

INSPECTION REPORT

VARNDEAN SCHOOL

Brighton, East Sussex

LEA area: Brighton and Hove

Unique reference number: 114579

Headteacher: Mr Andy Schofield

Reporting inspector: Dee Wheatley
3538

Dates of inspection: 22 – 26 October 2001

Inspection number: 199172

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Community

Age range of students: 11 – 16

Gender of students: Mixed

School address: Balfour Road
Brighton
East Sussex

Postcode: BN1 6NP

Telephone number: 01273 561281

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Appropriate authority: Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Juliet McCaffery

Date of previous inspection: 24/11/1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
3538	D Wheatley	Registered inspector	Equal opportunities	What sort of school is it? How high are standards – the schools' results and students' achievements How well are students taught? How well is the school led and managed? What should the school do to improve further?
19693	S Hall	Lay inspector		How high are standards – students' attitudes, values and personal development How well does the school care for its students? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
19278	R Allan	Team inspector	Mathematics	
16434	R Samways	Team inspector	English	
22865	C Jones	Team inspector	Science	
18032	I Randall	Team inspector	Information and communication technology	
2501	R Allison-Smith	Team inspector	Art	
3238	K Simmonds	Team inspector	Design and technology	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to students?
13228	M Foley	Team inspector	Geography	
17732	D Martin	Team inspector	History	
13007	C Wakely	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	
15866	J Forster	Team inspector	Music	
1085	J Laver	Team inspector	Physical education	
16546	G Langtree	Team inspector	Religious education	
27058	K Cannon	Team inspector	Special educational needs; English as an additional language	
13048	A Boyden	Team inspector	Business education	

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Varndean School is a Technology College with a comprehensive intake of boys and girls aged 11 – 16, situated in Brighton. The school is oversubscribed and there are regular appeals for admission. With a roll of 1199, it is bigger than average. The students are predominantly white although 69 (over five per cent which is a larger than average proportion) are from minority ethnic backgrounds, including Indian, Bangladeshi, African, Caribbean, Pakistani, and Chinese. Just over half of these students require support in learning English; the remainder are confident English speakers. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is broadly average. Students represent the full range of socio-economic backgrounds. The proportion of students with special educational needs, at 24 per cent, is above average. The main needs catered for are difficulties with reading and writing, emotional and behavioural difficulties and, to a lesser extent, hearing, visual or other physical impairment. The attainment on entry is below average overall although it has improved in the last two years.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Varndean is a very good school. Standards are well above average at Key Stage 4 (Years 10 and 11); they are average at Key Stage 3 (Years 7 – 9). The achievement of students is good at both key stages as a result of the effective teaching. The school has achieved national recognition as a Beacon School, awarded for excellence in key aspects of its work. Its procedures to ensure all students benefit from their time in school are very good. The leadership and management are very good. There is a strong focus on improvement, which has accelerated in the last two years with the advent of the present headteacher. The measures taken are clearly benefiting the teaching, learning and the curriculum provision. The school has excellent capacity, including the vision, drive and expertise, to improve further. The school's income and expenditure are above average and given the well above average standards and good achievement overall, the school provides very good value for money.

What the school does well

- The well above average standards, overall, at GCSE.
- The very good achievement in history, business studies and art and design at Key Stage 4, and in drama throughout the school.
- The strong strategic leadership of the headteacher and governors.
- The very good moral and social development of the students.
- The very wide and varied range of extra-curricular opportunities which considerably enhance the learning.
- The excellent support for the students' personal development.
- The high quality staff development.
- The very good financial planning.

What could be improved

- The arrangements by which assessment data is used to set targets and track students' progress are not wholly effective.
- The programme of risk assessments for the school is not complete.
- Achievement in religious education at Key Stage 4 is unsatisfactory because there is insufficient teaching time.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in November 1997. Improvement is good overall and there has been a real acceleration in the measures taken in the last two years. Standards have fluctuated to some extent since then but considerable improvement is reflected in the most recent results. A number of good strategies taken to improve the teaching and learning are bearing fruit in improved achievement. There have been very substantial improvements to the accommodation, to information and communication technology (ICT) provision, staff development and to arrangements for student support. A successful bid for phase two of Technology Status has also been achieved and the school engages in considerable outreach work supporting partner schools, particularly in ICT. This is highly valued by those involved. Effective action has been taken to address the key issues in the last report. Action on one of the issues, e.g. the monitoring and evaluation of teaching, has been so effective that it is recognised as an area of excellence in the award of Beacon Status. The lack of breadth in the curriculum has been addressed and there is now a broad and motivating curriculum at Key Stage 4. However, some aspects of balance, such as the time for religious education, still require attention. Assessment and marking are satisfactory in most areas. Very good progress has been made in revising the management structures and roles. This has been done with a clear focus on their impact on teaching and learning. The achievement of students has improved in the areas identified in the last report, i.e. ICT, modern foreign languages, food technology, and for girls generally.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved at the end of Year 11 based on average point scores in GCSE examinations.

Performance in:	compared with				Key well above average A above average B average C below average D well below average E
	all schools			Similar schools	
	1999	2000	2001	2001	
GCSE examinations	A	B	A	A	

At the age of 14, the students' results in the 2001 National Curriculum tests were above average in English and in line with the average in mathematics and science. The proportion achieving the higher levels (6 and above) was below average in mathematics and science. Boys performed better than girls in all three subjects. However, whilst the girls' achieved better results than girls nationally in English, this was not the case in mathematics and science. The inspection, however, did not find that girls' achievement lagged behind that of boys. The students' achievement in English is good across the board. In mathematics, the achievement is good overall, and that of students with special educational needs and English as an additional language is satisfactory. Achievement in science is satisfactory overall.

The school's overall GCSE results, based on the average points score, were well above the national average in 2001. They improved on the 2000 results, which were above average. With regard to the proportion of students obtaining five or more A* - C grades, the results were above average. The inspection showed that students of all abilities, including those with English as an additional language, special educational needs, and the most able, achieve well at Key Stage 4. Compared with schools which achieved similar results at the end of Key Stage 3, two years earlier, the results were in the top five per cent of schools

nationally. Whilst, the school's trend line for the five years to 2000 was below the national, indicating that the rate of improvement, year on year, was less than that found nationally, the 2001 results have considerably improved this picture. The subjects that performed best at GCSE in 2001 were history, where results were well above average, and English, drama, design and technology, and GNVQ information and communication technology (ICT), where results were above average. Girls attained more of the higher grades in history, and they achieved, overall, better than boys in mathematics, modern languages, science, art and physical education. Boys performed as well as girls in English, design and technology, ICT and geography and better in business studies. The inspection confirmed the well above average standards in history and drama, and found above average attainment in English, mathematics, design and technology, business studies, geography, music, and art. However, whilst the standards in religious education are average, owing to the good teaching, the achievement overall is unsatisfactory because there is insufficient teaching time for the subject.

Extensive data analysis is used to set targets at a whole school level and for individual students. The overall GCSE target for 2001 was not achieved because it was unrealistic i.e. when decided upon over two years ago it was not related to the prior attainment of the students. Current targets need a greater element of challenge. The use of assessment data to set targets for students and track their progress is not fully developed and the process is not sufficiently co-ordinated across the school.

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Good overall; the students' enthusiasm has a positive impact on their progress.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good. Students behave well; they are trustworthy and show respect for people and property. They also co-operate and support each other well.
Personal development and relationships	A strength of the school. Students are enabled to become mature and confident; they exercise responsibility very well.
Attendance	Good. Attendance is above the national average.

The atmosphere in the school is very positive. There is a high level of trust and mutual respect at all levels. Students enjoy taking responsibility and helping others, for example, through the 'buddies' initiative, whereby older students help younger ones with their reading. They co-operate very well, being sensitive to each others' opinions and ideas. There are fewer exclusions than in similar schools.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of students:	Years 7 – 9	Years 10 – 11
Quality of teaching	Very 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 teaching is good overall, and there is a considerable proportion of very good and excellent teaching at both key stages, which promotes effective learning. Only in four lessons during the inspection was the teaching found to be unsatisfactory. The teaching of students with special educational needs is good, that of students with English as an additional language is very good. The strong focus on improving teaching in recent years is evident in the very good teaching seen at Key Stage 3, although it is not yet wholly reflected in raised standards at the key stage.

The teaching is very good in English. Teachers know their subject well and inspire students with their enthusiasm. In mathematics, the teaching is satisfactory overall at Key Stage 3 and good at Key Stage 4. There is more variability in quality at Key Stage 3, from well planned lessons where expectations are high to one where the objectives were not appropriate and students were not provided with sufficient support. In science, the situation is reversed with teaching good at Key Stage 3, and satisfactory at Key Stage 4. Good challenge and pace were evident in the best lessons. Where the teaching is less effective, a restricted range of activities and too much teacher direction reduced the opportunities for students to contribute.

In other subjects, the teaching is very good in ICT at Key Stage 3 and in history, design and technology, business studies and art and design at Key Stage 4. It is good in drama and music at both key stages. It is good in all other subjects, and excellent lessons were seen in several subjects, most particularly in history and geography. In these lessons, the teachers demonstrated a skilled repertoire of techniques, which, linked to very thorough subject knowledge, great optimism and high quality resources, really motivate students. Two of the unsatisfactory lessons were due to inexperience and lack of familiarity with the group. In a physical education lesson, the learning was unsatisfactory because of the inadequacy of the accommodation, despite a valiant effort by the teacher to make the most of it. The teaching of literacy skills is good; there is an effective policy and a good level of staff awareness. There is not yet the same consistency in the attention to numeracy across the school.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good breadth at both key stages. Statutory requirements are met but there is insufficient time for religious education at Key Stage 4.
Provision for students with special educational needs	Very good. The identification of needs and planning to meet them is thorough.
Provision for students with English as an additional language	Very good. Students benefit from very well planned provision and teaching expertise and make very good progress in learning English.
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural, development	Good overall. Provision for moral and social development is very good. That for cultural is good. Provision for spiritual development is satisfactory but occasionally opportunities to promote this aspect are missed.
How well the school cares for its students	Good. Very good pastoral care arising from very well co-ordinated 'student support services', and effective academic

	monitoring overall.
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The links with parents are effective. The quality of information provided for parents is good. The curriculum is reasonably balanced but the reduced time for religious education at Key Stage 4 is affecting the learning. A good range of extra, motivating, courses is provided at Key Stage 4. The range of extra-curricular activities is very good, particularly in drama, music and physical education. The provision of personal and social education (PSE) and careers guidance is good and very good links with the community have a positive impact on students' development.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good. Strong leadership from the head and governors. The strategic planning is high quality with a strong emphasis on improvement. The leadership of subjects is very effective.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Very well. The governors are very well informed about the school's strengths and weaknesses. They are very effective in carrying out their strategic and monitoring roles.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good. The monitoring and evaluation of teaching and standards is effective. The use of target setting to raise standards is not fully developed.
The strategic use of resources	Very good. Financial planning is very closely linked to improvement priorities. Income is above average, standards are well above average, the school provides good value for money.

The accommodation has been very considerably improved since the last inspection, including the provision of new buildings, to provide high quality accommodation for English, humanities, religious education, science and modern foreign languages. However, the lack of adequate accommodation for physical education affects the learning. Resources are good overall and there has been extensive improvement in ICT resources. The match of staff to the school's teaching and management needs is good. The headteacher has a strong strategic vision, which he has deployed very skilfully to move the school forward on several fronts in the last two years. His expertise, with that of the very effective governing body and key staff, provides excellent capacity to improve the school further. The principles of best value are very well applied.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children like the school. • The good behaviour. • Their children are expected to work hard. • Their children make good progress. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How closely the school works with parents. • The information that the school provides for parents. • Some parents felt there was too little homework; others that there was too

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The willingness of staff to discuss parents' concerns.	much.
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The inspection team agrees with the parents' positive views of the school. Students made clear how much they like and value the school. Overall, the inspection team found no cause for concern with regard to the issues raised by some parents. The links with parents are good. The school makes stringent efforts to communicate with parents, to provide information and to be accessible, using direct mail, email and website access. In addition, their views are sought via surveys. The school investigates complaints thoroughly and is open in acknowledging when mistakes have been made. The quality of curriculum and other information provided is good and homework makes a satisfactory contribution to learning.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

1. The attainment on entry is below average overall. However, the performance is not uniform across all years. For instance, the intake data for the current Years 9, 10 and 11 indicates below average standards when these students joined the school but that for the current Years 7 and 8 shows an improving picture, particularly in English.

2. At the end of Key Stage 3 (Years 7 – 9), the results in the National Curriculum tests in 2001 were above the national average in English, and in line with that for similar schools (based on free school meal data). For students of all abilities, including those who are the most able, students with English as an additional language (EAL) and those with special educational needs (SEN), progress is good. In mathematics and science, the national test results in 2001 were in line with the national average and below that for similar schools. The proportion of students achieving the higher levels (6 and above) was below average in mathematics and science. The school's overall performance trend (over recent years) at the key stage is below that found nationally. Boys performed considerably better than boys nationally in English. In mathematics and science also, boys performed better than girls, whose results were below average. However, the achievement of girls and boys observed during the inspection in both subjects was satisfactory.

3. At GCSE, the school's results in 2001, based on the average point score, were well above the national average for both boys and girls. They represented an overall improvement on the 2000 results which were above average. The proportion of students achieving five or more A* - C grades in 2001 was above average, as was the percentage of the highest, i.e. A*/A, grades achieved. Compared with schools, which achieved similar results at the end of Key Stage 3, two years earlier, the results were in the top five per cent of schools nationally. Whilst, the school's trend line for the five years to 2000 was below the national, indicating that the rate of improvement, year on year, was less than that found nationally, the 2001 results have considerably improved this picture. Work seen during the inspection confirmed that the standards of the oldest students are above average. Students of all abilities, including those with SEN, EAL and the most able, achieve well overall at the key stage.

4. The school undertakes extensive data analysis and is using it to provide performance targets for students. However, this work is not yet wholly effective in promoting higher standards because:

- some of the data is inaccurate and there is insufficient whole school co-ordination of how the targets are used, which results in variability across departments;
- students are unclear about their targets and/or what to do to achieve them, although the picture is better at Key Stage 4;
- The targets do not take sufficient account of teacher assessment of individual student potential to improve, i.e. how quickly a student can overcome shortcomings in his work with the right teaching and support. This results in the targets being somewhat divorced from the individual in that students do not see the connection to their day-to-day learning. Some are not familiar with the level or grade descriptors nor how to improve aspects of their work to reach a higher grade or level.

5. With regard to the whole school GCSE targets, those set for 2001 were not achieved because they were wholly unrealistic, when decided upon, over two years ago. They were not related to the prior attainment of the cohort (year group). By contrast, current cohort targets are closely based on aggregated prior attainment data for individuals but there is still a need to ensure there is a sufficient element of challenge in the targets, identified through the 'student potential' dimension mentioned above.

6. In English, the overall provision¹ is very good. The standards being attained by the oldest students at Key Stage 3, are above average overall although the proportion of higher levels (6 and above) achieved in the 2001 national tests for 14 year olds, was slightly below average. However, boys achieved better than boys nationally in the tests. In the work seen during the inspection, the achievement of both boys and girls was good. The systematic and effective approach to spelling and technical skills in the good teaching at the key stage is reflected in quality of work produced. At Key Stage 4, GCSE results are above the national average. This was also found to be the case in the work seen during the inspection. The very good teaching, closely linked to the examination requirements, enables students to produce an impressive range of writing for their GCSE coursework. The achievement of particular groups, i.e. those with special needs (SEN), English as an additional language (EAL) and able students, is good at both key stages.

7. In mathematics, the provision is good. The results in the 2001 national tests were in line with the average overall although the proportion of higher levels (6 and above) was below average. Boys' results were better than girls', which were below average. The standards seen during the inspection were broadly average for both boys and girls and their achievement was good. By the end of Year 9, most students have a grasp of algebraic techniques and can use them to solve problems, they can follow mathematical reasoning and have the numerical competence required for their GCSE studies in a number of subjects. The GCSE results in 2001 were below the national average for both boys and girls, reflecting a similar picture for these students at the end of Key Stage 3. Girls made more progress than boys over the two years of the Key Stage 4. The standards in the current Year 11 are considerably better, being above average and the achievement of boys and girls is good. Achievement is also good overall at Key Stage 3. Students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress throughout at both key stages although the achievement of a few, mainly boys at Key Stage 3, could be better. The most able students and those with EAL make satisfactory progress at Key Stage 3 whilst their achievement is good at Key Stage 4. For instance, a high proportion of the more talented mathematicians who took GCSE statistics in 2001 attained good results.

8. In science, the provision is satisfactory. Standards at the end of Key Stage 3 are in line with the national average overall. The results in the national tests in 2001 were broadly average although the proportion of higher levels (6 and above) attained was below average. Boys' results were better than girls'. The inspection found the achievement of both genders to be satisfactory. Students are starting to develop a good grasp of scientific ideas at the key stage and can make predictions relevant to an experimental task. At Key Stage 4, standards are average and achievement satisfactory. The GCSE results in 2001 were below average overall, although they showed considerable improvement on the previous year. Girls' performance was better than boys, reversing the picture in 2000 when boys' results were higher. The achievement of all students, including those from minority ethnic groups, with EAL, and special needs is satisfactory at the key stage. The more able students handle equations and calculations confidently.

¹ This represents an overarching judgement which includes standards, teaching, curriculum and management.

9. With regard to the other subjects of the curriculum, overall provision is very good in history and business studies. It is satisfactory in physical education and good in all other subjects, i.e. modern foreign languages, design and technology, information and communication technology (ICT), art and design, music, religious education, drama, media studies, and expressive arts. At Key Stage 3, standards are average and students are achieving satisfactorily in geography and music. Whilst standards are broadly average, the achievement is good in modern foreign languages, design and technology, art and design and physical education, and both standards and achievement are good in religious education, history, and ICT. In drama, the standards and achievement are very good. At Key Stage 4, the inspection found that attainment is well above average and achievement is very good in history. Very good achievement is also reflected in the above average standards in drama, business studies, and art and design. Good standards and achievement are found in geography, design and technology, music, media studies and expressive arts. In modern foreign languages and ICT standards are average but achievement is good, whilst in physical education both standards and achievement are satisfactory. Religious education at the key stage has insufficient teaching time. Despite this handicap, the department has managed to achieve average standards which is a testament to the good teaching. Nonetheless, the achievement, overall, is unsatisfactory and could be further improved by increased time for the subject.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

10. The students' have maintained their good attitudes to school found at the time of the last inspection. They enjoy school and their enthusiasm for learning has a positive impact on their progress. In some lessons students have very good attitudes to their work. For example, in a Year 8 physical education lesson on rugby skills, the students listened attentively to the teacher and put maximum effort into their warm-ups. They concentrated hard on improving their skills, took notice of suggestions for improvement and were able to evaluate their efforts. During discussions with inspectors, the students from all year groups expressed a high level of enthusiasm for school life. They appreciate being called 'students' rather than 'pupils' and feel they are treated 'in a mature way'. They make very good use of the school's wide range of extra-curricular activities and 'out of hours' learning opportunities.

11. Overall, the students' behaviour is good and this judgement reflects the findings of the previous inspection. The school operates as a harmonious community and this has a positive effect on students' learning. The students know that adults working in the school expect good behaviour and the students nearly always behave well. They are trustworthy and generally show respect for property, for example when they are allowed to use classrooms at lunchtime without close supervision. Although not high to begin with, recorded incidents of bullying and racist, sexist and homophobic remarks have decreased substantially over the past four years. There have been no permanent exclusions in the past year. The rate of fixed term exclusions is lower than those found in similar schools.

12. The vast majority of parents who returned the questionnaires were pleased with the behaviour of the students. A minority of parents at the pre-inspection meeting voiced some concerns about students' behaviour. The inspection found that a very small number of students, mainly boys, sometimes behave inappropriately and have unsatisfactory attitudes to work. Occasionally, their attitudes and behaviour have a negative impact on their own and others' learning.

13. The students' personal development and relationships are very good and are strengths of the school. The vast majority of students are developing into mature and

confident members of the school community. There is a high level of trust and mutual respect between students, teachers and other adults. This has a very positive impact in lessons and around the school. Students are articulate in expressing their views and sensitively share their ideas and opinions, without fear of ridicule. They support each other and work particularly well together in mixed gender groups. For example two boys were very well integrated into an otherwise all girl food technology GCSE group. The students enjoy taking responsibility. The school council is effective in bringing about improvements in school life such as creating 'zones' for socialising at lunchtime. Older students act as 'buddies' and give valuable support to younger students in a successful reading programme. The students put a great deal of effort and enthusiasm into their charity work. Besides using their initiative to raise substantial funds for worthy causes, they organise entertainment and refreshments for senior citizens and have established links with an Aids hospital in Kenya.

14. The students have maintained the good attendance record found at the time of the last inspection. The attendance rate for 1999/2000 of 92.4 per cent was above the national average and all year groups had an attendance rate of over 90 per cent. The rate of unauthorised attendance of 0.4 per cent is less than that found in similar schools and is mainly due to unexplained absence. Some students who had poor attendance records have responded well to the school's support and guidance, resulting in improved attendance. The vast majority of students arrive at school on time; some come up to an hour early to work in the learning resource centre. The students' good attendance and punctuality has a positive impact on their attainment and progress.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

15. The teaching is good overall, with a substantial proportion of very good and excellent teaching. It is very good at Key Stage 3 as a result of the recent strong focus on improving the quality. The teaching is good at Key Stage 4 overall; whilst there is considerable very good and excellent teaching at the key stage, some unsatisfactory lessons were also observed during the inspection.

16. The inspection found teaching to be very good in English, music and drama throughout the school. It is also very good in ICT at Key Stage 3 and in history, design and technology, business studies and art and design at Key Stage 4. It is good in all other areas with the exception of mathematics at Key Stage 3 and science at Key Stage 4 where it is satisfactory.

17. In English, teachers know their subject well and inspire students with their enthusiasm. In mathematics, there is more variability in quality at Key Stage 3, from well planned lessons where expectations are high and learning effective to one where the objectives were not appropriate and students were not provided with sufficient support. In science, good challenge and pace were evident in the best lessons. Where teaching was less effective, a restricted range of activities and too much teacher direction reduced the opportunities for students to contribute.

18. The school has placed a high priority on improving the teaching standards in recent years. A range of strategies have been used to achieve this, including raising staff awareness of what constitutes effective teaching, providing training to broaden the range of teaching styles in use, and establishing a system of monitoring and evaluation of teaching throughout the school. This work has clearly led to improvements in teaching quality, most noticeably in the wide and effective range of teaching approaches being used, for instance in English, history, geography, modern foreign languages, design and technology, music

and religious education. Nonetheless, it has yet to be reflected in raised standards in some areas, particularly at Key Stage 3. Whilst the lesson observations carried out as part of the monitoring and evaluation processes are effective in improving teaching, there is still some inconsistency in their impact.

19. Excellent teaching was observed in several subjects during the inspection, most particularly in history, geography, English and information and communication technology, but also in modern foreign languages, music, art and design, business studies, media studies, drama, physical education and special educational needs. In these lessons, teachers bring together a wide and skilled teaching repertoire with excellent subject knowledge and high quality resources, all of which they deploy in their teaching with great enthusiasm and dynamism. The lessons, typically, are very focused and challenging but also have a lightness and humour which students really enjoy and respond to. There is very good emphasis on encouraging independent thinking and students are clearly used to working hard. For instance, in a superb Year 8 English lesson on reading, the teacher's wide knowledge and enthusiasm had the students 'hooked on books', responding with sustained concentration to a range of genres. In Year 10, a very well planned and resourced history lesson enabled students to understand how the historical and economic circumstances of the time led to the Wall Street Crash. Many of these features are also found in the good and very good lessons but to a less concentrated, and effective, extent.

20. The school has a very good inclusion policy which is aimed at ensuring that the needs of all students are planned for and met. Its effectiveness is demonstrated in the good learning of students with special educational needs and the very good learning by students for whom English is an additional language.

21. The very small proportion of unsatisfactory teaching observed (four lessons) was found at Key Stage 4. These were dispersed across four departments, i.e. modern foreign languages, mathematics, business studies and ICT. The main unsatisfactory elements involved inappropriate teaching objectives which resulted in work not being matched to students' learning needs, and class management skills which were not firm enough and resulted in off task behaviour. In one lesson, the teacher's good expertise and subject knowledge were valiantly deployed to make the most of a session where the wholly inadequate accommodation for physical education seriously undermined the learning.

22. The teaching of literacy is good, that of numeracy is satisfactory. There is an effective policy for the teaching of literacy and a good level of staff awareness. The use of key vocabulary and writing frames to support learning is well established in subjects, such as history, geography and science. Reading for information is well developed in many subjects, as is the development of speaking and listening skills. There is not yet the same consistency in the attention to numeracy across the school. However, effective examples of the application of number and data handling were seen in geography.

23. The use of assessment is satisfactory overall. Teachers use assessment of students' understanding and competency well, on a day to day basis, to match work appropriately to their abilities. In history, ICT, religious education and physical education assessment makes a positive contribution to learning by providing good feedback on students' work. However, in art and design and music at Key Stage 3, the use of assessment is unsatisfactory. There are shortcomings in the use of assessment data to provide individual targets and track students' progress. This is not sufficiently co-ordinated at a whole school level and in several subjects students are not sure of their target levels or grades or of what to do to achieve them. This is the case to varying degrees in science,

English, maths, geography and business studies, and at Key Stage 3 in design and technology, and modern foreign languages.

24. Homework makes a satisfactory contribution to learning. By and large, the homework is appropriate and relevant and most teachers adhere to the schedule.

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

25. The school provides an effective curriculum at Key Stages 3 and 4. Successful teaching supports the varied and often high quality range of learning opportunities provided. Similarly, Technology College and Beacon status, the strong ICT and the planned provision for gifted and talented students, are being effectively used to enhance the curriculum. Since the last inspection improvement in the curriculum has been significant and learning opportunities are now very well matched to the students' needs and have a positive impact upon their achievement. Weaknesses identified at the last inspection have been well addressed. For example, there is a clear curriculum statement from the governing body and good information is given to parents. The governors and the headteacher have a good strategic view of curriculum improvement. Developments are based on high expectations for pupil achievement and the maintenance of breadth and balance. The positive impact of this rationale is seen in the development of the Key Stage 3 ICT programme, the move to double science and the enhanced Key Stage 4 provision.

26. Statutory requirements are met and overall there is good breadth to the curriculum at both key stages. In particular, the provision of high quality additional courses, i.e. media studies, expressive arts and psychology and the effective business studies and vocational curriculum which ensure that Key Stage 4 curriculum is well matched to the students' needs and aspirations. The balance of the curriculum is good at Key Stage 3, although there is no opportunity for students to undertake a second modern foreign language. There are some concerns at Key Stage 4. The time allocation for religious education, in Year 11, is insufficient and restricts the students' achievement. In ICT, the discriminatory aspects, i.e. whereby students learn to decide independently when and how ICT can be used most effectively, are not well developed or applied in all subjects. Weaknesses in the use of ICT are seen in English, history, art and religious education. Aspects of appraising are under-developed in music. These weaknesses also impact upon equal opportunities in respect of the students' access to a full curriculum. In all other respects the provision for equal opportunities is satisfactory and well supported by a whole school policy.

27. Curriculum planning and subject schemes of work are often of a high quality. Arrangements for the grouping of students at both key stages are effective and, on the whole, succeed in meeting their different needs and aptitudes. Setting is used effectively in mathematics, science and modern foreign languages with mixed ability grouping used in all other subjects. Where setting is used, groups are appropriately formed on the basis of prior attainment, complemented by information from standardised tests such as the NFER Cognitive Abilities Test (CATs), and care is taken to ensure that students are placed in the right set. The mixed ability groups are successful because of the good quality of subject and teachers' planning. Learning is very well matched to the students' needs and supported by the school's effective self-evaluation and quality standards for teaching and learning.

28. Provision for students with special educational needs and English as an additional language is very good. For pupils with special needs, individual education plans are

effectively used in planning and have a positive impact upon the students' achievement both in specific 'withdrawal' lessons and in subjects such as geography and history. 'Successmaker', a computer aided learning programme, is well used to enhance the achievement of students with special educational needs. These students have good access to the curriculum and produce an equally full range of work for their abilities. For a minority, regular absence from some subjects to attend small group withdrawal sessions can disadvantage students even though the work is linked to that in the mainstream class. Similarly, the special educational needs curriculum can, on occasions, be too biased to literacy and behaviour management skills, with insufficient consideration of numeracy skills. Students with English as an additional language benefit from very well planned provision and extra, very effective teaching provided through the LEA support programme. They have full access to the curriculum and achieve considerable success, for example, in the 2001 GCSE examinations, where a number achieved high standards.

29. The school's approach to inclusion is clear and well understood. It makes very effective and flexible provision for the individual, based on a secure knowledge of both pastoral and learning needs. Positive examples are seen in the NVQ courses and the particularly effective provision in agriculture. They are also seen in the flexible and helpful approaches designed to meet students' specific needs at both key stages, for example, the provision of large print materials for students with sight difficulties and resources for a minority of students with co-ordination difficulties. This aspect of the school's work has benefited from the strategic leadership of the senior management team, in the establishment of the student services team and the positive links between it, the special educational needs team and subject leaders. The overall strength of this work is seen in the school's declining exclusion rate and the students' good achievements.

30. Gifted and talented students are appropriately identified. Talented students benefit from a range of well planned provision. Strengths are seen in geography, history, design and technology and music. The impact of this provision is reflected in the GCSE results students achieve in these subjects. Further provision is made in the Key Stage 3 ICT programme where Year 9 students can achieve the equivalent of a GNVQ Part One qualification. Some provision is currently made for gifted students, for example, in geography; however, most is a planned part of the school's Beacon status programme, which is only just being implemented. These plans offer a range of potentially effective provision, for example flexible or accelerated accreditation at Key Stage 4, and master class provision in conjunction with Brighton and Sussex Universities.

31. There is good planning for the teaching of literacy skills in many subjects. Effective use has been made of the school's involvement in the pilot stage of the National Key Stage 3 Strategy (a year before the full national implementation). The establishment of a literacy implementation management group has been helpful in raising teachers' awareness and providing common understanding. Reading is well supported at Key Stage 3 with younger students appreciating and benefiting from the paired-reading/mentoring by older students. Many subjects effectively reinforce spelling and vocabulary, through the regular use of 'key words'. Writing frames are also well used, for example in the recording of evaluations in design and technology. Talk and discussion are less secure, though good examples were seen in English, drama and history. The planning for numeracy is satisfactory, with effective examples of the application of number and data handling being seen in geography. However, there is not yet the consistency in the provision, which is seen in literacy. Implementation of a system similar to literacy is a focus of the current school improvement plan.

32. The school's extra-curricular provision is very good, being both varied and of a high quality. Discussion with students indicated that it was enjoyed and much appreciated. Strengths are seen in music, drama and physical education. The extra-curricular music is of high quality. There are regular musical productions and some groups such as the Samba band, perform locally and at national events. Coaches are employed for a number of specific sports and the students' own skills are well used, for example in the coaching of swimming and web authoring activity in ICT. Extra-curricular activities are also responsive to parent and pupil requests, often received by Email access to the schools' extranet. For example, the establishment of a robot club to take part in robot wars came via such a request. An appropriate range of trips and school journeys further supports these activities. Further, subjects such as geography and agriculture make effective use of the surrounding environment to enhance learning. Work experience is an effective and well planned aspect of the Key Stage 4 curriculum.

33. The development of students' personal, social and health education (PSHE) is good. Lessons in PSHE make a significant contribution to students' social development and awareness of themselves. Appropriate attention is paid to health education including issues of alcohol and drugs misuse and sex education. Careers and vocational education provision are good. Students benefit from a planned careers' awareness programme at Key Stage 3, progressing to good work experience provision and careers counselling at Key Stage 4. This provision is successfully supported by appropriately resourced and accessible careers' accommodation, though the ICT resources are inferior to those in other parts of the school.

34. The school's partnership with the community is very good. These links have a positive impact on the students' attainment and personal development. The school has very good links with various external agencies to support students' personal and academic progress. For example, a beneficial counselling service is provided. There are valuable links with the Prince's Trust and the members of the community act as mentors. The school has established links with the world of work and students benefit from work experience and extended work placements. A good range of trips and residential visits, which enrich the curriculum, are provided and visitors, such as artists and authors, deepen students' understanding of learning topics. The school encourages students to think of others and they raise funds for a number of charities. They also organise and participate in a social event for senior citizens. Members of the public and other local schools benefit from the school's Technology College status, especially the teaching of ICT skills.

35. The school has good links with its partner institutions. There are effective links with local primary schools to ensure a smooth transfer for Year 6 students. Through the outreach dimensions of its Beacon and Technology College status, the school has provided considerable support for its partner schools, particularly in the field of ICT development. There are some established curriculum links and teachers from Varndean have observed the teaching of English and mathematics in the contributory primary schools as part of their work to develop and improve the continuity for students on transfer. There are good links with the local further education college where students take vocational courses. The school has appropriate links with local post-16 institutions.

36. The provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall with many very good features.

37. Provision for spiritual development is satisfactory. There is very good provision in religious education where students study important questions such as evil and suffering, life after death and the existence of God. Students in religious education are also given the

opportunity to develop their spiritual awareness through moments of quiet reflection. In art, students reflect on paintings and consider their own thoughts and feelings. In English, students explore the feelings and experiences of characters within the stories they are studying. There is, however, no whole school guidance on spiritual development and, both in lessons and assemblies, opportunities are missed to develop students' spiritual awareness. All the assemblies observed during the inspection were led with skill and enthusiasm and made important contributions to students' moral and social awareness. In one assembly, the clear message about the importance of teamwork and belonging to the school community was very effectively enhanced by the school's samba band, which was superbly led by one of the students. In Year 8 and 10 assemblies, the skilful use of visual aids and pupil participation led to very good moral and social development. However, there were no opportunities for personal reflection. In a number of subjects, e.g. physical education, music, modern foreign languages, design and technology, and geography, there is no clear planning for spiritual development in schemes of work and opportunities to develop students' awareness were missed.

38. The school's provision for moral development is very good and a strength of the school. The personal and social education programme makes a significant contribution through the sensitive and mature exploration of a range of health and social issues. Provision in religious education is very good; students explore important issues such as prejudice and discrimination, medical ethics and the value of human beings. In physical education, clear rules for involvement are established and, at Key Stage 4, students consider significant moral issues such as drugs in sport, hooliganism and its causes/effects. In ICT, students consider misuse of the Internet. In geography and design and technology, there is a strong commitment to the consideration of ethical issues, such as unfair trading. In English, students are regularly encouraged to consider moral issues through literature. The school has a clear commitment to its values. It places strong emphasis on students treating each other with care and respect and on helping them develop their moral understanding of injustice in the world.

39. The school's provision for social development is also very good and a strength of the school. In many subjects, there are regular opportunities for students to work collaboratively in paired and group work. The school's PSHE programme actively encourages students, not just to develop their knowledge and understanding of social issues, but to develop attitudes of respect and co-operation. The wide range of extra-curricular activities and the commitment to ensuring students can fully access educational resources beyond lesson time create many opportunities for students to exercise responsibility and leads to very strong personal development. The students' actively lead and support a wide range of charitable activities which are well-used to develop their understanding of justice and fairness. The school clearly places a high emphasis on the importance of students exercising responsibility in all aspects of school life.

40. The school's provision for cultural development is good with a number of very good features. In mathematics, students consider interesting historical problems and puzzles and use mathematical insights from other cultures. In English, geography, expressive arts and religious education, students enhance their cultural awareness through the use of artefacts, photographs, video and ICT. Music contains a wide cultural range and the study of world music is a strength of the department. In art and design, students explore styles from non-western cultures and food technology embraces a multi-cultural approach to the subject. There is a strong and effective multi-cultural policy, which actively seeks to promote respect and understanding and to combat racism and stereotyping, which is clearly making an impact.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

41. The school provides excellent personal support for the students and this is a strength of the school. The staff know the students very well and there is an ethos of trust and respect throughout the school community. Students greatly value the 'Student Services' and know that they will be treated and supported as individuals. The vision to bring together the various elements of pastoral support, both physically and managerially, enables staff to work efficiently and very effectively. The support is very wide ranging and includes areas such as first aid, registration, special needs, inclusion, child protection and student co-ordinators. Staff work very well as a team and share relevant information. The school hosts a useful 'all agencies' meeting each half term which enhances the support offered to students.

42. Very good opportunities are provided for 'out of school hours' learning. Students are able to use the learning resource centre before and after school and during half terms and are offered support at the homework club. There are also valuable Easter revision sessions and departments operate their own 'surgeries' in preparation for examinations.

43. Procedures for assessing students' progress and for using the results of assessment in planning future work are good. There is good practice in English, history, information and communication technology (ICT), design technology and for students with special educational needs (SEN) throughout the school and additionally in religious education at Key Stage 3, and in design and technology at Key Stage 4. In music and art, however, procedures are unsatisfactory at Key Stage 3. There are satisfactory procedures for monitoring and supporting students' academic progress. These form an adequate basis for monitoring overall performance. Results of regular tests and assessments are provided for tutors so that students' general progress towards their targets can be monitored. The tutors are effectively supported by student co-ordinators and senior managers. However, departments vary in the effectiveness with which they use assessments and targets to help improve students' learning, especially at Key Stage 3. In some cases, targets do not match the higher expectations that teachers have for individual students and lack of consistency in interpreting the data that is provided for tutors leads to some confusion in practice. As a consequence, students do not always have sufficiently challenging targets or a clear sense of purpose; many are uncertain about their current levels of attainment or how exactly they can improve.

44. The procedures for monitoring and improving attendance are good. The last inspection highlighted concerns over registration and the school has now fully addressed these issues. Unexplained absences are followed up and attendance and punctuality are monitored appropriately. There are good links with the educational welfare officer (EWO) when students' attendance is a cause for concern. Certificates are awarded for good attendance. The school has had some success with students who were poor attenders through the various inclusion programmes, including regular work experience.

45. The school's procedures for monitoring and promoting good behaviour are good. This is not a highly regimented community, but one where there is an ethos of mutual consideration, trust and expectation of good behaviour. Rules are in place but they are not highly visible and the school takes a relaxed and effective attitude to uniform and appearance. Adults working in the school are good role models and treat the students in a mature manner. There is a good behaviour policy, which includes useful strategies and detailed procedures for dealing with inappropriate behaviour. The procedures for monitoring and eliminating oppressive behaviour are very good. The policy against bullying and harassment gives clear guidance on sanctions for the bully and support for the victim.

Bullying is discussed in PSHE lessons and students say that incidents are dealt with effectively. Incidents of bullying and racial, sexual and homophobic remarks are recorded and analysed. The school has been successful in substantially reducing the number of incidents over the past four years.

46. Although there are strengths in the school's procedures for ensuring students' welfare, the overall judgement is unsatisfactory because the programme of risk assessment, although underway, had not been completed at the time of the inspection. The school has recently adopted a good and comprehensive health and safety policy. However, some issues regarding health and safety were brought to the attention of the school during the inspection, including the need for improved risk assessments regarding the use of machinery in design and technology and chemical storage in science.

47. The school's arrangements for child protection are satisfactory. A member of the senior management team is the designated member of staff with responsibility for child protection; he carries out his duties effectively. The school has not drawn up its own child protection policy, but follows appropriate local authority guidelines. Staff working in the school are aware of the required procedures.

48. The arrangements of first aid are very good and six members of staff are qualified in first aid. Students who are ill or injured receive good care and attention and there is a well-equipped medical room. Arrangements for the storage and administration of medication are good.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

49. The parents and carers generally expressed positive views of the school. They are pleased that their children enjoy school and that their behaviour is good. The parents and carers say that their children are expected to work hard and that they are making good progress. They value the way in which staff are willing to discuss the parents' concerns.

50. A quarter of parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire feel that the school does not work closely with parents. The inspection team does not share these views and judges that the school's links with parents are good. The school regularly surveys parents and, although there are relatively few returns, has taken notice of the parents' suggestions. The school now sends information to parents by direct mail and provides parents with useful information through the school website. The switchboard is open during normal office hours and parents are able to telephone and e-mail staff. A few parents had problems in the past over the school's response to complaints, but recent evidence shows full investigations, prompt replies with apologies where appropriate.

51. The quality of information which the school provides to parents is good. The prospectus is informative, but the governors' annual report does not contain all the information it should. Regular newsletters give details of future events and celebrate students' achievements. The Varndean News contains 'in depth' articles on school life. The school has fully addressed a key issue from the previous inspection regarding curriculum information. Parents now receive full and valuable details on what their children will be studying as well as information about staffing and homework. The options booklet gives clear and detailed information about the choices students have at the end of Year 9. A significant minority of parents have concerns about the lack of information about how their children were getting on. The inspection team does not share these views. The school provides parents with satisfactory information about their children's progress. The students' annual reports are generally satisfactory. The school has addressed the issue

raised in the previous report; student reports now clearly show whether students are working at their expected level. However, not all departments are giving students clear messages about how they can improve their work. Some are too vague, for example 'work hard' and 'don't be so negative'. The monitoring sheets give parents a useful 'snapshot' of their children's attitude to their work, but do not indicate at what level they are working. The school offers parents appropriate opportunities to meet subject teachers to discuss their children's progress.

52. The impact of the parents' involvement in the work of the school is satisfactory. Parent governors are very supportive of the school and help shape its future. Parents and carers enjoy supporting productions and concerts, and the Friends of the School help with refreshments at such events. The vast majority of parents have signed the home-school agreement.

53. The parents' contribution to their children's learning is satisfactory. Parents are keen to support their children and the attendance rate at parent consultation evenings is over 90 per cent. Twenty per cent of parents who returned the questionnaires had concerns about homework. The inspection team found that homework makes a satisfactory contribution to students' learning. Student journals are often used as an effective communication between school and home.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

54. The leadership and management of the school are very good. The headteacher has a strong strategic vision and, with the effective senior management team, provides a clear and very good lead to its work. This is reflected in the very thorough strategic improvement plan (SIP). Improvements have been considerably accelerated since he took up the headship just under two years ago. In that time, Beacon status has been achieved for excellence in the areas of monitoring and evaluation, ICT, inclusion, staff development, and provision for gifted and talented students and those with special educational needs. In addition, a successful bid has been made for phase two of specialist technology college status, the match of staff to the school's teaching and management requirements has been considerably improved and an ambitious and effective training programme has been put in place. The accommodation has also been substantially upgraded.

55. The match of staff to the teaching and management requirements of the school is good. The head and headteacher and the senior management team have recognised that having good staff, both teaching, non-teaching who are well supported is central to the school's effectiveness. Action has been taken on several fronts to optimise staff expertise. This has included changing some in management roles and providing a very well planned staff development programme, which is one of the areas of excellence, recognised in its Beacon status. The school also provides for the training of teachers in conjunction with the Universities of Brighton and Sussex. The staff development programme is closely linked to a well-established performance management (PM) system, which includes non-teaching staff. Optimising teaching quality has high priority. For instance, the school is involved in the national pilot programme for transforming teaching at Key Stage 3 in science, modern foreign languages and geography. It is providing its own 'quality standards' for teaching and evaluating the impact of the work, although, as yet, this is at an early stage of development. In addition, a monitoring and evaluation process is being undertaken in conjunction with the PM system. Whilst this is leading to improvements in teaching in several areas, the impact is not as great in some subjects. The headteacher has also sought to ensure that staff creativity and enthusiasm are not diminished through overwork;

there is a policy to reduce bureaucracy and extra support is provided to minimise the administrative burden on staff.

56. The management of subjects is very good overall. It is not less than good in any area and is very good in English, drama, science, geography, history, modern foreign languages, ICT, business studies and religious education. There is a strong focus on inclusion and the management of the provision for students with English as an additional language and those with special needs is good. A strong sense of direction, good teamwork and thorough curriculum planning is characteristic of the effective management. So, also, is a clear focus on improving teaching and learning. For instance, in geography, where a number of shortcomings had been identified, a new head of department has acted swiftly to address them by introducing a focused range of strategies to monitor and raise standards. These are already having very good impact, even within a relatively short time frame. In science, too, a new head of department has set a clear agenda for improvement, which is having a positive impact in raising standards. In modern foreign languages, the effectiveness of the monitoring and evaluation procedures is evident in the way teachers share good practice and use it in the classroom. In mathematics, where there is a very recently appointed head of department, good improvements are in train but the full impact has yet to be felt.

57. The governors are very effective. They are very well informed and involved by the headteacher and senior team and have very good procedures for fulfilling their strategic role. A good range of expertise is represented on the governing body and is well deployed to optimise the overall effectiveness of the board. For instance, the chair of the finance committee is an accountant and well versed in financial matters and the chair of the development committee is involved in governor development and training in a Local Education Authority. The governors have recently revised their working practices to sharpen their monitoring role. They are well aware of the principles of best value and how they apply in the school situation. They have good understanding of the school's strengths and weakness and of the actions being taken to address the latter. For instance, heads of subjects, where required improvements are a priority, are invited to present their action plans to the governors and report progress at a later, agreed, date. The governing body is effective in fulfilling its statutory obligations in almost all respects. There are two exceptions to this, one of which concerns the provision of risk assessments for all areas of the school. The process is underway but is not yet complete and should be undertaken without further delay. The other statutory obligation not fulfilled is in the lack of provision of a daily act of collective worship.

58. Since the last inspection there has been a complete overhaul of the accommodation which has brought considerable improvements in the décor and the quality of the learning environment. This has included new buildings for English, humanities and religious education, the refurbishment of three science laboratories and improved provision for modern languages and ICT. The accommodation for physical education, drama, expressive arts and media studies is still inadequate. In the case of physical education, this poor accommodation is affecting the teaching and learning. The school has recently made a second bid to acquire new buildings through an LEA-led private funding initiative. This more ambitious bid, driven by the headteacher, seeks to provide new buildings to accommodate all of the inadequate areas mentioned. The current buildings are well maintained and the site is well managed but there is a shortage of storage space for such items as examination desks, which are kept outside under tarpaulins.

59. The level of resources is good overall, with very good improvement since the last inspection in the equipment for ICT, which is now better than national average. There is

also TV and video playback facilities in every teaching room. The school has also invested in CCTV to aid security and support the site monitoring. The numbers of textbooks have been increased; there are now enough textbooks in all subjects, so that students can take books out of school when they need them for homework. In addition, good subject based activities and resources are available on the school website so that they can be accessed from home. The website also provides a system of communication for all members of the school's wider community. There is very good access to reference and ICT equipment out of school hours in the Learning Centre, which is open during school holidays, as well as before and after school each day. Equipment for learning in design and technology, art and design and music is also good. Although there is a good range of computer software for general use, in some subjects, such as design and technology and geography there are gaps in the provision of subject-specific programs and equipment. The Learning Centre is well equipped and staffed by a professional librarian. Although the area provides good access to computers with Internet facility, there are not enough high quality non-fiction books or periodicals to serve the needs of the students or to encourage them to read books for pleasure.

60. The financial planning is strong. The school had a small surplus in the last financial year, which was earmarked for improvement to the science accommodation. Resources are well linked to improvement priorities and successful initiatives, such as the acquiring of Beacon and Technology College status, have attracted extra funds, which have been well, and properly, used. The monitoring of the budget is very thorough, with very good co-ordination by the excellent finance administrator, the headteacher and the finance committee of the governing body. Regular financial statements are carefully scrutinised to ensure spending against budget headings are not exceeded. The principles of best value are thoroughly applied, for instance, in the tendering process, which proceeds the awarding of contracts. Special grants, i.e. those provided for particular purposes, such as special needs, are used appropriately. The school supplements the special needs funds with additional moneys from the main school budget. The last auditor's report, which was five years ago, confirmed the good financial management. The local education authority confirms the school's current good practice in this area. The extra funding, provided by specialist and Beacon status, raises the income per student to above average. Overall, with its below average intake, its good teaching, very good management and well above average GCSE results, the school provides very good value for money.

61. Improvement since the last inspection is good overall, with a real acceleration in the last two years. The key issues for action in the last inspection (1997) have been successfully addressed in almost all particulars. Two of those issues, e.g. monitoring and evaluation of teaching and staff development, have since become areas of excellence in the school's achievement of Beacon Status. The curriculum has been considerably enriched and enhanced and the achievement in ICT, food technology and modern foreign languages, and for girls generally, considerably improved. There is still some year to year variation in how girls, and boys, achieve, however, and school needs to continue to monitor both genders in relation to their prior attainment and how their counterparts are performing nationally. Assessment was also an issue in the last report. Day-to-day assessment and marking of students' work are generally good, with the exception of art and design and music where there are weaknesses at Key Stage 3. However, the thinking on how to link assessment to the target-setting and student-tracking process is not sufficiently 'joined-up' and needs improvement.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

In order to improve further the standard of education provided, the senior managers and governors should:

- (1) Ensure the planned programme of risk assessments is completed without delay.**

(See paragraph 46)

- (2) Improve the arrangements for the use of data to set targets, track progress and help students improve their work, by:**

- Ensuring senior managers and heads of subjects together interpret and discuss the implications of performance data;
- Basing year group target grades or levels on teacher assessment of individual student potential, as well as on prior attainment data;
- Ensuring that students are clear about what they have to do to achieve their targets, how to do it and what help is available.

(See paragraphs 4, 5, 43)

- (3) Improve the achievement in religious education, by:**

- Increasing the time available for teaching the subject in Year 11.

(See paragraph 145)

Other weaknesses which are less serious but which should be considered for inclusion in the school's action plan are:

- Identify the ICT opportunities which each subject will provide for students and monitor the provision.

(See paragraph 116)

- Provide guidance for subjects on promoting spiritual development and ensure they identify where opportunities for spiritual reflection arise in their schemes of work.

(See paragraphs 37)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	161
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students	65

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	16	44	60	33	4	0	0
Percentage	10	28	39	21	2	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 students

Students on the school's roll

	Y7 – Y11
Number of students on the school's roll	1199
Number of full-time students known to be eligible for free school meals	156

Special educational needs

	Y7 – Y11
Number of students with statements of special educational needs	27
Number of students on the school's special educational needs register	290

English as an additional language

	No of students
Number of students with English as an additional language	36

Pupil mobility in the last school year

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

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	7.2
National comparative data	7.7

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.4
National comparative data	1.1

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage (Year 9)

Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	136	114	250

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	89	95	97
	Girls	89	66	68
	Total	178	161	161
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	71 (68)	64 (68)	66 (58)
	National	64 (63)	66 (66)	66 (60)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	24 (24)	36 (36)	24 (23)
	National	32 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	71	92	104
	Girls	86	63	77
	Total	157	155	181
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	64 (58)	65 (56)	76 (69)
	National	65 (64)	68 (64)	64 (59)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	33 (16)	32 (34)	32 (42)
	National	31 (31)	42 (37)	33 (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 students in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	108	105	213

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of students achieving the standard specified	Boys	53	96	103
	Girls	61	104	105
	Total	114	200	208
Percentage of students achieving the standard specified	School	54 (53)	94 (91)	98 (97)
	National	50 (49)	87 (87)	95 (94)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	45.0 (42.8)
	National	39.1 (38.4)

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 students who achieved all those they studied	School	64	83
	National		N/a

Ethnic background of students

	No of students
Black – Caribbean heritage	2
Black – African heritage	8
Black – other	2
Indian	9
Pakistani	4
Bangladeshi	8
Chinese	4
White	1126
Any other minority ethnic group	29

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	70.6
Number of students per qualified teacher	17

Education support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	26
Total aggregate hours worked per week	727

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	73.9%
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Average teaching group size: Y7– Y11

Key Stage 2	N/a
Key Stage 3	26.03
Key Stage 4	24.30

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	21.5
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	29.6
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	0.6
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage		
Black – African heritage		
Black – other		
Indian		
Pakistani		
Bangladeshi		
Chinese		
White	13	
Other minority ethnic groups		

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

Financial information

Financial year	2000
	£
Total income	3,332,742.00
Total expenditure	3,276,179.00
Expenditure per pupil	2,762.00
Balance brought forward from previous year	6,638.00
Balance carried forward to next year	63,201.00

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1199
Number of questionnaires returned	179

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	43	53	3	1	1
My child is making good progress in school.	46	43	6	0	5
Behaviour in the school is good.	25	53	11	2	8
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	17	59	15	5	3
The teaching is good.	31	57	4	1	7
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	25	49	17	2	6
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	44	47	7	1	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	48	44	5	1	2
The school works closely with parents.	24	43	20	4	8
The school is well led and managed.	35	46	6	3	10
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	42	43	7	2	7
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	36	44	10	2	7

PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES

ENGLISH

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

Strengths

- Above average attainment and good achievement.
- Consistently good teaching.
- Positive student attitudes and behaviour.
- A strong reading culture.
- Good leadership and strong team work.

Areas for improvement

- Develop the use of student performance data to set curriculum targets.
- Provide more consistent access to, and use of, ICT.

62. Standards of attainment on entry are below average overall, although there has been an improvement in the last two years, taking them to slightly above average for the current Year 7. By the end of Key Stage 3, the standards are above average for students gaining Level 5 in National Curriculum Tests, but the proportion gaining the higher levels (6 and above) is close to the national average. Standards achieved by boys are particularly good and better than the national average. Students with special educational needs, those for whom English is an additional language and the most able make good progress and achieve standards commensurate with their abilities. These patterns of attainment and achievement were reflected in the lessons observed and in the students' work scrutinised, during the inspection.

63. At Key Stage 4, the GCSE results in 2001 are above the national average for students gaining A*-C grades. It is particularly good that the performance of boys was, as at Key Stage 3, above the national average. English literature results were slightly below national expectations. In lessons observed and in the scrutiny of students' work, attainment in English was above average. In literature, the standards are broadly in line with those expected for students at the end of Year 11. As at Key Stage 3, students in Years 10 and 11 with special needs and English as an additional language continue to achieve well. Boys and the most able students also achieve very good standards.

64. Key Stage 3 schemes of work in English [and in Drama] ensure that all students experience a range of speaking and listening tasks. They develop their oral language skills well through group discussion and presentation activities, such as, in a superb Year 8 lesson, where pairs of students presented their favourite fiction texts to the whole class. In another lesson, small groups, in a Year 9 class, enjoyed rising to the challenge of reconstructing Charles Causley's 'Timothy Winters' poem. As they move into Key Stage 4 and face the demands of GCSE, students are increasingly able to present their ideas formally in presentations to the whole class and in smaller groups. Mixed groups in a Year 11 lesson, for example, showed considerable skill and fluency as they presented their findings on 'different realities' and the 'fairy world' in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In whole class situations most students respond confidently and with enthusiasm to teachers' questions.

65. Since the last inspection the department has been successful in enhancing the status of independent reading throughout the school, providing more texts suited to reluctant readers and boys. All Key Stage 3, the development of reading skills is good. Students have regular reading lessons where they recommend books to their peers and are challenged to read more widely. A particularly good extension of this was when a panel of students shadowed the Carnegie Medal awards process, reading the nominated books and deciding on a winner. Their choice coincided with that of the official panel in selecting Beverley Naidoo's new novel *The Other Side of Truth* which is now being read in Year 7 English lessons. Teachers monitor students' reading closely and expect them increasingly to tackle more demanding texts in preparation for the challenges of GCSE. The library section of the learning resources centre holds an extensive book stock, which is well used by the English department. Students are given regular opportunities to hear professional writers both through the annual book week and through visits to the GCSE 'live' authors sessions run by the examining body.

66. Students in Key Stage 3 classes cover an increasingly wide range of writing, exemplified in their files and in displays. Drafting and revising of written work are encouraged and there is a systematic and effective approach to spelling and technical skills. Some students identified as needing extra support in Year 7 are beginning successfully to use the National Literacy Strategy 'Progress Units'. Others go out regularly to use the 'Successmaker' programme to develop their literacy skills. Students produce a good range of personal writing, in the 'Myself' topic in Year 7 for example, and in various poetic and narrative forms. They add effectively to this range as they begin to handle discursive writing and more literary responses. Year 10 and 11 students produce an impressive range of writing, much of it of very high quality, for their GCSE coursework. Some of the most interesting and committed writing is seen in imaginative narratives – such as that produced to the title of 'The Dream Journey'. Some of the responses to literary texts are equally good. As part of their study of *Othello*, for example, Year 11 students were challenged to produce written responses in the style of both tabloid and broadsheet newspapers and then to write a more formal critique of their work.

67. The quality of teaching is very good overall. It is never less than satisfactory and often it is good, very good or excellent, particularly at Key Stage 3. Teachers know their subject in depth and they inspire students with their own enthusiasm. The best teaching at both key stages is characterised by thorough planning, high expectations and skilful variation of teaching and learning strategies. Relationships in the classroom are positive and good-humoured. Lessons are well paced and purposeful, providing regular opportunities for students to learn both through talking in a variety of pairs and small groups and also through whole-class discussion and reflection. The Key Stage 3 schemes of work and GCSE syllabuses are used most effectively to provide continuity of knowledge, skills and understanding. Written work is marked thoroughly, often with extensive comments to inform progress. Teachers maintain detailed records of assessment data for individual students, incorporating the school's high quality procedures for tracking and recording progress and achievement. Some students, however, are unclear about their levels of attainment and there is now scope to use this information more directly to inform target-setting for students, so that they know clearly what they must do to improve their performance.

68. The leadership and management of the department are very good. There is a strong sense of direction and teamwork, with a clearly stated and shared philosophy encapsulated in the handbook. Curriculum planning is secure so that schemes of work ensure coverage of the statutory curriculum whilst allowing teachers freedom to develop

their own ideas and styles of teaching. Monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning are well established. The new accommodation is excellent, providing a high quality environment for learning in the subject. Resource provision is extremely good; each of the six classrooms has in-built television and video and OHP facilities which are used most effectively to support and enhance students' learning. Access to ICT, however, is limited, so that the department has yet fully to exploit its potential in English beyond the obvious word-processing of work.

69. There have been considerable improvements since the last inspection, most notably:

- improved attainment and achievement at both key stages
- greatly improved reading culture, especially at Key Stage 3
- more secure planning and schemes of work
- more effective strategies for improving students' technical accuracy

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths

- Good teaching in Years 10 and 11, particularly that which promotes reasoned argument and clear communication.
- The direct teaching and practice of numeracy skills as part of lesson 'starters'.

Areas for improvement

- The standard of teaching in Years 7, 8 and 9 by raising the expectations of teachers and increasing the pace of lessons.
- Students' knowledge of their own levels of attainment and specifically how they can improve.

70. Standards of attainment on entry are below average overall, with girls' standards below those of boys. There has been some improvement in recent years, bringing them closer to the average. In 2001, the results of national tests at the end of Year 9 were broadly in line with the national average but with a lower proportion of students reaching the higher levels (6 and above). This has been the picture in recent years, with attainment by 14-year-olds comparable to that of students in similar schools and following the national trend. Boys' results in 2001 were higher than those of girls. Of work seen during the inspection, that of current Year 9 students is satisfactory. Taking the below average attainment on entry into account, the achievement of students, after three years in the school, is good. Students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress overall but almost one in five, mainly boys, do not achieve as well as expected. The achievement of students with English as an additional language is satisfactory and minority ethnic students also generally make satisfactory progress but a small minority do not.

71. At the end of Year 11, the proportion of students achieving A* - C grades in GCSE examinations was below the national average in 2001. These results correspond with the below average levels attained by those students at the end of Year 9 and on entry to the school in 1996. Boys' results were similar to those of girls', but considering the differences that existed at the beginning of Year 10, girls' achievement was better than that of boys. The present Year 11 students produce work of a good standard. The results were higher in 2000 and reflected those students' higher levels of prior attainment. In 2001, a high proportion of the more talented students taking the GCSE statistics examination attained good results. Overall, achievement is good at the key stage. Those who find learning

difficult and those with special educational needs make satisfactory progress but boys less so than girls. Those students for whom English is an additional language overcome difficulties in a short time and achieve well.

72. At Key Stage 3, students make good progress in their knowledge and use of technical vocabulary. Most learn algebraic techniques effectively; many apply these successfully to solve problems. The great majority can follow reasoned arguments and justifications of general results in work on shape, space and measures, such as the development of Pythagoras' Theorem. By the end of Year 9, the great majority of the students have improved their level of numeracy sufficiently to allow them to use mathematics effectively in many GCSE subjects. At Key Stage 4, for example, students can apply Ohm's Law in design and technology, use algebra confidently to re-arrange formulae and analyse patterns in data in science, use election figures to trace Hitler's rise to power in history and accurately interpret graphs and charts in religious education. However, only in geography does planned teaching of numerical, statistical and graphical skills contribute significantly to students' numeracy. Most students continue to make good progress in the development of abstract ideas in algebra and achieve well overall. However, some of the older students who did not benefit from focused numeracy teaching in their earlier years and who find learning difficult are hindered by a poor command of strategies for mental arithmetic and persistent weakness in ready recall of number relationships, such as multiplication tables. For example, several students successfully learn formal procedures for calculating compound probabilities but are unable to use them confidently due to poor knowledge of elementary fraction operations and tables.

73. Teaching is satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and good at Key Stage 4. However, the quality is uneven; there is considerable difference between the best teaching and the least effective, ranging from very good to unsatisfactory. Many students benefit from well planned and managed lessons where teachers have high expectations and maintain a brisk pace. In one Year 7 lesson, as a result of good anticipation of the most likely sources of misunderstanding, the teacher helped students use isometric paper effectively to represent three-dimensional objects. However, in a similar lesson, where the teacher underestimated the help that lower attaining students would need, their progress was slower and their learning less secure. In Year 11 lessons, students are taught how to recognise and use the structures underlying number patterns that arise during investigations. For the most capable, this includes finding general terms in second order sequences; other students study methods for finding linear generalisations. In this way, less confident students learn strategies that enable them to meet the demands of higher coursework criteria. In a few lessons, planning is weak and the pace unchallenging. In one instance, a teacher's lack of clear objectives and indecision gave rise to confusion amongst Year 10 students, fuelling disinterest. Consequently, most worked sporadically, wasted valuable time and made little progress on their GCSE coursework. Teachers mark work consistently and provide some guidance for students but generally, they do not inform students of the National Curriculum level or GCSE grade of their work or, in specific terms, how the higher level or grade might be achieved.

74. Students generally have a good attitude to learning. In all years, they concentrate well, pay close attention to their teachers and are keen to improve. They present their written work well. There are, however, instances of persistent, immature behaviour, mainly by boys, that demands a high level of the teacher's attention and disrupts the work of others. In some lower attaining groups, boys' attendance is poor whilst girls attend well and work conscientiously.

75. The department is well led. Changes introduced by the recently appointed subject manager have, as yet, had insufficient time for their impact to be significant; the revised scheme of work and the special classes for talented Year 9 students at the University of Brighton, for example. The framework of the National Numeracy Strategy has been used effectively but there is as yet no whole school numeracy policy. However, an implementation group is at work and training has begun. Monitoring has been established to raise the quality of teaching and standards of work, however, feedback does not always offer sufficient specific guidance to enable less effective teaching to be improved. Essential data are now being monitored in a way that will enable rational analysis to direct improvements and evaluate achievement. For example, the DfES 'value-added' tables are used to evaluate students' progress from Year 9 to Year 11. Results of aptitude tests and data on past attainment are now used to identify targets for students in Years 7 to 9. However, as yet, these targets do not always match the higher expectations evident in the best teaching.

76. Progress since the last inspection has been satisfactory. At that time there were no key issues specific to the department. Nonetheless, aspects of practice considered weak have been improved, such as the quality of guidance provided by long-term planning and the consistency of marking. Whilst assessment is now satisfactory, many students do not know in specific terms how they might raise the standards of their work.

SCIENCE

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

Strengths

- Practical work is used very effectively to deliver subject content and the skills of
- Investigation.
- The developing use of ICT, especially the interactive whiteboards, improves learning.
- Most lessons are well planned and linked to previous learning.

Areas for improvement

- Some lessons lack challenge and do not demand enough effort from students.
- The quality of written feedback in students' books needs to be more consistent.
- Chemical storage and day-to-day usage needs significant revision.

77. The standards reached in the Key Stage 3 national tests in 2001 were in line with those expected nationally and with schools in similar socio-economic characteristics. The boys' performance exceeded that of the girls'. The results were an improvement on those of the previous year but the proportion of higher levels attained was below average.

78. The GCSE results for 2000 were below the national average with two fifths of students achieving an A* to C grade in double science. Results for students who took three separate sciences in the year 2000 were also below the national average. The boys' performance exceeded that of the girls. The standards reached by the students in chemistry, physics and double science GCSEs are below those reached by the same students in other GCSE subjects. Although the results in 2001 were still below average students made more progress than in previous years, especially the small number who took three separate sciences. The girls' performance exceeded that of the boys in this year group.

79. The inspection found that that standards are in line with national expectations at both key stages. At Key Stage 3, students are starting to develop a good grasp of more

abstract concepts, for example, they can use the idea of producers and consumers to develop food chains and some students can extend this to the concept of food webs. Students understand the importance of fair testing and are making predictions relevant to the experimental task. They successfully consider experimental evidence and draw appropriate conclusions. Where students do not have a secure grasp of scientific ideas they cannot give appropriate explanations of their predictions. For example, when comparing metals for thermal conductivity, many students could not give initial predictions that were scientifically based. At Key Stage 4, students are able to use scientific concepts appropriately, for example when explaining eutrophication and its effects on biological systems. The more able students handle equations and calculations confidently using appropriate SI units.

80. The achievement of students at both key stages is satisfactory. Younger students are keen participants in their lessons and enjoy practical sessions. Older students work well and, where the work stretches their understanding, put a lot of effort into both class and practical work. However, where the tasks set for them are not demanding, they do not engage with the work and make minimal effort. Students with special needs at both key stages reach a satisfactory standard, as do more able students and those for whom English is an additional language.

81. The teaching of science is good at Key Stage 3 and satisfactory at Key Stage 4. Teachers know their subject and are able to apply this subject knowledge in a clear lesson structure. Where the teaching is good, the pace of lesson is challenging and supported by good use of appropriate resources, especially the interactive whiteboards, and a range of teaching strategies that engages the students' interests. Skilful questioning focuses the students on key points and challenges them to explain the thinking behind their answers. The variety of teaching strategies used improves in those lessons where the planning and schemes of work have recently been rewritten. Good relationships in the lessons produce a stimulating working atmosphere that involves the students in their learning. Where teaching is not so effective at Key Stage 4, too much direction by the teacher and a restricted range of activities limits the opportunities for students to contribute and reduces the demands made of them. This slows the pace and the students become restless. Students' work is marked regularly but the quality of feedback given to the students is not consistent across the department. Much of the assessment of students' work does not sufficiently inform the students about how they are doing and what they need to do to improve.

82. The leadership and management of the department is very good. The new head of department has set a clear agenda for improvement and monitoring and evaluation of the work of the department is carried out effectively. This is having a positive impact on raising standards in science. The use of ICT has improved significantly. Some very good practice in the use of interactive whiteboards to enhance learning needs to be extended to more lessons. Recent results at both key stages show an improving trend. Test papers are now more closely analysed to highlight areas for further curriculum development and teacher assessments now reflect the national test results. New schemes of work currently under development have streamlined the science curriculum and avoid repetition of work. Overall, there has been good improvement since the last inspection.

83. Risk assessment procedures have only recently been formalised and their integration into regular working practices is improving. However, chemical storage and the condition of the chemistry preparation room needs urgent review.

ART AND DESIGN

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

Strengths

- Very good achievement at Key Stage 4 – girls achieve particularly good examination results.
- The quality of teaching is good, with notable strengths in Years 10 and 11.
- Students are motivated and keen to learn and their behaviour is good.
- Teachers' knowledge and understanding of the subject are excellent: they employ very effective teaching and learning strategies that enable students to do well in examinations.

Areas for improvement

- Improve the consistency in teacher expectations at Key Stage 3, about the work rate, the quality of work and use of sketchbooks.
- Ensure that assessment objectives are routinely shared with students and monitor students' progress against National Curriculum levels at Key Stage 3.
- Improve the use of ICT at Key Stage 3.

84. Teacher assessments of students' attainment at the end of Year 9 showed attainment in 2001 to be above expected levels for their age and above the levels attained in most other subjects. The inspection found that work by students currently in Year 9 is of a lower standard but broadly in line with expectation. A significant number of students demonstrated higher levels of attainment, for example, in their ability to talk and critically analyse artists' work, but the range of practical work did not show the same depth and level of attainment. The quality and presentation of work in sketchbooks is variable; some are very good, especially where students use a combination of materials and annotate their drawings, but others do not fully reflect the standards students are capable of. Since students have to buy sketchbooks, an inappropriate request since they are a National Curriculum requirement, some choose not to and are disadvantaged by not having ready access to teacher comments and confirmation of the progress they are making. Students learn from the examples they see around them. Displays show good standards of two and three-dimensional and mixed media work. In contrast, there is little computer-generated work on display or covered within the curriculum. To date the use of computers has been mainly for research and to write notes rather than to manipulate images.

85. Standards on entry are lower than expected for students aged 11. Achievement at Key Stage 3 is satisfactory overall. It appears that many Year 7 students have experienced a narrow art and design curriculum in their previous schools and standards of basic skills across a range of two and three-dimensional materials are under developed. A few weeks into the first term, some, but not all classes, have made good progress. Progress is particularly good when the teacher asks challenging questions, probing for extended answers. For example, in Year a 8 class students had to explain how artists conveyed information in their use of symbols and communicated ideas and information through their work. Students offered thoughtful and imaginative responses and their practical work reflected this raised awareness. However, not all classes sustain the same rate of accelerated progress. A small number of boys disrupt the learning of other students by their poor behaviour.

86. Attainment in GCSE examinations has been above the average for several years but fell to broadly average standards in 2001. These unconfirmed results are the subject of an on-going dispute with the examination board. In previous years, where a breakdown of

the results is available, girls have achieved significantly better in art than in other subjects and higher attaining boys have also achieved well. The examination results for 2001 reflect the fact that several students, mainly boys, were entered for the examination but had less time in lessons because they were following a modified curriculum, which included one or two days each week of work experience. A few also had a poor attendance record.

87. In the lessons seen, standards of work by students currently in Year 11 indicate a similar above average picture as those found in other years. As in the past, several students attend fewer lessons because the curriculum has been modified to suit their learning needs. The subject caters well for these students and plays a major part in the school's policy for social inclusion. Most students enjoy working on open-ended tasks but those who are initially reluctant learners become more involved when they see the possibilities of pursuing work that taps into their individual interests. For some, the chance to use computers for research and to manipulate images has been particularly stimulating. Significant numbers of students have work of high quality with the depth of thinking and level of skill required for the higher grades. They are independent and able to make decisions for themselves that lead to thoughtful observations of their own and artists' work. A key factor in the very good achievement is that the students who are really keen to do well have a very good understanding of the examination requirements and marking criteria. This helps them recognise their strengths and attend to those areas that need to be improved. Overall, standards are above the average and achievement is very good.

88. Students with English as an additional language and those who have special educational needs and those with particular talents make satisfactory progress and greatly benefit from the one-to-one help and feedback they receive from teachers. At Key Stage 3, the occasional lack of clarity about lesson objectives results in work which is not sufficiently challenging for higher attaining students.

89. Teaching and learning are good overall. At Key Stage 3, they are satisfactory, and at Key Stage 4 they are mostly very good. Teachers' knowledge and understanding of the subject are excellent and used to good effect to set activities that generate students' interest and curiosity. A good rapport has been established with students and leads to positive working relationships. Students are co-operative, keen to learn and they work hard. Many return to the department to continue their work at the end of the school day. Teaching was very effective where exemplar material from past GCSE candidates was used to encourage Year 11 students to try new skills, techniques and different styles of presentation. The work and the explanations given by the teacher were successful in both raising students' awareness of the examination criteria and helping them critically evaluate what they had achieved so far and where improvements were possible. Teachers' tend to have higher expectations of students in examination groups than they do of students in Key Stage 3 classes. In these classes, achievements, effort and work rate are not so closely monitored. The double lessons sometimes lack pace and students do not complete enough work in the available time.

90. Management of the subject is good overall and has ensured that the very good achievement at Key Stage 4 has been maintained. Visits to national galleries and opportunities to consider art from Western and non-Western cultures make a significant contribution to students' spiritual and cultural understanding. Schemes of work have been improved since the last inspection and now have a homework programme linked to each activity. Homework is set regularly. The recent purchase of computers opens up the possibilities for increased use of ICT in the Key Stage 3 curriculum. The good practice that has led to high achievement at Key Stage 4 could help to make the necessary improvements with younger age classes. Learning intentions and criteria for assessment

need to be made clearer to students and their progress towards, and attainment at, the end of the key stage needs to be monitored more closely.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- The above average standards at Key Stage 4.
- Skilled teaching, supported by high quality planning and resources.
- The improved standards of food technology.
- The support and guidance given to students.

Areas for improvement

- The development of students skills in design analysis and evaluation at Key Stage 3, particularly through the use of discussion.
- The provision of individual achievement targets for students at Key Stage 3.
- The monitoring of health and safety through a full risk assessment.

91. Standards in the subject are above average and supported by effective teaching. Students produce quality products, reflecting a well-applied range of manufacturing and design skills. Graphic representation of design ideas is a strong feature of many students' GCSE work at Key Stage 4. Weaknesses in both manufacturing and designing, at entry in Year 7, are largely overcome by the end of Year 9. However, some shortcomings remain. For instance, a more sequenced programme of discussion about design analysis and evaluation, prior to students' recording their observations, is required to allow for more rapid gains in their learning and acquisition of design skills during Key Stage 3.

92. By the end of Key stage 3, the students reach standards that are in line with the national expectation. All students, including those with English as an additional language and special educational needs, make good progress in lessons and over the key stage. A minority of lessons, for example in Year 9 food and graphics, can give too much emphasis to written recording when students are evaluating their work. For example, students did not spend sufficient time considering the effectiveness of work they carried out on a high energy snack bar. This can lead to an inappropriate sequencing of skills and limit the gains in learning. The students develop good knowledge and understanding of the subject and their ability to research, plan and make their ideas is good. For example, students in a Year 7 food lesson were able to express their ideas clearly when talking about quality control and the changes they would make when producing their chosen idea.

93. At Key Stage 4, the standard that the students reach, both in class and in their examinations, is above average. In the 2001 GCSE examinations, the results were above average and in the 2000 they were well above in the proportion of A* - C grades attained. The 2001 results showed a slight decline on those of 2000, but this is accounted for by the performance of one group in the graphics examination and overall results remain above the national average. Until 2001, GCSE results have shown consistent improvement above the national trend and were higher than at the time of the last inspection. Manufacturing skills are effectively taught and practised. The quality of Year 10 projects and Year 11 coursework is of a high standard in all the material areas. In particular, both the GCSE results and the quality of students' work observed have significantly improved in food technology since the last inspection. Very good support materials, for example, the teacher-prepared course booklets in all material areas, provide guidance for students in organising their work and are a key feature of the success achieved in Year 11 coursework. Well managed and resourced lessons, as for example in Year 10 textiles, enable students

to make good progress in their designing. The students regularly and confidently use computers for the presentation of their designs. The achievement of all students, including those with English as an additional language and special needs, is good and both boys and girls do equally well in the subject.

94. Clear strengths of teaching are seen throughout the subject. The teaching and learning are good at Key Stage 3 and very good at Key Stage 4. Many lessons benefit from a very clear structure. Teaching is based on a depth of subject expertise and challenge to students to succeed in achieving the high expectation set, as, for example was observed in a demanding Year 11 resistant materials lesson when students had to use computers to produce orthographic drawings. Students respond well to this positive learning climate and most are confident and self-reliant in their work, organising coursework and meeting deadlines effectively. Good questioning and thoughtful strategies of intervention with students; support all ability groups in doing their best and producing products of high quality. For example, students in a Year 7 food lesson and a Year 8 textiles lesson, made very good gains in their learning through the teacher's use of short demonstration and question/response sessions followed by individual or small group support. Routines are well established and students use tools and equipment safely. Discussion of design ideas is robust but respectful of the other person's opinion, particularly at Key Stage 4. However, planned opportunities for discussions about design are more limited at Key Stage 3. Relationships are very good and often a mutual respect exists between students, teachers and other adults. Students know what they can do and how to improve their work. The quality of guidance and clear feedback to students in Years 10 and 11 has contributed significantly to the standards achieved at GCSE. The very effective tutor mentoring in Year 7 also makes a significant contribution to the students' progress and achievement. Behaviour is good, though occasionally weaker pupil management routines can cause minor problems in some Year 9 and 11 lessons.

95. The subject offers an effective and varied curriculum. Planning is rigorous and teaching is well organised. All students can follow a full GCSE at Key Stage 4 and most benefit from the high quality range of learning opportunities offered. Further breadth could be provided by the consideration of vocational course development. Weaknesses of the Key Stage 3 curriculum, in the development of the skills of analysis and evaluation, are being actively addressed, alongside the provision of more rigorous personal achievement targets to match the successful personal organisation targets currently being used.

96. Students' achievement benefits from the subject's clear view of itself and priorities for improvement. The leadership is clear sighted and there is a corporate commitment in the subject team to high standards and continued improvement. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. Issues in food technology, despite staffing difficulties, have been well addressed. Strengths and weaknesses are well known and the focused subject development plan together with the effective application of monitoring and self-evaluation has ensured continued improvement. Where weaknesses exist, as in aspects of resources for computer-aided design, library provision and risk assessment (linked to the safety of the machinery), there are good plans for improvement.

GEOGRAPHY

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

Strengths

- The overall quality of teaching.
- Standards and application of numeracy in the subject.
- The quality of ICT use.
- Good fieldwork experiences which are helping to raise standards.
- Increasingly effective provision for the more able.
- The impact of new leadership and management in the subject.

Areas for improvement

- Share National Curriculum levels with students and make clear how they can improve their work.
- Make explicit use of a greater range of thinking strategies, including the use of problem solving approaches.
- Systematically teach students the skill of asking geographical questions to increase the independence of the most able in Key Stage 3 investigation.

97. At the end of Key Stage 3 standards are in line with the national expectation. A small minority of Year 9 students have made very significant progress as they are engaged in a pilot programme of ICT-led GCSE level work and are clearly attaining well beyond the national expectation. Some other able students also attain very good standards. For example, they are able to write extensively in report form when analysing, comparing and explaining the factors which affect the top five economically developed countries of the world compared to the five least developed ones. There are no significant differences in the attainment of girls and boys. Effective efforts are made to include the geographical experiences of students with different language and cultural backgrounds in lessons when appropriate.

98. All students, including those with English as an additional language, and special needs, make good progress over time from Year 7 to Year 9. They enter the school in Year 7 with uneven experiences of map skills but quickly learn, through good teaching, to locate places on Ordnance Survey maps and to interpret the detail of such maps. In Year 8, students reinforce their map skills on a day's fieldwork in the Ashdown Forest. As the result of this active learning, with good classroom and homework follow up, they make good gains in their understanding of environmental management. The most able students can understand that the enjoyment of the countryside should involve balancing the needs of visitors with management practices which keep the environment from degrading. Students who attain less highly can quote some simple examples of visitors' effects on footpaths, for example, and steps taken to manage such erosion.

99. The GCSE results in 2001 were close to the national average in the proportion of A* - C grades obtained. The percentage of A* - G grades were, similarly just below national figures. However A* and A grades exceeded the national average. Progress from Key Stage 3 to GCSE was good for the majority of students. Their average points score for geography was higher than the national average. Results have varied widely since the last inspection, rising to well above the national standard but then falling back to the average in 2000 and 2001. There were significant variations in the performance of boys and girls, with boys unusually performing better than girls. The senior managers addressed these issues appropriately with a change of head of department. Determined management of the

department, with the introduction of a focused range of strategies to monitor and raise standards, is now having a very good impact within a limited time. Current Year 11 students are on track to exceed the national A*-C standards, with a good proportion of the A* and A results. In addition, a small minority of the pilot able pupil GCSE group is now in Year 10 and is expected to attain A* and A grades a year early. Students have detailed notes on the physical, human and environmental processes, which they have studied in Year 10 and 11, showing good standards. Students with special educational needs are well monitored and supported whilst challenged to achieve their best.

100. The department's emphasis on data handling is helping students present their information in a more detailed and wider range of ways in their GCSE coursework, with a consequent increase in standards. Students begin in Year 7 by analysing population data for Brighton, repeating the kind of techniques they would have met in primary school but with a much more challenging geographical context. By the time they reach Year 10 they can use their numeracy skills well to understand and construct proportional circles to show information about different shopping areas in Brighton.

101. Students of all abilities have a good knowledge of the vocabulary of the subject due to good teaching, and apply it well in their oral and written work. Teaching is good overall. It varies at both key stages from satisfactory to excellent. All teachers have very good relationships with students and show a sense of humour which students warm to. In the best lessons, teachers' work with great pace and challenge, with clear explanations of new geographical ideas and vocabulary. In one outstanding lesson, lower attaining Year 11 students made very good progress in explaining coastal processes using complex technical vocabulary, applying this to local examples of Beachy Head and Brighton Beach, shown in good colour overheads. An outstanding Year 9 lesson, using excellent school intranet resources on Stromboli, enabled students to access and use a wider range of suitable resources for their enquiry than they could have done using traditional resources. This, plus the clear writing structure required for using the maps, photographs and written data, enabled students to reach higher standards faster in geographical enquiry and 'pattern and process' work. Teachers employ many good strategies to include all students and enable them to learn successfully. In some satisfactory lessons with many good features, and in some good lessons, students could do more, faster, if teachers expected this. For example, in a Year 8 lesson teaching the comparison of climate graphs, the task needed a problem solving context and more timed targets to encourage students to get through a fairly straightforward but necessary exercise more quickly. Sometimes teachers do not allow students brief opportunities to clarify ideas together in a lesson rather than always teaching the whole class.

102. The schemes of work for both key stages are having an effective impact on standards as they have built in to them a wide range of stimulating case studies and techniques and show good progression. Mapwork and fieldwork techniques in the fieldwork enquiries reinforce classroom work and are really appreciated by students. Teachers are beginning to get students to reflect usefully on how they learn as they go along. Geographical enquiry techniques are a clear strength except that students are not taught to suggest their own geographical questions for investigation in Key Stage 3. They cannot, therefore, systematically demonstrate their standards and progress in this aspect. Whilst the department has done a significant amount of work on assessing students' work at Key Stage 3, this is not yet adding value to students' progress as they do not know what they need to do to reach the next level of attainment.

103. All issues for attention at the time of the last inspection have been successfully addressed. Subsequent staffing issues have been overcome. Whilst ICT is not yet fully developed for each year the quality of what already exists is outstanding.

HISTORY

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

Strengths

- The well above the national average standards at GCSE.
- The very good teaching at Key Stage 4.
- The shared commitment to improvement of the whole history department.

Areas for improvement

- To make more effective use of ICT in history.

104. At the end of Key Stage 3, the standards achieved are above the national expectation. All students are all making good progress, including those with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language. They have a sound chronological framework of the past by Year 9. Students of all abilities produce good extended writing in response to such questions as 'Why was the Roman army so successful?' They also demonstrate increasingly good factual knowledge and understanding, both orally and in writing, and can give accurate descriptions of features of past societies such as the position of women within society in Imperial China. Students' understanding of interpretations of history is weaker.

105. The students' performance at GCSE over the past three years has consistently been well above the national average. In 2000 and 2001 the proportion gaining A* - C grades and the highest A*/A grades was well above average with an increase in the latter in 2001. These high standards are the result of very good teaching by an experienced team of teachers. There are three areas of particular strength within the overall picture at GCSE. One is the achievement of boys which, unlike nationally, is in line with that of girls at A* - C grades, although boys are still not achieving as well at the highest grades as girls. The second is the quality of students' written communications skills and their ability to make very good use of historical sources. The third is the marked improvement since 1999 in the number of students achieving the very highest grade A*. This last improvement is the result of the history department recognising the issue and taking very effective steps to deal with it, both within lessons and through the additional Easter revision sessions for the most talented history students.

106. Observation of lessons and scrutiny of students' work confirms that the standards in the current Years 10 and 11 are well above national expectations. This represents good progress over the two years of the course for all students, including those with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language. All students can describe historical events such as the Long March and how Mao Zedong was able to turn defeat into victory. Middle and higher attaining students are able to analyse and then explain complex historical trends such as the weaknesses within the work of the League of Nations in the inter-war period. History is a popular option which students enjoy.

107. The quality of teaching and learning in history is good at Key Stage 3 and very good at Key Stage 4. Strong features of the most effective teaching are the good relationships between teachers and students. Many students in almost all classes are willing to answer

teachers' questions and to offer their own ideas. Teacher questioning, both oral and written, is very skilful. In a Year 10 lesson, for example, when a student suggested that one sanction the League of Nations could have taken against Japan over the Manchurian crisis in 1931 was to stop trade, the teacher used the opportunity well to help students work out why that would not have worked i.e. that as Japan's major trading partner, the USA, was not in the League, the sanction would not have worked. Teacher planning is also a strong feature, both of individual lessons and of series of lessons. Year 7 students were able to demonstrate their good understanding of the reasons for the success of the Roman Army in a common assessment task because the previous series of lessons had built their knowledge up step by step and structured the way in which they recorded their evidence. In another lesson, Year 10 students were able to spend time considering the relative importance of the factors that led to the Wall Street Crash because the teacher had already provided all the information that they needed. This focus upon thinking, rather than just learning information, led to good gains not only in their knowledge but also in their historical understanding. The relative weakness in teaching is where teachers' exposition is too long and where they are miss opportunities to explicitly model the text types they want students to employ, such as diaries, letters and handbills.

108. The leadership of history is very good. There have been a number of good improvements since the last inspection, most notably the numbers of students achieving A* grades at GCSE in the last two years. The strong team of specialist historians now have very good accommodation in a suite of rooms. This is helping them to more effectively share good practice. There is currently very little display of students' work to celebrate their achievements and to challenge others to match this. The schemes of work at Key Stage 3 give some effective guidance to all those teaching history. They are currently being updated and this is a good opportunity to specify the expectations for student attainment at each level of ability. The head of history formally monitors the teaching of the subject through lesson observation and work scrutiny and this is helping to promote good quality history teaching. The new system of common assessments at Key Stage 3 is focusing both students and teachers on the key elements of the subject, thus helping to raise standards. Resources are good at Key Stage 3 with a suitably wide selection of textbooks available and are very good at Key Stage 4, where each student has a copy of the core and the in depth study texts. This is having a very positive impact on the standards achieved. Little use is currently being made of information and communication technology.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

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

Strengths

- The vision of leadership and management in information and communication technology to improve standards.
- The quality of teaching, in particular the impact of very clear planning on students' learning in ICT lessons.
- The contribution to students' basic skills in literacy and ICT.

Areas for improvement

- To continue and extend the good start made in the use of ICT across the curriculum.

109. The oldest students at Key Stage 3, for whom the teaching time is much greater than in the past, are working above the national expectation, with a good quality of work in those parts of the GNVQ course that they have completed. They are strongly motivated by the knowledge that they are working towards a nationally recognised qualification. Also,

they enjoy working in the business context of the course. They have made good progress during their time in the school from a level that was below national expectation. Students seen during the inspection working on the construction of a database with links between sales representatives, customers and sales, were able to explain the structure of a database, with more than half of the class understanding the need for links between the files. The most able could explain the structure of the relationships between files. The least able succeeded in constructing the files, with very good support from the teacher and the classroom assistant. There are particular strengths in the high proportion of students who understand, from early in Year 8, the importance of considering the impact of a document on its intended audience.

110. The results obtained by students in the first group to follow the GNVQ course to the end of Year 11 in 2001 were good, with all students in the year group attaining the Part One GNVQ. This was a considerable achievement on the part of the students who had followed the course for only one year. Standards have therefore improved considerably over those of the GCSE groups in the previous two years. This improvement arises out of very good teaching and planning, coupled with the high level of commitment of both teachers and students who gave up time outside the school day for extra study. Year 11 students seen during the inspection have basic skills in ICT that are in line with national expectations, and are able to apply them in a range of business contexts. Their achievement is good, in light of the limited time available for the course and the low amount of ICT teaching that these same students experienced at, and after, the time of the last inspection. Throughout the school there is no great difference between the achievement of boys or girls, although the most able students are boys. They have been given the challenge of designing a web-based study guide for younger students. Students with special educational needs achieve well in information and communication technology. The GNVQ course, written by school staff, has an oral commentary that makes it possible for lower attainers to follow explanations and instructions on screen. In addition, the teachers and classroom assistants or technicians work closely together to give all individuals the support or challenge that they need.

111. Students of all ages seen during the inspection do not make wholly effective use of the power of the computer and software to improve the speed and quality of their work. For example, by using the mouse instead of cursor keys when moving around the screen, by grouping objects to copy them and by using editing facilities beyond deleting and starting again. In all classes there is a need to give greater attention to accuracy of layout and presentation.

112. Students, from Year 8 onward, are working toward the GNVQ information and communication technology qualification based on the course written by school staff to meet the needs of their own students. The course has been very successful so far in raising students' standards of basic ICT. At present it is being followed by students in Years 8 and 9 who are expected to complete at least GNVQ Part one by the end of Year 9. In addition, the course has been offered to students in Years 10 and 11, who value the opportunity to gain a qualification in ICT. Here the learning is less good than in the lower school because the time allocation of one lesson per fortnight is not frequent enough for students to build efficiently on what they learned in the previous lesson. Teachers show very high commitment to students by providing extra lessons out of school hours for those who wish to attempt the Full Award.

113. Students learn well in ICT because of the very good teaching, especially at Key Stage 3 where they have weekly lessons. All teachers plan their lessons very well to ensure that students of all abilities can understand and build on what they are learning.

The teachers have very good knowledge of their subject, with the result that the course they have designed is being used in many other schools. They time lessons well, so that they can reinforce the message of the lesson at the end. Teachers make sure that students understand why they are studying a topic, and what they need to do to achieve. All students therefore learn well, but those with special educational needs and others for whom English is an additional language benefit particularly from this reinforcement. Staff get on well with students, who appreciate the individual attention they receive during practical tasks. Teachers make excellent use of high quality display facilities. For example, a teacher explaining how to design a relational database could show students details using the touch screen. Further, a teacher requiring Year 7 to design a presentation asking a bank for funding, was able to demonstrate what he would like them to achieve both in the words on screen and in the style of presentation. In doing so he was able to convey challenging messages in a non-threatening and interesting way. Teachers expect and receive a high level of concentration and effort. They assess students' work constantly while helping individuals; they also mark written work thoroughly as part of the GNVQ arrangements, with the result that students know they have to try their best. Almost all, from Year 8 to Year 11, are confident that they can achieve at least Part One, and some are ambitious about going farther. The only students who do not work consistently throughout lessons are Year 10 and 11 students if the time gap since their last lesson has confused them.

114. The department's forward planning is very good. They recognise that the rise in standards in the lower school means they will need to provide a further challenge for those who are now taking the course. They have explored several possibilities, while still keeping an open mind about the most useful directions for their students.

115. Students in all years report that they enjoy information and communication technology, both studying it as a separate subject and also when they use it to help their learning in other subjects. Many use the school's very good facilities outside lessons. The department encourages them to do so by providing a very good range of opportunities, through informal access to computer rooms after school, or extra lessons for volunteers after school hours. Recently the department has begun to develop a website that makes it possible for students to retrieve school work and information through the Internet when they are not in school.

116. Some of the National Curriculum for information and communication technology is being taught in design and technology and science. The department gives all students a thorough basic grounding that has raised standards considerably since the time of the last inspection but not enough is done to develop ICT use across the other subjects of the curriculum and to encourage students to be more independent in determining its use. The school is working towards this end by running its own programme of ICT training for teachers, with the result that it now has a staff with good basic skills. Also, teachers are, over time, being provided with laptop computers to encourage them to use ICT in their work. This is a very good improvement in the situation reported at the last inspection. It is the result of strong leadership from the senior management, coupled with the innovating vision of the department. Both now recognise that the school is poised to move on to the next stage by making it possible to raise the quality of use of information and communication technology across all subjects.

117. The school's senior management, aware of the need to develop further the use of ICT to assist students' learning, is promoting the development of the website to be used by students, teachers, all other school staff, parents and the wider community. In addition, they recently appointed an ICT co-ordinator who has made an excellent start by identifying

all the uses of ICT which is being planned in subjects. Some subjects, for example science, business studies, design and technology, geography, modern foreign languages, and mathematics, have a good range of high quality activities that assist learning in both ICT and the subjects. In a few tasks, for example in geography, teachers also are beginning to offer students the chances that they need to choose when and how to use information and communication technology. In other subjects such as English and history the few activities that have been tried are not available to all students because they are not used by all teachers. Having identified these uneven areas, the co-ordinator is now planning eventually to develop the use of information and communication technology as a natural tool for learning. The school is therefore building on its existing good practice in a number of ways, showing that improvement since the last inspection, already very good, is set to develop even further.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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

Strengths

- The achievement of all students in French or German.
- The high grades attained by girls at GCSE.
- The good quality of the teaching.
- The very good accommodation and learning resources.
- The very good management and leadership of the department.

Areas for improvement

- Procedures for assessing the students' achievement at Key Stage 3.
- The provision for students to study a second modern foreign language.

118. More students in Year 11 pass a full GCSE in a modern foreign language than is the case nationally. The number of students attaining A*-C grades in 2001 was close to the national average in French and German. Girls performed significantly better than the national average in both subjects, particularly in gaining the top grades. There was no significant difference between boys' and girls' performance in German, but boys achieved less well than girls in French. French GCSE results have improved since the last inspection. German results have been above average, but showed a slight decline in 2001. Standards observed in lessons and in students' work at Key Stage 4 are in line with what is expected nationally in listening, speaking, reading and writing skills.

119. Teacher assessment grades at the end of Key Stage 3 showed the number of students attaining the nationally expected standards to be above average in 2001. Standards seen in lessons were closer to the national expectation in listening, speaking, reading and writing with little difference in the attainment of boys and girls.

120. Most students, including with English as an additional language and special needs, achieve well in relation to their prior attainment at both key stages. The department chooses to teach students in sets from Year 8. This enables the teachers to meet the needs of individual students so that most learn well. When students are taught in mixed ability classes in Year 11, the highest attaining students learn less than they should.

121. The students' listening and speaking skills are well developed at both key stages because teachers speak mainly in French or German during lessons. The students readily accept this and try hard to improve their own standards of pronunciation and intonation.

The teachers have high expectations of the students' speaking and skilfully encourage them to extend their spoken responses beyond the minimum required. At both key stages students are able to give and justify opinions and to talk about past and future events. They contribute well to whole class oral work and enjoy opportunities to speak to each other, such as when asked to complete a survey. However, they rarely take the initiative to speak in French or German, such as when asking the teachers for help.

122. Most students develop good reading and writing skills. Teachers provide a good range of reading opportunities including challenging tasks on the Internet. Good examples of accurate and well-presented writing, including word-processed work, is in evidence at both key stages. A small number of students, boys mainly, produce untidy, inaccurate written work. Teachers provide good opportunities for students to write creatively and with greater detail, however they are not encouraged systematically to improve their work through redrafting.

123. The quality of teaching is good at both key stages. The teachers are competent and enthusiastic linguists. Lessons are well planned, well managed and conducted at a lively pace so that many students show real interest in their learning. Most teachers use a skilful mixture of French or German and English. This enables the students to develop good listening and speaking skills for communication, but also to improve their knowledge and understanding of grammar. Teachers make very good use of the available teaching resources. In several lessons, very good use was made of the overhead projector to help students to understand new language and to develop more extended spoken responses. In two lessons students improved their listening skills by watching extracts recorded from French television. All students now have regular access to computers and in three lessons observed, they improved their reading skills as well as their knowledge of French culture, by accessing websites on the weather and about a famous French actress.

124. Students' work is marked regularly at both key stages. At Key Stage 4, teachers provide useful guidance to students on how to prepare for the GCSE exam. However, in exercise books at Key Stage 3, teachers' comments are usually brief and rarely show students what they need to do to improve their work. This weakness was identified in the last inspection. The department has good plans to improve its assessment procedures at Key Stage 3.

125. The students' attitudes to learning languages are good. They behave well and work with interest, and often enthusiasm in lessons at both key stages. The teachers make very good use of rewards and incentives to improve the students' motivation and learning. In a small number of cases the poor concentration of a minority of students, mainly boys, disrupts lessons.

126. The modern foreign languages department is very well led and managed. The teachers form a coherent team with a democratic ethos and a common purpose to improve teaching and learning in the subject. The quality of planning is very good and the effectiveness of the department's monitoring and evaluation procedures is evident in the way teachers share good practice and use it in the classroom. There are good plans to extend this further by enabling all teachers to observe each other teaching. Recent work as part of the Beacon Schools initiative has been effective in sharing good practice in modern languages teaching with another local secondary school.

127. There have been many improvements since the last inspection:

- More students reach expected standards at the end of Key Stage 3;
- Reading, writing and speaking skills are now in line with national expectations;

- Lesson planning is now good and well linked to the National Curriculum programme of study;
- Good classroom practice is now better shared between teachers;
- The curriculum model at Key Stage 3 now provides appropriate time for a modern foreign language.

128. Whilst the provision for all students at the school to learn a modern foreign language (French or German) is now good, the provision for them to begin and sustain the study of a second foreign language at Key Stage 3 is poor.

MUSIC

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

Strengths

- The quality of the teaching in lessons and rehearsals.
- Students' attitudes to the subject, observed in lessons and reflected in the rapid increase in numbers opting for GCSE in music.
- The breadth of the curriculum, including the range of world music and the expansion of the use of information and communication technology.
- The range and quality of extra-curricular opportunities and the number of students involved in these and in instrumental lessons.
- The clear vision for the improvement of the department and capacity of staff to achieve it.

Areas for Improvement

- Continue to improve the teaching of appraising and the attainment of boys at Key Stage 3.
- Review the scheme of work to ensure that higher level skills are taught and that the more musically able students are fully challenged to achieve them.
- Develop clearer assessment and monitoring procedures in order to track the progress of students to raise standards overall at KS3.

129. At Key Stage 3, the proportion of Year 9 students reaching the expected level or above in 2001 was close to the national average. However, relatively few students attained the higher levels (6 and above), indicating that the more musically able students, including those who learn to play musical instruments, were not sufficiently challenged. Although there is no hard data, it appears likely that this year group were a little below the expected level in music on entry to the school and their achievement overall during Key Stage 3 has therefore been satisfactory. The classes observed during the inspection are working in line with expectations although some current Year 9 students were observed using their own instruments to develop compositions at higher than average levels. Students with English as an additional language (EAL) and those with special needs make satisfactory progress.

130. There is a rapid and persistent trend towards more students of a wider range of musical abilities opting to study music at Key Stage 4. GCSE results in 2001 were in line with the national average and also showed most students, including those with EAL and special needs, achieving better than academic indicators predicted. Their achievement during the key stage was good, therefore. The work of current Year 11 students suggests that, with a yet larger cohort this year, standards will be at least maintained at national levels.

131. At Key Stage 3, students perform on keyboards and percussion with confidence and attention to detail, some using their own instruments to enhance their work. They play well together in groups and class ensembles. They are able to compose with clear understanding of structures and techniques, for example, when developing melodies in ternary form and when developing variations on a theme. They use musical terminology purposefully and usually accurately. They continue to have too little opportunity, however, to describe or to respond to music in sufficient depth. At both key stages, but at Key Stage 4 in particular, some students are not provided with clear information about how they can improve their work.

132. One in five students receive instrumental lessons [more than double the national average] and the high quality of playing in the extra-curricular activities, including the school orchestra, reflects the commitment of both students and teachers. Some groups, such as the enthusiastic Samba band, perform locally and in national events and, like the regular musical productions, they contribute richly to the life of the school.

133. Since the last inspection, the recently appointed head of the department has managed a major investment in the quantity and quality of music technology available, which is already enriching the work of students at both key stages including, at GCSE level, students creating and refining effective compositions with computer programs. In 1997, there was some evidence that boys were achieving less well than girls. Since then, the number of boys opting for GCSE and the number attending an appropriately improved range of extra-curricular opportunities has increased; nevertheless, two thirds of the students who do not reach the expected level at Key Stage 3 are boys.

134. The teaching observed in lessons at both key stages was very good and a number had outstanding features. The teachers are very good at motivating students through their own commitment and enthusiasm for the subject and by the positive encouragement and respect they show for the students and their work. They make very good use of limited time and manage their classes very well so that behaviour is seldom less than excellent. Teachers plan sequences of activities that keep the interest of the students and result in musically effective outcomes. The teachers' own musical competence enables them to give very clear instructions so that the students know exactly what they are required to do and this enables them to make good progress when they are working independently or in small groups. However, not all students are challenged as much as they should be. The otherwise well-structured scheme of work needs reviewing to ensure that the specific demands of Levels 5, 6 and 7 are identified and specifically taught so that students can achieve them. Also, a suitable homework policy needs to be devised to complement and enhance class work.

135. The department is well led and built upon strong principles. The teachers share an infectious commitment to the musical education and personal development of their students. This dynamism now needs to be matched by more rigorous attention to some aspects of its work, such as assessment, the tracking of students' progress and precise target setting, which are not yet fully in place.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- Good teaching, leading to good learning by many students.

- A good range of extra-curricular sport, with an enthusiastic take-up by students.
- Good leadership in addressing the issues raised in the previous inspection.

Areas for improvement

- Improving the behaviour and motivation of a small minority of students, mostly boys.
- Raising attainment at GCSE.
- Improving the quality of indoor accommodation.

136. The teacher assessments of students at the end of Year 9 in 2000, judged that overall standards were close to national expectations at Level 5 and above, although boys achieved better than girls at the higher levels. The 2001 assessments judged attainment above expectations, with boys again achieving better than girls. The evidence of the inspection is that standards of both boys and girls by the end of Year 9 in performance, knowledge and understanding in games, swimming and gymnastics are in line with the expectations of similarly aged students nationally. Since many students join the school at the age of eleven with standards slightly below expectations, this represents good achievement for those of all levels of ability, including higher attainers and students with special educational needs.

137. The proportion of students gaining an A*-C grade in the 2000 GCSE examination was close to the national average, with boys achieving better than girls. Whilst the overall standard in the 2001 examination was similar to 2000, girls achieved better than boys. There was no consistent overall trend in GCSE attainment in the three years prior to 2000, other than the fact that standards of girls rose significantly during this period. The evidence of the inspection is that overall standards (i.e. for both GCSE and 'core' physical education) of students by the end of Year 11 in performance, knowledge and understanding, are in line with the national average. Overall, this represents satisfactory achievement for students of all levels of ability, including those with special educational needs and minority ethnic pupils. A significant proportion of girls achieve well.

138. By the end of Year 9, students make variable progress in gymnastics, particularly in developing the ability to design and execute controlled sequences of movement on small apparatus, whilst demonstrating appropriate poise and balance. Higher attainers make the most progress in gymnastics. Girls learning rugby make very good progress in improving their passing skills. Younger students, especially lower-attainers, rapidly develop confidence and proficiency in basic swimming strokes, whilst in Year 9, students develop effective water rescue techniques.

139. By the end of Year 11, students make satisfactory progress overall in developing their skills in various activities. They make unsatisfactory progress in developing their basic racket skills and tactical awareness in badminton, due, not to deficiencies in teaching, but to poor facilities which severely restrict opportunities for sustained practice. Boys make satisfactory progress in developing basic football skills, although the progress of a minority is restricted by poor motivation and application. In netball, girls make good progress in reinforcing their passing and tactical skills in a game situation. Boys, on the GCSE course, make good progress in developing their ability to carry out a good lay-up shot in basketball. In GCSE theory lessons, students make good progress in furthering their understanding of the relationship between health and exercise, and also the social and moral aspects of sport: for example the links between the media and sport, issues involving drugs and hooliganism, and the differences between amateurism and professionalism. Students also make good progress in developing individual training plans. Poor literacy skills restrict the progress of some lower-attainers in communicating their understanding effectively,

although teachers assist these students by providing devices such as writing frames to guide them.

140. The overall quality of teaching is good, resulting in good learning. At Key Stage 3, the teaching is never less than satisfactory and is good or better in five out of six lessons. At Key Stage 4, the teaching is never less than satisfactory, and is good in three out of five lessons. The good, very good or excellent teaching has several qualities. Teachers use a range of carefully thought-out strategies, which provide appropriate challenge to students of all levels of ability. For example, in a GCSE lesson on hooliganism in sport, the activity of preparing and making a presentation was suitably challenging for the high attainers to make good progress, whilst less confident students were given additional support with their writing so that all could contribute effectively. Similarly, in a Year 11 netball tournament, girls following the GCSE option were made to assist with officiating and coaching, thereby extending their confidence and understanding. Another strong feature of the teaching is the good feedback which teachers give to students throughout the lessons. Teachers frequently remind students of the overall objectives and indicate how they can improve their standard, whilst their understanding is reinforced through good questioning. Students are also expected to evaluate how well they have improved their level of performance, either individually or in pairs. For example, the teacher gave good feedback in a Year 7 gymnastics lesson, enabling students to refine their travelling routines on small apparatus by improving their poise and balance. Teachers frequently encourage students to develop their sense of responsibility and initiative: for example, getting a pupil to explain and lead a warm-up routine in a Year 11 basketball lesson, and encouraging students to critically evaluate each other's work in gymnastics. Particularly effective was a Year 8 swimming lesson in which lower attainers were given responsibility for coaching and evaluating each other. The teacher's high expectations were rewarded by a high level of motivation and good improvement in students' basic backstroke technique. Because classes are usually well managed, and students are generally well motivated and respond well to the demands of progressively challenging exercises, in the best lessons they make good or very good progress in developing games and swimming skills.

141. In the small minority of lessons in which teaching is less effective, teachers have difficulty in managing a few less motivated students, mostly boys, who do not focus well on activities and therefore make less progress in developing skills, for example in Year 10 football. Occasionally teachers miss opportunities to involve students more in evaluation or do not consolidate understanding of rules, for example what constitutes a foul in ball games.

142. Leadership and management in physical education are good. New staff have been inducted well into the department, and there has been effective monitoring of teaching, with a good impact on learning. Most issues arising from the previous inspection have been addressed. The department is beginning to implement whole school initiatives, for example using technology such as camcorders to extend the potential of teaching and learning. The department is also focusing on improving standards of literacy on the GCSE course. Extra-curricular provision is a strength of the department: teachers are committed to running a range of clubs and teams. There is an enthusiastic and growing take-up of these opportunities, and both individuals and teams do well in the Brighton area and further afield. Although the swimming pool is a good resource, indoor accommodation is poor overall. The current gymnasium is adequate for some activities, but the hall, which has to be used for some lessons, is too small and is not always available for table use. The quality and range of some activities are severely restricted as a result.

143. Overall standards are generally in line with expectations as at the time of the previous inspection, although standards for students at the end of Year 9 are not as variable. Facilities are still inadequate. As before there are a minority of students with poor attitudes. There is still a strong extra-curricular programme. Significantly, the overall quality of teaching has improved, along with assessment and the effective monitoring of teaching. Therefore overall there has been good progress in physical education since the previous OFSTED inspection.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Overall, the quality of provision in religious education is **good**.

Strengths

- The good teaching which results in standards above the national expectation at Key Stage 3.
- Provision for pupils with special educational needs.
- Very good spiritual, moral and social development.
- High quality accommodation and resources.

Areas for improvement

- The insufficient time for the subject at Key Stage 4 which has a negative impact on students' achievement.

144. At Key Stage 3 standards are above the expectations of the Agreed Syllabus and achievement is good. Students are able to clearly highlight important beliefs and practices in Christianity and other principal religions studied. Through skilful, lively teaching, they are able to clearly link their own beliefs and ideas to those found in religion. In a Year 7 lesson, the very good use of questions by the teacher, combined with a stimulating learning environment, enabled the students to consider sensitively their own feelings on light as a symbol. The students show very good oral skills in class discussion and can share ideas with skill and maturity. Through very effective teaching and purposeful, positive relationships students with special educational needs make very good progress. They are particularly helped by the very good resources provided by the department. Gifted and talented students make satisfactory progress. On occasions they are not sufficiently challenged to extend and develop their ideas and thinking. Those with English as an additional language achieve well.

145. At Key Stage 4, the lack of time available in Year 11 leads to standards just reaching the average for the subject with achievement, overall, being unsatisfactory. The department has done remarkably well to achieve standards in line with national expectations given the time allocation is well short of that normally available for a GCSE short course in religious education. Good teaching and learning, and a very helpful revision booklet, ensures that everything possible is being done, within the current time constraints, to raise standards. Students can highlight important issues covered in the course, such as medical ethics, relationships and prejudice and discrimination. They also show good skills in sharing their own views and ideas and listening with respect to the views of others. However, because of insufficient time, there are significant gaps in students' learning. This is particularly true in students' knowledge and understanding of applying important religious beliefs and teachings to the moral and social issues covered in the course. There is insufficient depth in written responses and the limited time means that the learning in Year 11 becomes too disjointed, with little opportunity to really develop students' understanding and evaluative skills. Students with special educational needs make good progress again because of supportive teaching and helpful resources. Gifted and talented students with the aid of the revision booklet, make satisfactory progress, but, through lack of time, don't have the opportunity to develop their ideas and thinking. This is also the case for pupils' with English as an additional language. At both key stages, the students' attitudes to learning are good. They show interest and enthusiasm, good levels of concentration and are eager to answer questions. In a challenging Year 10 lesson, the students discussed with maturity and respect, arguments for and against euthanasia. In a creative Year 8 lesson, the students showed high levels of interest in creating their own special naming ceremonies and worked effectively in groups

146. The quality of teaching in religious education is consistently good with many very good features at both Key Stage 3 and 4. This represents significant improvement since the previous inspection. Religious education lessons show confident subject knowledge, positive and purposeful relationships; clear aims, which are shared, and very good summaries of the gains in learning students have made. A major strength of the teaching is creative ideas and activities that fully engage students. In Year 9 lesson on Buddhism, the effective use of resources (video, visual displays) and a quiet reflective activity, really helped students develop their understanding of Buddhist worship. In a Year 11 lesson, the careful structure of the lesson, complemented by good resources, enabled students to clearly identify forms and causes of suffering. In virtually all religious education lessons, there is an effective commitment to improving learning as well as promoting students' spiritual moral and social awareness. Teaching is also very effective in developing students' literacy, particularly speaking and listening. Occasionally, there are missed opportunities to really develop the understanding of more able students and the subject is only just beginning to clearly identify talented students in religious education.

147. Religious education is a lively stimulating subject that benefits from very good leadership. Assessment is good; marking is helpful and supportive and provides clear guidance as to how students can improve their work. Throughout the religious education syllabus, there are many opportunities for students to develop their spiritual, moral and cultural awareness although links with local religious communities are not yet fully developed. The department is very aware of its own strengths and areas for development through good use of monitoring and evaluation of students' learning.

148. Accommodation is very good. Religious education has a clear identity in the school that is enhanced by excellent visual display and the recently introduced "Captain Culture" ICT based activity that creates considerable interest from students.

149. Since the last inspection there has been good improvement overall and very good improvement in a number of aspects. There has been a clear rise in standards and achievement at Key Stage 3 and in the quality of teaching at both key stages. Marking is now regular and detailed. Support for children with special educational needs has improved enormously and is now a strength of the subject. Themes of work are impressively detailed and the department now benefits from very good subject leadership. The key area, which has not improved, is standard and achievement at Key Stage 4 because of insufficient time allocation in Year 11.

150. A young, talented, and enthusiastic team, have made a really positive impact on students' learning in religious education. If, the school can effectively address the time allocation in Year 11, standards of achievement at Key Stage 4 are set to rise considerably, and have the potential to be among the very best results achieved by the school.

OTHER SUBJECTS AT KEY STAGE 4 , INCLUDING VOCATIONAL COURSES

BUSINESS STUDIES

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

Strengths

- The very good achievement of the vast majority of students.
- Teaching and assessment approaches.
- Effective use of ICT provision.
- Enthusiasm for the subject generated in the students.

Areas for improvement

- Strategies to address the current difference in attainment between boys and girls.
- Refinement of the guidance given on assessment targets.
- Staff development through links with local businesses.

151. Business studies is taught as an option at Key Stage 4. More than a hundred students take the subject in each of Years 10 and 11. This is over double the number of students entered for the examination in 2001.

152. The proportion of students achieving GCSE results at A-C grades over the past four years has been above the national average and was significantly so in 2000. In that year, both girls and boys attained a high percentage of the top grades with girls outperforming boys. In 2001, the grades were closer to the national average but the boys' attainment remained at broadly the same high figure. The A-C pass rate for girls was well below the national average figure and very much lower than their performance in 2000. Nonetheless, both boys and girls made good progress relative to their prior attainment and their achievement in business studies was higher than in most other subjects they studied.

153. There is a wide range of student abilities in the current Year 11 with a significant minority in the lower ability range. Standards are slightly above average. At the current rate of progress well over half the students are on target to achieve A-C grades. Broadly half of those passes are on target to be at B grade or above. The boys' performance is generally higher than that of the girls. Most of the students have a good grasp of forms of business organisation and terminology and can apply conventional business analysis to real life topics such as industrial location and current issues in air travel. Many students use computers effectively both in presentation and analysis of their coursework topics. They use resources on the school Intranet system to good effect. The most able students plan their work well; show initiative in employing the latest business information available and make good use of terminology to describe and analyse problems. Their coursework is generally impressive both in content and style of presentation. The least able students can usually understand terminology but their work tends to be more descriptive than analytical and to lack grammatical precision. The achievement of students over the past year has been very good.

154. The teaching is generally very good. In nearly all the lessons seen, the students made good progress and in some their achievement was very good or excellent. The students respond with interest, commitment and enthusiasm to teaching which is positive and encouraging in tone. The teachers plan their lessons well and have good subject knowledge. They take care with how they explain topics and plan their learning resources to cater for the whole ability range so that nearly all students experience a sense of achievement at the end of a lesson. They combine high expectations of student behaviour

and application to work with humour and a readiness to support individuals who are experiencing difficulties. Thus, many of the students respond well to new challenges. Evidence of this was seen in a Year 10 class where a majority of lower ability students showed a good grasp of business growth in response to a lively teacher presentation. Virtually all Year 11 students were motivated to carry out sustained research into the current problems of British Airways on the Intranet system and the Internet. Lessons are structured to ensure that the students draw on their previous learning and use specific business terminology as appropriate. However, occasionally the teachers need to moderate the pace of their lessons and to ensure that all the students are fully involved in question and answer sessions. Student work is marked accurately in line with subject criteria and teachers draw both on these criteria and other information about student progress to make their assessments. Those assessments give detailed guidance on targets that the students should set to raise attainment. On occasions, however, the teachers need to be more specific in terms of the advice they give.

155. Business studies has very good leadership and it is significant that good progress has been maintained despite the recent absence of the head of department on maternity leave. The department has addressed very effectively all the issues highlighted by the last Ofsted report. The teaching team has worked hard and with considerable effect to raise standards of attainment in the subject and to use available data to modify and improve its provision. It has also introduced an effective approach to assessment and now makes full use of excellent ICT facilities. There are some good curriculum links with the business world. The level of GCSE examination grades have risen significantly as a result. The department now needs to consider in more detail how to approach the current imbalance between boy and girl achievement.

DRAMA

The quality of provision for drama and expressive arts is good.

Strengths

- Above average GCSE results and very good achievement.
- Very good teaching.
- Coherently planned schemes of work.

Areas for improvement

- The accommodation.

156. Drama is an increasingly popular subject in the school, taught separately from English at both Key Stages 3 and 4. Standards of attainment are good and in the most recent GCSE examinations students achieved results, which were well above those found nationally. In the small sample of lessons seen, both in Years 10 and 11 and in Year 8, the quality of teaching is consistently very good and standards are high. Teachers are experienced and have a secure knowledge of their subject. Students respond well, often within very strict timescales and achieve well when working in a variety of mixed groupings. They are very good at devising and presenting their work to audiences through imaginative uses of voice and movement, learning to use techniques such as hot seating and thought tracking. Students go on to develop increased independence in their GCSE course, often taking a great deal of responsibility for their own work. There is a good sense of continuity and progression in their learning and skills development, in which crucial elements are regular reflection and evaluation of their own and each other's work. This is a result of the well planned schemes of work.

157. Drama makes a very significant contribution to the life of the whole school, both in developing students' personal, social and cultural learning and also in providing a good range of opportunities for involvement in extra-curricular theatre activities and performances.

158. The department is well managed. There are coherently planned schemes of work for Key Stage 3 and GCSE and associated assessment procedures are well established at both key stages. The department is clear, however, that the scheme of work for Key Stage 4 will need to be re-written to meet the requirements of the new GCSE specifications. The small drama studio and one other non-specialist room provide barely adequate accommodation for the increased demands of the subject. The studio is, however, well equipped with lighting and audiovisual resources, which are used most effectively during lessons.

EXPRESSIVE ARTS

159. This GCSE course is a new optional subject at Key Stage 4 and is proving highly popular as an additional arts component in the curriculum. It is taught entirely by the head of drama and focuses largely on drama and verbal arts, with some elements of music. Other aspects of the course, such as mask making and dance are touched on but developments are limited by accommodation and resources.

160. Standards in the first Year 11 groups are broadly satisfactory. Whilst there are some clear indications of higher grades, many of the students are lacking in creative flair and imagination. Some are also hampered by poorly developed oral communication skills. Irregular attendance is also a factor, which, in this kind of course, inevitably has a negative impact on standards. In Year 10, however, the standards are already much better. Students are developing research skills and learning to use a variety of media in their practical responses to set topics. Many, for example, produced very good quality work in the 'Didgeridoo Project', where they had to conduct research using primary and secondary sources and present their findings to a peer group audience. It is noteworthy that there is good achievement in this course for students who have special educational needs.

161. The quality of teaching is consistently very good, characterised by excellent subject knowledge, clear objectives, positive, good humoured relationships and brisk pace. Students respond very well to the teacher's high expectations and to the in-built opportunities for reflection and evaluation, enabling them to maintain the necessary working notebook. Very good use is made of video recording facilities to capture work in progress and to help students refine and polish their presentations. Most students devote large amounts of time to their projects outside lessons, making good use of facilities during lunch times and after school.

162. The expressive arts and drama courses provide a good variety of links with the wider community, especially through the Brighton Carnival. Year 10 students have taken part in bilingual drama workshops in Rouen, with a similar event planned for next term. The head of department uses her considerable links with the wider arts community to ensure that as many students as possible benefit from working with professional artists and experiencing live theatre.

MEDIA STUDIES

163. GCSE media studies is a new subject in the Key Stage 4 options. It has already proved to be a popular choice, with thirty-six Year 11 students preparing for the first examination in 2002 and a further forty-eight Year 10 students close on their heels.

164. Standards in the Year 11 coursework are good, with at least half of the students expected to achieve A-C grades. Based on the limited sample of coursework available, the standards in Year 10 are also good. Students are producing some good quality assignments, for example, using three photographs of themselves to explore aspects of representation or exploring and analysing the impact of advertising or the tabloid press.

165. The quality of teaching is very good. Lessons are well planned and a wide variety of printed resources are used effectively. Relationships with the students are positive and good-humoured. Coursework is marked thoroughly, but sensitively, and there are some good displays in the classroom, exemplifying students' achievements. The course is taught in English classrooms and is running on minimal technical resources, although an editing suite has recently been purchased.

166. It is clear that this course offers students considerable challenges and opportunities for independent study. They enjoy its relevance to their own lives and thrive on being able practically to develop their own ideas. At the same time, there is a demanding theoretical dimension, which enables students to reflect on the social, cultural and moral impact of the media on their lives.

National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs)

167. This is the third year of the NVQ link programme with the local college of further education. It is an integral part of the school's work-related provision as an element of the Inclusion programme. The diversity of that provision is considerable and some, but not all, of the students also take part in extended work experience, have access to ongoing careers guidance and advice or to a mentor from outside the school. The students therefore take part in the elements of the programme best suited to their individual needs and interests.

168. The first two years of the programme have constituted part of a local school consortium working in partnership with City College, Brighton. Small numbers of students have opted for courses ranging from motor vehicle maintenance to beauty care and from construction to information and communication technology. Because student progress on these external courses has been disappointing, the school has looked to a further provider, Plumpton College, and the first NVQ link programme began there in September 2001. The programme gives the students the chance to 'taste' different elements of NVQs in Agriculture and Forestry before making a firm choice and moving towards accreditation at the end of Year 11. The school element of the programme includes a structured course induction session and regular student progress reviews.

169. Thirteen students were accepted for the Plumpton programme; over double the figure on NVQ link programmes in each of the previous years. Many more students applied to join the programme but selection was made on the basis of individual student need and assessment of their probable commitment to the course.

170. A well-structured lesson was seen at Plumpton College. It formed part of the Forestry element of the programme. It was effectively planned with a range and variety of related activities. The students were quickly able to recognise the health and safety aspects of working with farm machinery and virtually all of them successfully used a tractor

to load logs on to a trailer. They talked with enthusiasm about what they had learned over the course and their future commitment to it. They welcomed the opportunity to learn practical things in a different environment and they felt that they were being “treated as adults” at the college. The progress they made in the lesson was good and their attitudes and behaviour very positive. Although at an early stage of the programme the lecturer predicts that most of the students will complete the programme satisfactorily to ~~10~~ One level.

171. Currently nearly all the students are making progress beyond initial expectations and they value what they are learning. As one student was heard to remark to another: “this course has done wonders for my self-esteem”.

Psychology: A newly introduced and popular option at Key Stage 4, was not included in the inspection.