are obtained. In the second lesson, pupils worked well and made good progress in developing their practical skills, when they investigated the amount of iron (II) oxalate present in spinach by means of a redox titration.

Biology

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

Strengths

- Results in 2000 showed a marked improvement. They were above the national average, particularly in the highest grades of A and B.
- Students have a good grasp of the underlying principles of the topics they are studying. They answer questions well, showing an appreciation of the concepts and ideas behind them.
- Teaching is good; lessons are well structured, with a range of activities that help students to build up their knowledge and understanding effectively.
- Students share ideas freely and work well together.
- Students' very positive attitudes to their work and their excellent behaviour are contributory factors to their good, and often very good, learning.

Areas for improvement

- Support for less capable students is not as good as it could be.
- Less capable students tend to be more passive in class discussion and need to be brought more into discussions.
- Marking is not always as thorough as it could be and there is often insufficient guidance as to how students can improve their work.
- In some lessons, there is insufficient application of biological knowledge and principles to unforeseen situations, or, in some cases, relating them to every day life.

76. The A-level examination results for 2000 were above average for all maintained schools, but were below average for similar schools. There was an increase in the proportion achieving the highest grades, A and B although the pass rate, grades A to E, was slightly down on the previous year. Unconfirmed results for 2001 show an improvement in the overall pass rate, A to E grades, and a corresponding rise in the average point score per student. However, the proportion of grades A and B was lower. All students completed the course. In relation to their GCSE results, they did not do quite as well as expected in their A-level examinations.

77. The standard of work of current students is above average and is slightly better than that indicated by students' results in the A-level examinations in 2000 and 2001. In Year 13, students' achievements in relation to the school's predictions based on their GCSE results are satisfactory overall, although for some they are much better.

78. In lessons, students achieve well as a result of effective teaching which demands much of them. In one lesson, a range of activities maintained interest and momentum. Students found out how scientific research in the past had resulted in current theories on plant growth substances. Having found out about plant hormones and the way they stimulate, or inhibit, a plant's development, they were able to understand how this knowledge resulted in various developments to aid gardeners and commercial growers. In another lesson, students drew on their previously acquired knowledge of the factors affecting photosynthesis to plan and carry out their own experiment. This enabled them to calculate the rate of photosynthesis at different concentrations of carbon dioxide. Students are developing good practical skills.

79. Students in Year 12 are only a little way into their course, but their achievements are matching the standard expected at this stage of the course. They have a good knowledge and understanding of the structure and function of the various components of living cells. In one lesson, students drew on their prior understanding of the structure of membranes to help them analyse the various ways in which substances enter and leave cells in order to maintain life.

80. Teaching is good overall and students learn well as a result. The best teaching is characterised by careful planning; effective use of clear learning objectives to set clear targets for students' attainment; well-chosen introductory material; and effective direct teaching and presentation. Systematic and helpful intervention by the teacher promotes pace and sustains the students' progress. Teachers' subject knowledge is very good and is well applied in raising the attainment of their students. Of the four lessons seen, two were not as dynamic as the others, and although good, did not result in such secure teaching and learning.

81. Students are sometimes encouraged to evaluate their own work, but the level and quality of teachers' comments and marking to help students improve are variable. Whilst expectations, support and guidance meet the needs of the average and above average attaining students, it is not always appropriately extended to less capable students. Consequently, they are much more passive learners and make relatively less progress. These are areas for improvement in the context of teaching that has many strong features.

82. Students learn well. They are attentive, work productively and respond well to the supportive teaching and different learning styles that they experience. They rose to the challenge of researching and presenting information on *auxins*, *gibberellins*, *ethene* and *cytokinins*, and then being questioned by their peer group. The level of mutual respect amongst students is evident in the open way they interact with one another and the staff. Some less capable students are not confident in offering ideas in more open discussion and are not always brought into question and answer dialogues as much as they could be.

83. The independent work which students undertake is well prepared and the tasks set complement the content of the lessons well. They extract information from books and use ICT, and compile their notes carefully. Skills in ICT are developing well, but their progress in data logging techniques is hindered by a lack of access to appropriate resources.

84. The good teaching and learning are supported by good curriculum planning. There is a commitment to building on what has already been achieved and to improving standards. Schemes of work, however, need some refinement so that there are clear references to assessment activities, opportunities for less capable students and key skills, including ICT. Target setting, based on an analysis of students' performance in tests is becoming well established, and is working well.

Physics

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

Strengths

- New and strong leadership in the subject.
- Staffing is stable for the first time in a number of years.
- The new course, introduced in September 2000, is being implemented successfully.
- The results of the AS examination for the first cohort going through the new course show significant improvement in standards.
- Teaching is now good: lessons are well structured with a range of activities that maintain interest and help to build up students' knowledge and understanding effectively.
- Students have a good grasp of concepts and apply them well in class work.

Areas for improvement

- The take up and retention rate is poor.
- Students do not achieve as well as their GCSE results in combined science would indicate.
- The development of new schemes of work for modules has begun and this needs to continue.

85. In the A-level examinations in 2000, the small numbers of students entered make national comparisons inappropriate. However, the results were below the national average for all maintained schools. In relation to their GCSE results, students did not do as well as expected. The unconfirmed results for 2001 show a significant improvement over previous years, however.

86. From the work seen, standards are above those expected nationally, and are better than the results in the A-level examinations in 2000 and 2001. Much of this is due to improved stability in the staffing within the department. Students show a good understanding of basic facts and concepts. For example, some Year 13 students, having studied some of the uses of physics in the food industry, were able to use their knowledge and understanding of viscosity to describe how practically they could ascertain the viscosity of honey.

87. Students in Year 12 are achieving well in relation to their prior attainment at GCSE. In one lesson, students planned and tackled rigorous investigative work using pendulums, light gates and electronic trap doors to determine the acceleration due to gravity of falling objects. Students were able to explain why acceleration is constant. In another lesson, pupils were able to use experimental results to calculate the internal resistance of a power supply.

88. The quality of teaching is good overall and students learn well as a result. Teachers display an excellent grasp of the subject in their questioning and explanations, and in the tasks they set. They provide effective mathematical support to help deepen students' understanding of the subject. They plan lessons carefully and usually make the aims of the lesson clear so that students know what they are expected to learn. Demanding questioning, designed to make students reflect and think critically, gives staff a good understanding of their strengths and weaknesses. High expectations and the enthusiasm of teachers create a positive environment for learning.

89. The quality of homework is good. However, marking varies considerably in quality. The best has very clear assessment schemes and the work is carefully annotated with corrections and identification of omissions. Students are aware of how to improve this work. The least successful marking, seen more frequently with the less capable students, notes that work is not up to A-level standard but then fails to provide any guidance on what they need to do to meet requirements.

90. Students learn well. They take a keen interest in practical lessons and develop their practical skills well. They respond positively to challenges and work effectively on their own or in a group, supporting and helping one another well. They talk and listen to each other maturely as part of their learning. Outside visits, for example to local hospitals, help students to understand the application of physics in medicine.

91. Leadership and management of physics are now good. Significant changes have taken place very recently, which indicates that necessary improvements can be made. A new teacher is

responsible for physics and has a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses within the subject area. Suitable plans are being drawn up to tackle underachievement and to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Some schemes of work have been rewritten, but others have yet to be done. There are very good procedures for assessing students' attainment and progress, through course work assignments, practical work and end of module tests. The use of assessment information to guide the next stage of learning and the curriculum is generally good, although it does not always meet the needs of the less capable students sufficiently.

92. The take up rate for physics is low and this is linked to the lower performance rate in the physical science aspect of GCSE and to the image provided in the lower school for the subject. It is here that the problem needs to be addressed and rectified.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

93. Work in design and technology was sampled. The first cohort of students taking this subject is currently in Year 13. In the AS level examinations in 2001, all students gained grades A-E, with two-thirds gaining grades A or B. Retention rates are high. Two lessons were observed. Both were good. The teachers' very good subject knowledge and effective questioning helped students to think more critically and to develop their research and organisation skills well.

BUSINESS

94. Work in business studies/economics was sampled. The A-level results have been consistently well above average over the past few years and almost all students gained the highest grades of A or B in 2001. In the AS examinations in 2001, all students gained grades A-E, with nearly all gaining grades A or B. Retention rates are high. Two lessons were observed. Both were at least good. In one very good lesson, the teacher paced the lesson well to sustain interest and involvement, gave clear explanations and through the quality of the questioning made intellectual demands on the students which enabled them to make very good progress in understanding the concept of price elasticity of supply.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

95. An ICT course has been introduced for the first time this year. One AS lesson in Year 12 was sampled, which was satisfactory.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

96. Work in sport studies was sampled. The A-level results were above average in 1999 and 2000. Standards have been maintained in 2001, with all students gaining grades A-E and over a quarter gaining the highest grades of A or B. Retention rates are high. Two lessons were observed, one of which was good and the other very good. In one, very good teaching included the careful structuring of work, including practical activities to reinforce theoretical concepts, and the use of open-ended questioning to check understanding. As a result, students made good gains in their understanding of short- and long-term memory.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

97. The school makes no provision for A-level or AS courses in this curriculum area.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

98. The focus was on art and design at AS and A-level, although music and theatre studies were sampled. In music, no students were entered for A-level examinations in 1999 or 2000. In 2001, all students gained grades A-E, with half gaining grades A or B. One lesson was observed. The enthusiasm of the teaching and challenging questions ensured that students remained totally focused and made very good gains in developing their skills in evaluating music of the Baroque period, attaining very high standards in the lesson. In theatre studies, the small numbers taking the A-level examinations in recent years preclude comparisons with national figures, but in 2000, all students

gained grades A-E, and three-quarters attained grades A or B. The results were broadly similar in 2001. Two lessons were observed. Both were at least good. In one, very good teaching actively involved students and made particularly effective use of their prior knowledge to analyse group dynamics. As a result, they made considerable gains in their understanding of acceptance and blocking techniques. In both subjects, retention rates are high.

Art

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

Strengths

- Excellent quality of diagnostic marking giving clear guidelines on how work can be improved.
- Provision of a supportive environment in which to work. By encouraging analysis and evaluation and the sharing of ideas and advice, dialogue of high quality takes place among students and with teachers.
- Extensive reference to the work of established artists, enriched through visits to museums and galleries both here and abroad, provides a context within which to work. Positive role models are provided through the study of female artists past and present.

Areas for improvement

- Planning does not take sufficient account of individual needs, especially for the less capable students.
- Further training in the use of ICT for the head of department.
- The facilities for working outside lesson times are inadequate.

99. The A-level results have been well above the national average, with all students gaining grades A-E, and the majority with Grades A or B, and have been so for at least the last three years. This trend looks set to continue with all students gaining grade A in the AS examinations in 2001. All students complete the courses and maintain the high standards achieved in the GCSE examinations.

100. The standards of work of current students are also well above average. Students in Year 13 demonstrate their high level of motivation and involvement in the intensely personal development of their work and are able to discuss perceptively their aims and objectives. Drawing and painting are generally very good with some examples of excellence in progress, for example figure studies and portraits inspired by Lucien Freud and Jenny Saville. The standard of preparatory work in sketchbooks is excellent. The process of enquiry and refinement is shown in detail and relates directly to major finished works.

101. Standards observed in Year 12 are above average and already show good development of skills from those needed at GCSE level. There is some very high quality tonal pencil drawing from observation, such as contorted eyes and mouths showing expressions of anxiety as part of research for the theme *Emotion*. Studying the life and works of Frida Kahlo provides context and enriches understanding of expressing oneself through art. Experimental work in a variety of media shows a high level of enquiry and self-motivation with students able to explain their own personal aims and objectives.

102. The quality of teaching is very good overall, with some excellent features, and as a result students learn very well. The principal features of teaching are the quality and range of subject knowledge, and therefore advice given to students, and the establishment of a supportive environment in which to explore their ideas and feelings. In one excellent lesson, a particularly good discussion with students giving evaluative reviews of one another's homework encouraged a high degree of self and peer analysis. This led students to gain in confidence and perception in their work. Any weakness in teaching is in the provision of inspiration for any students who struggle with the development of their ideas. Here, the use of ICT, digital camera and photocopier could liberate students by exploring new approaches to their work.

103. Students learn very well. They are attentive, work productively and respond well to the challenges and opportunities they are offered. Students support and help each other effectively and, in groups, talk and listen to each other maturely as part of their learning. Trips to museums and

galleries both in this country and abroad, including the Van Gogh museum in Amsterdam and the Tate Modern in London, have given students the ability to express opinions confidently because they feel secure in their background knowledge. They are looking forward to having somewhere in which to work outside lesson time and have ideas and plans about how to achieve this in the near future.

104. The very good teaching and learning result from good leadership and management of the department. There is a commitment to building on what has already been achieved and to maintaining high standards. The system of assessment is very effective, with an excellent standard of diagnostic marking informing the setting of targets. There is adequate monitoring of teaching within the school by line managers, with frequent lesson observations and departmental meetings encouraging the exchange of good practice.

HUMANITIES

105. The focus was on geography and history, but Latin and sociology were also sampled. No students have been entered for A-level Latin in the last three years. All students gained grades A-E in the AS examinations in 2001, with half gaining the highest grades of A or B. There are currently no students studying Latin in Year 12. One lesson was observed, which was good. The teacher's enthusiasm and very good subject knowledge ensured that students made good progress and achieved well. In sociology, the A-level results in 2000 were broadly average, but showed a considerable improvement in 2001 with a much higher proportion of students gaining the highest grades of A or B. One lesson was observed, which was good. In both subjects, retention rates are high.

Geography

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

Strengths

- A-level standards are well above average, and above those of similar schools.
- Students achieve well: they assimilate quickly and maintain progress as expected.
- Teaching is consistently good: teachers are well-informed, ask sharp questions and provide clear structure to lessons.
- There is good leadership of the subject.

Areas for improvement

- Ensuring greater consistency in guiding students on how to improve work, especially those who are less capable, through written comments on their assignments.
- Involving all students in discussion more effectively.

106. Standards overall are well above average, and above those of similar schools. In 2000, all students gained grades A-E in the A-level examination, and over a half gained the highest grades of A or B. In the A-level examinations in 2001, all students obtained grades A-E, but fewer students than in the previous year gained the higher grades, with no student gaining a grade A. A number of students whose coursework indicated potential for grade A under-performed in the examination. However, over the previous three years, standards have been consistently well above average. In the AS examination, nearly every student gained grades A-E, and two-fifths gained grades A or B. Of the students who followed the AS course last year, three did not continue to take A-level.

107. Observation of students in lessons and an analysis of samples of work confirm that standards on the A-level course are well above average. They are higher than reported at the time of the last inspection. Students begin sixth form work with GCSE grades that are well above average and they maintain these high levels in their AS and A-level.

108. Students rapidly absorb detailed facts about patterns and processes in human and physical geography, and explain their understanding very clearly. They use skills of analysis and interpretation very well to perceive relationships, using statistics, maps and photographs. Students use these skills, and sampling techniques, particularly well when they undertake independent fieldwork for their AS course environmental investigations. Higher attaining students show greater

ability in reading critically and identifying inconsistencies. Students use ICT appropriately and with much skill to analyse and present statistical evidence as graphs. They relate theory to current events. For example, a student used a newspaper photograph of the Seattle earthquake in March 2001 to explain the tectonic processes that produced these forces.

109. Overall, teaching is good, and some is very good teaching. Teachers' knowledge and understanding of geography are very good, and they use these effectively when questioning students. Students answer very well, keeping up with the rapid pace of the lessons, in response to teachers' high expectations. For example, in a lesson on sampling techniques, students deduced through question and answer how to gather evidence of water infiltration at three sites in the school grounds. Teachers plan the structure of lessons carefully so that learning builds on existing knowledge and understanding. In a Year 12 lesson on the use of statistical correlation, the teacher introduced Spearman's rank coefficient of correlation in stages to match the varied mathematical abilities of the class. Students successfully understood this method and applied it to an exercise working on their own. Teachers mark students' work regularly, but there is inconsistency in writing a comment on work. Students do not always know why their work is especially good or how it could be improved. Teachers often comment when they return work, but this lacks the permanence and consideration of a written assessment. There are too few informative comments on their work to help students with relative weaknesses.

110. Students learn well. They respond quickly to questions and enjoy being challenged, for example to find a way of testing the hypothesis that 'there is no difference in the characteristics of two collections of pebbles'. Students become more confident in their own abilities and opinions in the sixth form. They read articles critically and do not accept readily all that is written. For example, a student questioned an article about managing a section of the Californian coast that stated more beach material had been removed than had arrived. Students have very good attitudes towards work and accept the demands of the courses cheerfully. They develop very good study skills through guidance from their teachers and opportunities to conduct independent fieldwork to test their hypotheses. However, where the teacher provides too great an input, a few students do not participate sufficiently in lessons.

111. The subject is well led. The scheme of work for the new AS course shows much careful thought by the two teachers of the subject. It includes a variety of teaching methods, such as debate, role-play, small group work and brainstorming. The choice of fieldwork links well with the course, and there is judicious use of case studies to illustrate geographical ideas. A scheme for the new A2 syllabus is being developed in a similar way. Resources are good, and include a new interactive computer linked whiteboard.

History

Overall, the quality of provision in history is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- Teachers have good subject knowledge, which encourages the interest and enjoyment of students.
- The use of a variety of teaching strategies, in which discussion is well managed and teachers' questioning is perceptive and sensitive.
- Students display good historical knowledge to substantiate arguments and reach historical judgements.

Areas for improvement

- The level of students' performance in the A-level examination needs to be raised, and the proportion of the highest grades of A and B increased.
- Although students have a good historical knowledge, they need to develop the higher order skills of analysis and synthesis.
- In the management of the department, there is insufficient monitoring of teaching and learning; in the use of assessment to inform teachers of students' needs and curriculum planning; and in the development of a detailed scheme of work.
- ICT is not used to support teaching and learning adequately.

112. Students' performance in the A-level examinations declined in 2000, and the results were below the national average, with a lower than average proportion of students gaining the highest grades of A or B. In the previous two years, the results were above average, representing an improvement on the examination results in history at the time of the last inspection. However, although results in 2001 at A-level continue to show a decline in standards, there is a significant improvement in the AS examinations, with all students achieving grades A or B. All students who start the A-level course complete it, although the achievement of the higher attaining students does not reflect the level of their previous attainment at GCSE. Students do far less well in history than in their other subjects.

113. Standards of work of current students in Year 12 are broadly average and their achievement overall is broadly satisfactory in relation to their GCSE results. All students commit themselves fully to their work, and their attainment is what might be expected at this early stage in the AS course. The overall performance of the current A-level group in Year 13 is of an average standard, although all the students had above average GCSE results and gained grades A and B in their AS examinations at the end of Year 12. Students are not achieving as well as their performance in the GCSE and AS examinations would indicate. The improvement necessary for higher attaining students to achieve A and B grades, identified in the last inspection report, has not been maintained.

114. Students have good historical knowledge, which they are able to recall accurately to substantiate arguments and reach historical judgements. They are confident in the use of both primary and secondary sources, and are able to evaluate these effectively. In their discussion on Cromwell's Major Generals, they recognise and comment confidently on how and why events, people and issues are interpreted and represented in different ways. Their written work is variable in quality; in many cases, course notes are not well-organised or sufficiently structured to aid learning. Essays on the Reformation indicate good historical knowledge, but not a good command of the higher order skills of analysis and synthesis. Students' work shows evidence of independent study and research, using the printed word and ICT. However, information gained from the Internet is not always sufficiently edited and evaluated.

115. Students make satisfactory progress in their sixth form history course, both in their thinking and writing skills. This results from sound teaching and from their own commitment to study, their independent work at home, and the use they make of the department library. Teaching is satisfactory overall, and occasionally good. Teachers' subject knowledge is good, lesson objectives are clear, and lessons planned to offer enjoyment and interest to students. Discussion is well managed, and questioning perceptive. However, although students work productively, there is, in some lessons, insufficient intellectual rigour. The progress made by higher attaining students is, consequently, unsatisfactory. Teachers' subject knowledge enables them to offer a variety of teaching strategies, which encourage students to take a more active involvement in lessons than was observed during the last inspection. Students work in pairs, as well as in small groups, analysing documentary sources to increase their knowledge of the terminology and practices of the mediaeval church, and the importance of the Major Generals in the Great Rebellion. Other approaches include memory-jogging exercises, and the use of video clips.

116. The relationship between teachers and students is very good, being relaxed yet respectful. Students respond to the variety of activities, and show commitment to their work. Teachers' marking of completed essays is thorough and helps students focus on their weaknesses, particularly the need for critical analysis rather than a description of events. Consequently, students' essay writing is improving over time. However, there is insufficient evaluation or guidance to improve their note taking, either in class or in their independent research. The school's assessment procedures are followed, but the process does not influence planning sufficiently or ensure that students' needs are adequately met.

117. An experienced head of department ensures a commitment to good relationships and equality of opportunity for all. The teaching staff are well qualified and suitably deployed. There is a shared commitment to improvement and the capacity to succeed. Recently, a new syllabus has been introduced in an effort to raise standards, but the course requirements have yet to be developed into an effective scheme of work. Monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning are minimal and insufficiently developed. Accommodation and resources within the department are sufficient to

meet the needs of the curriculum, and students have access to additional texts in the departmental library. Although the use of ICT has increased since the last inspection, it does not yet make a significant contribution to teaching and learning. The head of department organises a range of appropriate visits in conjunction with the history department of the University of Kent and students benefit from contact with university lecturers.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

118. The focus was on English, French and German.

English

Overall, the quality of provision in English is good.

Strengths

- A-level results are well above the national average and close to those in similar schools.
- Students make good progress and standards of work seen during the inspection are well above average.
- Teaching is good: teachers have very good subject knowledge and high expectations.
- Management of students is excellent.
- Students work together very well and learn from each other very effectively, especially in Year 13.

Areas for improvement

- Although marking is thorough and helpful, students' regular assignments are not given gradings that can be related to A-level standards.

119. Standards at A-level are well above average and close to similar schools. In 2000 and 2001, all students gained grades A-E. The proportion of students gaining the highest grades of A and B has consistently been well above the national average. Students make good progress from a high level of attainment at GCSE. Retention rates are high.

120. The work seen during the inspection confirms these standards. Students show a well above average understanding of the social and intellectual context of the books they read. They organise their ideas very well and justify them with close reference to the text. When writing about plays such as *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Year 13 students made very perceptive comments on the characters and their self-images. They make good progress in developing a fluent critical style to back up their responses to a wide range of classic and modern texts that ranges from Shakespeare to *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*.

121. The teaching of English is good. A very positive atmosphere in the classroom is achieved because relationships between teachers and students are very good. Students feel able to take risks and develop their thinking because they know they will not be put down. Their interest is stimulated and maintained by a variety of approaches, including pair or group discussion and presentations to the class. Students are actively encouraged to widen their reading and their awareness of the context in which each book is set. For example, one student reported on a television documentary about Mussolini that threw light on their reading of a chapter from *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*. When discussing Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, a Year 12 student showed exceptional awareness of the debate about the nature of human existence that was going on at the time. Students often follow their own lines of research, including information from the Internet. The pace of lessons is challenging and teachers' expectations are high. Because lessons are well planned, the students are able to build on prior knowledge and constantly test out their ideas in discussion. They have confidence in their teachers because of their very good subject knowledge: they are able to make close references to the text. All students are fully included in class work through the teachers' excellent management.

122. Overall, the students' response to English is very good. They enjoy their lessons and work very hard to succeed. They listen very closely to the teacher and to each other, and show genuine respect for differing opinions. In most lessons, they contribute very readily to discussions. In the

students' view, the popularity of English as an A-level choice is largely due to the quality of teaching they experienced earlier in the school. Their preferred way of learning is a good balance between presentation by the teacher and opportunities to analyse and discuss the text themselves, and in most lessons, they have this experience. They appreciate the helpful marking and punctual return of their work, but many are uncertain about their progress in relation to AS and A-level grades.

123. The leadership and management of English are good. The department is maintaining a well-structured and focused approach to the study of literature. The quality of teaching and the standards achieved are regularly monitored and the provision reviewed. There is a good balance of experience and expertise in the teaching staff. Accommodation is satisfactory, and the teaching resources - both books and audio-visual aids - are in good supply and well used. The school librarian ensures that relevant background reading is available as the set books change from year to year.

124. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. More students now gain the highest grades at A-level. Their contribution to class discussion has increased and they are challenged more to develop as independent thinkers.

MODERN LANGUAGES

French

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

Strengths

- A strong team of enthusiastic teachers with very good subject knowledge.
- A high percentage of good teaching.
- A well managed department operating consistently.
- The excellent behaviour and positive attitudes of students.
- The contribution made to students' social, moral and cultural development.

Areas for improvement

- Ensure that the needs of all students, including the less capable, are met.
- Improve feedback to tell students how to improve both language quality and content.
- Develop independent learning further.

125. Results in the A-level examinations in 2000 were well above standards nationally and above those for similar schools. All students achieved grades A–E and two-thirds gained the highest grades of A and B. Two students entered for Special Papers passed with merit. The A-level results dropped significantly in 2001 with a higher number of students entered for the examination. In the AS examinations in 2001, all students attained grades A-E and two-thirds gained grades A or B.

126. Standards in French in the work seen in Year 13 were above national expectations for this stage of the course. This is a higher standard than the previous year's A-level results would indicate. Regular tests on grammar are helping to improve standards. By the end of Year 12, students attain above average standards. Higher attaining students talk perceptively about issues relating to the Afghanistan/American crisis, making shrewd comments about recent television coverage. Average attaining pupils use a variety of expressions effectively to analyse the British education system.

127. Overall, achievement is satisfactory. Although students made good progress in the lessons observed, analysis of their work shows that progress over time, particularly for the less capable linguists, is not as good. Teachers do not always give these students enough advice about how to improve their work. As a result, some students who make good progress at the start of the course slow down as the work becomes more challenging.

128. Teaching is good overall. Teachers have clear aims and lessons are taught at a brisk pace. Most lessons begin with effective reviews of previous learning. Teachers are enthusiastic and use French well. As a result of the good teaching, learning is also good and is enhanced by the students' good attitudes and excellent behaviour. In one lesson, although satisfactory overall, the learning was less secure as students were not required to contribute actively to the learning and their

organisational skills were underdeveloped. Occasionally, teachers do not spend enough time ensuring that all members of the group have fully grasped the concepts being taught, with the result that a few students do not progress as quickly as the rest. Some students have weak organisational and learning skills, and not enough is being done at present to ensure that they order their work effectively, or to show them how to do better. In a Year 12 French lesson, for example, although higher attaining pupils skimmed and scanned a reading text well to extract information about the customs surrounding marriage in France, less capable students had difficulties with one or two questions and did not have the necessary skills to know how to go about finding the answers.

129. Judgements about leadership and management of French, which are the responsibility of the head of modern languages, are included at the end of the next section.

German

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

Strengths

- A strong team of enthusiastic teachers with very good subject knowledge.
- A high percentage of good teaching.
- A well managed department operating consistently.
- The excellent behaviour and positive attitudes of students.
- The contribution made to students' social, moral and cultural development.

Areas for improvement

- Ensure that the needs of all students, including the less capable, are met.
- Improve feedback to help students improve both language quality and content.
- Develop independent learning further.

130. The A-level results in 2000 were similar to the national average, with all students gaining a pass grade. At the highest grades of A and B, the results were below the national average and well below that for similar schools. They have been at this level for three years, and the picture in 2001 is broadly similar. Students do less well in German than they do in other subjects. In the AS examinations in 2001, all students gained a pass grade, nearly all attaining grade A or B.

131. In the work seen, standards in German are above expectations for the course, and higher than the A-level results last year would indicate. By the end of Year 12, standards are also above expectations. Using sophisticated German, higher attaining students talk fluently about the problems facing Germany after the Second World War; less capable students join the discussion using simpler structures.

132. Students' achievement in German follows a similar pattern to French and is satisfactory overall. Students achieve well in lessons but not all students, particularly the less capable, achieve as well over time because they are not getting enough support to help them to cope with more challenging work.

133. Teaching is uniformly good. Teachers have high expectations. They make good use of questioning and ensure that every student is fully involved. They use a variety of activities to practise their language skills, as in a Year 12 lesson where students analysed a series of advertisements in German to identify their ideal date. Visual aids such as the whiteboard and the overhead projector are used effectively to illustrate, for example, the changing face of Germany following the Second World War. As a result of the good teaching, learning is also good. Students work well together to attain the highest standards. They cover a lot of ground in a short amount of time. They use well-developed learning skills to enhance their acquisition of language. In a Year 13 lesson, for example, students used power point presentations effectively to illustrate a talk about changes in the environment and resulting pollution. They use dictionaries well. Behaviour and attitudes were uniformly very good in all lessons observed.

134. Management of the modern languages department, which includes both French and German, is good. The head of department provides clear educational direction and the department has a

shared commitment to raising standards and a good capacity for further improvement. Teachers make effective use of good resources and ICT.

135. Teachers assess work thoroughly and prepare students well for examinations. Higher attaining students are given good advice and guidance on how to improve their work but this is not always the case for less capable students who need more support. Students redraft and correct their work well and improve their performance in doing so.

136. Students' social, moral and cultural knowledge and skills are very effectively developed in both French and German. Ample opportunities are provided for discussion of topical subjects such as the chemical explosion in Toulouse and its effect on the environment. Additional resources made by teachers, who are themselves native speakers of French and German, such as video recordings of news and events, enhance students' cultural understanding.