

INSPECTION REPORT

WRITHLINGTON SCHOOL

Radstock, Bath

LEA area: Bath and North East Somerset

Unique reference number: 109303

Headteacher: Ms M Getheridge

Reporting inspector: Philip J H O'Neill
3162

Dates of inspection: 11th – 14th March 2002

Inspection number: 206881

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 - 18

Gender of students: Mixed

School address: Radstock
Bath
Bath and North East Somerset

Postcode: BA3 3NQ

Telephone number: 01761 433 581

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Appropriate authority: Governing body

Name of chair of governors: Mr K Norton

Date of previous inspection: May 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
3162	Mr P J H O'Neill	Registered inspector		<p>What sort of school is it?</p> <p>The school's results and students' achievements</p> <p>How well are students taught?</p> <p>How well is the school led and managed?</p> <p>What should the school do to improve further?</p>
9770	Mr J Baker	Lay inspector		<p>Students' attitudes, values and personal development</p> <p>How well does the school care for its students?</p> <p>How well does the school work in partnership with parents?</p>
3503	Mr A Allfree	Team inspector	<p>Art and design</p> <p>Design and technology</p>	
12331	Mrs V Grigg	Team inspector	<p>Science</p> <p>Special educational needs</p>	
10060	Mr D Gutmann	Team inspector	<p>Business studies in the sixth form</p>	
30699	Mr A Kemp	Team inspector	<p>Mathematics</p>	
3827	Mr J Knight	Team inspector	<p>Geography</p>	
22423	Mr J Lovgreen	Team inspector	<p>English</p>	
31821	Mr B McCann	Team inspector	<p>Physical education</p>	

1994	Ms H Olds	Team inspector	History Equal opportunities	How good are curricular and other opportunities?
16950	Ms C Orr	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages English as an additional language	
12276	Mr T Payne	Team inspector	Music	
10807	Mr P Quest	Team inspector	Religious education	
8672	Mr M Roberts	Team inspector	Information and communication technology	

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Writhlington School is a mixed comprehensive school for students aged 11-18. It serves a mainly rural population, with 95 per cent of students travelling to school by bus. There are 861 students on roll, of whom 86 are in the sixth form. The school is smaller than other secondary schools; the sixth form is also smaller than other sixth forms. In 2001, for the first time, the school was the school of first choice for all students. The number of students entitled to a free school meal, at 13 per cent, is around the national average. Less than one per cent of students are not from a white, UK heritage background. The proportion of students coming from homes where English is an additional language, at less than one per cent, is low. The percentage of students judged to have special educational needs, at 20 per cent, is average; the percentage of these students for whom a statement of special educational needs exists, at five per cent, is above average. About 37 per cent of students enrolled for courses in higher or further education in 2001 after completing sixth form courses at the school. Until 2001, students entered the school with levels of attainment that were below average, particularly in writing; standards of attainment on entry are now beginning to rise.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is an effective school and has just received the DFES school achievement award for 2000/2001. Outstanding leadership is relentlessly focused on raising standards and is very successful in doing so. Students experience a high proportion of good and very good teaching and, as a result, achieve well. The school provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- Standards across the school in most subjects are improving rapidly.
- The students experience a high proportion of good and very good teaching and, as a consequence, they achieve well.
- The monitoring of students' progress is outstanding.
- Relationships with provider primary schools and local schools and colleges are excellent.
- The leadership of the school is outstanding and the school is very well managed and the quality of financial management is excellent. It is well focused on educational priorities.
- The considerable skills of the governors are used to very good effect in taking the school forward in its development.
- Extra-curricular provision, particularly that for music, is outstanding. The students' involvement in Young Enterprise through the cultivation and sale of orchids makes a considerable contribution to their personal development, particularly in science and to their understanding of the world of enterprise.

What could be improved

- The standards of attainment are not high enough in mathematics in Year 11 and in the sixth form, in design and technology across the school and in religious education in Years 10 and 11 for students not taking the GCSE course in religious studies.
- The school does not meet the statutory requirements for the provision of religious education in Years 10 and 11, for a daily act of collective worship for all students or for the provision of singing in the music curriculum in Years 7, 8 and 9.
- The absence of a numeracy strategy weakens students' ability in applying number in subjects across the curriculum.
- The library is not always used effectively by teachers as a resource for learning.
- Accommodation is unsatisfactory in that there is a serious shortage of lavatories and there are

significant deficiencies in changing facilities for physical education.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The previous inspection took place in 1997. The governors and staff responded decisively and effectively to its findings. Overall standards in the GCSE examinations and at A Level have improved considerably. The provision of homework and its use, at that time a weakness, is now good. Monitoring of teaching and learning has improved considerably. The school has done much to try to raise boys' attainment, but with limited success. The leadership of art is now very good and the art curriculum has been improved. Improvements to the accommodation for physical education await the imminent completion of a new sports hall. The provision for information and communication technology has improved significantly since the previous inspection. All the health and safety issues raised at that time have been addressed appropriately, other than those relating to the provision of lavatories. The management of the school is now more effective and, as a result of an intensive programme of training, work on target-setting and tracking is now a major strength. Links with a local independent school have strengthened the sixth form. Work with the local primary schools is excellent. Overall, the school has developed in leaps and bounds over the last five years. It has the vision, imagination and the will to continue its drive towards excellence.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1999	2000	2001	2001
GCSE examinations	E	D	D	D
A-levels/AS-levels	E	B	B	

Key	
well above average	A
above average	B
average	C
below average	D
well below average	E

In the 2001 national tests, in comparison with all schools nationally, attainment in English was below average, below average in mathematics and average in science. In relation to similar schools the attainment of students in English was below average, below average in mathematics and above average in science. Boys did better than girls in English, which is against the national trend. In mathematics and science, boys did significantly better than girls against the national picture, where girls did slightly better than boys. Mathematics results were rising until 2001, when standards fell slightly. Attainment in science is on a rising trend, in line with the national trend. Overall attainment has been on a rising trend, faster than the national trend.

In the 2001 GCSE examinations, overall attainment, based on the average points scored by each student, was below average for boys and girls in relation to all schools and for similar schools. However, over the last six years, as a result of excellent leadership and good teaching, standards have risen dramatically. Girls were ahead of the boys, but to a lesser extent than nationally. In relation to the proportion of students gaining grades A*-C, the school's results have improved dramatically: results were average for all schools nationally and above average for similar schools. In relation to the proportion of students achieving A*-C grades, standards were well above average in art and design, English literature and German; above average in combined science and French; close to the average in English language, below average in drama and mathematics, and well below average in design and technology, geography and physical education. The school sets and meets challenging targets for attainment.

In the 2001 A level examinations, for students taking two or more A levels or AS equivalent, attainment was average in relation to all students nationally for boys and above average for girls. The results overall

were above average. The highest-attaining subjects were business studies and science. The lowest-attaining subjects were mathematics and media studies.

The standards revealed in the tests and examinations are broadly reflected in the students' current work. It is clear from the steady improvement in standards that the students achieve well in relation to their prior levels of attainment.

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	The attitudes of the majority of students are very good, although there is a small minority who are reluctant learners. Most students value what the school offers them and respond well.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	The great majority of students behave well in lessons and around the school.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships between students and among students and staff are good and this strengthens and supports learning.
Attendance	Attendance is satisfactory. Students are generally punctual and lessons begin on time.

The students are alive with interest in their work. They are eager to learn and to refine and improve their work.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

The quality of teaching is good across the school, with much that is very good and excellent. English, mathematics and science are well taught. Teaching is very good in religious education and good in other subjects, apart from design and technology where it is unsatisfactory. Literacy is satisfactorily taught across the school. There are, however, some missed opportunities to extend students' skills in speaking and writing. The school does not yet have a numeracy policy in place, with the consequence that standards of numeracy across the curriculum are weak. The teachers' key strengths lie in the quality of planning, their friendly but firm relationships with the students and the clarity with which they explain what is to be learned. The school works assiduously and successfully to ensure that the needs of all the students are met. Students are good learners and are particularly good at persevering with their work even when they experience difficulties.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The school provides a well-balanced range of learning opportunities that carefully meets the needs of students. It does not meet the requirements for the provision of religious education in Years 10 and 11, for the provision of singing in the music curriculum in Years 7, 8 and 9 or

	for a daily act of collective worship for all students. Extra-curricular opportunities are very strong, particularly in music and science.
Provision for students with special educational needs	The students who are withdrawn for special help or receive additional help in lessons are very well supported and make very good progress.
Provision for students with English as an additional language	The few students with English as an additional language are supported well in the development of fluency and make appropriate progress.
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	This provision is good overall. There is particular strength in the opportunities for social, moral and cultural development and in preparing students to take their role in society. Provision for spiritual development is satisfactory.
How well the school cares for its students	The great strength of the school lies in the precision and consistency with which students' progress is monitored.

A strength of the school is the way it looks beyond itself: it has very good links with parents and works very well with them in supporting the students' learning. There is a high level of successful collaboration with all other schools in the area. Particularly good is the quality of the collaboration with a nearby boys' independent school.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher, supported by her senior colleagues, provides excellent leadership to the work of the school, which is relentlessly focused on raising standards.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governors are very well led in the exercise of their distinctive responsibilities. Overall, they have ensured that most statutory requirements are met apart from those relating to the provision of religious education and a daily act of collective worship for all students and reporting appropriately on students with special educational needs in the annual report to parents.
The school's evaluation of its performance	A great strength of the school is the effectiveness of the measures it takes to evaluate its own performance against its aspirations.
The strategic use of resources	The resources available to the school are very effectively directed towards areas of greatest need. However, the library is not used well to support the students' learning.

There is an adequate number of experienced staff to teach the curriculum. Accommodation is unsatisfactory in that there are far too few lavatories to ensure the health and safety of the students. Additionally, changing facilities are inadequate. There is an adequate supply of resources to meet the needs of the curriculum. The governors and staff are meticulous in invoking considerations of cost and value in all items of significant expenditure. They take care, too, to compare the school's overall performance to that of similar schools.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> they can approach the school with 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the amount of homework provided for their children

<p>questions or concerns</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school expects their children to work hard and achieve well • the progress their children are making • the range of activities provided outside lessons 	<p>(some thinking there was too much and others that there was too little)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the quality of information about their children's progress • the way the school works with them to support their children's learning • the behaviour of some students
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The inspection confirms the parents' generally supportive views of the school. Some parents thought that there was too much homework and others that there was too little; the inspection looked carefully at the provision of homework and judges that the amount is appropriate and that it is well used to support learning. The inspection judgement is that the school's links with parents and the quality of information it provides for parents are very good. The inspection agrees that the behaviour of a few students is not as good as that of others, but overall behaviour is good.

ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM WRITHLINGTON SCHOOL

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

There are 86 students in the sixth form; it is smaller than most other sixth forms nationally. There are more boys than girls: this reflects the gender imbalance across the school. Most are students who have followed their education through the school. Just over half of those who complete their courses in Year 11 continue on into the sixth form. Very few join from other schools. About 37 per cent of students enrolled for courses in higher or further education in 2001 after completing sixth form courses at the school. Though low by national standards, this figure represents a considerable improvement since the previous inspection. Overall levels of attainment on joining the sixth form are below average. A few students have statements of special educational needs. Very few students do not continue to the end of their courses and these are directed into appropriate courses, employment or apprenticeship schemes. The sixth form is growing steadily as a result of the development of additional suitable courses. Currently, there is a good mix of A levels and vocational provision. Effective links with a local independent school have helped to extend this range.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

This is an effective sixth form where students reach good standards through the provision of opportunities that suit their aspirations and interests. They become good learners through the support of good and often very good or excellent teaching. The school makes every effort to accommodate all students, irrespective of their prior attainment. Standards have been steadily rising over the last five years. The sixth form is outstandingly well led and very well managed. The strong links with a local independent school work to the benefit of both institutions, particularly in ensuring that the sixth form is cost effective. The students' experience in the sixth form puts them on a firm footing for entering the next stage of their careers.

Strengths

- Students make unusually rapid progress in information and communication technology.
- The students experience a high proportion of good and very good teaching and some teaching that is excellent. As a result, they make good progress in their work.
- The curriculum is carefully designed to meet the needs and aspirations of the students.
- The students receive excellent support in their work.
- There are good opportunities for students to exercise leadership qualities in the mentoring of their peers.

What could be improved

- Standards in mathematics are not high enough and levels of entry to AS level mathematics are too low.
- Careers advice is not always appropriate.
- The statutory requirement for the provision of religious education for all students is not met.

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

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

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

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Business	Very good. Students make good progress in AS and A2 level and very good progress in Advanced Vocational Certificate in Education courses due to very good teaching. Their very positive attitudes help them develop good skills over time. More links with local businesses are needed. Leadership and management are very good.
Mathematics	Unsatisfactory. Standards of attainment are too low as students join the course with inadequate basic skills in mathematics. The students are taught well and achieve satisfactorily in relation to their low levels of prior learning. The subject is very well led and managed in the rest of the school and satisfactorily managed in the sixth form. Current arrangements for deciding who takes mathematics at A Level do not work well.
Information and communications technology	Very good. Standards in the Advanced Vocational Certificate in Education course in information technology are above expectations and achievement is very high because teaching is very good and students show a high level of interest in their work. The subject is very well led and managed.
Physical education	Good. The main strengths are the good teaching and the level of motivation shown by the students. Standards are broadly average. Students achieve well in relation to the standards they bring to the course. The subject is very well led and managed.
Art and design	Good. Standards are very good. The students experience a high proportion of very good teaching. There are very good opportunities for students to work independently. The course is becoming increasingly popular as a result of significant recent improvements in the quality of provision. The subject is very well led and managed.
English	Good. Average standards represent good achievement over the two years from GCSE. Teaching is good, responding to students' needs whilst retaining a focus on examination requirements. Class discussion is not sufficiently brisk or challenging. The subject is satisfactorily led and managed.

Apart from the subjects that formed the main focus for the inspection, other subjects were sampled. In physics and in the Advanced Vocational Certificate in Education (AVCE) in science, excellent teaching brings about significant advances in learning. In the AVCE in performance arts, good teaching and good learning lead to good standards of work. Students in media studies achieve satisfactorily. In design and technology, teachers work well to overcome the recent history of difficulties in teaching and help students to make good progress, but standards remain low. French and German are taught satisfactorily and students make sound advances in learning. Music is taught well and students achieve

well in relation to their prior learning. In religious education some good teaching leads to very rapid development in the understanding of some sophisticated concepts.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Teachers give students good guidance and support in their work overall and monitor their progress meticulously. The careers advice that is available to students, though generally effective, does not always match their needs.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	The sixth form is excellently led and very well managed through clarity of vision and very effective planning.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They are well taught and challenged • Teachers are very accessible should they need help with their work • They enjoy the sixth form and would recommend it to others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They feel that the range of activities and the enrichment of the curriculum is limited • The school does not seem to respond to their views • They do not feel supported enough in making career choices

The inspection evidence supports the students' overall very positive evaluation of the sixth form. Inspectors do not agree that there is a limited range of extra-curricular activities. In general, the school does listen to and respond to the views of the students. Inspectors agree that the quality of careers advice is often limited and does not always provide an imaginative view of what is possible on leaving school. All the students say about their experience reveals a deep affection for the school and an appreciation of what it offers them.

COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

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

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

1. In the 2001 national tests for 14-year-olds, in comparison with all schools nationally, attainment in English was below average, below average in mathematics and average in science. In relation to similar schools the attainment of students in English was below average, below average in mathematics and above average in science. Boys did better than girls in English against the national trend. In mathematics and science, boys did significantly better than girls: girls did slightly better than boys nationally. English results have remained stable, while mathematics results were rising until 2001, when standards fell slightly. Attainment in science is on a rising trend, in line with the national trend. Overall attainment has been on a rising trend, faster than the national trend. The evidence from lessons and work seen in Year 9 reveals above average standards in modern foreign languages, standards in mathematics, science, art, history and physical education that are average, whilst students show below average standards in English, drama, design and technology, geography, information and communication technology and music.
2. In the 2001 GCSE examinations, overall attainment, based on the average points attained by each student, was below average for boys and girls in relation to all schools and for similar schools. However, over the last six years, as a result of excellent leadership and good teaching, standards have risen dramatically. Girls were ahead of the boys, but to a lesser extent than nationally, in the GCSE examinations. In relation to the proportion of students gaining grades A*-C, the school's results have improved dramatically: results were average in relation to all schools nationally and above average for similar schools. Standards were well above average in art and design, English literature and German; above average in combined science and French; close to the national average in English language, below average in drama and mathematics, and well below average in geography, history and physical education. In design and technology, standards at GCSE in 2001 were above average in resistant materials, average in food technology and below average in graphics. The school sets and meets challenging targets for attainment. In lessons and work seen in Year 11, standards are above average in art and design and modern foreign languages; average in English, science, geography, history, information and communication technology and physical education. Standards for 16-year-olds are below average in mathematics, design and technology, drama and music, and in religious education for students not taking the GCSE course in religious studies.
3. Students generally achieve well in relation to their prior attainment. As they move through Years 7 to 9 they make good advances in the development of their knowledge and skill in drama, mathematics, history, information and communication technology, modern foreign languages, music, physical education and religious education. In these years, achievement is satisfactory in English, science, art and design and geography. It is unsatisfactory in design and technology. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is good in English, drama, art and design, geography, history, information and communication technology, modern foreign languages and music. It is satisfactory in mathematics, science and physical education and unsatisfactory in design and technology and religious education for those students not following a GCSE course. The few students for whom English is an additional language in the home achieve well and are often indistinguishable from their peers in their command of English.

Standards and achievement of students with special educational needs

4. Students with special educational needs make very good progress with the support of the teachers and the support assistants. Some of these students take the GCSE examinations and achieve as well as their peers. For some students, progress is slow but still measurable. For example, those students in the flexible learning centre have made substantial progress in their literacy in the short time that they have been there. They have also made progress in the control of their behaviour and many will move back into mainstream education. Some students make very good progress towards their targets, and move down the stages on the Code of Practice. Students have made very good progress in their spoken English since the time of the previous inspection. They spoke confidently, clearly and with a good command of English at the students' interviews. In addition, those who conducted visitors around the greenhouses during a recent formal event did so with a remarkable knowledge of the Latin names of the plants, and explained the plants and the conservation process without any hesitation.

Sixth Form

5. In the 2001 A level examinations, for students taking two or more A levels or AS equivalent, attainment was average in relation to all students nationally for boys and above average for girls. The results overall were above average. The highest-attaining subjects were business studies and science. The lowest-attaining subjects were mathematics and media studies. The standards revealed in the examinations are broadly reflected in the students' current work. It is clear from the steady trend towards higher standards that the students achieve well in relation to their prior levels of attainment. In the subjects inspected in detail, achievement is very good in information and communication technology, good in art and design, business and English, and satisfactory in mathematics and physical education. In other subjects, a particular strength is the achievement of the students in science as a result of excellent teaching.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

6. The students respond very well to their work, they enjoy school and join in very enthusiastically in all that is provided for them. Their commitment to extra-curricular activities, particularly orchid growing and music-making is a strength. Their very positive attitudes to learning have a major impact on the progress they make in their studies. However, there are a few students who are reluctant learners and remain so despite the school's best efforts. Students concentrate well in lessons and sustain a good rate of work. For example, in a Year 10 information and communication technology lesson, students worked hard on tasks that were quite demanding for them. As a result of their persistence with challenging work, they made considerable advances in knowledge and skill.
7. Students' good behaviour in lessons creates a calm atmosphere conducive to learning. Most students also behave well when moving around the school and when in the dining rooms or assembly. They are polite and courteous to each other and to adults, particularly visitors. The number of fixed-term exclusions is high compared with those of schools of similar size. However, permanent exclusions are very low. All exclusions have been justified and the agreed procedures followed in all instances including appropriate involvement by the governing body.
8. Students' personal development is good and they mature as they progress through the school. A high level of maturity for their years was shown by Year 7 and Year 9 members of the greenhouse club as they prepared to receive visitors from Bristol

University. Representatives of tutor groups on the school council willingly take on their responsibilities and exercise them well.

9. Relationships between students are good. They mix well together in their leisure time and work well together in lessons when involved in group or paired activities. This was particularly noticeable in a Year 8 personal, social and health education lesson, where students worked very well in groups during a role-play session on decision-making. Relationships between students and staff are also good and students are secure and confident in their relationships with other adults. The few pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds are fully integrated into the life of the school. Staff give a very positive lead in engendering good relationships by acting as good role models and building students' confidence at every opportunity.
10. Attendance is satisfactory, being in line with the national average. Students are punctual and lessons begin on time. These factors contribute positively to students' attainment and progress. Registration is carried out in accordance with statutory requirements and, in addition, registers are called at the start of lessons both in the main school and the sixth form. Attendance in the sixth form is good.
11. Students with special educational needs have very positive attitudes to school. They are pleased with their progress and are very ready to talk about their work. For example, a student delightedly showed the correct spellings that he had written. They attend regularly and play an active part in the life of the school. For example, they join in extra-curricular activities such as sport and music. Some are also involved in the greenhouse club, to which they have a total commitment, spending much of their free time working there. The majority behave well. Those who have behaviour as part of the reason for being on the code of practice may exhibit inappropriate behaviour, but these students are in the supporting environment of the flexible learning centre.

Sixth form

12. Sixth form students' attitudes to the school are good; most appreciate what it provides. Their attitudes to work are very good overall and this has a major impact on their learning. Most students consider that they are helped to work independently and this was clearly seen in a Year 12 science lesson when students were highly motivated to work on their own. Sixth formers take responsibility for younger students through an excellent programme of peer mentoring, which helps to sort out students' problems or disputes. Almost all the students would recommend the sixth form to their peers.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

13. Teaching is good across the school, with a high proportion of very good teaching and some that is excellent. Of the lessons seen in Years 7 to 11 teaching in over one in every 20 was excellent; very good in one out of every three, with a similar proportion very good. Around a quarter of lessons were taught satisfactorily, with a few lessons judged to be unsatisfactory. Teaching is very good in science in Years 7 to 11, in art and design in Years 10 and 11 and in religious education in Years 7 to 9. It is good in mathematics, geography, history, information and communication technology, modern foreign languages, music, physical education and drama in Years 7 to 11, in English and religious education in Years 10 to 11 and in art and design in Years 7 to 9. Teaching is satisfactory in English in Years 7 to 9 and in design and technology across the years.
14. The most significant strengths in teaching in Years 7 to 11 are the quality of the

teachers' relationships with the students, the clarity with which teachers explain or demonstrate tasks, the effectiveness of questioning, the positive control of students' behaviour, the stimulating pace of lessons, the efficient use of resources and the productive use of homework. These strengths lie at the heart of the students' creative engagement with their studies, their will to succeed and the desire to refine and improve their work. The school's success in raising standards of attainment and the students' self esteem has resulted from the continuing improvement in the quality of teaching.

15. The planning of lessons whereby the students are challenged by progressively demanding tasks helps them to move through their courses at a rate that suits their talents and temperaments. This was a marked feature of a very good Year 11 French lesson when the students were engaged in listening and reading activities. The teacher showed considerable skill in steadily building up the demands of the lesson in a way that included all the students, challenging them through the use of increasingly complex vocabulary. The students rose to the occasion and made significant advances in their confidence in the use of French. In the best lessons, questioning is used to very good effect by insisting on clarity and the provision of reasons in the students' answers. As a consequence, the students become more sensitive to the weakness of pure assertion and to the importance of rooting opinions in justification and argument. This was a feature of many lessons in science.
16. The quality of relationships between the teachers and the students and the positive way that students relate with one another are key strengths in lessons. At their best, the teachers' calm assuring presence encourages the students to take risks with their ideas. This was the defining feature of much of the teaching in physical education. For example, in one excellent dance lesson in Year 7, the teacher's vitality and enthusiasm communicated itself to the students who, in turn, lost all their inhibitions and let their imaginations run riot in the performance of their dances: they showed considerable control, variety, fluency and confidence in their work.
17. Occasionally lessons are weakened when the teacher keeps at too much of a distance from the students' learning, whilst in the more successful lessons, the teachers' proximity to the students' work through clear positive feedback to individuals is a strength. Another weakness arises from the provision of inappropriate tasks, where higher-attaining students are given work that is too easy or the lower-attaining students are left to struggle with tasks they do not fully understand. There are occasional missed opportunities for extending the students' language, when, for example, the technical language of the subjects taught is not fully employed. This arises because the literacy policy is not yet fully embedded in practice. In a few lessons, inconsistency in the handling of challenging behaviour weakens teachers' authority and slows the pace of lessons.
18. Students with special educational needs are taught well, either through effective support in lessons or through withdrawal from lessons for special help. The teaching of students with special educational needs takes place in small classes for most of the subjects. Where the faculty has a support assistant, this help is very well used. When Year 7 students are withdrawn for additional tuition the teaching is good, as it focuses on the students' individual literacy needs. For example, one student received individual tuition on phonics, while others continued with work on computers. They are encouraged to try and much is made of all achievements, no matter how small, which motivates students to continue. Targets on the individual education plans are clear and known to teachers. In the withdrawal sessions, the students are well supported by sixth form students, who have established very good relationships with those in Year 7.

The teaching within the flexible learning centre is excellent. The lessons are very well organised on a rotation basis, so that all cover the curriculum and students stay on one activity for a short time only, with the result that they do not lose interest. The teacher has established a calm learning environment, based on clear expectations of behaviour, and a known reward system. Good emphasis is placed on students learning to understand and to cope with their own behaviour. This was seen when they explored different responses to aggression. The support assistant provides excellent support, cajoling and encouraging students to work and to learn.

Sixth form

19. Teaching in Years 12 and 13 is good overall, with much that is very good and sometimes excellent. At the heart of teaching in the sixth form are the positive relationships between the students and the teachers. This leads to a community of learners that freely expresses ideas and is ready to challenge the teachers' most convincingly held views. There is much evidence of teachers in science encouraging students to explore ideas for themselves. For example, in an excellent lesson in Year 13 dealing with the hybridisation of orchids, the lesson was alive with ideas coming, in equal measure, from the students and the teacher. This was teaching at its very best, with the teacher's excellent subject knowledge and enthusiasm hovering in the background, but underpinning all that was happening. The crisp start to lessons, where aims and purposes are clear, is a strength. There are no deep-rooted weaknesses in teaching in the sixth form. However, lessons are occasionally weakened when the students are not encouraged enough to explore their own ideas and take risks with them. In the subjects inspected in detail, teaching is very good in art and design and information and communication technology and good in business, mathematics, English and physical education. In the lessons seen in other subjects, the teaching of the sciences was excellent; it was good in design and technology, religious education and performance arts. The teaching observed in media studies was satisfactory, as was that seen in modern foreign languages. Students are taught the key skills in information and communication technology very well. The teaching of communication and numeracy are less well developed.

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

20. The school provides a well-balanced range of learning opportunities that carefully meets the needs of students. Girls and boys from all backgrounds and with differing levels of subject competence are provided with equal access to the learning experiences available. In Years 7 to 9 students follow the full range of National Curriculum subjects. However, the school does not meet the National Curriculum requirements for the provision of religious education in Years 10 and 11, or for the daily act of collective worship for all students. This was the case also at the time of the last inspection. Additionally the school does not provide singing in the music curriculum in Years 7 to 9 as required. Setting and grouping arrangements are well managed and work to the advantage of students at all levels of attainment. Students with special educational needs are taught the full curriculum.
21. Students follow a good range of taught GCSE courses and those who choose to follow a two-day per week vocational course at a local college are provided with good work-related experience. The GNVQ courses offered, particularly the business and information and communication technology courses, extend further the range of experiences.

22. Time allocations for subjects are generally appropriate at all ages. The shortage of time for drama, information and communication technology and art and design has been addressed since the last inspection, with the consequence that students achieve well in these courses. The teaching of citizenship has been slow to take off, but is being strengthened through some good planning across departments. Much is being done to raise students' standards of literacy. The National Literacy Strategy has been effectively incorporated into planning. Many teachers use the specialist language of the subjects they teach to good effect. There is some good support, too, for the development of reading. The National Numeracy Strategy is as yet not formally embedded in practice and there is not yet enough encouragement given to the use of numeracy across the curriculum. It must be said, however, that the school has deliberately and rightly given priority to the development of literacy.
23. The provision for personal, social and health education is good and makes a significant contribution to students' personal development as well as preparing them well for life beyond school. The programme is wide in scope including citizenship, moral issues, health education and careers education. Overall, the support given to careers education is satisfactory, but the advice available to sixth form students is not always appropriate. All Year 10 students carry out well-organised work experience that helps to broaden their understanding of the world of work.
24. The programme of extra-curricular activities is impressive; all students are encouraged to participate and boys and girls respond with equal enthusiasm. Very good opportunities are provided through the orchid project and greenhouse club and the students' expertise is acknowledged nationally by Kew Gardens. There is a wide range of musical and drama activities, including participation in a musical festival and a current production of 'Guys and Dolls'. Many educational visits are available, including residential experiences for field studies and foreign travel. Theatre visits are arranged that extend the taught curriculum. Students have the opportunity to pursue a wide range of sports and games; the physical education department offers a programme of inter-tutor group and league fixtures. Parents and students appreciate the commitment of staff in providing this rich range of worthwhile experiences.
25. There are excellent links with the main primary schools. Particularly effective are the achievement centres, aimed at raising standards in the providing schools and managed by the school. Students from Year 6 make useful preliminary visits to the secondary school and are given good opportunities to take part in summer school classes. A well-planned able students' programme is linked effectively to what is provided by the local education authority. Teachers extend the links with primary schools very effectively by supporting the specialist teaching of subjects. The very good links with the local community have a very positive impact on the students' learning.
26. Overall, the provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The provision for spiritual development is satisfactory. In assemblies, there is a strong emphasis on moral and social awareness but no overtly spiritual content. Tutor time is not effectively used. Some subjects, including religious education, provide for moments of reflection on the meaning and purpose of life: in English teachers use poetry well to provide insights into life, whilst in geography students are invited to reflect upon their own responses to dramatic events such as earthquakes. Both art and music make a strong contribution to students' spiritual awareness, both in lessons and in extra-curricular activities. However, not all subjects address this aspect and many opportunities are missed.
27. Provision for moral development is good. Students are expected to behave well and

have a clear sense of right and wrong. The staff set good examples and the general ethos of the school creates positive expectations for moral behaviour. The contribution of students is valued and there are clear ground rules in lessons to guide students in their behaviour. The personal, social and health education programme has significant units of work on topics such as rights and values, drugs, bullying, crime and punishment.

28. The school's support for students' social development is very good. The organisation of the timetable encourages a wide range of friendship groups. Students value the support of their many friends and are given good opportunities to work with others: this encourages their social development well and helps them to develop sensitive attitudes towards each other. The social development of students with special educational needs is very well supported through the extra-curricular activities in which they participate. They are valued members of the school community; this was seen at the opening of the propagation laboratory, when they escorted members of the community around the greenhouses. They are also important members of the committee for the Young Enterprise scheme.
29. A significant number of clubs and activities, both inside and out of school, provide students with opportunities to develop positive relationships. These include residential experiences, sports clubs, musical productions, drama and field trips for geography and history. The student council encourages students to take a practical interest in their school and ways to improve it. They are well informed about the financial priorities to enhance their learning opportunities and they are sensitive to the many demands placed on teachers particularly those involved in extra-curricular activities such as science, music and sport.
30. Provision for the students' cultural education is good, particularly in English, art and design and music. There are regular productive visits to art galleries. The promotion of an understanding of Britain as a multicultural society is not so well developed, but there are good opportunities to become aware of the cultures of different peoples.

Sixth Form

31. The curriculum is carefully designed to meet the needs and aspirations of all students. It provides a wide range of opportunities. These are extended through well-developed partnerships with both a local independent boys' school and an independent school for students with special educational needs. Most students continue their studies into the sixth form. There is some effective careers education, including in-depth interviews with a careers advisor, mock interviews and appropriate provision for all abilities ranging from potential university entrants to those seeking direct employment. However, a minority of students follow less appropriate courses.
32. The sixth form curriculum is well structured to meet the needs of students of wide-ranging abilities. Students have equal access to all courses, dependent on their prior attainment. The few students from minority ethnic backgrounds follow a wide range of courses at different levels. Teachers are aware of the few students on the special needs register and ensure they have sufficient support to enable them to succeed in their chosen subjects.
33. The curriculum is well planned, allowing students to follow four AS level or equivalent vocational units in Year 12. More able students progress to study at least three of these subjects at A level or their vocational equivalent in Year 13. Schemes of work have been thoroughly revised to meet the requirements of the new AS and A level

courses and the allocation of time is satisfactory.

34. Students follow a well-planned course in general studies. This prepares them appropriately for examinations and incorporates a programme of work on communication skills, numeracy and information and communication technology. The amount of independent work is not logged or monitored rigorously enough.
35. A very good range of extra-curricular activities enriches the curriculum. These contribute significantly to the overall experience of students. Numerous visits are arranged to universities and open days. Local businesses are much involved with the school and provide a wealth of work experience placements available to all students. There are close and useful links and visits to Bath Spa, Bath and Bristol universities. Departments make significant contributions to the personal and cultural development of students through visits to theatres, museums and trips abroad to many parts of Europe. The research of students in science extends beyond the taught curriculum into an imaginative range of activities and becoming the winners of the Young Scientist of the Year award in 2001, being placed third in the European final.
36. There are frequent music and drama productions that strengthen the collaboration with the local independent school. The strong tradition of music-making is supported by the many bands and string orchestras led by students in the sixth form. The sixth form enriches other parts of the school curriculum not only through music, but also through its support reading programme where sixth form students hear younger students read. They also act as the first response to any incidence of bullying. There are ample opportunities for sport and physical recreation, with extended opportunities for developing individual skills through residential visits.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

37. Procedures for monitoring students' academic performance and personal development are excellent and the educational and personal support and guidance students receive is very good. Procedures for child protection and ensuring students' welfare are good overall.
38. Full use is made of all data to monitor students' academic performance. In Year 7 appropriate targets for attainment by the end of Year 9 are set against results of tests taken at the age of 11. A helpful progress review is then issued in November, giving target levels for all subjects, progress against these targets and an effort grade. This process continues through the key stage with termly reviews and appropriate action taken for students not on target. In addition, careful scrutiny of workbooks is carried out on a regular basis and findings reported back to the subject teacher and the students. These arrangements are very effective in helping students to keep track of how they are getting on. Similar excellent monitoring continues through Years 10 and 11. Very good academic support is available through GCSE revision classes at lunchtime and after school, together with a wide range of enrichment activities. The school has very good systems for establishing which students have special educational needs and for providing those identified with a well-worked-out plan for their progress.
39. Students' personal development is monitored very well against individual targets. They receive very good personal support and guidance. The arrangement by which students normally stay with their tutor group for five years works well, since tutors generally know their students very well, are sensitive to their needs and thus provide very good personal support and guidance. The good relationships between students and staff give students confidence to raise any concerns they may have, knowing that they will be dealt with sympathetically.

40. Child protection procedures are very good. The member of staff responsible for child protection is suitably trained and regularly attends courses to keep up-to-date. All staff have a copy of the child protection policy and are familiar with the procedures and their importance. All new staff receive appropriate training, and existing staff are kept up-to-date with changes in policy and practice.
41. Arrangements for ensuring a safe environment are good overall. Formal procedures are in place to enable staff to report any health and safety issues to the business manager and detailed health and safety checks are carried out termly. Thorough risk assessments are carried out regularly on high-risk areas such as the science department. All but one of the health and safety issues raised at the time of the last inspection have been resolved or, in the case of the sports hall, are being resolved. However, the unsatisfactory state of the lavatories, deemed unhygienic at the time of the last inspection, has not been addressed satisfactorily. The present provision of lavatories is grossly inadequate and constitutes a potential health and safety hazard for the students.
42. The very effective procedures for promoting good behaviour and eliminating bullying are based on high expectations and good relationships between students and staff. These result in the great majority of students willingly conforming to the high standards expected. Also, there are very thorough procedures for monitoring inappropriate behaviour. Tutors play a key role in helping to improve behaviour and parents are involved as necessary. The discipline committee of the governing body becomes appropriately involved if exclusion is being considered.
43. Procedures for monitoring and promoting regular attendance are very good. Attendance is carefully monitored using a well-managed computerised system. Absence is followed up appropriately with very good support provided by the education welfare officer. The importance of regular attendance is promoted very strongly through letters to all parents at the start of the academic year and discussion with parents of students with poor attendance, emphasising the adverse effect of this on academic progress. Registers are taken at the start of lessons in both the main school and the sixth form to discourage internal truancy. This system works well.

Sixth form

44. The students receive good guidance and support in their work and in their personal development. They tend to know how they are achieving and know what is required to improve their target grades. Students are constantly made aware of the course requirements and the standards expected of them by the examination boards. Careers advice does not provide the students with a broad enough sense of the different options open to them when they complete their studies. The procedures for assessing academic progress are excellent and are used well in helping students to improve their work. The teachers' very good knowledge of the subjects they teach ensures that students receive accurate judgements of their attainments. Teachers' written comments on the students' work and the advice they give orally are generally clear and to the point. Teachers are assiduous in keeping a sharp eye on the individual learning needs of the students and responding with the right level of help.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

45. There is a good partnership with parents overall, which makes a positive contribution to students' successful learning. Parents are satisfied with all aspects of the school, Some parents are not satisfied with the provision of homework (some feeling that there is too much and others that there is too little), information on children's progress, the standards of behaviour of some students and the closeness in the way the school works with them. Almost all parents would feel comfortable about approaching the school with problems and feel that the school expects their children to work hard and achieve their best. Also the vast majority considers that their children are making good progress, that teaching is good and that the school offers a good range of extra-curricular activities. The inspection team fully supports these positive views, but does not agree with the areas of dissatisfaction expressed by a significant number of parents. The team considers that the provision of homework is good, that information on students' progress is very good and that the school works very closely with parents. It considers behaviour to be good overall although there are isolated incidents of inappropriate behaviour.
46. Parents receive excellent information about the school through the prospectus, the governors' annual report, the 'Dragonfly' termly magazine and the fortnightly 'Home Page' newsletter. Information to parents about the curriculum is very good. Main school and sixth form subject brochures detail the syllabus for each subject and parents' councils are held termly, giving subject presentations and discussing aspects relevant to the year groups, such as preparation for examinations.
47. Parents are very well informed about their children's progress through parents' consultation evenings, interim and annual reports. Interim reports give target levels, progress against targets and an effort grade. Annual reports are very good in the main school and tell parents everything they need to know about their children's academic progress, personal development and attitudes. However, whilst they give long-term targets, there is insufficient detail on what students need to do to improve in the short term. Sixth form reports are good overall and give areas of success and areas for improvement as well as progress with coursework and results of external units or modules. In addition, in the main school, parents are advised by letter of their children's academic successes or any areas of concern which are then followed up by a meeting.
48. The school works very closely with parents at all stages of their children's education. At parents' council evenings, issues relevant to the year group are discussed, for example work experience and targeting. Parents have also recently received a leaflet 'Parents and Teachers working together' concerned with homework. The school seeks parents' views through an outside agency and takes these into account in their planning.
49. Parents of students with special educational needs are very supportive of their children, and this is indicated by the exceptionally high number attending the annual reviews.
50. Most parents support their children's learning through monitoring their homework diaries and by indicating the value they place on education by good attendance at parents' meetings. The parent teacher association raises considerable funds for the school and organises frequent social events for both students and parents. Parents are very supportive of the school and all have signed the home/school agreement.
51. Sixth form students' views about the school's provision for their education are positive overall. Virtually all consider that teachers are accessible for help. The vast majority considers that they are well taught and challenged, that choices suit their talents and

aspirations and that they are helped to study independently. However, a significant number have misgivings about careers advice, information on options and information on progress. The team fully supports their positive views, but does not fully support their misgivings. It considers that careers advice, though satisfactory overall, has some weaknesses. Inspectors have concerns about options' advice since there is a considerable drop-out rate in some subjects.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

52. The school is excellently led and very well managed. The key to the school's success lies in the way that the headteacher has delegated responsibility. The arrangement by which a senior manager is responsible for a key stage strengthens the monitoring and support provided to the teachers. There are high expectations for the performance of teachers and they rise to the challenge, forming themselves into a cohesive, self-critical community. A defining feature of the management of the school is the extent to which all are involved in determining the direction of developments. A further strength is the support provided by the governors in the use of their considerable expertise.
53. The governors are very well led in the exercise of their responsibilities. They are provided with the level of information they require in order to carry out their responsibility to hold the school to account for the quality of what it provides. They receive excellently prepared financial reports and use them well to keep track of spending. The arrangement by which each governor is attached to a curriculum area works well. Their response to the findings of the previous inspection was decisive. The action plan drawn up following the inspection set out clearly the action needed to remedy the issues raised. They have fulfilled most of their legal responsibilities. However, they have not ensured that the National Curriculum requirements for music are met, that religious education and a daily act of collective worship for all students are provided as required by statute, or that the obligation to report annually to parents on the special educational needs policy is fulfilled. The governors work through an appropriate range of committees and record the proceedings of their meetings meticulously.
54. The great strength in the school's planning is that it is outward looking. In a most imaginative way, it has embraced collaboration with the local independent sixth form and links with an independent school for students with special educational needs. Additionally, it has established very effective arrangements with the local college and Bath Spa University in developing appropriate courses for students. The school improvement plan has been particularly effective in embracing work with the providing primary schools. The development of the very successful community education programme, unique within the authority, bears witness to the high standing in the community the school has earned through inspiring leadership and the commitment and dedication of the staff.
55. The school's finances are managed excellently. The headteacher works very closely with the business manager in keeping track of expenditure. The very high quality and availability of reports on the progress of the budget are a strong feature. Every conceivable source of additional funding is tapped. Providers have very good grounds for believing that in all matters of expenditure the school is efficient and wise. The auditors found the school's accounts to be in good order, apart from a few minor procedural irregularities that have been addressed appropriately.
56. The day-to-day management of the school is very efficient. A very well run school office ensures that daily routines are established, clearly communicated to all staff and maintained. The office staff provide excellent support to the teachers and are skilled in handling queries and in communicating with parents where appropriate. First contact with the school communicates a sense of order and purpose.

57. What the school provides for students with special educational needs is very well led and managed by an experienced and committed co-ordinator. The documentation is excellent and has improved since the time of the previous inspection. The policy does not fully meet legal requirements, but is scheduled for review. The new Code of Practice has been implemented, and all staff are aware of the new structure. The learning support assistants have been allocated to faculties, which has proved to be an excellent arrangement, as they have gained expertise within the separate subject areas, which enables them to provide specific support to students. The system by which teachers identify students who are experiencing difficulties with their work is organised very well. The co-ordinator and the learning support assistants have received very good training. The governor for special educational needs is very well informed about the school and works well with it.
58. The governing body's annual report does not report on the success of the special educational needs policy or on how resources have been allocated to and amongst students with special educational needs over the previous year.
59. There is a satisfactory range of appropriately qualified and experienced teachers and other staff to support the teaching of the National Curriculum and other courses offered. Accommodation is unsatisfactory in that there are far too few lavatories to ensure the health and safety of the students. Additionally, changing facilities are inadequate. There is an adequate supply of resources to meet the needs of the curriculum and these are generally used well. However, the library is not well enough managed to provide a dynamic and stimulating environment to support learning.

Sixth form

60. The head of the sixth form provides excellent leadership. He has established a strong community of learners, providing the right level of independence and direction to the students. As a result of effective collaboration with a local independent school, the sixth form is cost effective. The governors keep a close eye on how the sixth form supports the work of the rest of the school. Forward planning is very good and reflects the clear vision of the future of the students' education beyond Year 11. For example, the current business enterprise bid is geared, not only to extend the range of sixth form subjects available to include law and travel and tourism as Advanced Vocational Certificate in Education subjects, but also to enhance further the very strong relationships with industry. A great strength of the management of the sixth form is the way senior managers analyse persistently the progress made towards the goals set in the improvement plan for the further development of the sixth form. There is an adequate range of appropriately qualified and experienced staff to meet the requirements of the courses taught. Resources are satisfactory and used well, as is accommodation.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

In order to sustain the drive towards higher standards and continue to meet the school's aims governors and staff should:

- **Raise standards of attainment:**

in mathematics in Year 11, and in graphics and resistant materials across the school by:

- monitoring more carefully the quality of teaching in these areas;
- providing teachers who experience difficulties with the support they need.

(paragraphs 83, 100-103)

in religious education for students not following the GCSE course in religious studies by:

- meeting the statutory requirements for the provision of religious education in Years 10 and 11.

(paragraphs 20, 161)

- **Meet the statutory requirement for the provision a daily act of collective worship for all students and for the provision of singing in the music curriculum in Years 7, 8 and 9.**

(paragraphs 20, 146, 161, 165)

- **Accelerate the development of the numeracy strategy across the curriculum by:**

- taking steps to strengthen students' competence in applying number in all subjects.

(paragraph 86)

- **Take steps to develop the library as a more dynamic and useful resource for learning by:**

- improving the overall management of resources for learning;
- encouraging greater use of the library in the development of the literacy policy;
- strengthening the links between the library and all departments, particularly the English department.

(paragraphs 59, 75)

- **Continue to press for the funding required to address the current unsatisfactory state of the accommodation, particularly the risk to the health and safety of the students, constituted by the serious shortage of lavatories and the significant deficiencies in changing facilities for physical education.**

(paragraphs 59, 148, 194)

Other issues for the attention of the governors:

Information and communication technology is not used well enough in all subjects.
(paragraphs 87, 117, 130, 133, 141, 166, 170, 175)

Accommodation for music is unsatisfactory
(paragraph 148)

There is not enough fieldwork in geography
(paragraph 114)

Sixth form:

- **Raise standards in mathematics by:**

- raising the requirements for entry to mathematics at AS level.

(paragraphs 168, 169)

- **Address weaknesses in careers advice by:**

- providing all students with a more imaginative sense of what is possible for them to achieve when they finish their studies.

(paragraph 23, 44)

- **Meet the requirement for the provision of religious education for all students.**

(paragraph 53)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 - 11	127
	Sixth form	30
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students		55

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 7 to11							
Number	6	39	46	33	3	0	0
Percentage	5	31	36	26	2	0	0
Sixth form							
Number	4	7	12	7	0	0	0
Percentage	13	23	40	23	0	0	0

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

Information about the school's students

Students on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of students on the school's roll	775	86
Number of full-time students known to be eligible for free school meals	113	3

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of students with statements of special educational needs	44	3
Number of students on the school's special educational needs register	166	3

English as an additional language	No of students
Number of students with English as an additional language	3

Student mobility in the last school year	No of students
Students who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	40
Students who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	19

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	9.1
National comparative data	8.1

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.5
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2001	82	79	161

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	42	52	60
	Girls	45	43	35
	Total	87	95	95
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	55 (50)	60 (66)	60 (54)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	18 (12)	31 (34)	35 (29)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	47	58	58
	Girls	45	52	45
	Total	92	110	103
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	58 (62)	70 (72)	66 (69)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	17 (17)	38 (52)	25 (37)
	National	31 (31)	42 (39)	33 (29)

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

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

Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	65	53	118

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	26	60	65
	Girls	30	49	53
	Total	56	109	118
Percentage of students achieving the standard specified	School	47 (45)	92 (85)	100 (98)
	National	48 (47)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	34 (32.8)
	National	39.1 (38.4)

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

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

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	14	16	30
	Average point score per candidate	14.4	16.1	15.3
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	18	17.5

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS examinations			For candidates entered for Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All	Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	10	14	24	7	5	12
	Average point score per candidate	9.9	13.4	12	14.6	13.8	14.2
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.9	17.4	9.8	11.4	10.6

Ethnic background of students

	No of students
Black – Caribbean heritage	2
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	855
Any other minority ethnic group	4

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	2	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	60	4
Other minority ethnic groups	1	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	50.85
Number of students per qualified teacher	17

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	12
Total aggregate hours worked per week	241

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	81.2
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	22.1
Key Stage 4	20.7

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000/01
	£
Total income	2336785
Total expenditure	2321167
Expenditure per student	2859
Balance brought forward from previous year	18978
Balance carried forward to next year	15618

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	12.8
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	19.1
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	4.4

Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0
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FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	861
Number of questionnaires returned	137

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	36	49	12	2	1
My child is making good progress in school.	42	45	9	2	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	20	55	15	7	4
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	19	53	16	9	4
The teaching is good.	23	63	7	3	4
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	30	47	15	8	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	58	35	4	3	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	60	32	6	1	1
The school works closely with parents.	27	47	16	7	4
The school is well led and managed.	53	32	6	5	4
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	39	45	12	4	1
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	47	42	3	2	4

Other issues raised by parents

There were no other issues raised.

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

ENGLISH

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

Strengths

- GCSE results have improved: they are now close to the national average in English language and well above average in English literature.
- Teaching in Years 10 and 11 is consistently good.
- Systems for assessing and tracking students' attainment and progress are very good.
- Planning in response to the national literacy strategy has been thorough and effective.
- Students' attitudes to work, including written work, are consistently good.

Areas for improvement

- Despite an improvement last year, results in the end of Year 9 national tests remain well below national average.
- In Years 7 to 9 there are too many inconsistencies in aspects of teaching, including the standard of work and presentation expected, the regularity and value of homework, and the quality of marking.

Standards and achievement

61. Results in the 2001 national tests in English, taken at the end of Year 9, were below the national average, despite some upgrades after an appeal against the marking. They were below those achieved in schools with a similar intake of students, and below those gained by the same students in mathematics and science tests. However, the trend of decline has been reversed. The gap between boys' and girls' achievement has narrowed, though this is in part the result of a decline in girls' achievement in the last two years. The proportion of students gaining at least the higher Level 6 remains well below average. The accuracy of teacher assessments has improved.
62. 2001 GCSE results in English language were close to the national average; those in English literature were well above average. In relation to the nation entry level, a relatively low proportion of students, the majority girls, was entered for the English literature examination. Even taking this into account, students, notably boys, did better in English literature than in English language. More of the higher grades A and B were achieved in the English literature examination. Over three years, English language results have improved slightly, despite more students being entered. In 2001 all Year 11 students were entered, and all gained a pass grade. English literature results, with an increased proportion of the year group entered, have improved significantly.
63. Standards seen in lessons and in work confirm that students presently in Year 9 show below average standards. Whilst this represents good achievement for many, achievement overall is satisfactory because some teachers do not have a sufficiently clear idea of students' capabilities. Books show great variation in how work is set out. Too many students are not helped to relate basic skills work to their writing, and

incomplete work is not always followed up. Some homework tasks are vague; in a minority of cases teacher marking is inadequate. Over time, these inconsistencies have inhibited the progress of some students in the middle sets. Those in higher sets write confidently and with a good awareness of how to demonstrate skills, for instance persuasive techniques related to the target audience. They show a good command of technical vocabulary such as 'internal monologue' and 'soliloquy', and quickly extract precise quotations from texts to support viewpoints. Lower-attaining students are positive about their work, including studying Shakespeare. They have a sound knowledge of plot and character, though the latter is expressed in too simple and colloquial a fashion in class discussion. Redrafting skills, including those related to computing, are effectively used to improve written work.

64. The present Year 11 students show good achievement from the results that they gained at the end of Year 9. Their current standards in English are close to the national average. Teaching is better: more consistent and with a well-shared understanding of what is required for success at GCSE. Students are aware of the importance of using standard English in more formal situations. This was very apparent in an effective Year 10 lesson when students spoke of parallels between the Holmes and Watson relationship, and those that more contemporary detectives such as Poirot, Morse, and Jonathan Creek have with their associates. Very good insights into the balance of personalities, and their interdependency, were expressed. Some students in middle sets make careless errors and use some clumsy expressions because of weaknesses in teaching in previous years, but most rise to the challenge of demanding assignments. Lower-attaining students are aware of the need to vary style, such as letter and diary form, and are not daunted by being expected to write at length. Students in higher sets show good ability to use exact, relevant detail to justify confident general statements about controversial issues or for literature essays. For most students, listening skills are relatively good, but for the majority speaking skills are less so. There has been improvement since the previous inspection in this regard, but the proportion of students confident to discuss ideas in detail and depth remains below what might be expected.
65. Students with special educational needs make good progress. Most are in lower sets where smaller student numbers, carefully targeted work, and some good learning support assistance help them to achieve well. A Year 9 class studying 'Twelfth Night' gained good understanding of Elizabethan pastimes and how some had developed into games still recognisable today, because both the teacher and the support assistant used students' ideas well as a basis for questions to extend their vocabulary.

Quality of education

66. Teaching is good overall, but it is better in Years 10 and 11 than in the earlier years, where there are inconsistencies. There is some unsatisfactory teaching but less than at the time of the previous inspection. The issue of some lessons being over-dominated by teachers remains, but its incidence is much reduced. Many students use pair and group work well because they have been taught to see its value in sharing new ideas. This is because teachers set up oral tasks that encourage some independence of thought. Whole-class discussion following such work is less successful, since teachers accept statements without asking supplementary questions to check understanding. This was not the case in a Year 9 lower set's study of Olivia in 'Twelfth Night' where thought-provoking questions drew perceptive views from students such as: "He wants to impress her"; "He doesn't love her, he just wants to love someone"; "She's scared to reveal herself. She's thinking, 'How can I get out of this?' ". Students concentrate and make an effort both in class and with written work at home,

but their learning in Years 7 to 9 is only satisfactory because up to a third are not taught how to work with consistency of care and effort. In some cases tightly-timed, challenging tasks with clearly understood skills involved are not set often enough.

67. Most lessons are well planned and well managed. Lesson objectives are shared, but these are sometimes rather vague and students are not always asked to reflect on what has been learned and where gaps in knowledge and skills remain. Whilst homework and marking are seen as an integral part of learning on GCSE courses, homework set in Years 7 to 9 is variable in both frequency and quality. The result is that some students are not taught the importance of extra study and they expect too little of themselves. This is not the case in Years 10 and 11 where there is a real sense of shared purpose between teachers and students, who are both well informed about the requirements of GCSE examinations. A developing feature of lessons in Years 7 to 9 is the way in which literacy issues and strategies are being included. This is consistently done with Year 7 students, who demonstrate greater confidence in, and knowledge of, language as a consequence.
68. Students' attitudes in English are good, and their behaviour is very good. This stems from the good relationships evident in almost all lessons, teachers' awareness of the need to use a range of methods to sustain interest, and the very thorough assessment system. The latter ensures that all students are aware of their potential grades against current performance, so that the majority understand their own responsibility for learning. Students of all abilities show a willingness to listen and to do as asked. Students respond best to being actively involved. When talked at for too long they become passive, teachers occasionally mistaking this for thoughtful attention. This is particularly an issue in those classes that have a double lesson lasting one hour and forty minutes or two lessons on the same day. In oral work some lower-attaining boys can over-dominate.

Leadership and management

69. There has been good improvement since the previous inspection in terms of the quality of teaching, better GCSE examination results, and some improved achievement by boys. Leadership and management are satisfactory, leading to a good and appropriate scheme of work and a clear strategy for improvement. Inconsistent practice in terms of administrative procedures, setting homework, and the level and frequency of marking are issues to be addressed, as these can restrict students' progress, especially in the younger years. Accommodation has been improved, but learning in several classrooms is sometimes affected by distracting noise coming through thin walls. At GCSE the proportion of students entered for English literature and/or media studies is well below that typically found. The department is in a good position to secure further improvement.

Literacy

70. There has been satisfactory progress in co-ordinating strategies to raise students' standards of literacy, which are well below average on entry to the school. The headteacher has taken on the role of literacy co-ordinator and exercises it well. The National Literacy Strategy has been effectively incorporated into planning in English and booster classes take place in Year 9. All teachers have undertaken appropriate training and a representative from each department receives additional training, which is intended to raise awareness of literacy issues within departments. Work within classrooms is varied in quality and some inconsistencies remain.

71. Teachers have a good understanding of the value of students' learning and using specialist terms. These are displayed in most classrooms although reference to such displays is rare, and some displays have too small a print size, or are too indiscriminate, to be fully useful. Lesson plans in mathematics make reference to key vocabulary, but this is not emphasised during the lessons. A good feature is the way in which many teachers introduce specialist terms into discussion, encouraging students to do the same. In information and communication technology, students are referred to wall displays where signal words and phrases such as 'especially', 'whereas' and 'instead of' help the style and balance of their written work. The school's focus on non-fiction writing, and taking account of audience and intention before planning, is bearing fruit. Good examples were noted in design and technology GCSE folders, in the redrafting of notes in geography, and in the written components of art and design in all years. However, expectations about how written work should be presented in books, and agreed standards for correcting errors, vary considerably both across and within departments.
72. There is good progress in reading because teachers know how and when to support less confident students; reading aloud is encouraged in subjects such as geography, and teachers give good guidance about when to use techniques such as scanning and skimming. In a Year 7 drama lesson students gained from reading an information sheet before discussing the possible meaning of key concepts such as 'man-made alternatives'. Silent reading sessions seen in some form periods and at the start of some lessons were valuable. Reading aloud with expression remains a weakness, and some teachers could provide better models of the value of this.
73. Most students listen carefully, but not always closely. Speaking skills are less developed but are improving. There is a stronger emphasis on the appropriateness of expression, and the need for greater formality and accuracy in class discussion. Students benefit from the example set by the many teachers who explain ideas thoughtfully and with interest.
74. The library is pleasant and neatly organised, but relatively small. Books are in reasonable condition, but the stock of about five thousand books is inadequate for a school of this size. Borrowing rates are below what is normally expected. There are no computers for students to work on, nor is there any computer administration system. The qualified librarian finishes at 2.30 pm each day, from which time there is only limited access. Few departments view the library as a valuable resource for research or wider reading, and its use beyond English lessons is limited. Initiatives such as a Year 7 induction programme, World Book Day quiz, Carnegie book shadowing and book fairs are used to raise the profile of reading for pleasure. Substantial changes are required if the library is to take its place as a focal point for stimulating improvement in students' literacy standards.

DRAMA

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

Drama is taught as a discrete subject in Years 7 to 9 and is offered as a GCSE option, where it is becoming increasingly popular. GCSE results in 2001 (the first time the subject was taken) were below national average. Although all students gained a pass grade, most achieved relatively better results in other subjects.

Strengths

- The subject has quickly become established across the school, from a position three years ago when there was no planned provision.
- Good and enthusiastic teaching is resulting in students of all ages improving their understanding of drama theory, and relating it to their own work.

Standards and achievement

75. Whilst standards of attainment are below the average expected of students at ages 14 and 16, this represents good progress. Until three years ago there was no drama provision. After a carefully planned introduction of the subject, a staffing change left the school without a drama specialist for two terms. Thus, only those students in Years 7 and 8 have had any consistent experience of drama lessons. By Year 9, students are enthusiastic about their work. They co-operate well in groups, though these are often single sex, and share ideas and tasks sensibly. As audience, they support each other by suggesting possible improvements to performance. Whilst they use space and movement well, many students are not skilled in projecting their performance. They use unhelpful stage angles, often speak too quickly and quietly, and only a minority exaggerate gesture and sustain facial expression. Nonetheless, this represents good achievement in a subject that demands the physical self-discipline, poise and confidence to perform which many students lack when they join the school in Year 7.
76. At the end of Year 11, standards are below those found nationally. Students efficiently organise themselves, space and furniture. They show some ability to use techniques such as hot-seating to gain insights into character, though only half portray character with realism. Most understand the value of reflecting on characters and situation to gain empathy.

Quality of education

77. Teaching is good. Lessons are well planned, and taught with confidence and enthusiasm. Students learn to engage in work, and to help others. Relationships are good and students of varying abilities are comfortable working together. Students with special educational needs likewise make good progress because they are accepted into groups and their contributions are encouraged and valued. Very good management of practical sessions leads students to understand that performance must be balanced by evaluation; suggesting ideas by listening to those of others.
78. Students have good attitudes to drama, which they obviously enjoy. They show willingness to take part, although their varied experiences of the subject have resulted in some uncertainty about drama conventions and techniques. Teachers are not always sufficiently alert to this, with the result that some basic skills and techniques are not taught systematically. Gesture, posture and voice projection are weaknesses in the work of too many students. In contrast, warm-ups are very well used because their

importance is understood and they are a regular feature.

Leadership and management

79. Despite staffing changes and a period when there was no specialist teacher, there has been good improvement since the last inspection when there was no coherent drama provision. There is a clear but realistic vision for developing the subject at all levels. Accommodation is unsatisfactory. Most lessons are taught in the hall and stage area. This has the advantage of space, flexibility, and access to good light and sound systems. Too often, other school demands result in it being unavailable for lessons. These include the increasing demands of examinations and various occasional uses. Additionally, time is lost in lessons following assemblies because drama classes have to clear chairs away before they can work. One GCSE class can lose up to half an hour of teaching time each week because of this. Regular drama clubs and productions give very good additional opportunities to students, adding other dimensions to the considerable contribution which drama makes to their social and personal development.

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths

- Progress from entry levels to attainment at age 14 is good.
- Teaching and learning are good in Years 7, 8 and 9.
- Collection and analysis of assessment data and their use in letting students know how well they are doing and how they might improve are good.

What could be improved

- Information and communication technology is not used widely enough to help the students' learning.
- Attainment at the highest grade, Level 7+ at age 14 and A*/A GCSE grades at age 16 remains too low.

Standards and achievement

80. The attainment of students on entry to the school is below national standards. The overall results of National Curriculum tests for 14-year-olds in 2001 were below the national average for all schools and when compared with schools with a similar intake. Results at the highest grades, Level 7 and above, are about half of that seen nationally. The progress made by students at the school between taking National Curriculum tests at the age of 11 and then at the age of 14 is much better than for students nationally. Students are making better progress now than at the time of the previous inspection. The overall performance of students is better than in English but not as good as in science.
81. The percentage of students gaining the higher grades A*-C in the GCSE examinations was below the national average in 2001 whilst the percentage gaining A*-G grades was above average. Results at the highest A*/A grades were below the national average. GCSE results have improved at a faster rate than nationally.
82. Standards seen in lessons and in work largely confirm the results of national tests for

14-year-olds and the results in the GCSE examinations. There is a marked variation in standards between Years 10 and 11. A significant number of higher-ability students in Year 11 underachieve, for example, whilst most confidently use routines to solve algebraic problems, they struggle to explain their reasoning. In Year 7, 8, 9 and 10 students' understanding is more highly developed. In a very low ability Year 9 group, students successfully ordered numbers such as 13.587, 13.506 and 13.609 and confidently explained the reasons for their answers. Their self-esteem and satisfaction within their work were clearly visible.

Quality of education

83. Teaching and learning are good in Years 7, 8 and 9. The best teaching is characterised by well-planned lessons with clear, shared purposes and effective and challenging question and answer methods. This leads to learning where students' opinions are valued and their self-esteem enhanced. In a Year 9 lesson, interesting use of paper-folding demonstrated the simple facts of fractions compared to parts of a whole number. The students maintained an active involvement with the lesson as the underlying concepts unfolded, their enthusiasm was infectious and the teacher sensitively reined in their energies when the occasion required. The students had acute learning needs and these were successfully met. At the conclusion most students recognised equivalent fractions and fractions greater than one. The high level of effective classroom management linked to the students' active contributions was instrumental in making the lesson both an enjoyable and productive exercise. Teaching and learning in Years 10 and 11 are satisfactory overall with some marked variations. In a higher-ability Year 11 class the teaching was clearly better than the learning. Good use was made of worksheets, coupled with very clear explanations using an overhead projector, but this failed to stimulate students' thinking or increase their eagerness for the subject. Students were restricted to understanding the basic techniques of simultaneous equations and remained unable to extend their wider application in mathematics. However, in a middle-ability Year 10 class the students were totally engaged with the ideas behind the Pythagoras theorem. Students discussed, with confidence, the principles of the theorem and made the important step of recognising the effects of rearranging the formula designed to calculate any side of the triangle. A key factor in their success in doing this was the clarity of the teacher's explanations. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed.
84. Learning by students with special educational needs is good. Students who start the school at Level 3 or below follow the catch-up programme for some of their timetabled lessons. In a good Year 7 lesson, after a warm-up session on doubling and halving using a card game, lower-attaining students working in pairs identified multiples of 6, 7, 8 and 9 in their written work. They were then asked collectively to give reasons for their results. This provided an opportunity for discussion, which extended to a whole-class review. Students reflected upon their conclusions, learned from any misconceptions and openly considered reasons for establishing appropriate answers. This style of teaching supported their learning by making them think more deeply about their work, rather than seeing mathematics solely as a system for applying given rules.
85. The introduction of the National Numeracy Strategy is clearly in evidence in many lessons. Most feature a short beginning of mental starters and use of teaching aids. Lesson endings invariably focus upon the students' learning, allowing the teacher to assess the effectiveness of what has been taught. The department has organised a locally reputed numeracy summer school. Members of the department have organised Year 6 taster days in local primary schools, using teaching material (bridging units) designed to ensure a smooth transition to secondary education. All these features

arise from the very good example set by the head of department who is determined to secure higher standards. The head of department is both reflective and receptive to new ideas that actively promote higher standards. She is well supported by a core team similarly devoted to make learning mathematics an enjoyable and productive activity.

Leadership and management

86. Very good leadership and management of the subject in Years 7 to 11 ensure that assessment is a strong feature of the department, as it is in the school. Monitoring of homework, books and lesson observations of selected members of the department is very well done. Students' progress is rigorously monitored individually, by teaching group and by years. Following mock tests at ages 14 and 16, targets are set, results analysed and as a result specific groups are targeted for closer monitoring. For example, students in Year 9 in danger of failing to achieve target grade Level 4, 5 or 6 receive additional attention and use the new booster material currently available. The overwhelming majority of students are aware of previous attainment as well as their target grades and all available assessment data is shared and promoted as an important feature of their learning. Little work with information and communication technology was seen either in displays or in the classroom. Not all students have ready access to computers.

Numeracy across the curriculum

87. This aspect of the National Numeracy Strategy is not yet formally a feature of the work of departments across the school. Some preliminary discussion work has taken place but a fuller consultation exercise within staff training is planned in the near future. Evidence of numerical work in many subjects is relatively limited. In modern foreign languages little evidence was seen of emphasis on number. Numeracy as outlined in the syllabus, such as numbers and prices, was not apparent in classroom displays or particularly highlighted in work seen. In geography, simple bar and pie charts were used in Years 7, 8 and 9. Higher-attaining students attempt simple correlation methods when analysing fieldwork data; they use scatter diagrams well and work out lines of best fit. In the sixth form good use of statistical techniques was observed. Students in the GNVQ business education course calculate percentage profit using calculators. The lack of a co-ordinated approach is resulting in considerable variation amongst subjects.

SCIENCE

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

The provision in science caters for all students from Years 7 to 9. In Years 10 and 11, 99 students take double science, and 176 take single science.

Strengths

- Leadership and management give a clear direction to the subject.
- Very good teaching results in students' high levels of achievement.
- Information and communication technology is used excellently to enhance students' learning.
- Extra-curricular activities are exceptional and provide inspiration to students.

Areas for improvement

- Standards at GCSE, particularly at grades A*-C, remain low.
- Test and examination results are not sufficiently analysed.
- Technician time is insufficient to support teaching adequately.

Standards and achievement

88. Standards overall are below the national average. However, they have risen steadily since the time of the last inspection. In the 2001 GCSE examinations in the A*-C grades, students' results were above the national average in double science, but well below the national average in single science. In the A*-G grades, students' results were above the national average. In the national tests for 14-year-olds, results were broadly in line with the national average and have risen steadily since the previous inspection. The number of students who gained Level 6 and above is above the national average. This includes those who gained a Level 8, which is an exceptional achievement. Boys do better here than they do nationally. Students achieve very well from low standards on entry to the school. Students with special educational needs achieve very well, and gain grades that are in line with other students in the GCSE examinations. This is a result of very good teaching.
89. An analysis of work shows that standards are in line with national expectations in Years 9 and 11. At Year 11, students have a sound understanding of life processes. For example, they explain how inherited genes may result in illnesses such as cystic fibrosis. All students have a clear understanding of the structure of atoms. Those on the double science course have a good knowledge of how and why electrons move when matter is heated. Students understand that sound and light travel in waves and record the different wave patterns accurately. In Year 9, students have a sound understanding of relationships between primary and secondary consumers in food pyramids, and that the primary producer has to be a plant that converts the sun's energy. They have a satisfactory understanding of the rock cycle, and know that rocks can be formed in different ways and have different characteristics. For example, they showed that rocks have different properties, such as their relative hardness. Students also show that light travels in a straight line, and is reflected by a mirror. This is to a satisfactory level. Students conduct many experiments, and record them carefully. However, they seldom predict, using evidence either from secondary sources, or gained at first-hand. Information and communication technology is used to a very high standard. For example, students collect data, use it on spreadsheets and from these create graphs to illustrate their work. They also use Powerpoint in presentations to the class. This was seen with their presentations on space. The presentation of their work improves quickly from Year 7 to reach a good standard.

Quality of education

90. The quality of teaching overall is very good, and has improved since the time of the last inspection, both in quality and in the teaching styles. Two out of eight lessons were excellent, and six out of eight lessons were very good. One lesson was satisfactory. All teachers have excellent subject knowledge, which is readily transmitted to students and which extends their understanding. The very good and excellent teaching is dynamic and reflects the enthusiasm that the teachers have for their subject. All lessons have some element of practical work, so that students learn by discovery. Teachers question effectively so that students learn by thinking about the answer, or by investigation. Teaching styles match the ability of the students very well. Lower-ability

students are given a variety of short tasks, and stopped after each. This ensures that they consolidate their learning. Relationships are very good: this encourages students to ask for assistance, and therefore ensures that they learn. Information and communication technology is effectively used, which includes Powerpoint and an Intelplay computer microscope. The use of information and communication technology has improved since the time of the last inspection. The faculty learning support assistant is very well used, and is effective in supporting students with special educational needs. Work is regularly marked, with comments provided that indicate to students how to improve their work.

91. Students enjoy science. They listen carefully. They work well together: this was seen when one student used the computer to retrieve information and another wrote it down. They also work well independently. In this lesson, students had to make their own decisions about the characteristics, which they did quickly and without fuss. They are very ready to explain what they are doing. They take care with their work.
92. The curriculum is enhanced by visits to places of specific interest, such as building sites. However, the outstanding feature of the department, and one whose influence extends far beyond the department into the school, the community and the wider world, is the growing of orchids. It is operated by the exceptionally dedicated head of physics, who also runs the greenhouse club. Club members are mostly students from Years 7 to 9, including those with special educational needs. The school led an expedition to Brazil in 2000, where the focus was the conservation of orchids. Through the studies undertaken on the expedition, two students gained the Young Scientist of the Year award in 2001 and one of these was third in Europe. Another student has also been runner-up in Britain. The result of the expedition has been a focus on the conservation of wild British orchids, particularly in the Mendips. Students are passionate about orchids, and are experts in discovering them in such diverse sites as quarries, and even on the school field. Their determination to conserve and reintroduce native orchids has led to a grant from the Millennium fund, via Bristol Zoo, for a propagation laboratory. All students have a wonderful wealth of detailed scientific knowledge about orchids, which they use with confidence. The school goes out into the community, and the students give talks in the area, and at major shows, such as in London. The school has a Royal Society Conservation Grant for their work with Kew Gardens. Years 8 and 9 students from the greenhouse club have formed themselves into a committee to work for the Young Enterprise West of England scheme. The committee has a full grasp of the operation and talked to the representatives without a teacher being present. The total operation is one of which the school is justly very proud, as it has resulted in the success of individuals in many spheres, in achievement, in gaining knowledge, in confidence in themselves, in the development of their ability to talk on equal terms with any adult and expert, and in working for valuable conservation.

Leadership and management

93. The leadership and management of the subject are very good. The documentation is excellent, and includes a clear way forward for the department. The areas on which the department has focused in the past have led to very high standards, such as in the use of information and communication technology. Assessment is excellent, and all students know their present and target grades and how to improve. The use of revision classes in preparation for examinations, coaching and encouraging students to enter the extension paper has included the gifted students, who have benefited from these courses. The science laboratories are primarily in one area, but on three floors, and there are other laboratories in other parts of the building and also in another building. This makes the running of the department difficult, especially for the technician, who is

only employed in the mornings. The time allocated is inadequate to service the department. The condition of the laboratories has improved since the time of the last inspection, with only two waiting to be refurbished. There has been an improvement in the provision of textbooks over the last four years.

ART AND DESIGN

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

Strengths

- Very good teaching in Years 10 and 11 has raised standards dramatically since the previous inspection.
- The shared vision of the teachers ensures clear direction for the subject.

Areas for improvement

- There is not enough reference made to examples of artwork from non-western cultures.
- Work in sketchbooks is not at the same standard as other work.

Standards and achievement

94. Since the last inspection GCSE results have improved dramatically and the number of students gaining A*-C grades in 2001 was well above the national average. The number of students who gain the higher A* and A grades was below average. Girls did better than boys, but boys did better than the national average for boys. Over recent years the attainment of students at the start of the course has been below average. This means that by the time they reach the age of 16 they have made very good progress.
95. When students join the school in Year 7 standards in art and design are well below average. In the 2001 teachers' assessments for 14-year-olds, attainment was below average. In lessons and in the work seen, students who are currently in Year 9 attain in line with the national average. This means that the progress made by younger students is improving and is now good. Students show average standards, for example in the Year 9 lessons where they draw sections of faces from observation, using a wide range of drawing techniques and media experiments. Sketchbook work is less well done, and some students whose sketchbooks contain work done in Year 7 show little evidence of sustained work from observation and the overall standard of work done in their own time is not as good as their class work. The sketchbooks of younger students show evidence of improving standards, but, overall, this aspect of their work is below average.
96. The department has set challenging targets to improve Year 11 GCSE results further. The standard of work seen in lessons and that completed over time indicates that these targets are realistic. The work shows that the course is underpinned by first-hand visual research. This can be seen, for example, in the work in Year 10 classes where students develop their drawings of still life groups into complex three-dimensional constructions, capturing the flavour of the work of the Cubists. Similarly in Year 11, students are encouraged to base their work on carefully observed drawings. One project uses the drawings of knots, which skilfully explore tonally the twisting and turning forms seen. Resulting from these drawings are experiments with colour and

technique, with students making their finished work in a range of media that exploits their strengths. A particularly good feature is the textile and batik work.

Quality of education

97. Teaching and learning of younger students in Years 7 to 9 is good, and for older students very good. The teachers use effective methods to stress the importance of research from first-hand experience, complemented by experiments with media. Teaching is frequently supported well by the good connections made with the work of famous artists, such as the work inspired by Georgia O'Keefe. Most of the references made by teachers are to western art, which limits the students' understanding of the wide range of art across different cultures. Teachers frequently demonstrate effectively to their classes how to approach their work: this helps to raise standards. For example, in a Year 9 lesson where the work on faces is being mounted, the importance of good presentation is emphasised. Teachers use well-timed intervention both for individual students and for whole groups. This raises attainment for all, and as a result the majority of students, including those with special educational needs, meets or exceeds expectations. The high standards consistently set by teachers have a direct impact on the attitudes shown by students. In Years 7 to 9, attitudes are mostly good and never less than satisfactory. In Years 10 and 11 they are consistently very good, and sometimes excellent. Students work purposefully in lessons.

Leadership and management

98. The leadership and management of the department are very good. The effect of this is seen in the clarity of thought and action, which has led to the raising of standards at GCSE in such a short time. The work of the department is kept under constant review and the departmental improvement plan has identified appropriate areas for further development. The two teachers work well together and have complementary skills. This is an improved department in which all issues raised in the previous inspection have been appropriately addressed.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

Overall the quality of provision in design and technology is **unsatisfactory**

Strengths

- Very good teaching of students in Year 11 food technology and textiles lessons ensures that students doing these subjects achieve well.
- Good teaching in food technology lessons for younger students is well matched to their needs.

Areas for improvement

- The management of the faculty to ensure effective action is taken to raise standards in all years and give clear direction to the subject is unsatisfactory.
- The quality of teaching and learning in graphics for older students, and resistant materials for all students is unsatisfactory.

Standards and achievement

99. In 2001 the proportion of students gaining A*-C grades at GCSE was below average. When the GCSE results in the different areas of design and technology are compared,

food technology, textiles and resistant materials have all had years when standards have been close to average, but results in graphics have been consistently low. The somewhat erratic nature of GCSE results over time indicates that there has been so far no consistent upward trend in design and technology to match that in the rest of the school. During this time students have been starting the GCSE course with below average attainment and standards remained below average at the end. Progress is unsatisfactory.

100. When students enter the school at age 11 their experience of design and technology is very limited, and standards are well below average. Teachers assessed students who reached the end of Year 9 in 2001 to be below average. This means that students have made satisfactory progress during this time, particularly in their acquisition of many of the basic skills related to the subject. Currently two of the full-time teachers are absent, one of whom is the head of faculty, who has been away for some considerable time. These absences are having a significant impact on the work of the department, which has been made worse by the difficulty the school has had in recruiting and retaining suitably qualified and capable supply teachers. As a result, in the resistant materials aspects of the work of Years 7 to 9 students, and for GCSE graphics and resistant materials students, progress and attainment are currently unsatisfactory.
101. In the work seen during the inspection in Years 7 to 9 there was significant difference in the standards seen in the areas of food technology and textiles and resistant materials. In food technology and textiles the standards seen were in line with the national average. For example, in a Year 9 food technology lesson students apply the knowledge they gained about different ways of cake-making within a context provided by the teacher. The most able speculate confidently about the different products that may result from varying the ingredients, and evaluate what they make by sampling and testing. Less able students doing a similar task are able to follow instructions and make products to a satisfactory standard. Courses in these two areas are well planned and appropriately matched to the National Curriculum. During the inspection the evidence available of work done in resistant materials was slight. Some folders were seen of simple electronics projects and some of a storage system project. The overall standard of this work was below average. In the lessons in resistant materials no students were engaged in making things. In a Year 9 lesson, students were learning about different mechanisms, but this was of a theoretical nature. Currently little progress is being made by students in their understanding of mechanisms.
102. A similar picture is seen in Years 10 and 11. In food technology and textiles, students achieve well. For example, in a textiles lesson where students were designing a care label for their products, they researched the information and presented it in the required form, all making good progress. In contrast to this, those taking the graphics products course in Year 10 make unsatisfactory progress and standards are well below average. Folders contain a collection of mostly unfinished and unrelated tasks, with little evidence of coherent teaching. Standards of presentation are poor and discussions with students indicate that simple basic learning, specific to the subject, had not been achieved. Students following the resistant materials course, who are about to do their GCSE examination, have project folders which are broadly in line with expectations: the lack of consistent teaching means that all are well behind in the construction of their products.

Quality of education

103. During the inspection the teaching and learning seen were satisfactory. This was

because the recruitment of two supply teachers has addressed the department's staffing problems in the short term. When teaching and learning is considered over time, the evidence from the work of a significant number of students, particularly those engaged on external examinations, is that teaching and learning overall have been unsatisfactory.

104. A review of students' folders indicates that not all unsatisfactory teaching and learning is a result of recent staff absence. For example, in the Year 10 graphics lessons since the start of the course in September 2001, teaching has lacked coherence. The teaching of basic skills, such as graphical rendering techniques, has been poor, and in the structure of projects, as with that concerned with package design, there has not been the right emphasis on developing and researching of ideas. The amount of work done is well below that which would normally be expected. Where long-term staff absence has affected students' progress and attainment, as in the Year 10 resistant materials lessons, there is considerable disaffection amongst the students.
105. The teachers who are currently working with these groups are beginning to re-establish an appropriate atmosphere in which progress can be made. In contrast to this, teaching of GCSE groups in food technology and textiles is very good. Teachers have a good understanding of the requirements of the GCSE course, which is reflected in the way the work has been well paced to ensure students complete the course on time. Assessment is a particularly good feature of the teaching of food technology, but routine marking in resistant materials is virtually absent. For each aspect of the course, students receive written feedback giving clear guidance about how well they have done and how they might improve. In a Year 11 textiles lesson seen, the relaxed assured presence of the teacher was a key feature in developing a positive atmosphere for learning: the students made very good progress in their work. The lack of continuity experienced by a significant number of students has caused disaffection and a high level of concern amongst those doing GCSE courses.

Leadership and management

106. The leadership and management of the department are unsatisfactory. The long-term absence of the head of faculty has had a negative impact on the routines of management. For example, the last recorded meeting of the faculty took place five months prior to the inspection. The difficulties of management pre-date this point. For example, the documentation provided by the department for the improvement plan for the period 2000/01 contained essential areas for development, such as the introduction of information and communication technology into the curriculum of younger students, and the updating of schemes of work to match new National Curriculum requirements. In the review document dated July 2001 none of the improvement targets set for the previous year were achieved. Currently, as a result of this lack of development, aspects such as the teaching of mechanism, structures and control technology are not being satisfactorily covered.
107. Overall this is an underachieving department where students are making unsatisfactory progress overall, and where standards are too low. Since the last inspection, notwithstanding the maintenance of standards in food technology and textiles, the department has regressed. The senior management of the school is well aware of the current difficulties and has a clear vision of the type of department that should be developed.

GEOGRAPHY

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

Strengths

- The quality of teaching is much improved since the previous inspection.
- The recording and tracking of students' progress is good.
- There are good schemes of work to support the work of the teachers.

Areas for development

- There is no fieldwork in Years 8 and 9.
- Boys underperform in examinations.
- Tasks are not always matched to individual students' capabilities.

Standards and achievement

108. Inspection evidence shows that overall standards of work are below age-related expectations in Years 7 to 9. This represents satisfactory progress for 14-year-old students, most of whom entered the school with below average standards. Observed standards in Years 10 and 11 are in line with national expectations. The progress of 16-year-old students is good in relation to their attainment at age 14. Overall, there has been a marginal improvement in standards since the previous inspection.
109. National Curriculum teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2001 show standards were in line with national expectations, a marked improvement over the last two years. Boys' levels were better than those of girls, the reverse of the national picture. GCSE results have fluctuated in recent years, but have been consistently well below average. In 2001, although the overall pass rate at grades A*-C was well below average, girls' results were average. The gender gap was much wider than the national difference. In 2001, relative examination performance figures showed geography to be one of the weaker subjects in the school.
110. By the age of 14 most students' attainment levels are below national expectations. Higher-attaining students compile good annotated maps and diagrams and make clear notes when extracting relevant information from a range of sources. Lower-attaining students are taxed by any requirement to write at length, although the department is beginning to take effective measures to help students improve their writing. Lower-attaining 14-year-olds, for example, describe well how native people in Brazil live in harmony with their environment. More able students in addition, explain clearly how human activity can both sustain and destroy the environment in rain forests.
111. Inspection evidence shows that by age 16, most students' attainment is in line with the national expectation. This represents an advance on the level suggested by the latest GCSE results. The difference is attributable in part to improvements in teaching and in part to the differences between successive cohorts of students. Higher-attaining students make detailed notes. They have, for example, a good grasp of the technical vocabulary of coastal geography and use it appropriately. Lower-attaining students know the meanings of the words in isolation, but are less confident in using them in context. As in Years 7 to 9, less able students have difficulty with any demands to write at length. In their coursework, students set up hypotheses and test them, using simple statistical methods to analyse their data. Less able students record their results in simple graphs, but are unsure in analysing their findings. Students with special educational needs make good progress in relation to their prior attainment. Their teachers know them well and give them good support. There are no obvious gender or

ethnic differences in the observed attainment in any year group.

Quality of education

112. Overall, teaching is good. None is unsatisfactory and most is good or very good. This is an improvement since the previous inspection. The best teaching is characterised by brisk pace, challenge, enthusiasm for the subject and sensible allocation of time to different activities. Students' response to this good teaching is overwhelmingly positive. Most of them behave well in lessons and concentrate on their work. An example of very good teaching was seen in a Year 8 lesson on rainfall types. Students were required to think through the sequence of processes that result in rainfall in upland areas. This is a task that would tax many older students. They were assisted by the orderly atmosphere in the room and the very clear guidance they received in the use of reference material. In many lessons teachers help the development of students' literacy through such devices as emphasis on key words and opportunities to read aloud. Most lessons start with a clear statement of aims and a review of recent lessons, enabling students to recall and consolidate previous learning. Teachers' good questioning ensures that all students become actively involved in lessons. In some lessons, however, there is insufficient matching of tasks to individual capabilities and too few opportunities for students to organise their own learning. As a result, higher-attaining students are not challenged sufficiently. Homework is set regularly and provides valuable reinforcement to classroom teaching. Work is marked thoroughly and for the most part the marking includes helpful comments.

Leadership and management

113. The department has responded well to the issues raised in the previous inspection. Students in Years 7 and 8 now have more opportunities for writing at length. The overall quality of students' response is better and teaching has improved. There is much less non-specialist teaching than formerly. Assessment and tracking of students' progress are much improved. These improvements are due, in part, to a recent change in the leadership of the humanities faculty. Leadership and management of the subject within the faculty are satisfactory and improving in response to guidance from faculty leadership. In order to improve examination results overall, the department needs to develop strategies to improve boys' performance. Currently there is no fieldwork in Years 8 and 9. This affects the students' progress in some aspects of their work. There are limited opportunities for students to develop their computer skills. The good provision for meeting the individual needs of Year 8 students offers a good model for expanding this practice to other year groups.

HISTORY

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

Strengths

- Teaching and learning are now good overall: lessons are well planned and reflect the strength of the teachers' subject knowledge and their good understanding of how students learn.
- The subject is very well led.

Areas for improvement

- GCSE results are well below the national average.
- Students' interpretation of source materials and extended writing are not good enough.
- Information and communication technology is not used enough to support learning.

Standards and achievement

114. The 2001 GCSE results were well below the national average, with few students showing good achievement. Few students were entered for GCSE in 1999 and 2000. Numbers were a little higher in 2001, although an unusually low proportion gained a GCSE grade. One girl and one boy attained a grade C. Fewer students take history than in similar schools. More boys than girls study the subject, although there is little difference in their attainment. It is one of the weakest GCSE subjects in the school. However, predicted grades suggest a rising trend in attainment. Students' attainment in Year 9 is a little below average although in Year 11 it is well below average. However, standards of work seen in lessons and from the work survey show standards are improving.
115. From Years 7 to 9, students work in two broad bands. More able students in Year 7 make good gains in their knowledge and understanding of history. They evaluate evidence from pictorial and written source materials effectively although there are weaknesses in spelling, both when copying terms and writing independently. Lower-ability groups and those with special educational needs have good oral skills, for example a student explained how people used 'boughs of sweet smelly wood' in the houses of plague victims. However, standards in a similar group of Year 8 students were much weaker: students struggled to understand the difference between 'describe' and 'explain' because the non-specialist teaching was not sufficiently supportive.
116. By Year 9, students read censored letters and poetry written during the First World War. They empathise well with the feelings of soldiers in the trenches. Boys respond very well to the documentary evidence to understand the changes in the personalities of the soldiers. More able students recognise why soldiers needed to 'hide that red thing' as a description of blood from a dead soldier. Their work reflects a very clear understanding of history. Lower-attaining students find the recording of evidence difficult. There are too few opportunities to use information and communication technology.
117. Attainment in Year 10 GCSE is around average. Students draw well on their prior knowledge and understanding of the First World War to consider the political positions of Britain, France and Germany leading to the Treaty of Versailles. Individually, students research the role of one leader. More able students explain clearly their positions. A dyslexic boy encouraged the group to consider the morality of punishing Germany more than the initial perpetrators of aggression and then recorded his work with only minor spelling errors. Overall attainment in Year 11 is well below national standards. In the lesson seen students responded very well when discussing which power was responsible for the cold war. Opinions are clarified from animated group discussion, and views are recorded on poster sheets.
118. Students now have good opportunities for learning. There is often very good progression from Year 7. Students make clear and accurate observations from historical sources and express very clear opinions orally and in writing. By Year 9 the most able students have a clear understanding of primary and secondary sources. They describe the damp, dark and really cramped social conditions in England. Below average students are supported by worksheets, although literacy skills remain a

problem. The learning of students with special educational needs is often well supported although this does not always happen with non-specialist teaching.

119. In Years 10 and 11 GCSE students make good and very good progress. Students in Year 10 record how quickly Stalin seized total power. Girls make concise notes whilst boys' work is less consistent and homework is not readily completed. The interpretation of source materials in GCSE coursework is often weak although a few students in Year 11 use these well to explain the significance of events.

Quality of education

120. Teaching is good overall and students learn well as a result. It has very good and sometimes outstanding features in Years 7 to 11. Most students are given very good opportunities to achieve. However, on occasion, in one lower-attaining group non-specialist teaching did not support students' learning effectively enough. The strengths of teaching are in the very good specialist knowledge and understanding and the very well-planned lessons which structure students' learning well, providing them with a good sense of achievement. In most lessons, the teaching of basic skills and the implementation of the literacy policy are very thorough. The emphasis on individual reading and writing skills and on extended prose, note-taking and historical analysis is raising standards.
121. Question and answer sessions value the contributions of all students. Most teachers have high expectations for what students can achieve and this has contributed much to the improvements in standards since the last inspection. Lessons are interesting and proceed at a good pace. Students receive stimulating opportunities to record what they have learned from decision-making exercises and the interpretation of historical sources. Tasks are well matched to students' abilities. Homework is well used, for example Year 9 students produce miniature books, which focus on nineteenth century living conditions. Students' work is celebrated through interesting classroom displays.

Leadership and management

122. The recently appointed head of humanities with responsibility for history has had a very positive impact on the department. She is an enthusiastic and competent leader who displays very good management and leadership qualities. Beginning from a very low base, she has already initiated major reforms in the quality of teaching and learning, the better use of literacy, departmental assessment and record keeping. New schemes of work and policy documentation have been prepared to raise standards overall and in examinations. In recent years, history has not been a popular subject at GCSE. The current Year 11 have been disadvantaged by the quality of prior provision and, although additional tuition has been provided, too much ground has been lost to raise standards significantly in 2002. However, standards in the lower years are improving. Relationships are very good and there is a positive ethos. The recruitment of additional specialist teaching, discrete time for history, and the provision for more students to study history is planned for the next academic year. In time, the department anticipates it will contribute to the teaching of A level history.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths.

- Teaching is good, as a result students make very rapid progress.
- The very good co-operation between teachers and support assistants ensures good progress for students with special educational needs.
- Leadership and management are much improved since the last inspection.
- The network manager's contribution to the management and teaching of the

Standards and achievement

123. Attainment on entry to the school is well below expectations, students' primary school experience having been very modest. This is apparent in the generally low level of Year 7 students' keyboard awareness. Many do not type using two hands, cannot find individual keys readily and need a lot of support to do simple tasks such as creating new folders. Although current standards of work observed in Years 7 to 9 are below expectations, this represents good progress, considering information and communication technology is not yet taught in discrete lessons to all students in Year 9. Furthermore the subject is not taught well through all other subjects. Teachers have high expectations, however, and students in Year 7, having completed a course on wordprocessing, are already learning to use spreadsheets. They respond well to the commitment of their teachers and support assistants and for the most part are fully engaged in their work. They enter data correctly into cells and make simple arithmetical calculations using the appropriate formulae. They concentrate well, work hard and make full use of the high quality of individual support they receive during lessons and make good progress. Students who work more quickly use the system competently to add columns of figures, calculate averages and identify maximum and minimum numbers in a random sequence. Students in Year 8 build on this progress to extend their knowledge and understanding of Powerpoint, a presentation software package. They create slides competently and animate their text very effectively, adding to their presentations the benefit of a variety of sounds. Most students, including those with special needs, achieve well.
124. Standards observed in Years 10 and 11, where students are following a GNVQ Part 1 course, are average, with a substantial minority attaining standards that are above average, although a smaller minority is attaining standards that are low. The current Year 11 students are the first to be entered for this course. Despite their limited experience of information and communication technology, students make good progress. They handle the school's system proficiently and are developing competent keyboard skills. The majority apply the more frequently used spreadsheet functions well and enhance the presentation of documents very effectively using colour and WordArt with images copied from ClipArt or more usually from appropriate websites on the Internet. They add footers to identify all documents and printout after each task is completed to sustain a record of development through their assignments. Wordprocessing skills are good and students generally use Windows effectively to move data between applications and build an explanatory document in a wordprocessor incorporating illustrations from a spreadsheet. Students in Year 11 uniformly compose text direct to screen, which is a higher-order skill. They understand

the difference between different types of computer image and where one might be used in preference to another.

125. Students with special educational needs make equally good progress because of the quality of support provided. Despite the help given by teachers and support assistants, students' literacy skills are weak and their spelling of commonplace words is inaccurate. Consequently they have difficulty in composing and writing the wordprocessed documentation that supports and explains their assignments. The substantial minority of more advanced students, which includes several with special educational needs, has made very good progress. They can use the graphics element of a spreadsheet to illustrate their tables, using the graphics facilities efficiently and confidently to produce coloured graphs and charts, some three-dimensional. The overall level of students' achievement in Years 10 and 11 is high.

Quality of education

126. The quality of teaching overall is good. There was no unsatisfactory teaching and in over a quarter of lessons observed teaching was very good. This is a significant improvement since the previous inspection. Relationships are good and humour is used well to lighten the atmosphere. The level of teachers' subject knowledge is very high. As a result, objectives or procedures are very clearly explained and often complemented by well-designed support resources. This engages students and gives them confidence. It stimulates interest and also enables teachers to deliver a high level of individual support during practical assignments. Individual lesson tasks are well planned to be progressively more demanding to meet the teachers' high expectations. In this way, students with special educational needs achieve well, whilst additional tasks offer greater challenge to those who are more gifted. As a result of this level of support from a teacher, one Year 10 student, initially entered for the GNVQ foundation course, has been promoted to the Part 1 course. Very good individual support is also given to students who have been absent.
127. Students respond well to good relationships and challenging work. They respond positively to questions, work co-operatively with each other and sustain a reasonably high level of concentration. They work well independently and develop confidence, as well extending their skills, and have progressed well from a poor knowledge and experience base. Behaviour is good, even though teachers often have to work hard to keep students focused. Where learning is less than good, students with poor social skills cause teachers to spend too much time in keeping them focused on their work and they are potentially disruptive. Occasionally, the lesson time is unduly long and students with learning difficulties are unable to sustain their attention and concentration, so underachievement results. There is an effective integration of the work of support assistants and teachers into the lessons: both work co-operatively together and as a result students of all levels of attainment are included fully in all activities.

Leadership and management

128. The subject is very well led and managed. The curriculum has been revised since the last inspection. The subject is now taught to all students in Years 7, 8 and 10 and selectively in Years 9 and 11. The co-ordinator has identified priority objectives, procured good up-to-date equipment, skilled technical support and works with a competent team of teachers. There has been some good training for all staff. Programmes of study are detailed and thorough, as is all the departmental documentation. The use of the Internet is managed very well with a very secure system of protection and the facility to monitor its traffic for misuse. This is very much

due to the excellent work of the network manager, who is also responsible for the very stable system that has experienced so few working problems since it was established. The assessment system is excellent and used very effectively to drive students' progress. The overall level of improvement since the previous inspection is very good.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

129. The use of information and communication technology generally across the curriculum is growing, but as yet is underdeveloped. The teaching and support staff of the school have all completed the nationally funded training and sufficient funds remain to provide further subject-specific training. The computer equipment provided is of good quality and very well maintained by the network manager and his colleague, but the quantity of equipment is not enough if the department's plans and the school's plans for the growth of information and communication technology are to be realised effectively.
130. In art and design, students capture landscape images and import them into a graphics programme. They use the drawing tools to regenerate the outlines, add colour and then use the spray facility to add texture and tone. In design and technology, wordprocessing and graphical images are used to enhance the presentation of work, but there was no evidence of students using control technology in Years 7 to 9. In physical education, students use wordprocessing and graphical images to enhance the presentation of their work. They also research topics, such as hockey, using CD-Rom and Internet resources, as the basis from which to complete a related project. Additionally, they use images captured from digital and video cameras to analyse the movement of the body in games activities.
131. Datalogging is used widely in science to record information for analysis and students working in pairs create computer-based presentations on specific topics. The Internet is widely used to derive information on a variety of topics. For example, a group of Year 10 students initiated a website search to complete a table of periodic elements and sixth form students researched information on orchid species to good effect. In a sixth form lesson, some students were learning about cross-pollination of orchids, using competently the Royal Horticultural Society's software to discover the genetic history of the relevant species and related hybrids. In the same lesson others were using a flexible camera to import images of blooms into a Word document that was recording the practical work that the students had done.
132. Whilst information and communication technology has been included into their programmes of study there is not much evidence of coherent use in mathematics, history, geography, modern foreign languages or English beyond the use of wordprocessing and graphical images to enhance the presentation of students' work.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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

Strengths

- GCSE results have risen considerably since the last inspection, and were above the national average in 2001.
- Standards at the end of Year 9 have risen.
- Teaching is good overall and students learn well as a result.
- Behaviour is good and good relationships exist between students and teachers.
- The subject is well led and teachers work well together.

Areas for improvement

- Information and communication technology is not fully integrated into classroom teaching.
- Teachers share materials, but the monitoring of teaching has not led to the sharing of best practice across the department.
- In Years 7, 8 and 9, the amount of written work and homework required of students of similar ability is not fully consistent across each year.

Standards and achievement

133. In 2001, the teachers' assessments of students' performance at the end of Year 9 indicated above average performance. This was an improvement over previous years. In addition, in 2001, boys' results in Year 9 matched those of the girls, whereas in 2000 the difference was wide, and similar to the national picture. At GCSE in 2001, French results were above the national average, and in German they were well above. Over the previous three years, French results had improved from below average; German results had maintained a high average. In recent years, overall, the difference between boys' and girls' performance in GCSE has been smaller than is the case nationally. Nearly all students in Years 10 and 11 take modern foreign languages at GCSE and the percentage of students achieving A*-C grades is high.
134. Standards in lessons and other work of current Year 9 students are slightly above average. Writing skills develop well, especially in the work of higher-attaining students. Most of these students write simply, but with good detail and length, for example, about school and holidays. However, over the three years from Year 7, there is too much variation within each year in the amount of written work and homework done by students of similar ability. During these years students generally listen well to the teacher and to tapes, and they mostly understand classroom instructions in the foreign languages. Most students develop satisfactory accents and are fairly confident in using the foreign language, provided they have enough practice in chorus-work. This was shown in a Year 7 lesson for higher-attaining students, where students' good pronunciation was the result of regular and carefully directed chorus-work, practised in every lesson. Furthermore, these students took care to copy closely the models of their native-speaker teacher and a bilingual student in the class. In many other classes, a few students are much more hesitant and make less effort. Students' reading skills are sound.
135. Standards in lessons and other work of current Year 11 students are above average. Students respond well to the demands of the coursework assignments of the GCSE modular course. With careful guidance from their teachers, higher-attaining students, and a significant proportion of middle-attaining students also, learn to write well using a range of tenses, phrases and expressions. Lower-attaining students write much more briefly and with less complexity, but perform in line with their abilities. Listening and

speaking skills generally develop satisfactorily and students respond positively to the challenge of making a tape about themselves for one of the coursework assignments. Some lower-attaining students are very slow in recalling vocabulary in reading passages but, across the whole range of attainment, most students learn to extract the information they need from reading passages on a range of familiar topics. Students have good opportunities to attend extra GCSE revision and extension classes in all language skills.

136. Overall, achievement is good, mainly because of the good teaching. Students with special educational needs progress well in the smaller groups created for them, where the teaching is mostly good. In one lesson, when the teaching was less good and control of behaviour was not firm enough progress was unsatisfactory.

Quality of education

137. The quality of teaching is good overall. Of the lessons seen, just under two-thirds were good or better and just over one-third were satisfactory. Most teachers use the foreign languages well in the classroom, enabling students to develop their listening and speaking skills well. Over the past year, teachers have raised their expectations of what students can achieve, particularly in written work in Years 7, 8 and 9, and they have revised the schemes of work appropriately. Teachers plan their individual lessons in all years very well, with a view to ensuring that students practise at least three of the four language skills in each lesson. For example, in a Year 11 French lesson, the teacher began the lesson on the topic of types of housing with a very well-conducted question and answer session, followed by a listening activity, using a tape, to consolidate the students' learning of new constructions. Finally, students moved on to a challenging writing task using the conditional tense. The approach was methodical, students felt well supported, and they learnt the substance of the lesson very well. Teachers use resources effectively, including the overhead projector, and materials are shared and discussed well. Teachers manage their students carefully and have high expectations of their behaviour in class; in consequence, students can concentrate, listen to each other and work productively. In only one lesson was the behaviour of students unsatisfactory. Overall, students have good attitudes towards modern foreign languages.

138. Areas for improvement in teaching, as exemplified in a minority of lessons, include: sharper procedures at the beginning and end of lessons to discuss objectives; and longer and more rapid chorus-work sessions to ensure all students have concentrated practice and can build up their confidence. Marking of exercise books is generally done well, except that teachers do not ask students to do follow-up corrections, and the attainment grades allocated do not always give students a clear idea of how well they are moving towards their targets.

Leadership and management

139. Improvement since the last inspection is good. GCSE results have improved considerably. Standards at the end of Year 9 are higher. Teachers have revised the schemes of work in order to raise standards, and higher-attaining students are now challenged well in the top sets. Good behaviour is maintained; this factor makes an important contribution to the raising of standards.

140. Separate heads of French and German manage the department effectively, although precise areas of responsibility and priorities for shared development have not been worked out fully enough. The joint leaders are in charge of a team of committed

teachers, who all work very well together. Documentation and records of students' work are very clear. Although teachers share materials appropriately, the monitoring of teaching does not ensure that best practice in teaching is shared across the department. Information and communication technology is not fully integrated into lessons.

MUSIC

Overall, the quality of provision in music is **good** in classroom work and **excellent** in instrumental tuition and extra-curricular work

Strengths:

- Teaching and students' achievement are good.
- Most students show positive attitudes, and behaviour is good.
- The range of opportunities in instrumental tuition is excellent and teaching is good and often very good.
- The standards reached in extra-curricular work are outstanding and bring much credit to the school.
- Leadership and management and the support given to music, including that given by the Writhlington Music Association, are excellent.

Areas for improvement:

- In Years 7 to 9 the statutory requirement to teach singing as part of the National Curriculum is not met and the time allocation for music in these years is too low and does not allow the curriculum to be taught in enough depth.
- Learning is too keyboard based; students make insufficient use of their own or other instruments in classroom work.
- The lack of soundproofing between rooms affects learning and affects standards.

Standards and achievement

141. GCSE examination results between 1997 and 2001 were above average when compared with all schools. Students have achieved well in graded music examinations.
142. Students enter the school with very variable musical experience related to the quality of their musical education in their previous schools, instrumental tuition experience, interests and level of home support. Some students enter with above average attainment, but most students enter with below average attainment in music and teachers' assessments confirm this. By Year 9, when students are aged 14, standards have improved and are just below average, across a range from Levels 3 to 6 with the majority of students working at Levels 4 or 5; a few talented students attain higher levels. Students make good progress in most lessons and achieve well; their achievement over time is affected by the shortage of time to teach the subject in Years 7 to 9 and by weaknesses in the curriculum. Students have not sung sufficiently or regularly to meet the requirements of the National Curriculum. Students make good use of keyboards but the instrumental performing skills of the majority are insufficiently developed; students do not have enough experience of instruments other than keyboards and too few opportunities to use their own instruments in classwork.
143. A unique feature is the opportunity for pupils to opt for band lessons as part of the music curriculum; this involves about 90 students in each year group who receive the

band training session as their weekly class lesson. Standards in these groups are high and playing skills levels are well above average; students show high levels of musical knowledge and their notation skills and understanding of music are being very successfully developed. When students compose pieces such as those based on ragas, the understanding of structures and devices of the most musical students is secure but the majority composes mathematically. Music-reading skills of the majority are unsatisfactory; many students use letters written under notes. Students listen respectfully to recordings and to each other when performing but their general musical knowledge, for example of instruments, composers, forms, structure and well-known pieces of music, is limited. The more experienced use appropriate technical vocabulary in appraising but the majority makes insufficient use of musical terms. Standards in Year 7 are relatively higher than in Year 9.

144. Although standards in GCSE work have been above average in recent years and students achieve well in relation to their lack of prior experience, standards in the current very small Year 11 and large Year 10 groups are below average. Students' instrumental skills are approaching grade 4 in the small Year 11 group and about grade 2 in the large Year 10. Students do not sing as a group. The most talented students show secure understanding of devices and structures in composing and create imaginative compositions. They understand harmony. They make good use of music technologies, including those at home, but are disadvantaged by the lack of computers in the department to help them develop pieces and notate their work. Students listen respectfully; their general musical knowledge is less well developed than expected but they show sound knowledge of instruments. Overall, students' achievement is good.

Quality of education

145. The quality of teaching in classroom work is mainly good and there is some very good and excellent teaching, for example in the band classes. Teachers show secure subject knowledge so that they teach confidently, using their skills as musicians effectively in lessons, for example when demonstrating, accompanying, directing or conducting. In the best lessons, instructions are clear and the students understand the objectives and how to achieve them. In the most successful lessons, expectations are high and students are challenged. Students with special educational needs are well integrated and make good progress, often with the help of learning support assistants. The best lessons have clear structures and are well organised so that there is time to review work, for example when students perform their pieces and appraise them.
146. The management of lessons is usually very good so that they are orderly and make good use of time. As a result, relationships are very good, students are good-humoured and they work well, especially in practical work. In a few weaker sessions, discipline is not fully established and some time-wasting occurs. Insufficient attention is paid to developing students' musical vocabulary and literacy. Lessons start briskly and proceed at a good pace so that students remain focused. In the best lessons, the assessment of students is supportive and shows them clearly how they can improve, as seen when students performed their reggae pieces to the class. Homework is not set regularly in Years 7 to 9 but is set appropriately to extend students' learning in examination work. Most students like instrumental work and use equipment sensibly, but dislike written work. Most are attentive, work productively and are supportive of each other; a small minority lack the self-control to work independently. Students are keen to answer questions, and the most enthusiastic involve themselves in opportunities offered by the department and through musical opportunities outside school. In GCSE work, attitudes are mature and all students take advantage of the opportunities in instrumental or voice tuition and extra-curricular work; this strengthens

their achievement. The range of extra-curricular activities in music is excellent and includes concert band, stage band, junior band, senior choir, junior choir and many other sectional ensembles and rock bands.

Leadership and management

147. The head of department is enthusiastic, committed to raising standards and extremely hard working; she is well supported by the school so that leadership and management are excellent. Music is superbly supported by the school's music association, which has raised considerable funds and given organisational and moral support over the years to enhance music provision. High quality documentation is well presented. Schemes of work, systems for monitoring and evaluating the subject's performance, planning for the future, assessment schemes and strategies to raise standards are all in place. These are under review; this is with a view to developing students' basic musical skills in performing in order to support work in composing and listening and further raise standards. There are useful and developing links with other schools but curricular links with primary schools need strengthening to build on their work. Music accommodation is spacious but the lack of adequate soundproofing between rooms affects learning, and the arrangement of desks in the main rooms inhibits teaching. Resourcing is unsatisfactory, with a need for computers, additional keyboards, another piano, classroom instruments to enhance creative work, band instruments, music for singing, playing and the library, OHP, TV and video, audio (including mini-disc) and recording equipment. There is no technical support in music, which imposes great pressures on the staff, and insufficient time is given to the head of department to organise music. Since the last inspection there have been improvements in resourcing and accommodation but the issue of lack of singing and lack of time has not been addressed.
148. The school promotes a large number of regular concerts and other musical events involving many students. Music makes a valuable contribution to students' personal development, especially their social and cultural development. These activities reflect the dedication of staff, support of parents and the school's music association and the enthusiasm of the talented musicians whose performances and successes bring much credit to the school and this vibrant department. The extra-curricular groups especially are a strength of the school.

Individual tuition lessons

149. Approximately 130 boys and girls, about 20 per cent of the students, a well above average number, receive instrumental or voice lessons from nine visiting teachers. Standards are broadly average. The progress and achievement of students is good in relation to their ages and the time they have received tuition. Teaching is good and some very good teaching was seen in voice lessons and percussion tuition. The curriculum insufficiently supports instrumental tuition and tuition makes little impact on the quality of students' musical experiences in the classroom in most classwork; this is a weakness the department intends to address. Standards are excellent and individual students reach high standards. The visiting teachers give excellent support to these groups.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Overall, the quality of provision for physical education is **good**.

Strengths

- Teaching is good overall and often very good.
- The students show a high level of commitment and enthusiasm in all lessons.
- There is a very good range of extra-curricular provision.

Standards and achievement

150. In the 2001 GCSE examination overall attainment was well below average. This was also true of the proportion of students gaining the higher A*-C grades. All students achieved a pass grade. The number of girls entered was too small to make valid comparisons with the boys' results. The outcome last summer was in sharp contrast to the exceptionally good results achieved in the previous year when 79 per cent of students achieved the higher grades. This is explained by the fact that many of the students in 2001 experienced considerable difficulty with elements of the theory paper. In some cases their standard of practical work also fell below that achieved by students the year before. Good standards are shown by the number of teams who compete against other schools in a range of different sports and by individual students who are selected at district or county level.
151. Teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2001 showed attainment to be above average. Standards seen during the inspection in Years 7 to 9 were broadly in line with expectations but were above average in some lessons. The majority of students show a good range of skills in a number of different activities. During the inspection these included gymnastics, football, hockey, netball and dance.
152. Inspection evidence shows that standards of attainment among non-examination students in Years 10 and 11 are also in line with national expectations. Students build effectively on the knowledge and skills developed earlier. The majority of students who are currently studying physical education at GCSE level attain standards that are at least average for the course. This is the case in Year 11 where most students show a satisfactory understanding of the theoretical elements of the syllabus and where the amount of time given to theory work has been increased in the light of the most recent results. Individual students attain above average standards across the school in rugby, netball, trampolining, football, tennis and athletics.
153. In relation to prior attainment most students achieve well. Although younger students have different prior experiences in physical education they make particularly good progress in Year 7. In part, this is a consequence of the increasingly good links with the providing primary schools. During the inspection, learning was excellent in a Year 7 dance lesson and very good in a football lesson in the same year group. Almost all students are highly motivated. They concentrate extremely well and they are willing to work very hard in order to make progress. Students with special educational needs progress as well as their peers. A small number of students with particular difficulties benefit considerably from the work of the learning support assistant. Achievement is satisfactory for the majority of non-examination students in Years 10 and 11. GCSE students in Years 10 and 11 are generally making good progress.

Quality of education

154. The quality of teaching is good overall. It varies from satisfactory to excellent; it is at least good and is frequently very good. There are some striking examples of good practice. One strong feature is the encouragement of independent learning skills. In many lessons, including those involving the youngest students, opportunities are provided for students to lead warm-up activities, analyse movements and act as officials. Students respond very positively to the teaching they receive and learning is good and often very good as a result. This was the case in the dance and football lessons mentioned earlier, where all the students were totally committed from start to finish. They answered questions very willingly, they worked with enthusiasm throughout and they achieved above average standards as a result of their efforts. Students following the GCSE course are also very positive in their approach, and their commitment in practical lessons is palpable. Levels of participation are very high in all years. Students are correctly dressed for physical activity in all lessons whether indoors or outside. Relationships between teachers and students are very good and expectations of work and behaviour are clear. As a result, students' motivation is high and behaviour is consistently very good. All these factors have a positive effect on learning. Where possible, students are encouraged to make good use of information and communication technology. Year 9 students recently produced some impressive projects after undertaking independent research on hockey.
155. All members of the department, supported by several other colleagues, contribute to a very good range of extra-curricular activities at lunchtime and after school. These activities provide students with additional opportunities for improving their level of skill. They are well supported by many students. The faculty has identified the need to encourage more of the younger students to become involved in these activities. Lunchtime tournaments, for example mini-tennis, are already helping to increase their participation. The school competes against other schools in a wide range of sports for boys and girls of all ages.

Leadership and management

156. Leadership and management of the faculty continue to be good. The documentation is detailed, impressive and helpful. The teachers work very well together and function as a hard-working and committed team. Examples of good practice are shared. Since the previous inspection a number of significant developments have taken place. The quality and use of assessment have been improved. Opportunities are provided for students to take the Junior Sports Leaders Award. Links with outside sporting clubs and organisations have been further developed. These links result in students receiving specialist coaching in a range of sports and this additional coaching is contributing to the standards being achieved. The number of courses organised in school has increased, resulting in students gaining recognised qualifications in hockey, badminton and cricket. The faculty has recently linked very effectively with Bath Spa University to develop a mentoring programme for particularly talented students. A learning support assistant with particular responsibility for physical education works effectively with students for three days each week. Her contributions are helping students who need additional help to make good progress. The school has recently re-applied for Sports Mark status, having first gained this award in 1999.
157. At present the faculty does not have a permanent base for teaching the theoretical elements of the examination syllabus. Consequently it is not easy to display useful posters or other learning aids, maintain a readily accessible library of relevant books and videos, or place appropriate emphasis on developing literacy skills through visual

presentations. The previous inspection made specific mention of serious problems relating to the condition of the sports hall. Those problems still exist but are currently being rectified in part. The first phase of the planned building programme is underway, with a new sports hall scheduled for completion in the summer. However, this phase does not include the provision of new changing rooms. The changing facilities still remain as they were at the time of the previous inspection when they were described as being 'in a poor and unacceptable condition'.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The provision for religious education at Key Stage 3 is good, but a lack of time and insufficient content at Key Stage 4 means that the overall provision is **unsatisfactory**.

Strengths

- Students make good progress in Key Stage 3.
- The provision for students with special educational needs is good.
- Students experience good teaching.
- The subject is well led.

Areas for improvement

- The provision for 14- to 16-year-olds is unsatisfactory.
- There is not enough use of information and communication technology to support learning.
- Management is unsatisfactory

Standards and achievement

158. There were no examination results for religious education in 2001, but results in previous years have been good. In 2000 results were above the national average. Students made good progress achieving grades that were above those predicted.
159. The standard of work seen in Years 7 to 9 is in line with those set out in the locally agreed syllabus. Students of all abilities make good progress, with those having special educational needs making very good progress. By the end of Year 9, students have a sound understanding of the major beliefs and practices of the main religions that are found in our society. They are able to use religious language well, and understand the importance of symbolism in society. A Year 7 group thoughtfully examined artists' representations of Jesus and expressed their own beliefs well. They had a good understanding of the important events in the life of Jesus. They fully appreciate the important role that religion plays in giving meaning and purpose to life, and are aware of the impact that religious faith has upon a person's life style. A Year 9 group demonstrated a very good understanding of the Buddhist sense of community as expressed in the Sangha.
160. In Years 10 and 11, religious education is part of the personal, social and health education programme. A shortage of time and limited coverage of the religious education curriculum means that the foundation that is laid in Years 7 to 9 is not built upon and progress in reaching the levels of attainment set out in the locally agreed syllabus is poor. Whilst they do have opportunities to discuss ethical issues, the explicitly religious dimension is not sufficiently addressed.
161. The small number of students in examination groups in Years 10 and 11 make good progress. The Year 10 group has a wide spread of ability but all students achieve well.

The current level of achievement suggests that they will attain grades above those predicted on the basis of previous performance. Their written work shows a good understanding of the teaching of Christianity on contemporary moral issues. In a class discussion, they expressed their view on the teaching of Christianity on the question of abortion in a thoughtful and sensitive manner.

162. A much stronger group in Year 11 is making very good progress. The students in this group have a very good understanding of religious language and concepts. They confidently discuss the deeper significance of the five pillars of faith in Islam. Their written work is of a high quality, demonstrating good organisation and independent learning skills. Students are on target to achieve grades above those predicted on previous performance.

Quality of education

163. The overall quality of teaching is very good. Of the eleven lessons seen, nine were good or better. In Years 7 to 9, the teachers have a very good knowledge of the subject, which they use well to deepen students' understanding of the subject. A Year 9 group was thoroughly involved as a teacher developed their understanding of such complex terms as Bhikku in Buddhism. Lessons are well planned, with good attention being paid to the needs of students with special educational needs. A good range of teaching methods is employed to interest and motivate students. Lessons proceed with pace and challenge. Suitable homework is set which is well marked with helpful comments. Classroom relationships are managed in a positive manner providing an environment in which students feel free to express their own beliefs and values. The opportunities provided for reflection help students to develop their own spiritual responses. As a result, students have a very positive attitude to the subject. The quality of their written work is good. They take a pride in the presentation of their work and complete homework assignments well.
164. This picture is not so strong in Years 10 to 11. The examination classes are well taught by a specialist teacher, but the inclusion of religious education in the personal, social and health education programme means that most of the religious education in these groups is taught by non-specialists. They have no training, with the choice of tutors being driven by other timetable priorities. Whilst the teachers are in sympathy with the subject, the skills required to teach the explicitly religious elements are lacking. In a Year 11 class there was only a passing reference to any specifically religious element when dealing with questions of morality.

Leadership and management

165. The subject is unsatisfactorily managed but well led. There is a strong team spirit with the subject leader giving very good support to the non-specialists. New assessment procedures have been successfully introduced in Years 7 to 9. Resources are well managed. The provision of suitable resources for students with special educational needs is very good. The department has yet to make full use of information and communication technology. Classrooms are bright and cheerful places with good displays. Monitoring has taken place with the head of faculty monitoring all teachers well. Pressure of time has meant that the subject leader has not had sufficient time to monitor the teaching of others in the department carefully. This is a particular problem in Years 10 and 11, where students are taught by non-specialists. The lack of time and content was raised in the last inspection and no progress has been made in addressing this.

166. Progress since the last inspection is good in some respects, but unsatisfactory in others. Standards for Years 7 to 9 continue to improve and examination results have improved. However, the failure of the school to address the provision of religious education at Key Stage 4 means that overall progress over the last five years is unsatisfactory.

PART E: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF

THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

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

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

GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	4	100	62	0	15	1.8	1.5
French	1	0	78	0	13	0	1.7

GCE A level and AVCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	6	50	87	0	43	1.0	5.8
Biology	6	100	88	0	34	3.3	5.3
Chemistry	2	50	90	0	43	1.0	5.9
Physics	4	100	88	0	40	3.0	5.7
Full design and technology	2	100	91	50	30	7.0	5.4
Business studies	7	100	92	29	32	5.4	5.5
AVCE Business	7	100		57		12.5	10.5
Art and design	1	100	96	100	46	8.0	6.6
Music	2	100	93	100	35	8.0	5.7
Geography	1	100	92	0	38	4.0	5.7
Religious studies	2	100	92	0	38	5.0	5.8
English literature	7	100	95	14	37	5.7	5.9
Media studies	6	100		17		4.3	
German	1	100	91	100	40	8.0	5.8

Intermediate vocational qualifications

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		Average point distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Science	11	73		0		7.3	
Information and communication technology	3	100		0		10.0	

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

The main focus for the inspection was mathematics but the sciences were sampled. In physics and in the Advanced Vocational Certificate in Education (science) excellent teaching was observed and students made significant advances in learning and reach good standards.

MATHEMATICS

Overall the quality of provision in mathematics is **unsatisfactory**.

Strengths

- Teaching is good and is particularly committed to supporting the diverse needs of the students.
- Marking of students' work is good and useful guidance is given.

Areas for improvement

- Standards of attainment are too low as students join the course with inadequate basic skills in mathematics.
- New technology, including information and communication technology and graphical calculators, are not used enough.
- Assessment is not used well enough to support students' learning.

Standards and achievement

167. The GCE A level results in 2001 were below national averages. Six students entered the examination; the three who passed gained a grade E. Mathematics, in comparison to other subjects in the school, performs relatively poorly. The department operates an open policy for inclusion on the Year 12 AS course, and students with modest GCSE grades are given encouragement to study mathematics in the sixth form. The results of AS level in 2001 for Year 12 students show that all 13 students achieved poor results in their module tests; the results were not converted to an overall full certificate. Three students continued with their studies into Year 13. However, these results need to be set against the national experience for this examination, whereby mathematics performance compares relatively unfavourably with other subjects.
168. The standards of work seen confirm the pattern of recent results. In a lesson observed in Year 12, the homework was being reviewed and students were insecure about key mathematical ideas. They needed reassurance of what was implied by some common terms. However, with support they could carry out some basic work in drawing graphs. The students were noticeably reliant upon the teacher's explanation and generally passive in their response to the lesson. In Year 13, work focused upon problems set at the appropriate level for this stage of the course and was very clearly explained. Despite probing questions by the teacher, the response of the students was slow and dependence upon the teacher was considerable. However, when the need arose to apply a previously taught algebraic routine it was successfully applied and students were visibly pleased with their achievement. The three students in this group had all

retaken their Year 12 modules and were awaiting the results. In Year 11 they had all achieved grade B in their GCSEs. Students generally fail to recognise or understand underlying ideas in mathematics and how to apply them in new situations. They are better at describing techniques than they are in applying mathematical reasoning.

Quality of education

169. Teaching is good overall. Students appreciate the commitment of their teachers and their readiness to assist at times outside of lessons. Good teaching is characterised by sensitivity to the needs of the students, whereby the pace of the lessons is appropriate to their different levels of attainment. Students' work is well marked and appropriately commented upon to give guidance on how best to improve. However, assessment information is not always used effectively to support learning. Use of information and communication technology or graphical calculators is underdeveloped and therefore a vital learning opportunity is lost.
170. In discussion with students they admit they find the work complex and challenging. When expected to work independently, they agreed that when difficulties arose, previous work or reference to textbooks or notes seldom secured greater understanding. Students' files show wide variations in their capacity to organise their work effectively; some serve as immaculately ordered records of work and useful sources of reference, others are repositories for haphazard notes.

Leadership and management

171. Although the subject is very well led and managed for Years 7 to 11, the management of mathematics in the sixth form, though satisfactory, is weakened by inadequate monitoring and evaluation of the consequences of the current arrangements by which students pursue mathematics at AS Level and A level. The rationale for the admission of students to sixth form mathematics with levels of attainment that are too low is not clear and needs to be reviewed.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

Design and technology was sampled in the sixth form. The numbers entered over recent years for A level design and technology have been very low, which makes comparison with national averages unreliable. In 2001 there were no entries. Currently there are no students in Year 13 and five students in Year 12 doing AS level design and technology. Students are behind with their work and standards are well below average because teaching has been unsatisfactory. This reflects the unsatisfactory management of the subject since the start of the course. Currently, action is being taken to retrieve the situation and the standard of teaching has improved and is now good.

BUSINESS

Courses currently run in the sixth form are AS/A2 level business studies, and Advanced Vocational Certificate in Education business, all at advanced level. There are no intermediate courses at present.

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

Strengths

- Teachers have very good knowledge of business and industry.
- Lesson planning is very good.

- Standards in the Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education are high.
- Teachers have very supportive relationships with students, whose potential is very well monitored.
- Students' excellent attitudes help them to make very good progress.

Areas for improvement

- In AS and A level lessons students do not use information and communications technology enough.
- Students do not use visits and work experience enough to enrich their learning.

Standards of attainment and achievement

172. A level standards were average in 2000 and 2001. The proportion gaining the top grades of A and B was also average and all students passed. Male students' results were above national and school averages, but female students' attainment was below average; their coursework projects were marked down by the examining board. Projects sampled were of a good standard and evaluated specific business problems in local companies very clearly. Students produced good graphical analysis of consumer surveys. Every A level business student has passed the examination every year for several years. Very few drop out, and several go on to study business at local universities. Most students achieved well from their GCSE starting points, with some attaining higher grades than teachers expected. Overall standards in A level business have improved very well since the last inspection, where they were below average.
173. Results in the new AS level examination in 2001 were below school and national averages, though this represents satisfactory progress from the students' attainment levels on joining the course. The new examination caused difficulties, mainly because the first module was examined too early. Teachers have considerably improved course arrangements this year.
174. Current students achieve well in lessons and on the evidence of work seen. Standards in lessons for Year 12 AS level students, boys and girls, are average for their stage of the course, though course numbers are small. The oral skills of nearly half of all students are above average. Students in Year 13 make good progress on the new A2 course. Work seen was average. Information and communication technology is not used enough to set up spreadsheet models of costs and profits in cash flow and break-even charts. Most students draw clear, well-labelled graphs and provide useful analyses of firms' marketing positions. In a very good Year 13 lesson, students showed good critical understanding of marketing strategies. Their coursework projects on manufacturers of consumer goods were well researched from Internet data and clearly written, although some spelling errors remained uncorrected. AS level and A2 students do not make enough use of visits to industry or work experience to enrich their analyses. A small number have some difficulty with the interpretation and analysis of statistical data, and in the recall of concepts.
175. Students in the Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education business course reached well above average results in 2001. All students passed, with nearly half obtaining distinction grades. When account is taken of the students' GCSE grades at the start of the course, their overall achievement was very good; their results were well above

teachers' predictions. Very few drop out of courses.

176. The achievement of current Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education students is also very good, and they are likely to obtain grades in 2002 that are above national expectation. In a very good Year 12 Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education lesson, students made brisk progress in learning about the implications of theories of leadership styles for different types of businesses. Several students effectively used experience from their part-time jobs to exemplify the good and bad motivating factors resulting from authoritarian and democratic patterns of leadership. Their coursework notes were well organised and neat and, when questioned, they correctly defined key management concepts, such as delegation. They showed a good level of understanding in explaining how the work of McGregor and Maslow could be linked to explain why people work for a living.

Quality of education

177. The overall quality of teaching and learning is very good. This is a considerable improvement since the last inspection, when teaching was mainly satisfactory. The teachers' very good subject knowledge underpins enthusiastic class discussions. Lessons had clear aims and good pace. In a very good Year 12 lesson, students were asked well-focused questions and consolidated and effectively applied concepts of interest rates and inflation to case studies. Students' very keen responses help them to develop good critical understanding of the consequences of poor motivation in different businesses. The teachers provide very good opportunities for students to engage in animated and constructive discussion, through which they reinforce key business concepts very well.
178. Lessons effectively combine theory with practical individual and paired tasks in which students work very well with each other. Although no group oral presentations were seen in the sampled lessons, students develop good skills of communication, number and information and communication technology, as well as problem solving. Teachers show very good, supportive relationships with students, whose interest and enthusiasm for the subject are supported by teachers' regular monitoring of their progress. In lessons, students show very mature attitudes in discussion, and a very good capacity for working independently and for engaging in relevant research using websites. Computers tend to be used by AS and A level students only for homework and portfolio projects. Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education students made good use of information and communication technology in lessons. Overall, students showed excellent attitudes to their work.
179. Teachers' thorough assessments are very closely linked to examination requirements. Marking is rigorous, constructive and regular. Half-termly work reports help students to evaluate their own strengths and weaknesses accurately. Students' progress is very well monitored, with performance continually measured against predicted grades.

Leadership and management

180. Business courses are very well led. A very clear sense of direction is shown by the well-planned introduction of the new Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education, AS level and A2 courses. Schemes of work fully meet examination requirements, and the department's progress in meeting school improvement targets is very good. Overall improvement since the last inspection has been very good. The school has submitted a well-researched bid for business and enterprise specialist status, which, if granted, will provide a much needed business studies base, more specialist staffing, and the

opportunity to expand the curriculum for 14- to 19-year-olds. Links with local business and industry are underdeveloped.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

The inspection focused on the Advanced Vocational Certificate in Education.

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

Strengths

- Students have made very good progress in developing their skills.
- Teaching is very good. Lessons are planned very well to support a well-structured series of work-related assignments.
- Excellent assessment procedures keep students well informed of their progress.
- Leadership and management are excellent.

Areas for development

- Current facilities will not support the demands of the projected expansion in the use of information and communication technology across the school.

Standards and achievement

181. Attainment on entry to the sixth form has been well below average because students have had little experience of information and communication technology in Years 7 to 11. Standards observed in Year 12, where students are mostly following the Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education course, are above average, with a substantial minority gaining standards that are well above average. Standards in Year 13 are also above average, with a high level of independent learning evident in earlier coursework. This is an improvement from what was noted in the previous inspection.
182. Despite their limited experience of using up-to-date equipment as a regular and structured part of their learning, students develop a high level of skill in a fairly short time. All students have good keyboard skills, typing well and composing direct to screen. They are very competent in accessing the school system and negotiate the Internet easily and confidently, importing relevant text or images from websites. They make notes on their findings directly into a Word document. They develop their independent learning skills well. Consequently, they make very good progress and their level of achievement is very high.
183. Students respond very positively to good relationships established by their teachers and as a result there is a strong sense of mutual commitment to raising standards. Their attitudes are excellent, as is their behaviour, which is responsible and mature. They find the work demanding and have to work hard to meet the challenge of their assignments. They become engrossed in the practical work, but enjoy that and do not regret choosing to study the subject. The practical assignments of the course are planned well by the teachers to be commercially realistic and applicable. Designing a workbook, created for office use, students compile a complex database of information accurately, in relation to which a series of calculation formulae are entered. In building up their documentation to support their assignments, students use wordprocessing skills well, moving confidently between applications. In an assignment devoted to the

development of wordprocessing skills, students interviewed executive staff of specific companies in the locality and, over a period of four weeks, built up a picture of the extent to which information and communication technology is integrated into company procedures and practices.

Quality of education

184. The quality of teaching is very good and has improved significantly since the previous inspection. The teachers establish very good relationships with the students. The students respond with interest and enthusiasm and their attitudes are excellent. The very effective interaction between the students and the teachers encourages a very good work rate, with the consequence that students have extended their knowledge considerably in a relatively short period. A key strength of teaching is the high degree of subject knowledge, which encourages students to seek help and reach for the highest standards possible for them. The encouragement and the clarity of the individual support given by teachers during practical work and in the marking of the assignments, particularly for those with special educational needs, stimulates commitment and progress. In this respect, teachers have good awareness of the specific problems of students with special educational needs. The assessment of students' written and practical work is very thorough. The results of assessments are used very positively to monitor progress and to shape the evolving sixth form curriculum.

Leadership and management

185. Leadership and management are excellent. There is a commitment to building good resources and a clear vision of the long-term future of information and communication technology in the school and in the sixth form in particular. Specific important priorities for development were identified in the more recent past and these have been successfully achieved and implemented. The quality of computer provision is good and its use is increasing, with the consequence that students are already experiencing difficulty in gaining access for independent study. The assessment system is excellent and used very effectively to bring about improvement in students' work. Programmes of study are detailed and thorough, as is all the departmental documentation. The use of the Internet is managed very well with a very secure system of protection and the facility to monitor its traffic for misuse. This is very much a result of the excellent work of the network manager who is also responsible for the exceptionally stable system that has experienced so few working problems since it was established. The overall level of improvement since the previous inspection is very good. There are not enough facilities to support the demands of the projected expansion in the use of information and communication technology across the school.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- The consistent use of perceptive questions is a strong feature of the good teaching.
- Students are enthusiastic and well motivated.
- There are positive and constructive links with a local independent boys' school.

Areas for Development

- The small numbers that result from the separation of Writhlington students and students from the local independent school for practical work results in a restriction of peer-group challenge.
- There is no timetabled provision for recreational physical education in the sixth form

Standards and achievement

186. A total of nine students sat the AS examination in 2001. All nine achieved pass grades with one student gaining a grade B, four obtaining grade C, three achieving grade D and one obtaining grade E. Four students were from Writhlington and five from the collaborating independent school.
187. Inspection evidence shows that most students in Years 12 and 13 produce work that is average for the course. Although there are eight students in each year, only Writhlington students were observed, two from Year 12 and four from Year 13 in practical lessons. This is because the students from the independent school undertake their practical sessions in their own school.
188. All students in Year 12 have made good progress since they started the course and they achieve well. In both year groups, coursework is generally of a good standard. Work on producing personal exercise plans and on observation, analysis and evaluation is accurate and thoughtfully presented. Written work indicates that students have a sound understanding of the physiological and psychological factors that improve performance. Good work was seen in folders relating to the socio-cultural and historical implications of participation in physical activities.
189. In Year 13, students link theory and practice very well, for example, they know the precise physiological effects of warm-up exercises. In badminton, they evaluate aspects of their own play, with the result that they gain greater tactical appreciation. They comment sensibly on the effects of motivation, body typing, skill transference and self-confidence as factors that influence performance. They show good tactical awareness and play a variety of shots competently.

Quality of education

190. The quality of teaching overall is good and in some lessons teaching is very good. A particularly strong feature of practical lessons is the way in which the students are consistently questioned and encouraged to focus thoughtfully on all aspects of their performance. High expectations and a brisk pace to lessons results in good learning. Teachers ensure that students understand the aims of the lesson, placing appropriate emphasis on the correct terminology. Effective planning includes challenging activities that help students to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding. Students' written work is assessed thoroughly. Opportunities are provided for students to meet their teachers on a one-to-one basis to discuss any issues arising from homework. Students speak appreciatively about the level of support they receive from their teachers.
191. Students adopt a very positive and responsible attitude towards their work. Motivation is

good. They attend regularly. Only one student withdrew from the course last year. They express themselves clearly in discussion, for example about the effects of performance-enhancing drugs. Their coursework shows that they make good use of information and communication technology.

Leadership and management

192. Management is good. Co-ordination and co-operation between the schools is effective and productive. Resources for learning have improved significantly as a result of the partnership between the two schools. Accommodation remains an issue, but work on building a new sports hall is now underway. At present there are no timetabled opportunities for non-examination students to become involved in recreational physical education, a point that was also mentioned in the previous report.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

No courses are offered in this area

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The focus for the inspection was art and design. Work and lessons in the Advanced Vocational Certificate in Education, performance arts, was sampled. This is the first year of the course. In the two lessons seen students were making very good progress in planning a community performance because the teacher had given a thorough yet concise explanation of the task. This encouraged students to explore possibilities and problems for themselves. Their standard of work was good. They showed considerable initiative and enthusiasm; the teacher showed a fine judgement of when to let ideas run, and when to make an appropriate intervention.

In the sixth form, at the time of the inspection just two students were studying AS level music in Year 12; and two others studying A level in Year 13. Standards are broadly average, with students achieving well, especially in practical work. Good teaching, the enthusiasm of the students, instrumental tuition and students' involvement in extra-curricular work support work well.

ART AND DESIGN

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

Strengths

- The students experience a high proportion of very good teaching.
- The opportunities provided for students to experiment with media and to extend their work into three dimensions are very good.
- The large rise in recruitment to the course reflects the recent positive changes in the department.

Areas for development

- The work rate and productivity of some students are not good enough.

Standards and achievement

193. The number of students who have taken art and design at A level in recent years has been very low, making comparisons with national averages unreliable. One student took the examination in 2001 gaining a grade B; this grade reflected the level of the learning the student brought to the course. There are currently no students following the A level examination in Year 13. Twelve students started the AS level course in Sept 2001 and are due to complete this summer. This dramatic rise in numbers is a reflection of the improved provision for students in Year 11.
194. Year 12 students achieve well in relation to predictions based on their GCSE results and a small number are exceeding their potential. Research from direct observation is the starting point of much of the work, for example in the natural form project, students have good collections of drawings investigating the linear, textural and formal qualities of shells, plants and trees. From these interesting media experiments have resulted, which have supported their final pieces. Students are willing to extend their work into three dimensions and the fantastical chairs inspired by the work of Giger show their ability to interpret ideas imaginatively and on a large scale. The personal studies component of the course is progressing well and students are beginning to show a wider understanding of art and the context in which it is made. They increasingly understand how the work of others influences and helps them in their own work.

Quality of education

195. Teaching and learning overall are very good. There is a good balance between formal teaching and the opportunities provided for students to explore their own ideas. Students comment favourably on the way teachers encourage them to develop their own ideas from the security of the clear guidance provided by them at the start of projects. In lessons, teachers are very responsive to the needs of students and provide careful and considered advice both of a technical and aesthetic nature, which promotes learning and raises standards. Students show good levels of commitment to their work. They frequently use the studio provided for their own use to work outside the formal lessons. There are a few students, however, whose rate of work and productivity is not as good as it should be.

Leadership and management

196. The management of the subject is very good. In a very short time, recruitment to the course has increased substantially and a studio dedicated to sixth form use has been provided. The importance of widening the students' experience is recognised by the teachers who have arranged visits to the national collections of art in London and to those available locally. This course is in the early stages of development but it is

developing into a successful two-year course recruiting good numbers at AS and A2 level.

HUMANITIES

No courses in this area were inspected. Religious education was sampled. There is no provision for statutory religious education. Previous examination results are below the national average, but students make good progress and achieve grades that are above those predicted on previous results. A small A level group is well taught by a teacher who has an excellent knowledge of the subject. Students have a good knowledge of complex language and concepts and are on target to achieve grades in line with those predicted. Low retention rates in this group give some cause for concern.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus was on English literature, but media studies was also sampled. In media studies, A level examination results have been consistently below the national average for three years, partly because no students have attained higher grades. One lesson was observed. Satisfactory teaching helped the students, who were keen and articulate, to define and use specialist terms. They had good background knowledge to the subject, but the teacher allowed discussion to become too general and anecdotal and the lesson lost some of its original focus. Some French and German lessons were also sampled. In these lessons teaching was sound and students were progressing satisfactorily with their work.

ENGLISH

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

Strengths

- There has been considerable improvement in A level results, which in 2001 were at the national average.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge, and use this to stimulate illuminating references between texts.
- Written tasks are particularly appropriate to examination preparation and the way in which they are marked is particularly helpful.

Areas for improvement

- Too many students do not engage enough in discussion, which they see as less important than written work.
- Teachers do not ask enough challenging questions that necessitate personal response in clear, well-constructed English.
- Marking is sometimes not sufficiently prompt.

Standards and achievement

197. A level examination results in English literature in 2001 were close to the national average, which represents a significant improvement on those in previous years. Students tend to get better results in English literature than they do in other subjects. All students gained a pass grade, many doing well in relation to their GCSE results.

Most students taking the subject completed the course.

198. Observation of lessons and a scrutiny of work confirm that the standard reached by the present Year 13 students is close to the national average. Whilst very few are capable of the highest grades, all have the potential to achieve a pass grade. Students of average ability are diligent and show a sound understanding of broad themes and issues, although their ability to demonstrate this is sometimes restricted by limitations in written language. This is especially the case where deeper meaning and inference are required. In contrast, explanation of and personal response to texts are good and all students show the ability to research texts and to use sources effectively in their own work. Thus comparisons of 'Brave New World' and 'Nineteen Eighty Four' included appropriate references to the historical and social contexts of both the late 1920's and post-war 1940's.
199. Achievement is good. Many students are accepted onto courses with a grade C at GCSE. Files show a conscientious approach to work. Students appreciate that they are being well taught and prepared for examination. They show interest in the subject. Too few fully appreciate how lively, but well-focused, discussion and exemplification of issues are an integral part of the learning process. They listen closely, but miss too many opportunities to tease out new ideas and vocabulary and refine expression, by probing and thinking through speech.

Quality of education

200. Teaching is good. Students gain in confidence because teachers have good subject knowledge allied to a clear awareness of examination requirements. This resulted in the teacher of a Year 13 group studying an extract from Henry V realising the need to revise briefly the idea of social hierarchy implicit in the Elizabethan view of natural order. Teachers convey enthusiasm for their subject and show how sensitivity and response to literature are as important as technical vocabulary and analysis. Students benefit from the very good advice and personal guidance they receive. This includes very detailed marking of their formal written work, where teachers are adept at giving encouragement without lessening the rigour of the assessment. Hence students have a very precise understanding of their level of success. Too many assignments, however, are returned some time after their completion, so that the impact of the marking comments about where and how improvements could be made is lessened.
201. Students learn well. They are confident in tackling texts and quickly see links to other literature which they have studied. This means that they perceive parallel themes, such as glory, honour and comradeship in war. Many are comfortable in using specialist terms when analysing techniques used by authors, but find difficulty in explaining the consequent effects achieved by them. All students concentrate well and some show considerable independence of thought. One consequence was an interesting discussion about the supposed female idealised/male pragmatic contrasting viewpoints of war. In general, however, students rely on the teacher to guide them as to when to delve more deeply into texts. Teachers use open questioning well, and argue in devil's advocate style to broaden students' awareness. A general weakness is that students rely on general reference to texts: few have the skill of using quick and accurate quotation, or gaining new insights into well-known references. This spills over into written work where quotation in essays can be too predictable, or expected to do too much work, being used for support rather than as illumination. Teachers too rarely ask intellectually challenging questions with the expectation that answers will be detailed and well supported.

Leadership and management

202. There is satisfactory leadership and management of sixth form courses. Schemes of work, planning and assessment are suitably organised, giving teachers and students a secure basis from which to work and enabling improved standards to be achieved.