

INSPECTION REPORT

**SANDY UPPER SCHOOL AND
COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

Sandy

LEA area: Bedfordshire

Unique reference number: 109669

Headteacher: Mrs M J Baker

Reporting inspector: Mrs C Gillies

Dates of inspection: 8th to 12th October 2001

Inspection number: 217425

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

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Community

Age range of students: 13 to 18 years

Gender of students: Mixed

School address: Engayne Avenue
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Bedfordshire

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Appropriate authority: The governing body

Name of chair of governors: Ms Elizabeth Belcher

Date of previous inspection: 18th October 1999

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
20597	Mrs C Gillies	Registered inspector	BTEC Childhood studies General studies	What sort of school is it? The school's results and students' achievements How well are students taught? How well is the school led and managed? What should the school do to improve further?
11414	Ms A Bennett	Lay inspector		Students' attitudes, values and personal development How well does the school care for its students? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
4351	Ms J Strickland	Team inspector	English (Post-16) Drama	
13619	Mr B Meech	Team inspector	Mathematics (Post-16)	
5241	Dr C Millband	Team inspector	Science Biology (Post-16)	
10053	Ms J Simms	Team inspector	Art and design (Post-16)	
20588	Mr I Hodgkinson	Team inspector	Design and technology Psychology Computer studies (GNVQ)	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to students?
16930	Mr J Plumb	Team inspector	Geography	
13739	Mr B Frederick	Team inspector	Geography (Post-16)	
31329	Ms K Barratt	Team inspector	History (Post-16)	
10060	Mr D Gutmann	Team inspector	Information and communication technology Leisure and tourism (Post- 16) Business studies	
4373	Mr P McKenzie	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	
29510	Mr N Mayfield	Team inspector	Music	
18888	Ms J Boulton	Team inspector	Physical education (Post- 16) Health and social care (GNVQ)	

12179	Mr Moscrop	L	Team inspector	Religious education English as an additional language Personal, social and health education	
15678	Mrs Radford	J	Team inspector	Special educational needs Equal opportunities Communication studies Drama (Post-16)	

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Sandy Upper School and Community College caters for over 850 students in Years 9 to 13 (of whom 161 are in the sixth form). In Years 9 to 11 just over 50 students take free school meals – below average. Boys outnumber girls in Years 10 and 11. The percentage of students on the register of special educational needs (22 per cent) is close to average. Twenty-six students in Years 9 to 11 have statements of special educational needs - slightly higher than average. Almost 98 per cent of students are white with very small numbers from minority ethnic groups. Eleven students speak English as an additional language of whom two are at an early stage of learning English. Joint provision for two sixth-form courses is made with Stratton Upper School in Biggleswade. Most students come from a wide area of East Bedfordshire, mainly from the three local middle schools. Standards of attainment on entry are average. A learning support centre opened in October with places for between 10 and 15 students. The school is a member of the Bedfordshire School Improvement Partnership and is involved with an exciting project with the Science Museum called 'The Classroom of the Future'. In a few areas the school has considerable problems recruiting staff.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

The school is improving and now clearly moving in the right direction. A new headteacher and many new teachers have joined the school during the last two years. Effective systems have been introduced to raise standards, which are still average, but they have not been in place long enough for their impact to be felt. A major curriculum review is under way to extend the already better range of subjects available. Teaching is good and leadership and management are good; both have improved considerably since the last inspection. Taking all these factors into account the school provides satisfactory value for money.

What the school does well

- Teaching is good in over three-quarters of lessons including over a third which is very good.
- Leadership and management have improved significantly – they are good. The headteacher provides firm and respected guidance so the school now has clear values and priorities for development.
- The governing body responded constructively to the last inspection report and is now supportive, focused and fully involved in all school developments.
- Students are cared for well and receive good support if they have special educational needs or any other particular needs.
- The sixth form is successful and is a strength of the school.
- Signs of slowly improving standards are evident in Year 9 and the sixth form.
- Links with the middle schools are very good.

What could be improved

- Standards in Years 10 and 11, particularly for students who underachieve.
- Behaviour, by a minority of students in Years 9 to 11 who spoil lessons for others. A few teachers do not deal with incidents of poor behaviour consistently.

- Teaching - in the few lessons where it is unsatisfactory or has elements which are not satisfactory.
- The limited amount of time in all years for religious education (statutory requirements are not met) and for personal, social and health education.
- The use of value-added data to analyse results and set targets and to challenge students to achieve as well as possible.

The areas for improvement will form the basis of the governors' action plan. These areas have already been recognised in the school's development plan.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The action plan to address the large number of issues raised in the last report, in October 1999, was completed in April 2000. In just over four terms, governors, the headteacher and senior managers have tackled the issues convincingly so improvement has been satisfactory. Leadership and management have improved significantly in all areas. Teaching is better and is monitored carefully by the senior management team, as part of rigorous school self-evaluation. Standards have remained stubbornly average but effective systems have been introduced to raise them, and to improve progress. These have not been in place long enough for their impact to be felt. In different ways all the subjects highlighted for improvement have taken steps forward: a completely new team is tackling standards in mathematics in Years 9 to 11; the music schemes of work are clear and focused; teaching has improved in science; standards have crept upward in modern foreign languages, but still too much English is spoken in some classes and Year 9 now have discrete information and communication technology lessons. Behaviour is better – but not yet good enough. Provision for religious education has improved, but statutory requirements are still not met and elements of the timetable are still unsatisfactory.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 16- and 18-year-olds based on average point scores in GCSE and A-level/AS-level examinations.

Performance in:	Compared with				Key
	all schools			similar schools	
	1998	1999	2000	2000	
GCSE examinations	C	C	D	E	well above A average B above average average C below average D well below average E
A-levels/AS-levels	D	B	C		

Similar schools are those where the percentage of those known to be eligible for free school meals is in the same range. Only a limited amount of Year 9 national data for 2001 was available during the inspection.

Year 9: The average points score, better than in 2000, is likely to be above average in 2001. Above average results in mathematics and science. Average in English. No significant difference between boys and girls. Standards seen were above average in mathematics, below average in design and technology and religious education and average in all other subjects. Achievement (progress) is good in mathematics, design

and technology, physical education and drama, unsatisfactory in religious education over time and sound in all other subjects.

GCSE: likely that 2001 GCSE results will be average, but improved compared to similar schools. In 2000, the percentage of students attaining five or more A*-C grades was the highest yet. Dropped slightly in 2001 to 43 per cent but much improved percentage of A*-G grades. Average points score improved. Girls performed better than boys in 2000 and 2001. Strong GCSE results in English (especially girls), drama and physical education (especially boys). Relatively weak in food technology, textiles, German and Spanish. Standards seen were above average in graphics, drama and physical education, below average in food technology, textiles, religious education and GNVQ health and social care and average in all other subjects. Achievement is good in graphics, drama, physical education and GNVQ leisure and tourism, unsatisfactory in food technology, textiles and religious education over time, poor in GNVQ health and social care and sound in all other subjects. The trend in standards is slightly below that seen nationally. The school sets realistic but challenging targets.

Sixth form: average standards overall and good achievement.

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Satisfactory overall but with extremes. Most Year 9 students have a reasonably good outlook and all members of the sixth form are extremely positive about life at school. A few students in Years 10 and 11 convey apathy and a general lack of enthusiasm.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Satisfactory overall but with extremes. Sixth-form students are thoughtful, considerate and most attentive in lessons. Although most students in Years 9 and 11 get on sensibly, a significant minority do not and they make little effort to participate or contribute. No aggressive behaviour was seen during the inspection and students move around the school quite calmly.
Personal development and relationships	Students mostly get on well with their teachers. They actively support each other in lessons, and through the Student Voice initiative and peer counselling. Some of them lack social skills and could be encouraged to be more thoughtful and considerate.
Attendance	Average. Good in the sixth form.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching students:	of	Year 9	Years 10 - 11	Years 12 - 13

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

The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection. At that time teaching was good or better in less than half the lessons, now it is good or better in over three-quarters. In Years 9 to 11 teaching is satisfactory in English and science and good in mathematics. Literacy and numeracy are taught soundly overall and information and communication technology skills have improved. The school meets the needs of all its students satisfactorily, partly by setting in several subjects and offering vocational courses in Years 10 and 11. Only a few teachers do not plan work carefully to challenge higher and lower attainers. Students learned well in about two-thirds of the lessons seen. There was little difference in the percentage of very good teaching in Years 9 and 10 but it was not quite so strong in Year 11. In this year, students' attitudes and behaviour had a significant impact on the atmosphere of lessons, especially in English and science, so their learning was not so good. Teaching is particularly effective in history and religious education.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Satisfactory. A major, well-structured curriculum review is under way as the school is keen to broaden its work-related choices, especially in Years 10 and 11, and widen the choice of subjects in the sixth form. Too little time is allocated in all years for religious education (statutory requirements are not met) and also for personal, social and health education. Still a few unsatisfactory timetable arrangements. Very good extra-curricular sporting activities.
Provision for students with special educational needs	Good. Students with special educational needs usually make satisfactory progress. However, a minority of students with behavioural difficulties do not achieve successfully in lessons where teachers are not confident in classroom management.
Provision for students with English as an additional language	Very good.
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Satisfactory overall and good for moral and social development. Spiritual development is limited because there is little time for religious education, and assemblies do not regularly include moments for reflection. Students have a limited awareness of cultural diversity in the United Kingdom and beyond.
How well the school cares for its students	Good: pastoral care is good and well-considered efforts are made to provide for students' individual circumstances. Tutorial time is not always used constructively. Recent initiatives to improve behaviour have started to have an impact. Teachers

	use assessment information more effectively than during the last inspection.
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The school does as much as possible to work closely with parents, inviting them to evenings to discuss important issues, such as homework and the reporting system.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good. They have improved significantly in recent months. The headteacher provides firm and respected guidance so the school now has clear values and priorities for development and a positive atmosphere. Senior and middle managers (heads of departments and heads of years) all work well together and contribute effectively to the organisation and sense of purpose in the school.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Good. The governing body has improved considerably since the last inspection. It holds regular meetings which are now well attended. It monitors and discusses standards, progress and developments in depth. It is fully involved in planning for the future.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The headteacher has introduced self-evaluation, regular monitoring of teaching and learning, structured analysis of data, and evaluation of standards and results. These are beginning to raise standards. Teachers are encouraged to research and consider all aspects of teaching and learning.
The strategic use of resources	Detailed accounts are kept for all specific grants and funds (including the targeted school improvement grant) which clearly show that monies are used as intended. The principles of best value are applied to all orders and for services which are not provided by the local education authority.

The turnover of staff has been considerable during the last two years, for example the mathematics department was completely new in September 2001. Staffing problems (beyond the school's control) in food technology, French and health and social care contribute to the low standards seen in these subjects. Overall the accommodation and resources are satisfactory. The accommodation is poor in food technology, textiles and modern foreign languages.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The school expects students to work hard and achieve their best. Four-fifths feel their child is making good progress and being helped to become mature and responsible. Parents feel comfortable approaching the school with questions or problems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Just under half feel they are not kept well informed about how their child is getting on and two-thirds feel that the school does not work closely with them. Almost one-third feel behaviour is not good.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Almost 90 per cent state their child likes school. • The school is well led and managed. • Parents are most supportive of the headteacher. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> not good. • Lack of consistency in teaching, especially when children have several supply teachers.
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The inspection confirmed the parents' positive comments, although several students in Years 10 and 11 do not appear to like school. Parents' observations about contact and information perhaps reflect the fact that the inspection was early in the year when they have not yet received reports. The school does as much as possible to work closely with parents, inviting them to evenings to discuss important issues. The school is fully aware of the problems generated when children are taught by supply teachers. It tries hard to fill vacant posts and cover staff absence with the minimum disruption. Parents' concerns about behaviour are valid and this is an area for improvement.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form of this upper school, which has 695 students in Years 9 to 11, has 161 students. This is just under one fifth of the school, with 99 students in Year 12 and 62 in Year 13, which has more girls than boys. Numbers have declined in recent years but they are still about average. In most years about half Year 11 stay on into the sixth form, others go to sixth-form colleges within the county and neighbouring ones. Only a very few students enter the sixth form from other schools. The majority of students come from Sandy Upper. Five students have statements of special educational needs. Joint provision for music and German AS-level is made with Stratton Upper School in Biggleswade. Practically all students study at AS-level and a few combine these with vocational courses. In recent years about two-thirds of students have progressed into higher education, the majority at university.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The sixth form is successful and cost effective. The A-level and advanced GNVQ points scores went up in 2001. The A- and AS-level pass rate was over 90 per cent. Teaching is very good so students learn well and make good progress. A wide range of AS- and A-level courses is offered (including psychology, communication studies and drama) as well as an advanced vocational course (AVCE) in business, and intermediate GNVQs in leisure and tourism and art and design. All students follow worthwhile courses in general studies and personal, social and health education. They participate in numerous extra-curricular activities and are well prepared for their future studies and lives. The main strengths and areas that could be improved in the sixth form are:

Strengths

- Standards are improving and a significant number of students achieve well.
- Teaching is very good in 50 per cent of lessons.
- Relationships are very good between students, and students and teachers.
- Students are mature, articulate, cheerful and positive. They make a valuable contribution to the life of school.

What could be improved

- Organisation and understanding about the recently extended careers programme and guidance.
- The role of the form tutor in guiding and helping students to meet their academic targets.

Further areas for improvement are included in curriculum area reports.

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

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

The table below shows overall judgements about the provision in the subjects and courses that were inspected in depth in the sixth form. Judgements are based mainly on the quality of teaching and learning and how well students achieve.

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	Good. Above average A-level results. Improving standards and achievement. Good, confident and effective teaching.
Biology	Satisfactory. An increasingly popular subject. A-level results were well below average in 2000 but better in 2001. Teaching and progress are good and students work extremely well together. Problem solving, analysis and use of data and essay writing are weak.
Information and communication technology	Very good. High quality teaching resulted in very good A-level results in 2001. Students achieve extremely well.
Physical education	Satisfactory. Teaching is inconsistent but good overall. Students of all abilities make good progress and achieve well. A-level results have varied recently; they are slightly below average.
Art	Good. A range of courses is offered. Improving results, but still below average. Students do not integrate historical and critical studies of art into their own work. Good teaching.
Drama	Good. Increasingly popular. A-level results were average in 2000 but improved significantly in 2001 (72 per cent A/B grades). Students achieve well as a result of good teaching and their very good attitudes towards the subject.
Geography	Satisfactory. Provision at present is affected by the absence of the head of department who teaches half the course. Average A-level results in 2000 improved in 2001 (58 per cent A/B grades). Teachers have strong subject knowledge. Coursework in physical geography is very good and fieldwork is a strength. Feedback from assessment is too uneven in quality.
History	Very good. Students' attitudes are uniformly positive. They respond with maturity to the excellent teaching. Standards are above average.
English	Good. A most popular subject. It combines a high take-up with good achievement. The average standards, good teaching and positive student response noted in the last report have been maintained.

In other subjects sampled teaching was good. It was very good in all the business courses, childhood studies, chemistry, design and technology, psychology, physics and Spanish. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and most prepare interesting lessons. The general studies course is taught well. In 2001, business, chemistry, design and technology and physics results were good. Only a few study modern foreign languages – results are mixed. Popular AS-level subjects in 2001 were art, English, biology, drama, physical education and psychology. Over 50 per cent A/B grades in AS-level English, drama, history, German and communication studies.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Good induction procedures. Satisfactory guidance about choices; most move on to appropriate courses in higher/further education or into work. Careers education and guidance are now satisfactory although tutors need to explain the purpose of the careers programme more carefully. Procedures for monitoring students' progress and setting targets are satisfactory. New systems have been introduced to improve the role of tutors.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	This is very good. The governing body, headteacher and new head of sixth form are focused on developing the existing strengths and improving other areas such as subject choices, careers and guidance. The head of sixth form is promoting more structured contact between subject teachers and tutors.

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 feel they are treated as responsible young adults, enjoy being in the sixth form and would advise other students to join it. • The school listens and responds to their views. • They feel they are taught well, challenged to do their best in most subjects and helped and encouraged to study and research topics independently. • They find teachers are accessible to help them if they have difficulties with their work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The advice they received about what they should study in the sixth form and careers advice and guidance about what they might do after they leave school. • The quality of assessment so they could see better how to improve it. • The information they receive about their progress related to the qualifications they hope to get.

Almost half the sixth-form students returned the questionnaire (a higher percentage in Year 12). The school has already addressed the need to improve the quality of careers

support and guidance. Some Year 12 students were badly affected by the withdrawal of one group of subjects (which should have been delivered through the adult education centre) just before term started. All the positive comments students made about the sixth form were confirmed during the inspection.

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

Attainment or **standards** describe what students achieve compared to national averages. Standards are also compared with results obtained in similar schools, that is those with a similar uptake of free school meals. **Achievement** refers to the progress students make in terms of where they started when they entered the school, or when they started their GCSE or sixth-form courses. National data for 2001 was not available during the inspection.

- Standards of work seen in Years 9 to 11 were average overall. Students attain average standards in English, mathematics and science.
- Students' achievement in Years 9 to 11 is sound.

End of Year 9: *students are expected to reach at least National Curriculum Level 5 in English, mathematics and science national tests taken at the end of Year 9. Level 6 and above are referred to as higher levels. Average points scores are also calculated. Level 5 is worth 33 points.*

1. In national tests in 1999 the average points score was the best the school has attained, because the English results were particularly high. English results dropped considerably in 2000 but a small improvement in mathematics and science meant that the average points score only fell a little. The percentage of students attaining the expected and higher levels increased in all three subjects in 2001, especially in science. The average points score in 2001 increased to just below the record one of 1999, so it has changed little since the last inspection. The slight upward trend of the last five years is lower than that seen nationally. For 2001 the average points score is likely to be above average. The mathematics and science points scores are above average, the English points score is average.

2. The average points score in 2000 was below average compared to similar schools, although it was in line for science. It increased slightly in 2001 so this relative position may well be better, a considerable improvement since the last inspection. In mathematics and science, the small difference between boys' and girls' results is the same as that seen nationally. In English girls' results are slightly above national ones and boys are slightly below.
3. Standards seen during the inspection were:
 - above average in mathematics;
 - below average in design and technology and religious education;
 - average in all other subjects.
4. Achievement (progress) is:
 - good in mathematics, design and technology, physical education and drama;
 - unsatisfactory in religious education over time;
 - sound in all other subjects.

GCSE results: *In 2000 nationally, 47 per cent of students attained five or more grades A*-C, 91 per cent attained five or more grades A*- G and 96 per cent attained one or more grades A*- G. The average total points score was 38. 4 (calculated by 8 points for A*, 7 for A, etc).*

5. In 2000 the percentage of students attaining five or more grades A*-C was 46.7 per cent. This was the highest the school has obtained and above its target. This dropped slightly in 2001 but the percentage of students attaining five or more grades A*-G increased significantly to 94 per cent. The average points score improved in 2001 and was almost as high as in 1999 when it just exceeded the national figure. Girls performed better than boys in 2000 and 2001, both absolutely and compared to national figures. Comparison with similar schools shows that the average points score was well below average in 2000 but this position is likely to improve for 2001. Relating standards at the end of Year 9 in 1998, with GCSE results in 2000, students made reasonable progress and achieved satisfactorily. Inspection examination suggests that the same progress will be evident between 1999 and 2001.
6. The school has concerns about the grades awarded by one examining board, particularly in art, mathematics and geography. Inspection evidence supports the school's concerns. Several examples exist of students who attained grades A/B in all their subjects and grade D in geography, despite coursework awarded grade B. Others reached high levels at the end of Year 9 but attained a low mathematics grade at GCSE. For a significant number of students the D grades they attained prevented them from attaining five GCSE grades A*-C. The results of an appeal about grades in mathematics and geography had not been received during the inspection.
7. The strongest GCSE subjects are English, especially for girls, and drama and physical education, especially for boys. The weakest are in food technology, German and Spanish. In 2000, the percentage of students attaining grades A*-C was at least average in business, double and single science, drama, English

language and literature, geography, history, mathematics and physical education. English, design and technology and all three modern foreign languages went up a little in 2001, but in all other subjects results were lower.

8. In 2000 students' performance was strong in business, double science, drama and physical education, the latter two especially for boys, and in English for girls. In 2001 their performance was strong in drama, English, physical education and resistant materials. The opposite was true in food technology, German and Spanish in 2000 and 2001. Senior management, in liaison with heads of department, set challenging but realistic targets for individual subjects for GCSEs.
9. Standards seen during the inspection were:
 - above average in graphics, drama and physical education;
 - below average in food technology, textiles, religious education and GNVQ health and social care;
 - average in all other subjects.
10. Achievement (progress) is:
 - good in graphics, drama, physical education and GNVQ leisure and tourism;
 - unsatisfactory in food technology, textiles and religious education over time;
 - poor in GNVQ health and social care
 - sound in all other subjects.
11. **English:** In Year 9 higher attainers' writing is inventive, fluent and well organised. They readily read aloud. Lower attaining students do not read and write well and their speaking and listening skills are often poorly developed. Middle and lower attaining students, particularly in Year 9, do not write regularly or at length enough. By Year 11 students' writing includes good descriptive, imaginative and narrative writing. In most lessons students listen well. Students' speaking of Shakespeare however, at all ages and levels, is unsatisfactory. Access to information and communication technology (ICT) encourages students to take pride in the presentation of their writing.
12. **Literacy:** Most subjects now display key words and encourage their use. Drama contributes to students' oral confidence in Years 10 and 11. Reading is being well promoted in history and religious education, physical education and modern foreign languages. Specialist vocabulary extension was noted in mathematics, science, design and technology and geography. There is little encouragement of reading in science, art and design or ICT. The amount of writing students are required to do varies between subjects. In science, religious education and modern foreign languages the range is limited. History makes a particularly good contribution to students' overall language development.
13. **Mathematics:** Inspection evidence in Year 9 shows good continuity in numeracy from the middle schools, and mental arithmetic skills develop well. Many Year 9 students work at an above average level; they confidently and accurately tackle a range of problems. Lower attainers make good progress although they attain below average standards. In Year 10, students work confidently on addition, subtraction, multiplication and division of fractions. In Year 11, work in number

shows little progression from Year 10. There is considerable variation in algebraic skills, particularly for middle and lower attaining students.

14. Standards of **numeracy** and mental arithmetic are very good in Year 9, good in Year 10 and satisfactory in Year 11. Most students can work without a calculator to a considerable extent. Except in English, art and design and music, students apply their mathematical skills well in other subjects. Opportunities to reinforce work with mathematics are often missed. In Year 9, students represent experimental data graphically, and in Year 10 are confident carrying out scientific calculations. By Year 11 students apply their numeracy skills well in ICT, business studies, design and technology, geography and history.
15. **ICT:** The majority of students gain good basic skills in their Year 9 ICT lessons, search databases with reasonable confidence, and higher attaining students evaluate their searches well. Most students develop and explore information well, but have less secure skills to respond and control events by planning, testing and modifying sequences of instructions. Students following the GNVQ ICT course do well. Only about a fifth of Years 10 and 11 students use computers regularly (in their GNVQ or business studies lessons), although most students use computers at home. ICT competence is satisfactory for the majority of students by the end of Year 11.
16. **ICT across the curriculum:** Students apply their ICT skills well in English (presenting newspapers and downloading photographs from the Internet), design and technology (computer-aided design and manufacture) and geography (searching interactive websites) but have so far had too few opportunities to do so in mathematics, modern foreign languages, music, history, religious education and art and design. Opportunities for data logging in science have been too few, but are increasing. In some personal and social education lessons, students use computers to research different careers.
17. Students with **special educational needs** usually attain the standards which their teachers expect of them and several do better than expected in their GCSE examinations and attain high grades. In Years 9 to 11 most make satisfactory progress overall and those with weak literacy skills do well. They make good progress in those lessons where work is carefully matched to their needs (for example in business studies) and when they have learning support (for example in design and technology). However, a minority of students who have behavioural difficulties make unsatisfactory progress, partly because they have negative attitudes and partly because the teaching does not meet their needs, for example no writing frames which would help them to structure their work. The two Year 10 students with **English as an additional language** are making good progress.

Sixth form

Pass grades (A to E) at A-level and AS-level are converted into points: 10 points for grade A, 8 points for grade B and so on - half these points are given for AS-levels, The total average points score for students taking 2 or more A-level or AS equivalent was 18.2 in 2000. In 2000, 73 per cent of students attained intermediate GNVQs nationally.

- Standards of work seen were average.
 - Students make good progress and achieve well.
18. Practically all students complete their chosen courses so retention rates are good. A few Year 12 students start studying four AS-levels and then decide to drop one. Only a very few students did not attend regularly between 1999-2001; three have not yet completed the advanced GNVQ course. Standards of work seen during the inspection are described in detail in section E. They are high in computer studies and above expected standards in mathematics, English, physical education and history.
 19. The school has only recently started to analyse individual Year 13 students' results compared to their GCSE ones. Inspection evidence shows that students achieve particularly well in chemistry, physics, business courses, computer studies, childhood studies and psychology. In other subjects students achieve well overall, particularly boys in mathematics, and satisfactorily in art and design, biology and music. Individual examples of past underachievement were noted in French and art and design. Although students' goals are not always quantified, they are largely aware of what they should realistically aim for, know what they have to do to improve and work towards this.
 20. The trend in A-level results is upwards. The total average points score for the 62 students who took two or more A-levels or equivalent was very close to average in 1999, but slightly lower in 2000. Girls did better than boys. With a similar number of students, the average points score went up considerably in 2001. Design and technology, history and mathematics results are consistently strong. The very few students who took less than two A-levels or equivalent attained a points score above average in 2000; this figure dropped slightly in 2001. In 2001, the school challenged all departments to attain 100 per cent pass rates. They were largely successful, as the list of subjects in the following paragraph shows.
 21. In 2001 all Year 13 students who took the following A-level subjects attained pass grades in art, business studies, English, design communication, chemistry, physics, drama, history, design, Spanish, music and computing studies. Six out of eleven students attained grades A/B in mathematics. In 2001, Year 13 students performed relatively well at A-level in chemistry, computer studies, design and technology, drama, French, physics, Spanish and technical graphics. Popular subjects were English, biology, chemistry and physical education. Only a few students took AS-level examinations in Year 13. Fifty students sat the general studies A-level examination and 88 per cent passed.
 22. In 2001, 63 students took the new AS-level and the pass rate was 92 per cent. Girls did better than boys. All students who took the following AS-level subjects passed: business studies; English; biology; drama; geography; history; French; German; Spanish; music and communication. Popular AS-level subjects in the present Year 12 are English, chemistry, communication studies, ICT and psychology.
 23. At intermediate GNVQ in 2000 an above average percentage of students obtained the qualification. Seventy-five per cent obtained intermediate GNVQ

qualifications in 2001, in art and design, leisure and tourism and health and social care. In 2000 and 2001 all students passed the BTEC diploma in childhood studies. The advanced GNVQ results declined until 2000 but improved in 2001 (for those students who completed the course). The majority of students passed the AVCE business units studied in Year 12. Eight students attained distinction in a text processing examination. All ten students involved with Young Enterprise projects passed - two with credits.

24. Throughout their sixth-form years students are expected to develop the **key skills** of communication, application of number and ICT. Other skills particularly link into students' preparation for their future lives (working with others, improving own learning and performance and problem solving). The school considered all these carefully in the last academic year and some students chose to enter the new tests. The time taken to assemble portfolios of evidence was considerable, so no students will take the tests this year. However, the experience increased the school's awareness of these skills, which continue to be addressed well. All students meet sound enough levels in the key skills to tackle the courses they have chosen. During the inspection, students took a mature and thoughtful approach to problem-solving challenges. Their confidence in contributing to discussions and working independently was evident in several subjects during the inspection. Sixth-form students with special educational needs have a mature approach to their work and are well motivated, so they achieve well.
25. The following selected aspects of what students can do well were seen during the inspection:
- impressive skills of appreciation and critical analysis of literary text (English);
 - good analysis of features of spoken English and discussion about the differences between scripted and unscripted talk in Year 12 (English language);
 - well-developed analysis and use of algebraic skills in Year 13 with confident work seen in differentiation and integration (mathematics);
 - particularly good reference to work placement experiences (GNVQ and AVCE business lessons);
 - rapid progress which develops good theoretical knowledge and high standards of coursework, which includes comprehensive design and testing (computer studies);
 - students know a great deal about the sports in which they participate and some attain very high standards. They have good knowledge and understanding of anatomy and physiology (physical education);
 - impressive confidence and discussion skills (childhood studies);
 - good recall of knowledge and effective application of techniques (geography);
 - use of a wide range of media, for example making copper jewellery in a design technology workshop (GNVQ art and design);
 - higher attaining students develop characters with ingenuity through different situations (drama);
 - high attainment, particularly evident in the quality of students' contribution to discussions (psychology);
 - students assess evidence and use their detailed knowledge to reach considered conclusions. They extend their arguments in lively debates (history);

- students speak well and all contribute to lively discussions (Spanish);
 - confident and well-informed group presentations (communication studies).
26. The following areas for improvement and development were noted in work seen during the inspection:
- weak problem solving, interrogation of data and explanations which are too simple (biology);
 - students' confidence in discussion was less than expected given the quality of their work (mathematics);
 - a few students have difficulty sustaining characterisations and the majority need more structured support in the organisation of group work (drama);
 - a few students have not yet developed sensible working habits and evidence suggests they prefer to rely on their teacher or a book than think for themselves (GNVQ leisure and tourism);
 - difficulty integrating their historical and critical studies into their own work effectively (art and design);
 - human aspects of the course are not developing well as the head of department is absent (geography);
 - students' poor and hesitant speaking is testimony to the overuse of English in earlier years. Written work contains many inaccuracies (French);
 - unsatisfactory reading of Shakespeare - it is both reluctant and lacking any real feeling for the lines as lively dialogue (English).

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

- Students' attitudes to school are satisfactory overall, but with extremes;
 - Behaviour satisfactory overall; no evidence of bullying, a high exclusion rate in the last year which is now falling;
 - Personal development and relationships are satisfactory. In some classes relationships with teachers are confrontational and a minority of students lack social Skills;
 - Attendance is in line with the national average.
27. Students' attitudes were very good in a quarter of lessons observed during the inspection, at least good in two-thirds, but unsatisfactory in just over one in ten. This shows some improvement in Year 9 since the last inspection as the proportion of unsatisfactory lessons has almost halved. In the other two years the proportion of lessons with unsatisfactory attitudes or behaviour is the same. In the majority of lessons students engage with their teachers in learning. This is successful, for example in history, where the department organises lessons so that there are short tasks which engage the students' interest and in physical education where the teachers' enthusiasm is infectious. Behaviour was noticeably good in these two subjects and in art and design, music and religious education. The new mathematics department has started the year with a determination to control behaviour and it has almost succeeded; it was unsatisfactory in only one Year 11 lesson.
28. The contrast between lessons is so marked that it is hard to believe the same students are present. In several cases where behaviour was challenging, a

significant number of students with special educational needs were present, for example in geography. Most students with special educational needs have positive attitudes to their work and to school life in general. They usually behave sensibly and have good relationships with their teachers and other students. They respond well to the care they receive.

29. Pockets of disenchanted students make little effort to learn, mess about in lessons, show a lack of respect for their teachers and find it amusing to mimic, to undermine and to be unco-operative. One boy was observed listening to a radio during a lesson and paper aeroplanes were also spotted. Although behaviour in modern foreign languages is generally good, and students are compliant, their attitudes are less good, because they rarely show any enthusiasm for language learning and are reluctant to speak. It is in a few English and science lessons, particularly in Years 10 and 11, where behaviour and attitudes can be worryingly poor.
30. The majority of students are thoughtful and considerate and able to articulate their views of school life in a reasoned way. Practically all are appreciative of the effort many teachers make to provide extra-curricular activities, particularly in sport, music and drama. A minority of students lack basic social skills, for example not holding doors open or not talking easily with visitors; they lack kindness, sensitivity or awareness of others. This was particularly noted in a Year 10 personal, social and health education (PSHE) lesson. Such students conveyed apathy and a general lack of enthusiasm for school when they spoke to inspectors. Their perception is that teaching has got worse since the last inspection because many good teachers have left and others are not attracted to the school. They do not understand that the school's recruitment problems are no greater than those seen nationally.
31. Students appear to be at ease with each other during their breaks and lunchtime, and behaviour at these times is satisfactory. There was no evidence of any kind of bullying. Since the last inspection lockers have been removed from the corridors, allowing easier and safer movement around the building. Improvements such as seating in stairwells and redecoration and displays on the corridor walls make the building more pleasant for the students.
32. Since the introduction of a new behaviour policy during the last school year the number of exclusions has been reduced - only three so far this term, compared with 14 over the same period in 2000. Altogether there were 56 fixed-term and three permanent exclusions in the last school year, involving 32 students; the number of fixed-term exclusions was high by national comparisons. The reduction is a direct result of curriculum provision and judicious use of the isolation room. Year 9 students value the reward part of the behaviour policy, but there were few occasions in which it was observed being used.
33. There are good numbers of students enthusiastically taking opportunities offered to them to make their voice heard. The student council is active, and students edit the Sandy Upper School News. In addition 17 students from across the school acted as reporters for a special twelve-page insert published in March, entitled 'A week in the life of Sandy Upper School' in the local paper. They wrote

with real interest and enthusiasm about the aspects of school life normally hidden from students' eyes. Others act as peer counsellors available to listen to those with problems or difficulties.

34. Attendance in the main school is satisfactory. In the last school year attendance averaged 91 per cent which is very close to the national average, but below the school's own target. The deputy headteacher analyses attendance carefully, and has figures to show that the fall in attendance last year was similar in all year groups, and coincided with illness. Unauthorised absences remain broadly in line with national averages. The school is working to reduce both the few long-term absentees and instances of truancy. The school now telephones a student's home on the first day of absence and this appears to be effective, since figures for the first month of this year are better than the previous year. The majority of students arrive at school by bus, so punctuality is good. At the time of the last inspection punctuality to lessons was an issue. This is no longer a serious problem, bearing in mind that no time is allowed for movement between lessons.

Sixth form

- Very good attitudes to school life and work in nearly all areas
 - Very good behaviour and involvement in activities
 - Very good relationships with each other and their teachers
 - Good attendance
35. Sixth-form students are mature young people who take full advantage of all the opportunities offered to them at school. They develop well academically and socially during their time in the sixth form. At all levels and in practically all subjects, they are committed to their studies, prepare their work well and contribute enthusiastically in class. Attendance, at 94 per cent so far this term, is good. Those in Year 12 are making a very disciplined start to their courses. An overall exception is in French, where students are still reluctant to speak the language, and where they are sometimes unprepared for lessons. Students showed excellent or very good attitudes to their work in two-thirds of the lessons observed during the inspection. They were particularly mature in the general studies lessons, whether considering ethics or health issues.
36. They show considerable enjoyment for their studies and enter into dialogue with their teachers respectfully and with maturity. They keep asking questions because they want to learn and, in the healthy debates that follow, learn from each other. In practical activities they willingly support each other and share their expertise. Their motivation allows them to use their good training to work together very well. They are not insular; music students enjoy sharing lessons with students from another school. The student voice is heard, and some students were even involved in the appointment of the new head of sixth form.
37. Students play a leading role in many activities in the life of the school and they participate with considerable enthusiasm and determination. The sixth-form committee manages important aspects of sixth-form life and provides an effective means of addressing sixth-form concerns through well-organised, minuted meetings. Representatives of the sixth-form committee have been trained to

provide a key part in the 'student voice' initiative, which has helped to communicate students' preferences about learning styles to teachers and produced changes in teaching and learning as a result. Some students support students who have English as an additional language as well as participating in the Community Listening and Support Service (CLASS). All students take part in the Student Action Service, in which students use their skills or interests to provide help to the rest of the school, sometimes technical in repairs and maintenance, or advisory in support of students in the main school.

38. Students raise money for charitable causes such as Christian Aid and the Mozambique flood victims. The sixth form write, organise and produce their own show every year, and this is a very popular feature of the school calendar. The commitment of every tutor group to putting on a Christmas party for senior citizens is remarkably good. Young Enterprise companies at the school have been successful in winning awards for the last two years, and the current company has a very good marketing plan for selling clocks to local companies.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

39. During the inspection almost 200 lessons were observed in the whole school. Teaching was excellent in nine (six in the sixth form), very good in 63 (almost half in the sixth form), good in 78 and satisfactory in all the rest except nine (one in the sixth form). The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection. At that time teaching was good or better in less than half the lessons, now it is good or better in over three-quarters. Less than one in ten lessons were very good and now one in three are.

- Teaching is good overall in Years 9 to 11
- Learning is good in Year 9 and satisfactory in Years 10 and 11

40. Teaching was good in 65 per cent of Year 9 lessons and 70 per cent of those seen in Years 10 and 11. There was little difference in the percentage of very good teaching in Years 9 and 10 but it was not quite so strong in Year 11. In this year students' attitudes and behaviour had a significant impact on the atmosphere of lessons and their learning was consequently not so good. Unsatisfactory teaching was observed in English, design and technology, science, ICT and physical education but examples of very good teaching were also seen in all these subjects. Teaching is particularly effective in history and religious education.

41. A significant feature of effective lessons was when teachers used a helpful, interesting and varied range of resources. In several Year 9 mathematics lessons an interesting variety of problems sustained students' interest and probed their understanding. Students respond well to the wide range of two- and three-dimensional resources used in art and design. The workbooks written by design and technology teachers help students to improve their drawing, designing and planning skills. Geographers offer stimulating fieldwork which generates much enthusiasm. During the inspection a game about cause and effect of destruction of the rainforest was used most effectively. Students enjoy unusual topics in art and design, such as the Year 9 study of shoes.

42. In design and technology teachers encourage good habits and develop students' basic skills well. In the best lessons they insist that students measure accurately and use discussions well to reinforce good design techniques. In ICT lessons difficult procedures are explained in careful short steps so students learn methodically. Good strategies for teaching grammar were seen in one German lesson. In most subjects teachers plan well and state the objectives of the lesson clearly, particularly in mathematics and history, so students are clear about the purpose of the lesson. Although teachers share the objectives for lessons with students, occasionally they do not leave enough time to round off and reflect on what has been achieved at the end.
43. Teachers' enthusiasm was obvious in several lessons and their good subject expertise contributes to this. The best science lessons were stimulating because the teachers' enthusiasm was infectious and so students were keen, worked willingly, put effort into their work and were interested. Drama students respond well to the expertise the teacher shows in demonstrations. Geography teachers share their own travel experiences and bring in interesting materials. The head of music gives high quality performances which students respond to creatively. Great enthusiasm for literature was noted in many English lessons. Several physical education teachers are able to provide superb demonstrations of techniques and skills. As a result students put much physical effort into their lessons. In religious education, teachers are particularly skilful at making the material studied relevant to events happening in the world.
44. It is notable how well teachers know what has been studied in middle schools. Students comment that they hardly repeat any work at all. Nevertheless, although students are setted in several subjects, a range of attainment is evident within all classes. Also, there is no evidence of specially prepared materials for gifted and talented students. During the inspection teachers did not have any lists of these students in their classes. Particularly in lower sets, teachers do not always provide the right level of written work or adapt materials so that all can make progress.
45. If work is too challenging, especially for those with weak literacy skills, frustration sets in and learning stops. In a Year 9 mathematics lesson on fractions, decimals and percentages careful assessment of students' previous knowledge meant that learning was effective. Unsatisfactory science lessons were often explained by a failure to plan at the right level, by not establishing what students already knew, hence teachers had low expectations. In contrast, a Year 10 top set science group made too little progress when they merely coloured and labelled a diagram about the digestive system. In religious education more extension work is needed to challenge the highest attainers.
46. Teachers monitor coursework and assess students' work well in mathematics so they usually know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve their grades. GNVQ ICT study units are marked thoroughly. In music, students are not always clear about what they need to do to improve. History teachers provide constructive and realistic feedback. Physical education files are not checked carefully enough.

47. In the right circumstances students are quite prepared to make an intellectual effort to learn. In the higher English sets they usually come to lessons ready to work and willing to co-operate. In practically all groups, teachers ensured that the pace and content of the lesson met students' expectations and the buzz of interest was sustained. In mathematics, students in the top set state that they do not need firm discipline as they are eager to move on. In drama, students enjoy creative effort and contribute willingly to presentations and evaluations. In art and design, students develop their imagination to draw fantasy ideas about shoes. Students put a considerable amount of physical energy into their physical education lessons.
48. Many teachers can successfully counteract apathy and awaken curiosity and interest. A successful example of this was seen in a Year 11 English class, when students in an initially lacklustre group were gripped by a short story. By the end of the lesson all students had made good progress and there was a very different atmosphere in the classroom. In the best mathematics lessons a good pace and variety of tasks or activities sustain students' enthusiasm, hence effective learning takes place. Students concentrate and apply themselves well in several science lessons, especially when tackling tricky problems. A Year 10 single science class cheerfully applied itself to using a fun piece of apparatus and eagerly explained observations. The drama teacher skilfully intervenes to get students going in creative work and successfully manages and motivates students with behaviour or learning difficulties. French teachers mainly manage to counteract students' negative attitudes, but they do not help their speaking skills by allowing them to speak English too much.
49. Students work very hard and learn well in a large number of lessons but learn little in lessons which are disrupted by a few. Poor behaviour emerges from a mixture of unimaginative and/or boring teaching, poor behaviour control (compounded in ICT by the poor layout of one room) and a few students' determination to be unco-operative. One factor alone is rarely enough to trigger unsatisfactory learning although in a few English lessons all three factors were present. Students showed little interest, being either passively compliant or actively disruptive, behaviour control was inadequate and the lesson content failed to stimulate. When teachers anticipated poor behaviour, they were not firm enough in their expectations and were too ready to be grateful for any fitful signs of co-operation or reasonable response.
50. In a few science lessons dull teaching means that students become disinterested and occasionally do not behave well. A major source of students' discontent in these lessons is the amount of time they spend copying notes and diagrams from textbooks. They do notice when teachers get on with other marking during their lessons and do not give them enough attention. A feature of successful business studies lessons is how little students copy from textbooks because they largely apply concepts to practical tasks. Teaching in GNVQ leisure and tourism is effective because it is not over-prescriptive and students are encouraged to learn independently. Art and design teachers need to blend the practical elements of the subject with research and knowledge about artists.

51. Most teachers are alert to the consistency needed to nurture students' literacy and numeracy skills. They display key works and some classes (geography for example) start with quick checks on technical vocabulary. History lessons aim to discuss new vocabulary as often as possible. More focus on literacy and numeracy is needed in physical education, for example prompt sheets or work cards showing basic terms.
52. Most teachers encourage students to use ICT for research and wordprocessing and many guide students to useful websites. Students' independent learning skills are nurtured by the use of the Internet and CD-Roms in most subjects. Teachers show considerable competence in the following areas: business studies (spreadsheets and databases); design and technology (computer-aided design and manufacture); English (wordprocessing); music (composition) and geography (data analysis and presentation for coursework). In some areas the full range of software available is not used enough: art and design teachers do not show students the wide opportunities for creative work with computers; science teachers have only recently started to use data logging equipment and physical education teachers hardly use computers at all. Overall, however, teachers' computer skills have improved since the last inspection and they continue to receive training to further extend their confidence.
53. Students with special educational needs are generally well taught. Teachers usually have a good knowledge of students' individual education plans (IEPs). Many successfully adapt their methods and materials to students' needs and check that students know what they need to do to succeed. A Year 11 business studies lesson was notable for the way students worked so successfully at different levels. In several of the small group lessons good relationships had a very positive impact on students' achievement. Students developed their social and communication skills playing board games in the positive and cheerful atmosphere found in the curriculum support centre.
54. However, learning is held back in several large classes where teachers do not manage behaviour confidently (as described above). Support in mathematics lessons is well organised and well managed; in many cases learning support assistants and teachers jointly support whole groups. In a lower attaining Year 10 practical class the availability of two teachers meant students received almost instant response to any problem; a sustained pace and sense of achievement resulted. In contrast a few students in a Year 9 geography lesson found it hard to keep up without a writing frame to guide them.
55. Teaching was very good in half the PHSE lessons observed. It was equally good and satisfactory in the rest. In a lesson on relationships the teacher used a video skilfully, stopping it at appropriate points and defusing potential embarrassment with humour. In a Year 9 lesson on careers the teacher's punchy approach, enthusiasm and subtle development of team building, made research into DfES occupation codes fun! In a different Year 9 class, the ICT network crashed and the teacher immediately changed course and delivered an impressive lesson on qualifications, training and aspirations.

Sixth form

- Teaching is very good overall
 - Learning is good
56. Seventy lessons were observed during the inspection and teaching was at least good in all but five. It was very good in exactly half and excellent in six, in history and computer studies. Teaching was particularly effective in business studies, chemistry, childhood studies, computer studies, geography, technology, history, physics, psychology and Spanish. There was very little difference between the quality of teaching in Years 12 and 13. In almost two-thirds of lessons students had most positive and constructive attitudes. They worked hard and learned well.
57. It is evident from this high quality of teaching that teachers have very good knowledge of their subjects. The great majority of lessons are carefully planned and students respond extremely well to the styles of teaching exemplified below:
- a Year 12 chemistry group noticeably improved their practical techniques because the teacher demonstrated them so skilfully, making links between practical work and calculations explicit;
 - the computer studies teacher's excellent subject knowledge ensures that the pace of theory lessons is fast, and that explanations of theory are well linked to practical examples. These were frequently exemplified by the teacher's own business and industrial experiences;
 - GNVQ leisure and tourism teachers use PowerPoint well and effectively relate topics to their own work experiences, for example discussing health and safety in the workplace;
 - the drama teacher's brisk and lively approach challenges students to think things out carefully and to give of their best. Students work very productively and achieve well because they have a clear understanding of what is required for different attainment levels;
 - good geography teaching was characterised by excellent specialist knowledge, especially about field trips, and infectious enthusiasm. Personal slides are used effectively;
 - communication studies lessons are well planned and structured with challenging content;
 - in a chemistry practical analysing rates of reaction, the teacher, perceptive of students' capabilities, challenged them differently and individually. All made very good progress;
 - in a physics lesson the teacher competently guided the revision of mechanics for one student, and challenged others to evaluate evidence and procedures correctly;
 - the best mathematics lessons are characterised by clear explanations, working through well-chosen examples and students' understanding being checked with challenging questions;
 - art and design students benefit greatly from the focused, one-to-one sessions they have with the teachers;
 - psychology lessons are characterised by a very good pace and high expectations;
 - history teachers achieve a good balance between intervention, needed to advance students' thinking, and time for students to study and reflect, to ensure depth of understanding.

58. In a few subjects weaknesses were noted which mean that progress over time is not fast enough. Biology lessons are not planned imaginatively and they are rarely lively, so it is not surprising that students are not involved enough. In the unsatisfactory physical education lesson, students were given no opportunity for independent research or investigation and were mostly taught by dictated notes. Art and design students need far more opportunities to discuss the links between historical and critical studies and their own work in order to be able to demonstrate them securely. French teachers resort to English too often so students lack fluency.
59. Most subjects nurture and develop students' ICT skills and encourage them to use the Internet for research. In business studies, students use a wide range of software packages competently and well. They research information in physical education and then share it with the group as an introduction to lessons; they are expected to wordprocess their personal performance portfolio. Students on the childhood studies course use computers to produce well-presented documents which are nearly as good as the teachers'. GNVQ art students' creative use of digital cameras and computers has helped them to make very good progress in the first weeks of their course. In several subjects, such as mathematics and geography, teachers expect students to use ICT but they rarely use it in lessons. This is partly because access to computers is difficult in classrooms where these subjects are taught.
60. In practically all lessons students were productive, worked at a good pace, sustained concentration, used the knowledge they already had and contributed to the successful outcomes, as the following examples reflect:
- certain students in biology used their knowledge from similar work in A-level chemistry and physical education well;
 - physics students pursued various tasks with exemplary commitment to learning;
 - biology students often help each other. One generously and competently explained the ramifications of calibration to a less confident student;
 - physical education students spend much time in the department helping with clubs and lessons and assisting younger students;
 - English students sit with the teacher in a circle so discussion and interaction are the norm. Students appreciate this and respond to it well;
 - excellent team work and problem-solving skills in business studies;
 - Year 13 computer studies students are quite clear about their strengths and weaknesses;
 - in geography the teacher is careful to build on students' prior knowledge by referring to GCSE knowledge;
 - active participation, intelligent comments, excellent teamwork and genuine interest shown in several general studies lessons.
61. In contrast, a lack of variety in a few mathematics classes limits students' contributions to lessons and they become too dependent on the teacher for support. In a large Year 12 computer studies class students are less sure of their day-to-day progress. Many find the new concepts difficult and do not always have the opportunity to review their individual progress at the end lessons. Physical education teachers miss opportunities to base students' understanding on their own experiences of their specialist sport. In biology a significant minority of

students had problems understanding the underlying principles of glycolysis because there were no resources to help them visualise the ideas – they struggled to follow the sequence of events that take place within a cell.

62. Since the last inspection the school has moved forward considerably in its use of data. Now most departments use GCSE attainment to calculate predicted grades for groups. So far this does not happen enough at the level of individual students. Work done during the inspection revealed the underachievement of an art student last year. In general, science teachers are benefiting substantially from the department's analysis of performance data from Year 9 although target setting, derived from such analysis, is not yet established. Business studies teachers support individuals closely and set helpful targets in each lesson. There is a well-organised system of recording individual results for each module in computer studies.
63. Work is assessed well in mathematics and marked quickly, which is helpful. Students usually know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve their grades. Biology marking is usually encouraging and helpful; occasionally the generosity of comments does not clearly match the mark given, so messages to students are clouded. In physical education, students' files are not monitored enough to ensure they provide a useful revision tool in the future. More frequent record keeping, marking and monitoring would increase students' understanding of their progress. In contrast, history teachers mark work thoroughly. They give written and oral feedback which shows students how to develop, for example in structuring their essays. English essays are carefully read and marked, with comments that often set up constructive dialogues. These give students a clear idea of strengths and weaknesses in their work and how they can develop it.

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

- The quality and range of learning opportunities are satisfactory
 - The appropriate statutory curriculum is not in place (religious education)
 - Provision for students' personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory
64. The school provides a satisfactory curriculum, which meets the interests, aptitudes and particular needs of students. It makes good provision for students with special educational needs. There are some weaknesses in the provision of religious education in all years. A major and well-structured curriculum review is under way, with the full involvement of the governing body, to explore the best ways in which the school can further address the needs of all of its students and the local community.
65. In Year 9 students study all National Curriculum subjects and these have enough time. Religious education and PSHE do not. This means the locally agreed syllabus is not studied in enough depth, hence statutory requirements are not met. Just under half the students study two modern foreign languages and those

that study one receive extra English lessons. Drama is studied in the middle schools but not in Year 9.

66. In Years 10 and 11, the majority of students follow a fairly traditional curriculum leading to GCSE qualifications. Part One GNVQ courses are offered in ICT, health and social care and leisure & tourism, at foundation and intermediate level. This addresses the needs of students who benefit from a work-related approach in the curriculum. Those who follow the GNVQ courses are disappplied from languages or design and technology where appropriate. A community and leisure (life skills) course has started for those students who do not study any modern foreign language. It develops their confidence and self-esteem and prepares them for the realities of living and working when they have left school. The progress of these students and the value of the course are being carefully reviewed as it develops.
67. This year no special curriculum arrangements exist to support the learning of gifted and talented students. In the last academic year an enrichment group was set up and students missed one ordinary lesson a week to participate. This arrangement was not popular with the students or parents. A few attended successful summer courses in French and mathematics. Talented students are certainly spotted in physical education, music and art and design and given every encouragement to nurture their aptitudes. However, without a formal register of academically gifted students teachers are not always aware of those who need extra challenging work or stimulus.
68. The provision for ICT in Years 10 and 11 is planned through other subjects for those students not taking a GNVQ course in the subject; this now meets statutory requirements and is an improvement. As in Year 9, the time for PSHE and religious education is far too short. The agreed syllabus is not covered properly and statutory requirements are not met.
69. Schemes of work are detailed and there has been general improvement since the last inspection report, especially in music where effective new schemes are in place for all years. Timetabling, a key issue in the last report, has improved overall. In science, though, there remains a lack of balance. The teaching of biology for two hours in one day and then not again for two weeks disrupts the continuity of learning for some students in Year 10. Two teachers sharing physical education in one sport, hockey for example, is not good for continuity.
70. The school has just begun to develop procedures to support literacy and numeracy in all subjects. These procedures are satisfactory at present. The overall effectiveness of teachers' skills for teaching literacy and numeracy is satisfactory, although it needs to be tightened up and monitored carefully. Examples of work in this area are described in paragraphs 149 to 151.
71. All students with special educational needs have access to the full curriculum and to all the extra-curricular activities. Setting arrangements in mathematics, small group lessons and individual help in the learning support room all improve students' basic skills in numeracy, literacy and ICT. Individual education plans contain clear targets and effectively ensure that students' particular needs are

identified and catered for. The range of vocational courses in Years 10 and 11 enables students with special educational needs to choose subjects in which they can succeed.

72. Teachers have good information about students' needs and learning support assistants provide effective support in lessons. Planning in advance, between teachers and learning support assistants, is often most effective in several classes. Students with special educational needs have good opportunities for personal development through activities which improve their social skills: group work in lessons; school productions and teamwork in physical education.
73. Students in Years 9 to 11 follow a soundly planned course in PSHE, which provides for the development of a range of learning and interpersonal skills to prepare them for adult life. The health education includes significant units of work on sex education, alcohol and drugs awareness, smoking and other substance abuse. The programme also includes three units of work on relationships. This is intended to prepare the students for life outside the school as well as in it. The extended work on citizenship fulfils a similar function as well as addressing organisational topics such as target setting, time management and study skills.
74. Several outside speakers from organisations such as the Apex Trust for young offenders, the police and National Childline visit the school and give presentations. Industrial tutors make an input to the careers units. These have recently been rewritten by a new member of staff. The programme is taught once a fortnight by form tutors. This is not enough time to do justice to the good content of the course. The programme organiser holds regular meetings with heads of year to discuss the progress and effectiveness of the work – this is good.
75. The school's provision for extra-curricular activities is good. These activities broaden students' learning and experiences. Teachers give very willingly of their time to organise and manage these activities. There is a particularly good range of sporting, musical and dramatic activities. At lunchtimes there are extensive games activities and practices, and after school there are competitive fixtures for the many sports teams. Musicians and actors have many opportunities to perform throughout the year in concerts and shows which one parent described as 'second to none'. In certain other subjects extra-curricular opportunities are not as strong. There are not many subject-related clubs and societies. In English, students are not involved in running a school publication, they do not experience a debating society or make visits to theatres, for example. The science department does not take students out.
76. Links with the local community are satisfactory, but vary between subjects. In art and design there are extensive activities through which students help to decorate buildings in the community, mount exhibitions in civic offices and participate in local festivals. Visiting speakers give evening presentations organised for the community by the art department. There are active links with local employers such as the RSPB who come into school to support the careers programme and to act as Young Enterprise link advisers. Parents and the community use school

facilities. Links with middle schools are very good and provide for a very successful transition between Years 8 and 9, a 'seamless' link in the case of mathematics, for example. Students commented on how little work was repeated in Year 9 and how the work seemed more challenging and exciting than in Years 7 and 8.

77. Careers provision is satisfactory. Careers units are built into the PSHE programme and students develop decision-making skills through this work, but tutors need better guidance on how to make best use of this new material in lessons and how they can support students. All students undertake a full work experience programme for two weeks in Year 11, but its timing after half-term in November means that, including half-term, students are away from school for three weeks, at an important time in the development of their major coursework in design and technology. The amount of time allocated to the visiting careers advisor has increased this year in response to previous Year 11 students' concerns about the breadth and quality of that advice.
78. Provision for spiritual development is satisfactory. There are some opportunities for students to reflect and be quiet in several assemblies but this does not happen regularly. Some departments include work and activities which have a spiritual element, such as in history where the ethos of the department is to think and reflect on issues in the past and in the more immediate present. Some valuable work is done in religious education but students have too few lessons in this subject for it to have a significant impact. Overall the opportunities for students to gain a knowledge and insight into a wider range of values and beliefs is limited as are opportunities for them to reflect on their own beliefs and experiences. The modern world presents many complexities, and the school does not do enough to help the students make sense of it all. The statutory requirements for collective worship are not being met.
79. Provision for moral development is good; it has improved since the last inspection. The school's code of conduct and Shared Values statements unambiguously indicate the standards expected: the necessity for good behaviour; distinguishing a clear sense of right and wrong and respect for others and their points of view. Practically all teachers are good role models, although a small minority shout at students and do not always treat them respectfully. The PSHE programme includes topics of a distinctly moral nature and many visitors to the school, such as the police, reinforce this provision. Assembly themes include presentations on honesty and reputations. Individual departments also include study units on crime and punishment and other moral issues such as relativism and slavery.
80. Provision for social development is good. Clubs and extra-curricular activities provide students with opportunities to develop positive relationships. These include sports and musical activities as well as trips out of the school. As at the last inspection, opportunities for students to take responsibility and to participate in the community are limited. This still needs additional attention and emphasis. Nonetheless most students have the opportunity to help out at parents' evenings and open days as well participating in CLASS, where students offer help to those who might need friendly support and advice.

81. Several themes in assemblies, for example neighbours and families, and PSHE work on relationships include direction on social development. An appreciation of the rights and responsibilities of citizens is also covered in this programme and many visitors to the school give clear guidance in this respect. Subject teachers endeavour to promote social development, through collaborative team and group work although greater emphasis on social skills is needed.
82. Provision for cultural development is satisfactory. There are many musical activities in the school, including the school drama production and instrumental groups. Trips outside school, to a mountain centre, to Bedford and to museums and galleries in London all broaden students' outlook. The school does not nurture an awareness of the multicultural character of modern society in the United Kingdom and wider world sufficiently, although there are some contacts with, and visits to, several European destinations. The school has contacts with an Indian band and there is a West African artist in residence.
83. Some departments, by virtue of their schemes of work, examine several multicultural topics. These include some world religions and African and Indonesian music. A few assembly themes also celebrate the religious and cultural diversity of life outside the school. Overall, however, more could be done to create a fuller awareness of this diversity and to better prepare the students for life in a multiracial society.

Sixth form

- The quality and range of learning opportunities is good
 - The appropriate statutory curriculum is not in place for religious education
 - Provision for students' personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good
84. The sixth-form curriculum is good in both the quality and range of academic and vocational courses offered. For a school of its size, it offers a wide choice of subjects for study at both AS- and A-levels, as well as an advanced vocational (AVCE) course in business and intermediate GNVQs in art and design and leisure and tourism. A diploma in childhood studies is also offered. There are particularly good ranges of courses and options in mathematics and physical education. The history curriculum is very well structured to build on students' learning at GCSE. In all subjects, courses are planned at least adequately to ensure that specifications are met and that students learn well.
 85. In order to maintain the breadth of its provision for students, the school has sought to develop alliances with other schools, colleges and providers. The links with Stratton Upper School in Biggleswade to provide German and music have been successful. Not successful was an attempt to offer a range of sociology, politics and law AS-level courses in co-operation with the school's adult learning provision. These courses were withdrawn at late notice early in the term (see paragraph 130) and as a consequence a significant minority of students who would have taken four AS-levels are now taking only three. In most other regards, though, the school manages its sixth-form curriculum well, and there is no

financial subsidy of the sixth form from the main school. Classes in communication studies AS-level are, however, exceptionally large with 29 students, and students feel that this makes individual contact with the teacher difficult.

86. Written materials to guide students in subject choices in the sixth form are satisfactory. Year 11 students have detailed interviews with the head of sixth form and the year tutor to ensure that they choose the best sixth-form courses to meet their needs. They receive an effective induction programme during the first few weeks of Year 12. While an entry standard exists for AS and AVCE courses it is applied flexibly. Students who do not meet this standard are guided onto the intermediate vocational courses on offer. There is, then, equality of access to these courses and equal opportunities to succeed on them, as shown by the success of lower attaining boys indicated in preliminary analysis of the 2001 A-level results. Students with special educational needs are well supported and have full access to the sixth-form curriculum. Students' private study time is carefully managed so they have rooms available for quiet study; most use their time effectively.
87. The curriculum offers many opportunities for students to develop their key skills and their personal qualities. It is reinforced by a range of extra-curricular activities and opportunities to take responsibility, such as Young Enterprise and the Student Voice initiative, which broaden students' experiences. Students' involvement in such areas is described in paragraphs 37 and 38. Throughout their time in the sixth form, the importance of participation in a wide range of activities is stressed to students; personal development is given a very high priority. This approach is successful as sixth formers develop into mature young people who co-operate very well with others and willingly take responsibility. The school introduced a programme to develop and accredit key skills last year; building and assessment of portfolios imposed excessive burdens on students and teachers. Provision to develop key skills continues, through a well-structured general studies and PSHE programme which includes, for example, management of finances (application of number), problem-solving skills, ethics (communication) and ICT. Students can choose to take general studies to at least AS-level.
88. Such a wide provision of enrichment studies and activities ensures that students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The ethics component of the PSHE programme is not sufficient, however, to meet statutory requirements for religious education, and students are not involved in a daily act of collective worship as required. Some opportunities for students to consider and reflect on issues and events that are happening outside of school exist in assemblies and individual subjects, for example discussion about events in the news and more general issues, such as prejudice. These times enable the students to feel sympathy for others.
89. Whilst a few assemblies include a time of reflection, some opportunities to experience the quality of silence are lost. The lack of a full religious education course in the sixth form means that a good potential source of spiritual development is not available. Particularly good opportunities for moral

development occur in individual departments. These include modern foreign languages and the general studies course. In the former, the students look at topics on crime and punishment and in the latter the students have a well-developed ethics course which, in addition to particular areas of study, includes a more philosophical investigation of ethical and moral issues. Many assemblies include moral themes.

90. Provision for social development is particularly good with many opportunities for creative relationships. In many subjects teachers and students work closely together, pooling knowledge and expertise. Other opportunities to take initiative and responsibility are described in paragraphs 37 and 38. The particular highlight of cultural development in the sixth form is the major productions. These are an important aspect of school life and involve many students both directly and indirectly. With no study of world religions in the sixth form, students' knowledge and sensitivity to the multicultural richness of the world is not well planned. It is certainly addressed in subjects such as history and through some English texts but it should be organised for all students. This is an area for further development.
91. Careers education is satisfactory. The new programme will help students to develop awareness of their own skills and personal qualities and to improve their career planning. Students' response to the pre-inspection questionnaire showed this has not happened yet. The views of the current Year 12 students in particular about guidance have been adversely affected by the late withdrawal of one block of AS-level subjects (see paragraph 130). It may also be because tutors have not adequately explained the main objectives of the careers programme or how students should make best use of the materials, which they work on alone at present (see also paragraph 105).

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

- Procedures for child protection and for ensuring students' welfare are good
 - Monitoring of students' academic performance and personal development are satisfactory
 - Educational and personal support and guidance for students are satisfactory
92. The deputy headteacher and teachers with responsibilities for the pastoral care of students know them well and make good efforts to provide for their specific needs; the deputy headteacher knows exactly which students are in care, or caring for others themselves, for example, and he ensures the right agencies are involved and monitors whether the systems are working. Heads of year maintain close contact with their teams of form tutors and information is freely passed between them.
 93. The morning registration time needs to be more structured; too often it is an occasion when students chat amongst themselves. The role of the form tutor is still developing. The school's plan, to use form tutors to collate and monitor individual targets with students, would raise the profile of this time. This term the school has begun to telephone a student's parent or carers on the first day of

absence. This is already having a good effect, raising the profile of full attendance, but it is too recent to have an impact on the attendance figures.

94. Students devised a code of conduct, and a new behaviour policy was introduced in the last academic year. The aim, for students to have some ownership over it, has not been fully met. The rewards part of the policy is popular with younger students, and, although there has been some improvement since the last inspection, behaviour in a few classes is still unsatisfactory. The deputy headteacher who monitors referrals from class, restricts this to a very limited group of students with whom he works closely. He is also the nominated child protection officer, and arrangements both to deal with cases and to brief new staff are good.
95. At the time of the last inspection there were concerns over health and safety. Governors are now fully involved with health and safety matters; they undertake regular tours, risk assessments are part of departmental policy, and accidents or injuries in school are followed up. There are satisfactory arrangements for students who are injured or unwell in school and a good number of trained first aiders. Documentation is thorough and medical room facilities include an element of privacy, though supervision is difficult because of their location.
96. The school monitors the performance of students with special educational needs in a very effective way. The systems for identifying and supporting students in need of extra help are very good and particularly clear. Individual education plans give effective guidance on the kind of support which students require, for example 'help to edit coursework'. Most subject departments now use this information to plan their lessons, an improvement since the last inspection. Arrangements for monitoring behaviour and recording academic and personal achievement are very good. Learning support staff work together very effectively; their daily monitoring alerts them promptly to potential problems. They know their students well and the good relationships which they build up make an important contribution towards students' general wellbeing. There is a good liaison between the school and its partner schools and also with the local specialist services.
97. Since the last inspection, there have been considerable improvements in both procedures for, and use of, assessment information throughout the school. Assessment procedures continue to be good. The school's database holds baseline data on all students and records their progress from Year 6 to Year 9 tests, then on to GCSE/GNVQ and through to advanced courses in the sixth form. It also includes the NFER test scores and assessed reading ages for each student. Four times a year, students' progress is comprehensively assessed in terms of effort and attainment and, for GCSE and GNVQ courses, indicative grades of likely performance in public examinations are made. These assessments are reported to parents.
98. Plenty of data therefore exists to chart students' progress in all years and an increasing number of tutors and departments are becoming more skilful at using this information to support students' progress, to set them targets, and to guide their own planning. The use of assessment information to guide planning in subjects is now good overall. There has been an improvement in assessment in

music, though tasks are not always matched to National Curriculum levels, and more especially in science, where the analysis of students' progress is now very good. It is also very good in mathematics, and it is good in English, history, modern foreign languages and some areas of design and technology. Use of assessment information is now satisfactory in physical education, having been unsatisfactory in the previous report. Departments now produce a detailed analysis of their summer results which has helped to improve teachers' understanding of how examination data can be interpreted.

99. The procedures for monitoring and supporting students' academic progress are satisfactory overall. Use of value-added techniques, such as predicting the performance of a student or examination group by looking at what improvement can be expected nationally, is well understood by some teachers, but not by all. The school recognises that more staff training is necessary and has embarked on this. Currently, where value-added techniques are used to set targets, a number of approaches are taken. Giving students their percentage chances of achieving certain grades is over-complicated and confusing. The school has not yet reached the stage where it systematically analyses the performance of students by the improvement they make over time, but this is being addressed.

Sixth form

- The steps taken to ensure students' health and safety are good
- Monitoring of students' academic performance and personal development is good
- Educational and personal support and guidance for students are satisfactory
- The effectiveness of careers education and guidance for future courses is satisfactory

Assessment

100. Procedures for assessing students' work in subjects are good. Teachers have worked hard to understand the assessment requirements of new AS-level, A-level and GNVQ courses and in most subjects their assessment of students' work is accurate and helpful. It is very good in mathematics, science and history where assessments offer students particularly clear indications about how to improve.
101. As in the main school, the skill with which teachers use assessment information to guide their planning varies; it is mostly good, but art and design teachers have not been rigorous. They have not been aware of significant underperformance by some individuals who started A-level with good GCSE results. The four times a year effort and attainment assessments and termly predicted grades are sent to parents in clear and helpful reports. These identify how students are doing in different parts of each subject. Thus progress is monitored carefully by teachers, tutors, parents and the students themselves. Students' performance is particularly well monitored during their first half-term in the sixth form. If they are clearly struggling to meet the requirements of their courses, they are advised on how to improve or to consider alternatives; this good practice identifies problems early and motivates students to work hard and to make good contributions to sixth-form life.

Advice, support and guidance

102. Students speak highly of their teachers, and the extent to which teachers offer them individual help when required - this is good. Students do not see their more general guidance about initial subject choices and future careers options in the same favourable light but the situation has changed recently. A comprehensive system for setting and monitoring academic and personal targets has clearly been lacking in the past but is now being developed, although tutors still have very little time to meet students individually.
103. The head of sixth form and the year tutor are regularly available to give advice; they publish their timetables on their office door so that students know where to find them. In response to the questionnaire, students conveyed that they did not feel there was someone in the school they would talk to about personal problems. This may be explained by the fact that Year 12 students (few Year 13 responded) are still getting to know their tutors and the head of sixth form is new to the school this term. His predecessor clearly knew every student very well and, given time, the present head of sixth form is determined to do the same.
104. The quality of support and guidance for students' personal development is good. Tutor group activities and a broad ranging PSHE and general studies programme provide many opportunities for students to develop into mature individuals, taking rational decisions and working with others. Numerous examples of students' response to the wealth of interesting challenges are described in paragraphs 35 to 38. The importance of participation in this range of activities is stressed to students throughout their time in the sixth form. Personal development is given a very high priority and is most successful in producing students who are mature, articulate, cheerful and positive. The school sets high standard for attendance and encourages students to work in school. Health and safety issues are as well structured as in Years 9 to 11. If students have a job involving more than eight hours they are strongly advised to consider the impact this has on their studies.
105. Careers education is described in paragraph 91. A careers advisor will be in school for one session per week to target support at those leaving by the end of the academic year and to offer help to others by appointment. Otherwise, the head of sixth form co-ordinates university applications and, with tutors, offers satisfactory guidance. As a result 90 per cent of leavers in 2001 found places on higher or further education courses or went directly into employment or training.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

- Parents' views of the school are good overall
106. There was a poor response to the questionnaire (19 per cent) and only 24 parents attended the pre-inspection meeting. These parents are supportive of the school, and in particular appreciate the extensive sporting and drama opportunities. At the time of the last inspection, and the present one, parents expressed concerns about indiscipline in class and lack of challenge; their concerns over behaviour are understood as it was unsatisfactory in fourteen lessons during the inspection. Nevertheless, the school has good strategies, but

yet to be fully implemented by all teachers, to manage behaviour. The headteacher has worked hard to increase opportunities for consultation with parents. They have contributed to developments in school such as the new statement of Shared Values. The school produces an extensive range of good quality written information. The regular newsletters from the headteacher are supplemented by Sandy Upper School News (SUS), produced by students, and a weekly column in the local paper. This is more than many schools provide, and it effectively keeps parents and the community informed about what is going on at the school.

107. Only two-thirds of parents felt that they were kept well informed about how their child is getting on at school. Inspectors found that parents are well informed; termly grade sheets track a student's effort, behaviour, homework and attainment in each subject. These are supplemented by good quality end-of-year reports with written comments for each subject. Most have clear indications of the student's attainment in that subject, cover the National Curriculum requirements and give some suggestions about how students might improve. The form tutors' and head of year's comments are currently too similar, with comments on students' attitude to work and social development but no clear overview of academic progress.
108. The school has a good partnership with parents of students with special educational needs. Parents are encouraged to come into school to contribute to their children's individual education plans, to attend annual reviews of progress and to borrow resources for use at home. A realistic home-school agreement is in place. Regular communication between home and school through homework diaries is not fully effective; class teachers do not regularly make sure that the homework is recorded and there is no space for parents to sign them.
109. Sixth-form students are certainly satisfied with what the school provides for them. They feel they are treated as responsible young adults, enjoy being in the sixth form and would advise other students to join it. They know the school listens and responds to their views. They are confident that they are taught well, challenged to do their best in most subjects and helped and encouraged to study and research topics independently. They find teachers are accessible to help them if they have difficulties with their work. The school has taken careful note of their concerns about careers advice and guidance and the quality of assessment.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

- The leadership and management of the headteacher and key staff are good
 - The effectiveness of the governing body in fulfilling its responsibilities is good
 - Monitoring and evaluation of the school's performance and taking effective action are good
 - Strategic use of resources, including specific grants and other funding, is good
 - The principles of best value are applied well
110. The headteacher was appointed in an acting capacity in March 2000 and her position was confirmed in December 2000. When she arrived, parts of the action

plan, written in response to the previous report, had to be rewritten. Together with senior managers and governors she aimed to re-establish an ethos of shared commitment to the school. Staff, governors, parents and students contributed to a statement called Shared Values and most are aware of its importance. The behaviour policy has also been reviewed. It now has the potential to improve the unsatisfactory elements noticed during the inspection. However, this will not happen until all teachers, particularly temporary and supply ones, implement it consistently. There are signs this is beginning to be the case.

111. Several members of staff state that they feel more secure and focused since the headteacher arrived. She conveys her clear sense of direction and the high standards she expects extremely well. The majority of teachers accept the necessary developments she has introduced, for the school to move forward. Her leadership style is respected. The deputy headteacher and three assistant headteachers are hard working and support the headteacher well. With several most effective heads of department and heads of year, leadership has improved considerably since the last inspection, when it was a key issue.
112. The school's shared values and aims are reflected in its work, combined with a commitment to equality of opportunity for all. Hence the introduction of vocational courses in Years 10 and 11 and the major review of the curriculum which is well under way. This is partly to widen the choice of work-related options, particularly for those students for whom academic courses are not the best way forward. Another sign of how equality of opportunity is addressed is the increasing role students are expected to play in decision-making. The ethos of the school is better but this has not yet seeped through into the thinking of several students in Years 10 and 11. They feel the school has not improved since the last inspection, largely because several teachers they felt were good have left.
113. Both in the action plan and the school's development plan, the targets and priorities for development are very good and the school is methodically addressing them well. With the great majority of teachers on board, the school has a very good shared commitment to improvement and the capacity to succeed. It has to be remembered that the headteacher has had little more than three terms in which to tackle the previous significant weaknesses. A tight monitoring schedule of lesson observations has been followed, so the headteacher and senior management team know exactly where problems lie and where good practice occurs.
114. At the time of the last inspection, a valuable DfES document, which provides data for detailed analysis and comparison with other schools, had not been opened. Hence teachers who were producing reasonable results in national terms were unaware that students were making better progress and achieving more in similar schools elsewhere. Now all teachers are expected to analyse their performance data so they can highlight underachievement and do something about it. The culture has shifted dramatically and departments now present the headteacher and governors with explanations and justification for their performance. This is very good practice but it will take many more months for it to have an impact on standards.

115. The governors responded constructively and with determination to the last inspection report. They set up task groups to get things moving and their procedures and involvement with the school have improved in many ways. Meetings are regular and well attended. The three committees probe initiatives and issues thoughtfully and do not accept the status quo. They work well with the headteacher and rightly feel confident that they know what is going on and have an important part to play. Members of the governing body are linked with subjects and a few find time to forge worthwhile contact and offer helpful support. Governors' understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses is now very good, as is their role in shaping the direction of the school. The governing body is aware that it does not fulfil all its statutory responsibilities because the school does not have a daily act of collective worship and the locally agreed religious education content is not covered in enough depth.
116. As governors, the headteacher and senior managers have tackled the last inspection issues convincingly, improvement over the last four terms has been satisfactory. Leadership and management have improved significantly. Teaching (and monitoring of it) is better. Standards have remained stubbornly average but effective systems have been introduced to raise them. In different ways all the subjects highlighted for improvement have taken steps forward: a completely new mathematics team is tackling standards in Years 9 to 11; the music schemes of work are clear and focused; teaching has improved in science; standards have crept up in modern foreign languages and Year 9 now have discrete ICT lessons. Behaviour is better, but not yet good enough, and provision for religious education has improved - but statutory requirements are still not met. Elements of the timetable are still unsatisfactory.
117. The restructuring of management responsibilities in the learning support department has resulted in several new and recent appointments. It is therefore too early to evaluate the overall effectiveness of these changes, although the management of some specific areas of special educational needs is good. For example, the collaborative working of the learning support manager and the senior learning support assistant is very effective in all aspects of administration and support. The timetable for support arrangements has been very efficiently worked out. This is imaginatively displayed as a wall chart for ease of access.
118. The new curriculum support centre has also made a strong start. Working routines are well established and students' records are efficiently organised. The refurbished accommodation is conducive to learning with a cheerful colour scheme and a well-planned layout. The work of the manager for inclusive education will develop in the coming months. The school has responded positively to the key issue of resources as identified in the last report and has increased the number of support staff. Resources in terms of books, electronic equipment and software are very good. The specific grants for special educational needs are well used for their designated purposes. The school is committed to education for all and the priority is to improve the management of difficult behaviour in the classroom by sharing the successful practice.
119. The school's match of staff to meet the demands of its current curriculum is unsatisfactory in Years 9 to 11 (though it varies considerably between departments), largely because of internal and external circumstances beyond the school's control. The school provides well for students in many subjects. ICT has good technical support and well-qualified technicians also contribute much to

provision in science, design and technology and art and design. Learning support assistants significantly help students' learning. The modern foreign languages department has no native speaking language assistants; plans to recruit some will provide much better for the speaking and listening aspects of the curriculum. Another issue is the lack of any male role model for boys in this department.

120. A significant number of teachers have left since the last inspection, the majority for new jobs or retirement. A few staffing problems remain, despite the school's determined efforts. Two attempts to recruit a head of science have been unsuccessful and still science groups have different teachers for one discipline, so continuity is not good. Arrangements for cover in food technology and textiles are totally unsatisfactory and certainly contributing to low standards. Some physical education classes have two teachers for the same skill, for example hockey, which damages continuity and progression. Religious education is also unsatisfactory because half the main specialist's timetable is taken up with science. The school needs a second drama teacher and additional help in music to cover its current timetable properly. Of serious concern is teaching of GNVQ health and social care; several non-specialists struggle to cover the gap left by a September appointment that did not work. Students have made little progress since the beginning of term.
121. The school has good induction procedures for new staff and newly qualified teachers speak well of their effectiveness. One member of staff is on the graduate teacher programme, with several more applicants requesting consideration. The school now has the capacity to be an appropriate provider of such training. The school has successfully worked with trainee teachers from Homerton College in Cambridge and De Montfort University.
122. Verification of teachers' threshold assessments confirmed highly effective implementation of this process (an 'ethos of respect and openness') and that good performance management is well underway. Training for existing staff is satisfactory. The school's enthusiastic involvement in the Bedfordshire School Improvement Partnership means that a few teachers have pursued areas of professional development which they highlighted in their performance management objectives. This is very good practice as it benefits both teachers and students.
123. The accommodation allows the curriculum to be taught effectively in all subjects except food technology, textiles and modern foreign languages. The food technology room still has no natural light, limited practical space and noisy extraction fans, as was the case at the time of the last inspection. This has a negative impact on pace and progress in lessons. The textiles room is drab and in a very poor state of decorative repair. The rooms for modern foreign languages are small, in poor decorative order and one is two floors away from the others. The English, mathematics and physical education offices are not large enough. Science laboratories are old and small and not conducive to practical work with large classes. However, a large new science laboratory is almost ready. Accommodation for teaching the theoretical aspects of physical education is unsatisfactory. Teachers use a variety of rooms which limits the effectiveness of their teaching. Limited storage space is a problem for many departments,

particularly English and geography. Access for the disabled is limited to the ground floor.

124. The quality of display is good in most subjects and the reception area is particularly interesting and well presented. Rooms and corridors are clean and well cared for and the grounds are spacious. There is an open ditch running across the length of the fields which catches much litter and looks very unsightly. The shared community and school leisure facilities, like the courts, sports hall and AstroTurf pitch, provide very good opportunities for both students and the community. The drama studio and theatre are very good. The library is bright and spacious and provides a variety of pleasant areas for study. There have been several significant developments since the last inspection, many of which have addressed specific points raised in the report. These include a new base for the learning support unit, better storage space in art and design and a newly refurbished ICT room.
125. Resources are at least adequate in all departments. Those in modern foreign languages have greatly improved since the previous inspection, with well-equipped rooms and almost enough textbooks for each student. Specific grants have been used well in the special educational needs department and its resources are good. The ICT equipment has been upgraded in the dedicated rooms and the ratio of computers to students is almost average. There are too few computers in history, modern foreign languages, art and design, design and technology and physical education. The main allocation of money to departments to buy resources is linked to the number of students studying the subject. In the past, allocation of other funds on an annual basis only, had made it difficult for departments to plan major long-term developments. With an improved budget this is now changing. This is especially noticeable in design and technology and physical education.
126. The strategic management of the financial resources available to the school is good. Detailed accounts are kept for all specific grants and funds, including the targeted school improvement grant, which show clearly that monies have been deployed as intended. The governing body is fully involved with the planning and formulating the budget through the work of its finance and premises committee. This committee provides effective routine monitoring of the school's financial affairs with regular reports to the full governing body.
127. Efficient computer-based financial systems are in place and effective use is made of these by the finance officer, to monitor and control expenditure against budget. The principles of best value are applied well to all orders for books or equipment and for services that are not provided by the local authority. An internal audit by Bedfordshire County Council in October 2000 found financial control to be satisfactory and the school has addressed all but one of its recommendations. The governors have agreed not to follow the recommendation regarding the audit of the school fund. From a deficit budget of £55,000 in the past, the school will have a balanced budget in 2002, a year earlier than planned. The income per student is above average but taking into account the slowly improving standards, the strength of the sixth form and the improvements since the last inspection,

especially in leadership and management and teaching, it provides satisfactory value for money.

Sixth form

- The leadership and management of the headteacher and key staff are good
- The effectiveness of the governing body in fulfilling its responsibilities is good
- Monitoring and evaluation of the school's performance and taking effective action are good
- Strategic use of resources, including specific grants and other funding is good
- The principles of best value are applied well. The sixth form is cost effective

Leadership and management

128. The new head of sixth form has quickly noted the many strengths that exist and homed in on the areas, such as careers guidance, needing improvement. His management style is effective - more structured contact between subject teachers and tutors is happening. He is keenly supporting the school's determination to improve analysis and use of baseline, predicted and progress data and targets. Sixth-form teachers have received appropriate training to deliver the new AS-level, A-level, AVCE and GNVQ courses. Research by the head of history and an English teacher confirm the school's positive approach to teachers' professional development. The benefits of this work, wholly relevant to classroom practice, are already apparent. Several teachers have considered how their teaching should reflect understanding about how students learn.
129. The headteacher and governing body are fully committed to the sixth form and they are keen to see its numbers go up. They appreciate that the school cannot offer such a broad range of courses as some sixth-form colleges. So, as part of the curriculum review under way, the AS-level subjects and vocational options offered will be considered carefully and students' views will be fully incorporated.
130. In general, staffing of sixth-form courses is good, although non-specialists teach physics and chemistry. The long-term absence of the head of geography is being covered well within the department and students' progress has not yet been affected. The school's plans for AS-levels in sociology, law and other social sciences were thwarted this year by circumstances beyond their control. The school could not recruit teachers for these subjects so plans were agreed for the adult learning centre to provide them (mainly in the evenings), but the arrangements were not honoured. Inevitably this caused great disappointment to many students and a few chose to study elsewhere as a result.
131. The sixth form is cost effective, as income is exactly balanced by the teaching hours in Years 12 and 13. There are some small groups, for example in music and modern foreign languages, but these costs are offset by several quite large groups and by shared teaching with Stratton Upper School for German and music. This is a sensible arrangement both financially and because students do not work alone or in very small groups. The governors are keen to extend such

arrangements and consideration of more joint provision is already incorporated into the major review of the curriculum.

Resources

132. Resources, including accommodation, are satisfactory. The sixth-form base has a small social area with a pool table and vending machines and a larger study area. The furnishings are poor and the study area does not have any computers. Students are happy with their accommodation although they do admit that it can be congested at lunch and break-times. Subject accommodation is satisfactory except for childhood studies which has no suitable base, and for physical education, where there is no dedicated room for teaching the theory element of the course. As this is a significant part of the syllabus it means teachers transport equipment, audio-visual appliances and books around the school. There is a small sixth-form teaching room in modern foreign languages and a seminar style room in English. Most other subjects do not have any special accommodation for teaching the sixth form and are often disadvantaged by using ordinary classrooms. The library is open for sixth-form use all day and provides them with ICT facilities and a good study area.
133. The lack of computers in the sixth-form area and within departments has a detrimental effect on students' learning and is inadequate to support and encourage independent research and study. The library provides students with very good learning support and they make good use of the computers. The new librarian has a dedicated budget so students can always gain access. The quality and quantity of the library's art books and the art and design department's materials for large-scale three-dimensional work are good. The furnishing and decoration of many classrooms are old and in poor condition, for example in mathematics and modern foreign languages, and needs updating for sixth-form use.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

134. In order to raise standards further the governors and senior management should:

- (1) Raise standards in Years 10 and 11, particularly for students who underachieve.

This is closely linked to all the other key issues:

- use centrally generated data to highlight students' potential and to monitor their progress;
- ensure all departments use this data to provide the correct levels of support for all students;
- check that work is always at the right level for students of different attainment levels.

(paragraphs 7, 8, 44, 45, 54, 62 and 97-99)

- (2) Improve the behaviour of the minority of students who spoil lessons for others. Make sure that teachers all deal with incidents of poor behaviour consistently:
- focus first on the compulsory GCSE subjects of English and science where unsatisfactory behaviour was seen in more than one lesson;
 - tackle unsatisfactory behaviour in Year 9 firmly;
 - address the disaffection with school in general which several students in Years 10 and 11 expressed during the inspection;
 - ensure that all teachers follow the behaviour policy strictly and fairly;
 - persevere with putting the Shared Values statement into practice, particularly concentrating on the importance of high social standards, kindness and tolerance.
- (paragraphs 28, 29, 30, 94)
- (3) Eliminate any lessons where teaching is unsatisfactory or it has unsatisfactory elements:
- address all the weaknesses described in Section D by sharing good practice both between and within departments.
- (4) Increase the amount of time in all years for religious education and for PSHE. (paragraphs 65, 68, 73, 239-245)
- (5) Continue the developments in using value-added data to analyse results, to set targets and to challenge students to achieve as well as possible. (paragraphs 44, 45, 54, 62, 97-99 and 114)

Sixth form

- (6) Help students and tutors to understand how the recently extended careers programme and guidance works. (paragraph 91)
- (7) Make sure form tutors have enough time and information to guide and help students to meet their academic targets. (paragraph 105)
- (8) Address the areas for improvement in the curriculum area reports.

In addition to the main areas for improvement, governors and senior management should consider including the following areas in the action plan:

- the use of tutor time to make it more purposeful and consistent; (paragraph 93)
- accommodation for food technology; (paragraph 123)
- use of homework diaries. (paragraph 109)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 9 to 11	125
	Sixth form	70
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students		120

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years							
Number	3	34	48	32	8	0	0
Percentage	2.4	27.2	38.4	25.6	6.4	0	0
Sixth form							
Number	6	29	30	4	1	0	0
Percentage	8.6	41.4	42.9	5.7	1.4	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 the sixth form as each lesson represents more than one percentage point.

Information about the school's students

Students on the school's roll	Y9 to Y11	Sixth form
Number of students on the school's roll	699	161
Number of full-time students known to be eligible for free school meals	54	0

Special educational needs	Y9 to Y11	Sixth form
Number of students with statements of special educational needs	26	5
Number of students on the school's special educational needs register	151	11

English as an additional language	No of students
Number of students with English as an additional language	2

Student mobility in the last school year	No of students
Students who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	16
Students who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	21

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data (2000-2001)	8.7
National comparative data (1999-2000)	7.7

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data (2000-2001)	0.5
National comparative data (1999-2000)	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	119	109	228

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	64	86	93
	Girls	85	81	80
	Total	149	167	173
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	65 (63)	73 (69)	76 (71)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	29 (19)	45 (43)	38 (35)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	64	92	84
	Girls	85	89	70
	Total	149	181	154
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	65	79	68
	National	66 (64)	69 (66)	65 (62)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	24	45	41
	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	113	99	212

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	44	102	108
	Girls	48	97	98
	Total	92	199	206
Percentage of students achieving the standard specified	School	43.4 (47)	92.9 (88)	96.7 (96)
	National	(47.4)	(90.6)	(95.6)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per student	School	37.1 (35)
	National	(38.4)

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those students who achieved all those they studied	School	25	100
	National		

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

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	37	34	71

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	18.9 (14.8)	17.1 (17.1)	18.0 (15.9)	N/A (5.3)	3.3 (3.5)	3.3 (4.3)
National	(17.7)	(18.6)	(18.2)	(2.6)	(2.9)	(2.7)

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number in their final year of studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those students who achieved all those they studied	School	6	100
	National		

Ethnic background of students

	No of students
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	1
Black – other	3
Indian	4
Pakistani	3
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	2
White	834
Any other minority ethnic group	9

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	12	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	43	3
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: Y9 to Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	52
Number of students per qualified teacher	17

Education support staff: Y9 to Y13

Total number of education support staff	11
Total aggregate hours worked per week	281

Deployment of teachers: Y9 to Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	80
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Average teaching group size: Y9 to Y13

Key Stage 3	24
Key Stage 4	23

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000 - 2001
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	£
Total income	2,713,012
Total expenditure	2,648,327
Expenditure per student	3,013
Balance brought forward from previous year	13,923
Balance carried forward to next year	78,608

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	35
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	31

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	3
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	2
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	854
Number of questionnaires returned	159

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	28	59	7	6	0
My child is making good progress in school.	26	54	10	0	10
Behaviour in the school is good.	12	58	18	3	9
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	17	59	17	3	4
The teaching is good.	12	65	11	3	9
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	19	48	18	4	11
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	42	48	5	1	3
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	45	45	5	0	4
The school works closely with parents.	23	45	21	3	8
The school is well led and managed.	30	52	9	2	7
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	21	60	10	2	6
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	19	53	11	3	14

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

- A strong well led team whose members share enthusiasm for the subject and a commitment to evaluation and improvement.
- The increasing number of A* and A grades at GCSE.
- Good departmental policy and practice in ICT so students develop skills which they use to increase the range of their writing and research.

Areas for improvement

- The management and motivation of a minority of students, particularly in Years 10 and 11, who are disaffected or disruptive in lessons.
- The study of Shakespeare, which needs a more active approach to improve students' understanding and enjoyment of the plays.
- The department's contribution to the school's extra-curricular programme.

135. Students enter the school with average attainment overall. They make sound progress and maintain this standard in all years. In Year 9 tests the trend over time has not been consistent but results have steadied recently. In 2000, the number of students reaching the higher levels was below average. This improved in 2001. However, the school does less well than similar schools in these tests, and students attain higher standards in both mathematics and science. Following the national pattern, girls do better than boys in English in Year 9, though the difference is more marked at the higher levels.
136. In Years 10 and 11 sound progress and achievement continue and the school has a satisfactory record in the two GCSE examinations. Virtually all students are entered for English language, and the school now has a commendably high entry rate for English literature. In 2000, results were slightly above average in both examinations. English language results were a little higher in 2001. In English literature in 2001, with an improved entry rate, the percentage attaining A*-C grades, though lower, was still close to the previous year's average. A pleasing feature of the results in 2001 was the number of students awarded the A*/A grades in both examinations, the best yet. Although girls do better than boys in GCSEs the difference in 2000 was similar to that recorded nationally, and the gap narrowed in 2001. English results compare favourably with those in other subjects and they did not drop in 2001 as they did in a number of other subjects.
137. During the inspection week good work was seen in Year 9 lessons, although there is considerable disparity between the work of higher and lower attainers. Some students have already achieved the language competence expected at the end of the year. Their writing is inventive, fluent and well organised. They clearly enjoy their work and respond to good teaching with lively interest and participation. They show interest in books and some are keen readers who have begun to understand and have opinions about genre. They readily read aloud and have some grasp of the ways in which voice and presentation can be varied

to suit material and audience. A Year 9 lesson in which students presented extracts from the class novel was a good example of close reading and small group discussion leading to effective whole class sharing of a text.

138. Students whose previous attainment is much lower do not read and write at the required level and their speaking and listening skills are often poorly developed. Many of them make steady progress with carefully targeted support and they benefit from some of the Key Stage 3 literacy strategies which are being used well to improve all students' basic skills. Others make less progress because their interest has not been stimulated and the work they are doing is not sufficiently motivating. In Year 9, where there is a wide range of learning needs, progress reflects the degree of success with which students' needs are met by good teaching and planning and appropriate resources.
139. In Years 10 and 11 the same range is apparent, with some impressive achievement by higher attainers. Students write for a range of purposes and readerships, in prose and sometimes in verse. Coursework folders and displays contain good descriptive, imaginative and narrative writing. Thoughtful work, on media and analytical essays, shows that students have understood and enjoyed the literature texts. In a Year 11 lesson, students discussed three different film presentations of the first witches scene in Macbeth, made well-considered comparisons and suggested other performance possibilities. In an informal debate on euthanasia, students in Year 10 weighed up the pros and cons of this difficult issue, expressed their own opinions and listened thoughtfully to the views of others. In both these top sets, the levels of concentration, thought and language indicated that many students were likely to achieve high examination grades.
140. In one mixed ability class in Year 10 and one in Year 11, students were developing a good understanding of genre. In one class a macabre short story, and in the other a television comedy script, provided accessible and thought-provoking material. Students were interested and curious so they willingly answered and asked questions; learning was good. In each class, a few potentially disruptive students were intrigued by the material and by the teachers' skilful presentation so they remained attentive throughout. In two other lessons, the apathy or hostility of a number of students, who had come to the lesson determined not to co-operate, undermined the teachers' control and confidence. In these lessons very little learning took place and the efforts of those students who were willing to work were frustrated.
141. Attainment in speaking and listening is linked to students' attitudes and behaviour, and the quality of teaching. In most lessons students listen well. In a Year 9 assembly students listened attentively and courteously when a teacher spoke about an issue in the news. Given an absorbing topic, articulate students in Year 10 presented their ideas, arguments and hypotheses well and sustained a level of interest which made them disregard the bell at the end of the lesson. In several classes, teachers encouraged reading aloud effectively, for example lower attaining students in Year 11 took part in a script reading and enjoyed it.

142. At all ages and levels, students do not speak Shakespeare well enough. Very few Year 11 students, studying Macbeth, were able to give any life or coherence to the lines, and they appeared to have learned little about speaking Shakespeare from their study of another play in Year 9. The fact that Year 13 students did little better with their A-level Shakespeare play shows that not enough is done to encourage pleasure in reading and performing scenes. The school has no recent history of Shakespeare performance, even on a small scale.
143. Students are introduced to a good range of novels, plays, poetry, newspapers and ICT based information texts. Teachers liaise well with the librarian; students are encouraged to use the library by an induction session in Year 9 and regular class visits. In Years 10 and 11 book reviews and recommendations help to develop students' awareness of writers and genres, and the English stock contains some texts from different cultures and traditions. Students in all years are usually able to take home the novels they are reading in class, though resources do not always allow the same set to be used in two parallel classes. The department has recognised the need to encourage boys to read more and is looking at ways of doing this.
144. Drafting and redrafting are well established and students regularly use ICT to present their work well; Year 9 students used desktop publishing confidently working on their own newspaper. Some very attractive pieces of work are on display. Year 10 students wrote a pamphlet based on Internet research. Work on literature in Years 10 and 11 has resulted in some lively critical and analytical writing. Year 11 folders contain some good essays on the play *An Inspector Calls*. However, middle and lower attaining students, particularly in Year 9, do not write regularly enough; what they do write is often not long enough. Producing a sustained piece of writing for weekly marking is not yet regular practice in all classes.
145. The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall and in almost half the lessons seen it was good or very good. Three lessons in Years 10 and 11 were unsatisfactory but these teachers gave satisfactory, and in two cases good, lessons to other classes. In the best lessons teachers and students shared pleasure in the work and there was often a sense of investigation or discovery in the learning. Students in the higher sets usually came to lessons ready to work and willing to co-operate. The challenge to teachers in these classes, usually well met, was to ensure that the pace and content of the lesson met students' expectations and that the buzz of interest was sustained. In some classes students arrived with little enthusiasm. Here the teacher's task was to challenge apathy and awaken curiosity. A successful example of this was seen when students, in an initially lacklustre Year 11 group, were gripped by a short story and fully involved in a test which the teacher had devised to investigate the quality of their listening. By the end of the lesson all students had made good progress and there was a very different atmosphere in the classroom.
146. In the few lessons where teaching was unsatisfactory or less successful, students showed little interest and were either passively compliant or actively disruptive. Behaviour control was inadequate and when the lesson content failed to stimulate, restlessness and boredom ensued, with no spark of interest or

enjoyment. When teachers anticipated poor behaviour, they were not firm enough and were too ready to be grateful for any fitful signs of co-operation or reasonable response. In two lessons the teacher's role was too much that of task setter and supervisor. In these lessons, despite the presence of students with learning and behaviour problems, there were no learning support assistants. In lessons where they were present, there was good liaison and teamwork.

147. Teachers mark work conscientiously and often give students very constructive feedback, especially about coursework. Students recognise the value of this and appreciate it. However, teachers' records are limited to marks in their mark book with no system for noting stages in progress, specific targets, needs or significant achievements. The leadership and management of the department are good. The head of English is a very good teacher who has valuable subject knowledge and understanding of examination requirements. He analyses data and monitors the department well. The department has a very good understanding of its achievements, needs and targets.
148. Progress since the last inspection has been satisfactory. Standards in Years 10 and 11 have improved and, despite some changes of staff, the overall quality of teaching remains satisfactory, with much good or very good work. Staff deployment is now much better. The behaviour and attitudes of a significant minority of students, noted in the last report, remain a problem which has not yet been solved. The department contributes little to the school's extra-curricular programme. It is well placed to offer activities which can enrich and extend students' experience.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

149. The school has no central policy or strategy for literacy across the curriculum as yet and departmental practice varies. A whole-school training day on literacy is planned for this term. The English department, liaising with middle schools, is developing aspects of the Key Stage 3 National Literacy Strategy in Year 9. In assemblies students often listened attentively and spoke confidently. However, in interviews during the inspection, students in Years 10 and 11 were unforthcoming and clearly need more help with their communication and social skills.
150. Most subject areas now display key words and encourage their use. Some subject teachers are more aware than others of how their work can develop students' skills in reading, writing and speaking. English has a key role in the development of language skills, and drama contributes to students' oral confidence in Years 10 and 11. Reading is being well promoted in history, religious education, physical education and modern foreign languages. Specialist vocabulary extension was noted in mathematics, science, design and technology and in geography. There is little encouragement of reading in science, art and design or ICT.
151. In mathematics students speak confidently and can marshal their thoughts well. There is some good discussion in history, geography, and physical education. Opportunities for discussion and presentations in class are weaker in science, art and design, religious education and ICT and speaking skills in modern foreign

languages are below average. The amount of writing students are required to do varies between subjects. Some extended investigative writing was seen in mathematics and there was also a good range of writing in ICT. In science, religious education and modern foreign languages the range was limited. In geography, there is a higher standard of writing in Year 9 than in Years 10 and 11. History makes a particularly good contribution to students' overall language development, with strengths in reading and writing and some very good work in small group and whole-class discussion.

Drama

152. There is good provision for drama in Years 10 and 11, where it is a popular GCSE option, with continuing strengths in examination results and in the quality of teaching, which is good overall. Drama also makes a major and valuable contribution to the school's extra-curricular programme, with its regular stage productions involving large numbers of students. The main development area now is to improve assessment and how progress and achievement are recorded. During the inspection the small department was undergoing a staffing crisis as the second teacher, appointed to teach drama two days a week, had left the school a few weeks after the start of term. All three lessons observed were taught by the head of drama who is currently the only specialist. Teaching was good in two lessons and very good in one.
153. In 2000, 41 students took GCSE. Over 70 per cent attained grades A*-C and 29 per cent A*/A grades, both well above average. In 2001, almost 50 students attained 67 per cent A*-C grades, again with a good percentage of A*/A grades. Girls outnumber boys but the gender difference is less marked in the current Year 11. In both years students learn well.
154. Teaching was very good when Year 10 students of mixed ability worked together effectively and with evident enjoyment. Only a few weeks into the term, they were already familiar with the disciplines of the drama studio and observed them carefully. They learned how to control and direct their energies, using movement, gesture and voice to convey character. Although their drama skills were at an early stage of development and also varied considerably, all students took part in a short presentation and evaluated their own and others' work. Attainment at this stage of the course indicates that most of these students should be able to gain good grades in their final examinations.
155. In Year 11, students of all abilities were able to create and briefly sustain a character and they showed that they understood the nature and conventions of the task. Higher attainers used some variations of accent, volume, tone and pace in their presentation. However, some students, even in the second year of their course, did not show very much confidence or imagination in their work and one of the two classes required a good deal of intervention and energising by the teacher to get them going.
156. In all lessons the teachers' subject knowledge and enthusiasm were well demonstrated. All students responded well to the good lesson structures, clear instructions and high expectations which are the norm. Students take their work

seriously and at the same time enjoy it. A particular strength is the way in which the teacher is able to manage and motivate students who have behaviour or learning difficulties. Preparation for the GCSE examination is careful and well informed, and good results follow from this combination of good teaching and the enthusiasm shown by students.

157. Drama is very well accommodated, with a spacious drama studio and an adjoining theatre with a raked auditorium in which the school productions take place. At present no drama is taught in Year 9, but if staffing and timetabling allow, the school will benefit from extending the subject into this year.

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths

- Achievement and standards at the end of Year 9 are above average.
- Virtually all teaching is good or better.
- Leadership and management are good, with a clear focus on improving attitudes and behaviour to raise standards.
- A well-planned curriculum.

Areas for improvement

- Achievement and standards at the end of Year 11.
- Use of time in example work to sustain pace and challenge.
- The limited resources and strategies to support the full attainment range of students.

158. Year 9 test results in 2000 were average but below average for the similar school comparison. They were better in 2001, 73 per cent attained the expected level and 46 per cent the higher levels. In GCSE the overall percentage of students attaining grades A*-G has been consistently above average and the percentage of grades A*-C was average for the first time in 2000. The considerably lower percentage of grades A*-C in 2001 is well out of line with the school's expectations and the results of a request for remarking are not yet known. In 2000 results in mathematics at the end of Year 9 and at the end of Year 11 were close to those for English and below those for science.

159. Inspection evidence in Year 9 shows good continuity in numeracy from the middle schools and sustained progress through the year. Students' mental arithmetic skills are systematically extended as teachers start many lessons with short number puzzles or a game. Students of all levels are regularly required to work with and without a calculator. In a Year 9 class students' work with fractions, percentages and decimals was well above average; they confidently and accurately tackled a range of problems. Most students cope well with the development of algebraic expressions and the higher attainers are confident in their work with straight-line graphs. Support for students with special educational needs is good, with appropriate well-managed support in lessons. As a result these students, as others, make good progress and achieve well. In general the above average work seen was consistent with the 2001 tests results at the end of Year 9.

160. The work seen in Year 10 is consistent with progress from Year 9. There is a good continued emphasis on number work and students work confidently on addition, subtraction, multiplication and division of fractions. Statistics work involves students collecting and tabulating data and choosing appropriate charts to display or interpret the information. Much of this work from students of all levels is confident and very well presented. Investigative work begins to develop students' skills in looking for patterns and describing these in words and by formulae. Some good challenging work for lower attaining students was seen when they were looking at sequences of square and triangular numbers.
161. In Year 11, work in number shows little progression from Year 10. There is a continuing emphasis on numeracy but in a number of classes students lacked confidence with tables and with basic arithmetic. There is also considerable variation in algebraic skills, particularly for middle and lower attaining students. While most could handle the concept of like terms, work with inequalities proved very demanding. Higher attainers however, have good algebraic skills, they can work with the concept of the n th term of a series and the graph of a function. In one Year 11 class some very good work was seen when students used spreadsheet software to investigate graphs of quadratic functions, but they all had to crowd around one computer. Overall inspection evidence suggests progress in Year 10 is good and better than that in Year 11, where only higher attainers make secure progress. Therefore for these two years overall, achievement is satisfactory and standards are average.
162. Teachers use a range of activities to maintain students' interest and concentration. Relationships in the classroom vary from satisfactory to good. Students are mostly keen to answer questions or explain their ideas but in a few classes, particularly in Years 10 and 11, a few students' poor attitudes reduce the effectiveness of a lesson. Good classroom management skills, however, ensure that even in these classes at least satisfactory learning takes place. Some students in the top sets feel that they are not treated as young adults and that they do not need firm discipline, as they are keen to learn. The department has acknowledged their comments.
163. All but one member of the department is new this year. including the head and deputy head of department. The schemes of work have been revised and restructured well and the new team has a clear focus on setting appropriately high expectations for attitudes and behaviour. The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection and is now good. Learning is good in Year 9 and satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. In the lessons seen teaching was satisfactory in one Year 9 lesson and equally good and very good in the rest. Teachers have detailed assessment records of all students' standards and progress, so lessons are now well planned to match students' needs, including those with special educational needs.
164. In the best lessons the aims of the lesson are shared with students at the beginning and a good variety of tasks or activities sustains their enthusiasm, hence effective learning takes place. In a Year 9 class working with fractions, decimals and percentages an interesting variety of problems sustained students'

interest and probed their understanding. The good relationships in this class helped the teacher to both support and challenge the group; careful assessment of students' previous knowledge also meant that learning was effective.

165. Support in lessons is well organised and well managed; in many cases learning support assistants and teachers jointly support whole groups. In a lower attaining Year 10 practical class, working on long division without calculators, the availability of two teachers meant students received almost instant response to any problem. The sustained pace and sense of achievement which resulted meant that the practical work was clearly enjoyed and learning was good. In some classes, when students are working on examples, it can be difficult for a single teacher to combine optimising the time for the activity with confidence building for lower attainers (through support and reinforcement) and encouragement for relatively higher attainers to work independently.
166. The leadership and management of this new department are good. The sense of team spirit developed in the short time the group has been together is excellent. There is a clear focus on raising achievement in Years 10 and 11, by maintaining high expectations for attitudes and behaviour, and continuing to develop the curriculum and teaching styles. ICT is embedded in the schemes of work but more detail about how it is to be used would be helpful. Resources are generally good but more computers, or some form of large ICT visual display, would improve teaching and provide extra stimulus, particularly to challenge higher attainers.

Numeracy across the curriculum

167. Standards of numeracy and mental arithmetic are very good in Year 9, good in Year 10 and satisfactory in Year 11, reflecting the progress of the Key Stage 3 National Numeracy Strategy. The mathematics department has rewritten its scheme of work for Year 9 to incorporate this strategy and there is a good emphasis on promoting number skills whenever possible. Lessons in Year 9 are often planned to begin with a short number puzzle or game and these are popular. Students are often required to make calculations without using their calculators and as a result most can work without a calculator to a considerable extent with both integers and fractions. The school has yet to establish a whole-school policy for numeracy but with the exceptions of English, art and design and music there is evidence of students applying their mathematical skills well in other subjects. Opportunities to reinforce work with mathematics are, however, still often missed.
168. There is a clear policy for numeracy in science. In Year 9 students represent experimental data graphically, and in Year 10 are confident in carrying out scientific calculations although lower attainers would benefit from more practice. By Year 11 students' skills to find lines of best fit and work with formulae are well developed. In cross-curricular ICT many of the problem-solving assignments also reinforce basic numeracy. In business studies students calculate expenditure totals confidently to complete a cash flow forecast. There is good general promotion of mathematical skills in design and technology where projects require

students to measure with accuracy. Students regularly cost production and are aware of cost constraints on a project.

169. Numeracy skills are built into the schemes of work in geography and students create databases and illustrate data with charts and graphs. Concepts of bearing, scale and grid reference underpin map work. There is a numeracy policy in history and students work with census and survey data presenting information in charts and graphs. A range of graphical representations is used to look at economic and industrial indicators. There is limited reinforcement of numeracy in physical education. Students measure pulse and heart rate and time activities to calculate a training zone but opportunities to present results in tables and graphs are missed. In GNVQ leisure and tourism, however, students use graphs, bar charts and spreadsheets to present the timetable of use of a sports centre's facilities.

SCIENCE

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

Strengths

- Improved test results at the end of Year 9.
- The department (a strongly supportive team) is developing a focus on improving standards by analysing standards achieved by individuals.
- Teachers have very good specialist subject knowledge.
- Excellent support provided by a highly competent team of technicians.

Areas for improvement

- Teaching methods: whatever their levels of attainment, too many students are not challenged enough. Some classes are not stimulating because teaching is dull.
- Teachers' knowledge and understanding of how to set and achieve learning objectives for a lesson.
- Too little experimental and investigative procedures in class work.
- The lack of visits to places of scientific interest or speakers coming to the school.
- Targets set for individual students, derived from monitoring their performance.
- Monitoring of teaching and learning through classroom observations and scrutiny of students' work – this is not done regularly.

170. Test results at the end of Year 9 were above average in 2000 and in line with the average for similar schools. Year 9 results were better in 2001 – 76 per cent of students attained the expected level and 39 per cent the higher levels. In 2000 GCSE results, including the percentage of A/B grades, were above average in the double science award. Results in 2001 were not quite so good. Although the percentage of students attaining grades A* and A went up, bunching around grades C and D continued. Standards in single science were above average in 2000 but considerably lower in 2001.

171. In all years, attainment is average overall and achievement is satisfactory. Attainment at the beginning of Year 9 is well above average in the top set. From work done earlier in their middle schools, students already know which metals are

more reactive than others. They can accurately construct word equations which describe chemical reactions. Studying physical science they learn well that force has size and direction – and increase their technical vocabulary at the same time, as do students in the lower set when explaining simply the fundamentals of photosynthesis.

172. Attainment is significantly affected by the variable quality of teaching; standards reach expected levels where teachers have high expectations and plan stimulating lessons. Students in one of the lowest sets made very good progress deepening their knowledge when they pretended to be elements! They enthusiastically explained the structure of their chosen element and then eagerly and accurately represented it as a picture. They keenly matched the teacher's ambitious expectations of what they could understand, in this case about electrons. A few in the class also learned more about the nature of electrical charges in electrons and protons. Others needed and received the teacher's support to understand the link between the activity and the ideas it described. On the other hand, where teachers' planning has not taken into account the knowledge and understanding students already have, learning slows down considerably. Furthermore, students in a top set have unexpected misconceptions, for instance about the classification of water as a compound, because fundamental underlying ideas are not reinforced when dull textbook activities become central to a lesson. Progress is unsatisfactory, and so students underachieve.
173. Standards in Year 11 are average but there are significant variations. Year 11 students, extending their knowledge about chemical structures, made very good progress as they quickly responded to the teacher's infectious enthusiasm about boiling points! Clear explanations followed, driven by strikingly good specialist knowledge, which encouraged competent practical and computer work. All this underpinned well above average standards and very good quality learning about melting and boiling points and molar mass. In contrast, although a notable proportion of students in Year 10 attained high standards in Year 9, some of them currently underachieve in lessons when tasks are set at too low a level. In addition, they neither develop their own ideas nor apply them, if they merely repeat most of an activity already done by the teacher. Progress was certainly not high enough in a Year 10 top set lesson where students wasted time by colouring and labelling a diagram about the digestive system.
174. An improvement since the last inspection is the widening of students' technical vocabulary. A good example of students using scientific words was noted as they explained their work about different waveforms. Although rarely included in lesson plans, key words displayed in classrooms were used to advantage in several lessons where teaching was good. Students' numeracy skills develop as they learn science, although, again, the rate depends on the quality of teaching. High attainers accurately calculate gravitational potential energy by repeating several examples. In contrast, middle and lower attainers have fewer opportunities to practise their calculations because they are expected to do less work. Students do not always present their notes well; standards are variable and generally not good enough. In all years the quality and quantity of much work,

including the accuracy and presentation of annotated two-dimensional diagrams, is unsatisfactory; several classes do not do enough practical work.

175. The overall quality of teaching is satisfactory, an improvement since the last inspection. In about one third of lessons teaching was good or very good. Teaching was unsatisfactory in three lessons but there were weak features in others. These patterns were reflected in the quality of students' learning, which is sound overall. Clearly in evidence is teachers' subject expertise and that they can use it to very good effect, and then students learn well. Practical activities are planned skilfully and safely with generous help from very high quality technician support. Also clear was that teachers' expectations of what students could achieve, and hence the work they covered, tended to diminish in the lower the set. In addition, within sets, students who learn quickly need more thoughtful, challenging work. Students with special educational needs make similar progress to other students, depending upon the quality of teaching and level of extra support.
176. The best lessons were stimulating because teachers' enthusiasm was infectious and students were interested, keen to learn and willingly put effort into their work. They know how to concentrate and apply themselves, especially when tackling tricky problems. Students' involvement and contributions are stimulated when a helpful and varied range of resources are used. A Year 10 single science class cheerfully applied itself to work, had fun using the 'slinky' apparatus and eagerly explained observations of its waves compared with those they saw caused by sound. Weaknesses in teaching can be summarised by a failure to plan at the right level, by not establishing what students already know, low expectations and a limited range of dull teaching styles. To these, students' response is clear; they become disinterested and/or do not behave well. A major source of students' discontent in these lessons is the amount of time they spend copying notes and diagrams from textbooks. They do notice when teachers get on with other marking during their lessons so they do not receive enough attention. During the inspection they were perceptive and articulate about the qualities of good teaching.
177. Science teachers support each other strongly. The department is increasingly evaluating its performance. Ad hoc classroom observations are taking place but as yet no systematic process is in place. This means good practice is not being shared. Under the guidance of the temporary acting head of department, clear strategies have been established to meticulously track individual student's performance through different aspects of science. Targets do not yet stem from this monitoring and those set are not ly focused sharply enough. Marking is consistent but occasionally superficial on class work; comments do not guide progress. Where constructive comments are made, students seldom act upon them. Preparation areas are expertly organised and the strong team of technicians provides very good service and contributes a great deal to the quality of science education. Students hardly ever visit places of scientific interest, neither does the department organise visiting speakers. Both would enrich students' experience.

ART AND DESIGN

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

Strengths

- Consistently good teaching.
- Students' good attitudes and behaviour.
- The development of independent working by Year 11.
- Teachers' very good one-to-one guidance.

Areas for improvement

- Attainment in GCSE examinations.
- Integration of students' historical and critical studies into their practical and written work.
- Use of ICT.

178. Students enter Year 9 with an average range of skills and understanding. The continuity of work from middle schools is well managed, so students' progress and learning are satisfactory. By the end of Year 9 attainment is still in line with expectations. Projects, such as the current one based on studying shoes, interest and motivate students and they develop imaginative, fantasy ideas from observational drawing. Students are creating three-dimensional models of shoes in a variety of media such as card, papier-mâché or clay. These show an average range of manipulation and control over the media and an interesting range of 'fantastic' designs, based on various ideas and research. Two-dimensional work, such as drawing and painting in sketchbooks and elsewhere, also shows an average range of attainment.
179. A larger than average proportion of students take art and design for GCSE. Grades A*-C results in 2000 were below average, but better than at the time of the last inspection. In 2001, A*-C results dropped very significantly and were well below predicated grades and targets. Inspection evidence confirms this decline was unexpected and surprising. Current work in Year 11 shows sound development of practical skills from Year 9 in a wide variety of media. Students also undertake an appropriate range of research, recording this satisfactorily in various ways, visually and in writing. Work seen during the inspection was average overall.
180. Teachers do not, however, show students well enough how to link these two aspects of their work. The two strands develop separately in the majority of students' thinking. Students' work therefore, does not integrate their research into artists' work, their personal responses to this and/or development of these ideas well enough into their own final pieces. While many students use ICT for research, they do not regularly use computers in any creative way in their artwork, so this element is also missing. This is largely because there are too few computers in the art rooms and teachers lack training in this aspect of the curriculum.
181. In most areas of learning, all students, including those with special educational needs, make satisfactory progress in Years 10 and 11. After an introduction programme into the GCSE course, students rapidly develop a high degree of independence because teachers rightly expect them to produce an individual

response to initial ideas. By Year 11 this is well established, as seen in their current work on the theme of 'myself'. Here students ably select from a variety of two- and three-dimensional media and use them effectively to produce the visual effects they have chosen. In this project though, despite teachers' urgings to do so, students' research and individual work are not linked enough. Although the teaching of this skill is evident, students have not absorbed its importance. The department is aware of this weakness and is addressing it, but not yet fully effectively. An underlying cause may be the separation of theory and practice in Year 9, where different sketchbooks are used for class work and homework. As homework is often research and investigation, this encourages students to conceptualise the notions as separate.

182. Homework is set and marked rigorously, but is not always fully integrated with work done in lessons. The head of department does not yet use information about their Year 9 standards to set individual targets and predict GCSE grades, as a way of challenge to students to achieve highly. Another weakness, related to how students evaluate and comment on art, is the lack of opportunity, in most lessons, for them to articulate and share their responses to artwork together. Although students do this at the beginning and end of projects, these can be weeks apart. Students require more frequent opportunities to talk about artwork, using appropriate, technical language, in order to become confident in its use in their own projects. The inclusion of this type of session into more lessons would help students with the literacy and oracy elements of the curriculum in art and design and elsewhere in the school.
183. With only single, 60-minute lessons it is difficult for teachers to incorporate enough discussion time into lessons and still ensure that students produce the volume of coursework needed for the examination. Teachers are well experienced and the quality of teaching is consistently good throughout the department. The one-to-one sessions which students experience in lessons, with their teacher's attention focused principally on their individual needs, are key to the effectiveness of the teaching. Lessons occur in a very purposeful, quiet atmosphere where students can concentrate well and make good progress on their tasks. The good relationships between teachers and students and the very positive attitudes students bring to their lessons are also key factors in students' enjoyment of the subject.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- The proportion of students who pass GCSE at grades A*-G is consistently above average.
- GCSE grades A*-C in graphic products are consistently above average.
- The good progress and achievement made by most students in all years.

- The success of much of the teaching in developing students' basic design and making skills.

Areas for improvement

- The low proportion of GCSE A* grades.
- Consistently below average GCSE grades A*-C in textiles.
- Lower standards in food technology and textiles than in other areas of the subject.
- Poor accommodation for food technology and textiles.

184. Standards attained by students by the end of Year 9 are below those expected. Students join the school with weak technical skills; many have never used basic workshop hand tools, such as wood planes, before and have no experience of formal drawing and lettering techniques. During their first year in the school they make good progress acquiring these basic practical skills and graphic techniques. In work on simple projects they draw with accuracy and make products of a good quality. Thus achievement is good, as it was at the last inspection, as most students develop their skills and understanding well.
185. GCSE performance in 2001 was similar to that at the time of the last inspection: graphics results at grades A*-C are likely to be above average; resistant materials and systems and control results average and food technology and textiles below average. Work seen during the inspection confirmed these standards. Results have varied over time at grades A*-C in most of these subjects, but generally graphics results have been above average and textiles results well below. Across all subjects over recent years, pass grades at A*-G have been well above average, a low number of students have attained A* grades, and a high proportion of students have scored grade D. In 2000, students' average points score in design and technology was above average and students did better in design and technology than in other GCSE subjects.
186. Overall standards attained and progress by the end of Year 11 are average but there is a variation in the quality of design work between those students working in graphics, resistant materials and systems and control, and those in food technology and textiles. In textiles in particular there are weaknesses in how students communicate their design ideas; students do not carry forward the skills of drawing, sketching and detailed annotation which they began to develop in Year 9, and the presentation of their work is below expectation. In other areas, design work is good and students explain and communicate their ideas to a high standard. Broad ranging research is undertaken to develop initial design ideas. Students process and make good use of data generated by questionnaire surveys – this helps them to understand consumers' views when developing specifications for their products. In food technology, students' evaluation of their practical work as they make their dishes is very good, and they draw on a good technical vocabulary to help them.
187. Teaching and learning are good overall. Over 80 per cent was good or better and only one lesson was unsatisfactory. The key strength of the teaching is the way teachers encourage good habits and develop students' basic skills. Good practice in design is constantly reinforced by helpful discussions. When teaching was very good or excellent, such as in Year 9, teachers insisted that students

measured very accurately and guided them well about how to plan and make wooden desk tidies or about how to complete a sensory analysis of cake products. In food technology in particular, but in all areas of the subject, students' communication skills are improved by activities which encourage them to use technical and descriptive words when analysing their products.

188. In graphics and resistant materials in Year 9, teachers have written workbooks which show students how to improve their drawing, designing and planning skills and how to match these against clear targets. The teaching programme does not, however, give enough attention to the understanding of structures and materials, partly because there are too few textbooks in Years 10 and 11. Higher and middle attainers in particular need to be able to reflect more on different materials which they could use for the products they have designed.
189. Teaching styles are not consistent enough across the subject. Teachers mark work regularly, but the different marking schemes are confusing, especially to students new to the school in Year 9. In systems and control and food technology in Year 11, as each stage is completed, students benefit from very good assessment of their coursework against exam criteria; in other areas the oral discussion of progress, though helpful, gives students less precise indications of how they are doing. Teachers' expectations of design standards are too low in textiles, and teaching here needs to be monitored and developed more rigorously.
190. Students mostly enjoy their work, apply themselves fully in lessons and show some good independent study skills when they research information outside lessons. Their competent computer skills help them to improve the quality of their designs, to process survey information, and to carry out research, either on the Internet or contacting businesses by e-mail. Students with special educational needs make good progress and are very well supported by learning support assistants.
191. Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. There has been good evaluation of the subject's performance since the last inspection. This has resulted in effective systems for identifying and supporting students' progress in resistant materials, graphics and systems. Consequently, results improved significantly between 2000 and 2001. Too many inconsistencies in approach remain, between resistant materials, graphics and systems on one hand and food technology and textiles on the other. Management of the two areas was split until this year, preventing the sharing of good practice, and signs in the school pointing to 'design and technology' and 'home economics' reinforce that division.
192. Accommodation for food technology and textiles is poor although the workshops and graphic areas are good and well maintained. The food technology room still has all the problems identified at the last inspection: no natural light; noisy and ineffective extraction and ventilation; very limited practical space and an awkward L-shaped design which makes managing classes very difficult indeed. The textiles room, drab and in a poor state of decorative repair, provides students with no inspiration or examples of good practice. This poor accommodation represents an unsatisfactory workplace for teachers and may contribute to staff recruitment difficulties in food technology and textiles.

GEOGRAPHY

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

Strengths

- Teaching which demands much from students so they learn well.
- Good development of enquiry skills in all years.
- Good use of fieldwork to support learning.
- For most students lessons develop their literacy skills well.

Areas for improvement

- Provision of more materials for students with special educational needs.
- Missed opportunities to promote students' spiritual and cultural development.
- Use of performance data to raise standards further.

193. By the end of Year 9 the majority of students attain average standards, with a substantial minority above. In 2000 an average percentage of students attained GCSE grades A*-C and all attained grades A*-G, an improvement since the last inspection. The percentage of A*-C grades dipped in 2001 and the school is waiting for the outcome of an appeal to the examining board. Apart from this questionable dip, results have improved each year since 1998. Evidence from the inspection indicates that the current Year 11 students should attain average grades. In recent years, girls' results have been better by roughly the same margin as that seen nationally.
194. Most Year 9 students have particularly well-developed enquiry skills. They can extract relevant information from a range of sources, including textbooks, worksheets, the Internet and CD-Roms, to produce good project work. Such research activity was well illustrated in a Year 9 class as students embarked on an enquiry into the cause and effect of the rainforest's destruction. Most students produce well-written notes, for example when they watched a video about sustainable management of the rainforest. However, a small minority of students with literacy difficulties find any task requiring lengthy passages of writing very difficult. In one lesson where students with special education needs did not have a writing frame to support them, a few of them expressed challenging behaviour; they felt frustrated with the task they had been given. Almost all Year 9 students' learning and achievement is satisfactory and many learn well. Most draw clear annotated maps and diagrams. The majority draw simple graphs to summarise statistical data. Overall, their knowledge of place and their thinking skills are better than at the time of the last inspection.
195. The majority of GCSE students learn satisfactorily over time and so attainment for the majority remains close to average. Most Year 11 students produce at least satisfactory quality coursework, including clear descriptive writing and often well-presented text and graphs using ICT. Most use correlation techniques such as scatter graphs to establish trends in the fieldwork data they collect. The quality of

the coursework shows that students have been well grounded in fieldwork methods, particularly gathering and analysing data to test hypotheses. Students have a satisfactory knowledge of geographical models. Their knowledge and understanding of glacial features and their skill in locating these features on maps is secure. They have a good understanding of the factors contributing to the different shapes of hydrographs because they receive good teaching about rivers. Progress in physical geography is satisfactory in most lessons.

196. Students' attitudes to learning are mainly positive. In a Year 9 lesson when students played a game about cause and effect of rainforest damage they listened well when two students stood up and competed against each other to see how many key words they had learned during the lesson. This was an enjoyable, fun activity, which made a significant contribution to the speaking and listening skills of the whole class. However, in two Year 11 lessons the flow of the lesson was disturbed by a few individuals' unco-operative behaviour; in one lesson the lack of appropriate work was a contributory factor.
197. Overall, the quality of teaching is good. It ranges from satisfactory to very good in all years. All teachers have good knowledge and enthusiasm for the subject. They provide a good atmosphere for learning through interesting teaching and by managing behaviour well in most lessons. Potential misbehaviour is usually nipped in the bud skilfully and without confrontation. Good pace and challenge were apparent in a Year 9 lesson. The teacher challenged students by using geographical terms, but always posed questions which effectively checked their understanding before moving on. The exciting range of activities moved the lesson along very quickly and all students achieved the planned learning outcomes, which had been shared with them at the start of the lesson. Overall students' learn satisfactorily.
198. Even the best teaching missed opportunities to promote students' spiritual and cultural development, for example in a lesson on an indigenous people. Students make at least satisfactory and often good progress in lessons but discussion with them and scrutiny of their work suggests that they make only satisfactory progress over time. Students with special educational needs make satisfactory gains in learning in most lessons. When they could not tackle the work set, often because of their poor literacy skills, their behaviour became challenging and their progress unsatisfactory. This weakness was identified at the last inspection and it has not been addressed. Most lessons start with a review of key words learnt from the previous lesson which makes a significant contribution to the development of students' literacy skills. Opportunities to engage in independent learning are a key strength of the department.
199. Although the head of department was absent during the inspection it is evident that the department is well managed, works well as a team and provides a well-balanced curriculum. There have been a number of improvements since the last inspection, particularly in the way in which work is marked to indicate clearly what students need to do to improve it. The department is at a very early stage of analysing performance data and using that data to inform planning and to raise standards further.

HISTORY

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

Strengths

- Teachers plan lessons well and teach historical skills effectively.
- Teachers have very good subject knowledge.

Areas for improvement

- The subject's contribution to students' understanding of multicultural societies.

200. Standards of work in Year 9 are average. In 2000, 57 per cent of students attained GCSE grades A*-C, which was average. This dropped slightly in 2001 to 53 per cent. However, results have risen since the last inspection. The A*-G pass rate was 100 per cent in 2000 and very close to this in 2001. Teaching is very good overall.
201. Year 9 students can establish links between different causes to explain, for example, the growth of the British Empire. They cross reference historical sources in their investigation of child labour in nineteenth century factories. The majority offer thoughtful comments on how reliable evidence is, for example the possible bias of artists who painted children at work in factories and fields. When studying Haig as a World War One leader, Year 10 students assess the range of contradictory opinions held about him and higher attaining students offer reasons for the different interpretations of his leadership. By Year 11 students understand the variety of causes which underlay 'war fever' in 1914 and they evaluate the significance of World War One in the struggle to achieve the vote for women. Higher attaining Year 11 students can assess the relative importance of causes of these events.
202. Students make sound progress and achieve satisfactory standards in all years. Their positive attitude helps them to keep up with the fast pace of lessons. Teachers effectively blend the development of students' historical understanding with application of historical skills; neither is taught in isolation. In particular, students persevere well to complete tasks set and they respond maturely to opportunities for them to discuss and understand their own learning. Students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress in all years. They are particularly well supported as teachers know the details of their individual education plans and learning support assistants provide helpful guidance in lessons.
203. As part of her own professional development, the head of department is particularly keen to develop students' thinking skills, to find out which teaching styles they find helpful and to share with them ideas about learning – 'what is it and how do we do it'? Such open and constructive debate has benefited teachers and students. Teachers helpfully guide students to reflect on what skills they will need for a particular piece of work, such as extracting and cross-referencing relevant evidence to support an opinion. This worked well in a Year 9 lesson when students considered conflicting opinions about the development of new sources of power in the industrial revolution. Teachers thus encourage students to think about what they do that helps them to learn. This is good practice.

204. Teaching was very good in 75 per cent of the lessons seen (including one where it was excellent). It has a sustained and positive impact upon students' learning as teachers plan lessons very well and choose interesting resources. Well chosen extracts from videos, for example about women's suffrage in Year 11 and Haig in Year 10, provide the basis for thoughtful discussion. Teachers have very good knowledge and understanding of the subject. They use brainstorming techniques to reinforce prior knowledge at the same time as advancing current understanding. Particularly effective use of brainstorming was seen in a Year 9 lesson which explored issues of witness reliability and interpretation. Teachers develop students' literacy skills by making sure that they understand and use historical vocabulary correctly (catalyst and ephemeral for example). The development of numeracy skills is satisfactory. It mainly involves putting events in chronological order and analysing statistics in several GCSE topics. GCSE classes are very well prepared for the examination. They do many practice questions which are marked following the examination criteria.
205. Leadership and management are very good. Teachers use data well to track students' progress and to set realistic GCSE targets. The subject makes a good contribution to students' social and moral development but students' understanding of aspects of multicultural societies is not addressed in enough detail. The department has made satisfactory progress since the last inspection; it has introduced ICT into the schemes of work and uses it in several topics, such as the Cuban missile crisis which is studied for GCSE.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Overall, the quality provision in ICT is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- Good teaching with good relationships and management of behaviour.
- More up-to-date computers in use, and a student/computer ratio which is nearly average.
- Discrete lessons in Year 9 help to develop confidence and good basic skills. The GNVQ course in Years 10 and 11 helps students, including some who might otherwise be disaffected, to take more responsibility for their work.
- Students' skills in exploring and developing information are good.

Areas for improvement

- Opportunities for students to use computers more in some subjects and teachers' expertise to guide them.
- Replacement of old stock and increasing the number of computers.
- Extend regular marking of students' work, particularly for lower attainers who find some of the work too hard.
- Modelling problems and measuring and control need more practice.

206. Standards are average. Since the last inspection teaching, particularly by specialists, the numbers of computers, levels reached in Year 9 and the use of

ICT in other departments have improved. Year 9 students have a weekly ICT lesson as well as extending their competence in other subjects. This provision now meets statutory requirements. Some students in Years 10 and 11 opt to take GNVQ in ICT but, except in business studies, there are still too few planned opportunities for students to use ICT regularly. Year 9 standards are average and reflect satisfactory progress and achievement for girls, boys and those with special educational needs.

207. Teachers assessed Year 9 standards as above average in 2000 and reported even higher levels in 2001. Inspection evidence suggests attainment was slightly overestimated for modelling and for measurement and control, otherwise it was generally accurate. The majority of students gain good basic skills in their Year 9 ICT lessons, and apply these well in English, design and technology and geography but have too few opportunities to do so in mathematics, modern foreign languages, music and art and design. This is mainly because some teachers lack expertise and confidence, and access to computers is not easy. Most students develop and explore information well, but their skills to plan, test and modify sequences of instructions by responding to and controlling events are less secure. Opportunities for data logging in science have been too few, but are increasing.
208. In Year 9 all students search databases with reasonable confidence, and higher attaining students evaluate their searches well and compare layouts critically. In geography, students search interactive websites on the Amazon forest to learn about different farming strategies. In English, students draft murder stories for a newspaper and present their work attractively using a variety of fonts together with photographs downloaded from the Internet. In some PSHE lessons, students use computers to research different careers and students with special educational needs develop their basic skills well using special mathematics and reading programs in the learning centre.
209. By the end of Year 11 students' ICT capability is average overall. Only about a fifth of each year group use computers regularly (in their GNVQ or business studies lessons) although most students use computers at home. Planned opportunities in other lessons are still inconsistent, although they improve as new machinery comes on stream.
210. In GNVQ ICT, present Year 11 students made unsatisfactory progress in Year 10 due to changes in teachers and equipment problems. Although standards are still slightly below average these students are now making good progress and learning well. They work on a variety of tasks involving databases of video shops and desktop produced advertisements, although few analyse their draft work in enough depth. Current Year 10 students have better levels of attainment so their work is at least in line with expectations and the majority achieve well. Students type accurate business letters and advertisements for a computer fair that integrate text and graphics attractively to appeal to the chosen audience. They evaluate their work as they go along rather than merely at the end, and develop good skills of working on their own to strict deadlines.

211. Opportunities to extend competence in other subjects have been inconsistent but are getting better. In business studies students use spreadsheets and databases regularly. In design and technology teachers are starting to use computer-aided design and computer-aided manufacture which they demonstrate well. Religious education teachers book computers twice a term to explore CD-Roms, and occasionally students draw graphs from data in science and mathematics (good practice was seen using spreadsheet modelling for quadratic graphs). Numeracy is quite well developed in spreadsheet work in ICT lessons but there is scope for teachers to incorporate more advanced graphs and statistics in mathematics and science and use spreadsheets more often to model problems. Several English teachers use ICT regularly to develop literacy and drafting skills. During the inspection, little use of ICT was seen in art and design, history, mathematics, science and modern foreign languages. There is still no evidence that subject teachers report ICT progress to parents by the end of Year 11. Most students use their home computers well for wordprocessing and to research websites for homework tasks in several subjects. Overall ICT competence is satisfactory for the majority of students by the end of Year 11.
212. Teaching is good overall because teachers are very well qualified, experienced, and relate well to students, helping them to be positive about learning. Teachers manage some students with behaviour problems very well. Teaching was good or better in two-thirds of lessons seen in all years; it was less effective in Year 9 because classes are large, they sometimes take place in an unsuitable room where students cannot be seen easily and tasks do not always match their individual needs. Teachers plan lessons well and set clear objectives, which they share enthusiastically with students. Lessons begin promptly with reviews of previous work. This helps students make good progress because they are reminded of key concepts and techniques. Teachers explain topics clearly so all students know exactly what they are doing.
213. Teachers guide students effectively through sometimes difficult routines in small steps. For example in Year 9, where database queries are learnt, students work through progressively harder examples. Lower attaining students, including several with special educational needs, sometimes find database queries too difficult, and their progress is not checked often enough. Higher attaining students are stretched by suitable extension tasks that develop their analytical skills. In the best lessons, teachers show high expectations by encouraging students to be creative, for example exploring their own designs through PowerPoint presentations to other students. All students, including those with special educational needs (who are not supported by learning assistants), use equipment safely and responsibly and are very keen. In lessons seen, GNVQ students in all years, including students in Year 11 who would otherwise be disaffected, developed good skills of working on their own and taking responsibility for improving the standard of their work.
214. In specific ICT lessons, teachers set homework from time to time in order to extend research out of the classroom. However, marking is not frequent enough to help the progress of individuals who find learning difficult, and who require more short-term targets to experience success. Teachers mark completed GNVQ

study units thoroughly. This clearly shows students how they can obtain better grades.

215. The ICT department is very well managed by an experienced teacher, supported by a good systems manager. Machine faults are dealt with quickly. Accommodation, though satisfactory, is spread throughout the school and is of variable quality. The fixed layout in one unsatisfactory room does not easily allow teacher supervision or group work to develop students' teamwork and communication skills. Ventilation problems give rise to possible health and safety problems. The location of computers makes it difficult for some subjects such as physical education, art and design and history to use computers during lessons. There are a few computers for students' use in the library and careers room. Students use a good selection of software and have well-regulated Internet access during lunchtimes. The school has an attractive website. A-level computer studies students help younger students in some lessons as part of their community service. Overall improvement since the last inspection has been good, and the ICT department is well placed to support further development in the school. Further equipment upgrades are planned.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Overall, the quality of provision in modern foreign languages is **satisfactory**

Strengths

- Teaching and particularly the pace of lessons.
- Management of the department: policies, schemes of work and monitoring processes.

Areas for improvement

- Teachers speak too much English in lessons so students' speaking is unsatisfactory.
- Too little use of reading and writing materials which match individual students' levels.
- Accommodation: two very small classrooms and one which is far away from the rest.

216. Standards at the end of Year 9 were assessed by teachers as high in 2000 and inspection evidence suggests that these levels were overestimated. Nevertheless, over the last four years the number of students attaining average levels has increased steadily and the number attaining higher levels has increased significantly. In French and Spanish the percentage of GCSE grades A*-C was below average in 2000; in German it was low. The percentage of grades A*-G was above average in French and about average in German and Spanish. Compared with their results in other subjects students did less well in Spanish and much less well in French and German, although attainment in these languages has risen steadily since the last inspection. In the past only higher attainers studied Spanish as a second modern foreign language. Now students can choose their first language, which partly explains why standards in Spanish have fallen. In all languages students improve over time but girls' standards continue to exceed boys', by more than the national average.

217. Improvements are beginning to be seen in the classroom. French standards observed and work seen were average in all years; achievement and progress are sound. Standards in Spanish and German are below average in Year 9 because students are in their first year of studying these languages and early progress is very good. This is an improvement on the reported levels of low attainment during the last inspection. French and German standards observed and work seen in Years 10 and 11 are average, which also represents an improvement from the last inspection. Achievement continues to be satisfactory.
218. In all years students have good listening and reading skills and are able to understand French, German or Spanish in context. However too often, teachers encourage them to explain their understanding in English and, over time, this results in speaking standards which fall well short of expectations, particularly in French. Writing is good in top sets, where students write good paragraphs of often accurate French, German or Spanish. In Year 11, there is good evidence of re-drafting longer passages for examination coursework. Standards in other sets fall well short of this level and writing rarely exceeds short sentences. Work is insufficiently matched to students' attainment so a greater range of tasks is needed. Support for students with special educational needs is confined to lowest sets, although a number of students with identified needs appear in other classes.
219. Teaching is good. It has improved since the last inspection, when it was satisfactory. Ninety per cent of teaching is good or better, including almost 20 per cent which was very good. Teaching is based on clear planning and sharing objectives with students. In most cases, these are reviewed at the end of the lesson. In effective lessons there is a variety of activities, good management of students and opportunities to practise the language in pairs or groups. Good strategies for teaching grammar were seen in a Year 9 German lesson. The teacher identified gender by colour and cases were presented through repeated practice so that students successfully identified words in combination.
220. However, the good challenge created by the use of the target language is frequently lost as teachers and students too often lapse into English. Available materials for reading and writing, matched to students' attainment, are under-used, resulting in underachievement for lower attaining students. As a result of good teaching, students' learning is satisfactory in Year 9. Students make more immediate progress in Spanish and German, which are new languages to them. Progress in French is slower because students have a lack of enthusiasm and some bring poor attitudes and behaviour to lessons; possibly because they have studied French in the middle schools. However, this is well-managed by teachers but a negative attitude from a significant number of students slows progress for all: 'Why do we have to say in it French? Why can't everybody speak English?'
221. In lessons observed, learning was good in GCSE classes, again because of good teaching. Progress continues to be good in Spanish and German and in the top sets in French. Even in these groups, students' speaking skills are inadequate and their readiness to resort to English is affecting standards. This reluctance to speak was evident at the last inspection. Their listening and reading are strengths.

222. After a period of change and uncertainty staffing is almost satisfactory, although one member of the department was away during the inspection. The department lacks a male role model to help improve boys' attainment and there are no foreign language assistants. The level of books and equipment is good and has improved significantly since the last inspection. The department now has good quality modern courses, and is moving towards its goal of a book per student in languages studied. Accommodation is unsatisfactory. Two classrooms are very small and one is two floors away. In order to match the size of classes to rooms teachers move around regularly, often carrying large items of equipment.
223. It is good that three languages are taught throughout the school. Assessment processes are a strong feature and the information generated is used quite well to plan developments in the curriculum. Marking is not consistent, it neither relates to National Curriculum levels nor does it always help students to improve. Reports to parents are imprecise about attainment – they do not refer to National Curriculum levels.
224. The leadership of the department is very good and it explains the many improvements seen since the last inspection. The new head of department has put in place better schemes of work, now including appropriate tasks, and a range of policies and monitoring procedures. She is aware of the need to make more use of materials appropriate to students' abilities and to raise speaking standards by reducing the use of English by both teachers and students.

MUSIC

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

Strengths

- The effective integration of ICT in the vast majority of lessons in all years.
- The teachers' breadth of musical experience and expertise.

Areas for improvement

- The absence of links between the schemes of work and assessment procedures.
- The second music room, which is too small and too few resources for practical work in two classes at the same time.

225. Students come to the school with a wide range of attainment. By the end of Year 9, boys and girls both attain average standards. They make sound progress, which is an improvement since the last inspection. Students enjoy their music lessons. The percentage of students attaining GCSE grades A*- C was below average in 2000 but it improved significantly in 2001 (88 per cent grades A*- C). GCSE students also make sound progress but they do not attain as well as they do in their other subjects.
226. The standard of teaching is satisfactory overall, teachers have good subject knowledge and manage their classes well. Relevant homework is set, work is marked regularly and tests are given at the end of every unit. As a result students know what progress they are making. GCSE students have a solid grounding in

the subject and are clear about what they are meant to be doing. Present standards and achievement are average. They are used to working with notation and chords and are able to discuss their choice of instruments and style for compositions. Recordings of recent GCSE work confirm that some students are good performers. Group tutorials help students to make sustained efforts to refine their work.

227. In Year 9 the standard of teaching was satisfactory and good in equal proportions. Year 9 students show relative strength as composers. Recordings of their work show that students handle sounds sensitively. Year 9 and GCSE students benefit from being tutored in small groups in separate rooms where they can refine their compositions, for example in a Blues style, at their own pace. Students use the two computers regularly; this is particularly effective when they are writing in a particular style, such as dance music for advertisements. Although students receive lots of encouragement they are not regularly told in detail how they could develop their strengths and remove weaknesses. Thus their learning and progress is no more than satisfactory overall. Where teaching is well paced and energetic students make good progress, as seen in a lesson where they discussed a wide range of reasons why songs are written. Students play the keyboard sensibly and quite well but their singing is only average. Teachers give high quality practical demonstrations and students enjoy these. Students with special educational needs make the same amount of progress as others.
228. Satisfactory behaviour is due to firm and gentle discipline. Lessons are good humoured and voices are rarely raised. Teachers and students enjoy good relationships and there is a high degree of mutual respect. The department makes a very good contribution to the social and cultural life of the school. In a Year 9 lesson students learned to appreciate the religious and cultural importance of many songs in a well-focused discussion. Seven per cent of students learn to play instruments at school; they can choose from a full range of orchestral instruments as well as voice, keyboard and guitar. There are three shows a year and regular concerts and performances by visiting musicians. A high standard of performance was seen in rehearsal and heard in recordings. Performances are well attended.
229. The department is led by an able musician who provides a strong role model as a performer and a composer. Formal links between schemes of work and assessment have yet to be established. One classroom is too small for practical work and there are too few instruments for more than one class at a time to use them. On several occasions two classes are taught together and this creates difficulties
230. The head of department has made extensive improvements both to standards and administration since the last inspection. These include better GCSE results recently, better management of students and students' attitudes, the progress of Year 9 students and their good standards of composition. Schemes of work and assessment procedures have been put in place for all courses and teaching is now monitored. Valuable links with the middle schools have been set up; the head of department spends one day a

week working with younger students and this is helping to raise standards before students arrive at Sandy Upper.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- Teaching is good overall so students make good progress.
- Attainment in Years 10 and 11 is above expectations.
- The number and variety of extra-curricular activities is very good.
- The leadership and management of the department are very good.
- Students' attitudes are very good in Year 9.

Areas for improvement

- Teaching: inconsistencies between the nine specialists and more than one teacher for some groups.
- Schemes of work in relation to National Curriculum content, assessment, ICT, literacy and numeracy.
- The monitoring of GCSE files.

231. Below average attainment on entry is the result of students' lack of experience of some areas of the National Curriculum before joining the school, for example in analysing performance and understanding elements of fitness. Students make good progress in all years so their achievement is good overall. At the end of Year 9, students attain levels that are in line with expectations. With very little experience in hockey at this early stage of the year, Year 9 girls lack consistency in their basic dribbling and passing skills. Boys lack knowledge of health and fitness and are not confident when asked to give feedback to a partner, in trampolining for example. Their co-ordination and agility is good but their skill level is low because this is a new activity for most of them. By observing boys and girls in Year 10, close to the beginning of the school year, it is clear that they are mostly fit and energetic and understand the reasons for warming up and stretching. These observations confirm the good progress made in Year 9 as it raises their attainment in readiness for Year 10.
232. The percentage of students who gained GCSE A*-C grades in 2000 was average and all gained grades A*-G – above average. Girls' results (44 per cent grades A*-C) were better than boys'. In 2001, boys' and girls' results fell, although in both years their results were slightly better than those attained in their other subjects. Whilst most students did well in the practical activities, their marks in theory papers were below average. Girls in Years 10 and 11 have good performance skills in netball and are able to dodge with speed and agility. In badminton, boys have sound basic skills and are beginning to understand positional and tactical strategies.
233. GCSE students' knowledge and use of technical language is limited, for example when describing defensive and attacking shots. Students' analytical and evaluative skills are not well developed and teachers do not promote this strand of the National Curriculum enough. Although written work is mostly well presented the low-level literacy skills of a few students hinder their overall

attainment. Teachers do not monitor students' files regularly to check that work is complete and clear for revision. Teaching methods and the quality of learning are limited by the lack of a dedicated base for teaching the theoretical aspects of GCSE.

234. Students in Years 10 and 11 in core physical education attain standards above those expected nationally. In aerobics the majority of girls work energetically with very good co-ordination and rhythm and understand the importance of a well-balanced exercise programme. Boys play basketball with speed and skill and are able to organise their own teams. Their play is energetic and competitive.
235. A few individual students and many teams achieve high standards in district and county competitions in athletics, football, basketball, rugby, netball and hockey. The attainment of these students is well above average and they benefit considerably from the many opportunities offered by the hard work and dedication of their teachers. Good links have been established with a variety of sporting organisations. The partnership with the local hockey club who use the Astroturf has successfully promoted this activity and teachers have strong links with several other junior county teams. Students enjoy the very good extra-curricular provision and are keen, interested and participate regularly. They appreciate the reward system of colours and the sports presentation evening which is always well attended by parents and students.
236. The quality of teaching observed during the inspection was good overall. Over one third was very good or excellent. The nine teachers are all specialists, but five of them have responsibilities in other areas of the school. This accounts for the range and inconsistency of the teaching. A few classes are taught by two teachers. This hinders continuity (girls' hockey in Year 9) and/or progression (boys' basketball in Year 10). In the best lessons students learn well because a wide variety of challenging tasks are set and very good relationships have been established. In less successful lessons learning is satisfactory, but teachers focus on students' performance skills and managing the activity rather than promoting and guiding students' planning and evaluative skills. There is a lack of detail in the schemes of work. In a few lessons this results in students being given too few independent tasks, for example to help and encourage them to take responsibility for warming up and stretching out.
237. The department does not focus on literacy, numeracy or ICT skills enough and teachers do not appreciate their value as a foundation for those students in Years 9 who later progress to the GCSE course. The use of additional sources of reference in the form of prompt sheets or work cards would help. Objectives are shared with students at the start of each lesson and good summaries at the end mean that learning is well focused. Most teachers have good knowledge of the subject and are able to give high quality demonstrations of techniques. This gives students a good visual image of the activity and shows them clearly how to improve their skills.
238. The head of department provides clear educational direction and very good leadership for the subject. He leads by very good example with his teaching and supports the newest members of staff well. However, better links between the

schemes of work, assessment and curriculum initiatives would ensure students fully understand their level of success. The link governor for this subject is in close touch with the head of department and keenly interested in its work.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Overall, the provision in religious education is **unsatisfactory**.

Strengths

- Teaching is very good, particularly in setting clear objectives.
- Teachers are enthusiastic and the subject is becoming more popular with students.

Areas for development;

- The amount of time for the subject, which is too little for statutory requirements to be met.

239. The scheme of work for Year 9 covers the topics that are required to be taught in the agreed syllabus. In Years 10 and 11 all students follow an examination syllabus which also reflects these requirements. With only one lesson a fortnight in Year 9 and too little time in Years 10 and 11, the content of the agreed syllabus cannot be taught in enough depth and detail so, in all years, statutory requirements are not met. This situation has not changed since the last inspection. The amount of time is less than half that recommended in the agreed syllabus. Forty five per cent of the 120 students who chose to take the GCSE short course in 2001, the first time, attained grades A* to C. Standards over time, particularly in written work, are below those required by the agreed syllabus. In all years, they are not high enough.

240. In the individual lessons students learn well because teaching is very good. Lessons are well planned and presented with clarity and confidence, so students' learning is purposeful and has clear direction. The content of lessons has a strong religious focus. A fast pace and high expectations, as well the teachers' good subject knowledge, also add to the very positive experience students have. However, students starting the GCSE course in Year 10 have little knowledge and understanding to build on from Year 9. The limited amount of work in books, in both Years 10 and 11, means that it is difficult to be sure what the students know and understand.

241. Since the beginning of term very little ground has been covered in Year 9, with very little to show that students' learning about Christianity and other world religions has developed in any significant way. The schemes of work comprehensively cover the two main learning objectives of the agreed syllabus: learning about how religions function and present themselves, and how present day society and individuals might put into practice some of the principles and insights of world religions. In this respect what students study in the fortnightly lessons is clear and purposeful. They are encouraged to appreciate that knowledge and understanding of world religions is much more than the mere acquisition of facts and figures. Teachers expect a lot from students in lessons and make the most of the time available. However, there is very little to indicate

that students have made much progress in seeing the possible relevance of this subject to their own lives and experiences.

242. Students' progress in individual lessons is satisfactory in all years. Over time, with only one lesson a fortnight, they do not achieve enough as they cover too little ground. Teachers work hard to improve students' attainment levels. They usually state the objectives of the lessons clearly, though occasionally they could emphasise them even more. The rigour and business-like manner of lessons clearly help students to focus their attention and to work hard. Overall there is a very positive and pleasant atmosphere in lessons and this makes for good learning and achievement. Students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress, as some work is adapted so they can progress at the right level. More extension work would benefit the higher attainers.
243. About eight students have chosen to take the full GCSE course in the same amount of time as the short course. Most students concentrate very well and are interested. On rare occasions the teacher is not decisive enough so the students' usually good behaviour lapses. Students do respect each other's ideas and viewpoints and they are willing to express their opinions on a range of religious issues. They could be encouraged to do this more. Students' social skills could be further developed with more collaborative work in the classroom.
244. Overall teaching is very good. A particularly effective feature is that teachers make the lessons relevant to the events that are happening in the outside world. This makes students feel that their learning is worthwhile, although they are not in the habit of contributing their personal responses to the issues that they are studying. Although homework is set to match students' different needs, one or two of the smaller tasks, particularly in Year 10, are a bit too simple to be of any real value. More work in the form of extended writing or research would be good for higher attainers and those who finish their work quickly. An assessment and recording policy tells students about their progress and helps them to improve their learning.
245. A newly appointed specialist teacher manages the department. About half his timetable is allocated to science teaching, which is not good use of his religious education expertise. The teachers use ICT most effectively to prepare lesson materials and some students use it too. The department improves students' literacy by introducing and explaining new words and phrases well and by having them displayed around the room. With only one lesson a fortnight, the department's potentially valuable contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and to the life of the school is limited.

BUSINESS STUDIES

246. In 2000, 67 per cent of students attained grades A*-C – above average. Standards have risen steadily since the last inspection although the percentage of students (56 per cent) who attained grades A*-C was lower in 2001. These results reflect the stability and experience of the teachers and the relevance of the syllabus and its practical approach to students' needs. Girls attain higher

grades, and more boys study this subject, but both achieve well, often better than predicted – particularly compared to the other subjects they take at GCSE.

247. Students enjoy their lessons and make good progress. Overall standards are above average. Students consolidate their understanding of theory by practical assignments and surveys taken out of school. These help them to add depth to their descriptions of businesses. In all lessons seen during the inspection, students behave sensibly as they understand clearly what they have to do. They enjoy their work, are interested and attentive and persevere with demanding topics. They work well independently whether writing or using computers to plan and evaluate their coursework assignments.
248. In Year 10 lessons seen, students used ICT effectively to create partnership deeds for their own company. The majority of students, including those with special educational needs, have a good understanding of how limited liability applies to companies. By working in pairs and small groups, students develop good key skills in communication and teamwork. Year 11 students produced databases for a video business, and carried out database searches to help construct relevant marketing strategies. Students' examination coursework assignments are well presented, particularly by girls. By the end of Year 11 most students develop good numeracy skills by analysing case study data on local businesses. They produce spreadsheets showing cash flow and clear break-even charts and evaluate data in detail. This reflects their clear understanding of business concepts and their competence relating them to practical business situations.
249. Teaching is good in both years as learning of basic concepts is well supported by very clear help sheets. Teachers develop students' key skills well, although no examples of group oral presentations were seen during the inspection. Students are encouraged to develop their computer skills each week through a variety of software packages, including databases and spreadsheets. Teachers make sure that tasks are generally well matched to students' different levels. A few students who might, or have, become disaffected with school life, find the course interesting and they make good progress and learn well. Occasionally they take a text processing examination rather than GCSE.
250. Students do not spend much time copying from textbooks but quickly apply concepts in practical tasks – this is good practice. They learn at a good pace because teachers explain concepts well and make sure they all understand what they are doing. Teachers' well-focused questions help students to develop critical understanding of business concepts. Teachers use very good, topical subject knowledge to plan case study activities, and give students checklists so they know what tasks to complete. Students regularly evaluate their progress against targets they discuss with teachers. Students' note taking and bibliographies sometimes lack depth, and most depend on teachers to provide books and other materials. Students often incorporate material from work experience in their course work.
251. Success in GCSE coursework research means students can progress easily to A-level or AVCE courses. The business studies department is very ably led; the

team monitors courses regularly to improve techniques and results, writes good schemes of work and relevant development plans. Links with local business and the community are good, but the Internet is not used enough for research in lessons.

VOCATIONAL COURSES

252. These vocational courses provide a valuable addition to the work-related curriculum. They were introduced in 2000, so the first groups will complete the courses in 2002. The majority of students plan to attain the foundation level but some hope to work towards the intermediate level.

GNVQ Leisure and Tourism

253. Students respond well to the content of this syllabus and the way it is taught suits them. Teaching is good. The pass rate in previous years, when the course was taken by Year 12 students, reflects good standards. Present indications are that students in both years will attain pass standards in line with course requirements. A few students, with continued commitment to the course, will gain higher accreditation. Students demonstrate confidence using the Internet for research. They work and learn independently and develop sensible enquiry skills so they make good progress. The department's planning and organisation is very good. Teaching was good in one lesson observed and very good in the other. It is not over prescriptive and its content, varied style of delivery and interesting range of materials provide good opportunities for independent learning, role-play was used effectively in one lesson for example.

254. Resources outside the classroom are used very well. Students in Year 10 had just returned from a trip to a leisure park and the lesson observed involved them in planning surveys directly related to their visit. The work experience programme is used effectively in conjunction with the curriculum units. There is a good rapport between teachers and students and many students say it is their favourite subject.

GNVQ Health and Social Care

255. The Year 10 and Year 11 lessons seen during the inspection were both taught by substitute teachers, at very short notice. This illustrates that the school has had a major problem staffing the subject. Students are clearly disenchanted and confused by the number of teachers who have taught them. Year 10 girls showed this in their poor behaviour. In this lesson the majority of them lacked motivation and disrupted learning. They achieved very little because they did not concentrate or listen properly. They have produced very little work in their files from the start of term. It was not possible to locate Year 11 students' completed units of work. Overall the provision for health and social care is unsatisfactory. From January 2002 the staffing situation will be resolved.

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

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

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2001. Where subjects are listed twice the second entry was taken following the new AS-level syllabus.

National data for 2001 was not available during the inspection.

GCE AS-level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Year 13							
Communication studies	2	100		0		5	
Computing	2	100		0		5	
English	3	100		0		4.7	
French	1	100		0		4	
Geography	1	100		100		8	
Mathematics	6	33		0		1	
Physical education	1	0		0		0	
Psychology	2	0		0		0	
Psychology	1	0		0		0	

Spanish	1	100		0		2	
Spanish	1	100		0		6	
Year 12							
Art	13	62		15		1.5	
Biology	13	100		46		3.2	
Business studies	7	100		43		3.4	
Communication studies	11	100		73		4.1	
Computing	10	90		10		2.2	
Design and communications	12	92		0		1.3	
Drama	13	100		54		3.2	
English	20	100		50		3.4	
French	4	100		25		3.3	
Geography	7	100		0		2.3	
German	2	100		50		3	
History	12	100		75		3.9	
Mathematics	7	86		29		2.7	
Music	1	100		0		3	
Physical education	18	66		0		0.9	
Physics	5	60		20		2	
Psychology	14	79		0		1.2	
Spanish	5	100		0		1.8	

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
Art	12	100		17		4.83	
Biology	16	94		25		5.13	
Business (AVCE)	16	75		0		2.37	
Business studies	4	100		25		11.5	
Chemistry	17	100		59		6.71	
Communication studies	3	33		0		1.33	
Computing	9	100		33		5.56	
Design and communications	8	100		25		6.5	
Design and technology	8	100		38		7	
Drama	7	100		71		7.1	
Economics	6	66		0		2.33	
English	18	100		22		5.22	
French	3	66		33		4.00	
General studies	50	88		28		4.88	
Geography	12	92		58		7	
History	12	100		33		5.67	

Mathematics	11	82		55		3.89	
Music	7	100		29		4.0	
Physical education	13	69		15		7.00	
Physics	7	100		57		7.43	
Spanish	2	100		50		7	

Intermediate vocational qualifications

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		Average point distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	1	100		100			
Business	7	100		14.2			
Health and social care	5	100		20			
Leisure and tourism	11	100		27.2			
Diploma of childhood studies	5	100		N/A		N/A	

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

The focus was on mathematics and biology, but chemistry and physics were also sampled.

256. **Chemistry and physics:** the best results have been in chemistry. In 2000 all four students, and in 2001, 13 out of 17 students attained grade C and above. In 2000 physics results were below average but those in 2001 were better – in a small group three students attained grade A. More students have chosen to study science subjects in Year 12 but there is still a need to promote them, especially physics. Teaching is very good in physics and chemistry. A strong feature of chemistry lessons is the teacher's exceptionally wide subject knowledge which is used most effectively. In a chemistry practical analysing rates of reaction, the teacher, perceptive of students' capabilities, challenged them differently and individually. All made very good progress building on their knowledge and conceptual understanding of kinetics. Similarly, a Year 12 group noticeably improved their practical techniques through titration, because the teacher demonstrated them so skilfully, making links between practical work and calculations explicit. Shortage of equipment did not dampen Year 12 students' enthusiasm to get to grips with learning how to calculate Young's Modulus. They successfully used a vernier and micrometer and constantly quizzed their teacher about the topic; they made very good progress throughout a carefully planned lesson. In a skilfully managed and cheerful atmosphere, Year 13 physics students pursued various tasks with exemplary commitment to learning. The teacher competently guided the revision of mechanics for one student, and challenged others to evaluate evidence and procedures correctly.

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

Strengths

- Mastery of the subject and skilful management of practical work so students build on their knowledge and conceptual understanding.
- Teachers share their specialist knowledge, resources and teaching methods.
- Very good relationships - students share ideas freely and support each other.

Areas for improvement

- Standards in both years.
- Teaching methods: a more lively approach would foster stronger interaction with students and involve them more.
- Students' skills of analysis, evaluation, argument and essay writing.
- Early use of assessment data to analyse performance for predicted grades, to set sharply focused targets and learning objectives and to guide teaching methods.

257. A-level examination results in 2000 were well below average. Only six students took the examination and one gained grade A. Results improved in 2001 when three times as many students took the examination; the pass rate is likely to be average although the percentage of grades A/B is likely to be below. In relation to their GCSE results not all achieved as expected but a few with modest GCSE results did better than expected.

258. Year 13 assessments so far show that, in terms of predictions based on their GCSE results, eight students are in line and four are below. Analysis of work, however, highlighted important weaknesses in problem solving, quality of analysis and use of data. Current standards, overall, are below average. In one lesson, the teacher's competent knowledge of biochemistry meant a review about respiration was finely structured, so the majority of students consolidated previous ideas. They were competently led through the mechanism of glycolysis and reminded about phosphorylation. Certain students used their knowledge from similar work in A-level chemistry and physical education well. A significant minority had problems understanding the underlying principles of glycolysis because there were no resources to help them visualise the ideas. They struggled to follow the sequence of events that take place within a cell. In another lesson a wide variety of good specimens, illustrating vegetative features of plants, significantly helped students to recognise the various different structures. The teacher ably drew on wide knowledge of the topic derived from experiences as an apple grower. Students were pleased to listen to the explanations, look at the examples and complete the tasks by using information they had already been given. There is scope for students to discover more facts for themselves. Skilled questioning should guide their observations, which need to become increasingly sophisticated.
259. Overall, Year 12 students are progressing well. A significant number are successfully moving on from their GCSE work into new areas. They quickly deepened their knowledge of cell structure as they delved into micro-structural organelles. Much was achieved in a lesson when students grappled with calibrating a microscope eyepiece graticule using a stage micrometer. The teacher's explanation about the calculations was confident and the group was strongly motivated and good-humoured. Students attained well above average GCSE grades overall and good grades in mathematics. Most therefore tackle calculations confidently although a few find them difficult. Essays do not yet show the same quality as seen in class; they lack structure and sustained argument to penetrate the subject matter.
260. In both years teaching was good overall. Teaching, and students' learning, was very good in a briskly paced lesson which enthused the students. Students support and help each other effectively – a grade A mathematics student generously and competently explained the ramifications of calibration to a less confident student. Marking is usually encouraging and helpful. Occasionally the generosity of comments does not clearly match the mark given, so messages to students are clouded. Analysis of work shows that occasionally students neither take note of the teachers' comments nor respond about their understanding or misconceptions. Students' interrogation of data is weak. The quality of their analysis of results into the rate of photosynthesis, for example, is below average; their explanations are far too simple. They do not make clear the relationship between the biochemical processes of photosynthesis, oxygen production and light intensity. They find it difficult to apply scientific laws in support of hypotheses. Students do not discuss and debate ideas enough. Lessons are not planned imaginatively and they are rarely lively, so it is not surprising that students are not involved enough.

261. Monitoring of teaching and learning through classroom observations and scrutiny of students' work does not take place. The head of department is keen to develop more management expertise. Teachers share their specialist knowledge, resources and teaching methods and support each other well. The subject is benefiting substantially from the analysis of performance data from Year 9 undertaken by the science department. Target-setting, derived from this analysis and on current tests, is not yet established so students are not yet crystal clear about what they have to do next to improve.

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

Strengths

- Improving achievement. Above average standards.
- Confident and effective teaching.
- Very good relationships and students' positive attitudes to learning.
- Good use of assessment data to monitor progress and set targets.

Areas for improvement

- Extend the range of teaching styles so students participate more in lessons.
- Improve resources to support independent learning.
- Provide appropriate ICT in the classroom to support teaching

262. The percentage of A-level grades A/B was above average in 2000 and similar in 2001. The percentage of students gaining pass grades has been above average for the past four years but it fell in 2001. Performance in the AS-level examinations has improved. It was average in 2000 and better in 2001 in terms of both the percentage of A/B and pass grades. Entry to the AS-level courses requires a GCSE grade A* to C. The evidence from work seen in lessons and from Year 12 files reflects a broad range of attainment at the start of the course.

263. In a mechanics lesson students showed a good understanding of the principals of motion with constant acceleration but had difficulty solving the problem with a quadratic equation. In statistics there was a good understanding of probability, particularly with Venn diagrams and compound probability but some students still needed continual reassurance in their example work. Overall the evidence is of good progress in pure mathematics, applied mathematics and statistics over the year.

264. By Year 13, students' algebraic skills and analysis are well developed with confident work seen in differentiation and integration. Work with the exponential and logarithmic functions confirms a sound knowledge of underlying concepts. Students apply their knowledge across the curriculum to calculate the equation for the area of a circle, the equation of a tangent and the centre of gravity of complex areas. In further mathematics, some interesting work in mechanics

looking at the motion of a particle on an elastic string showed students applying Hooke's Law and the theory of motion with non-constant acceleration. All the work seen was consistent with the above average results at A-level, but students' confidence in discussion was less than expected given the quality of their work.

265. Although all but one member of the mathematics staff are new to the department this year most are not new to A-level teaching. All the teaching seen was good or better. Lessons are well planned with clear objectives that are shared with students. In the best lessons teachers give clear explanations, work through well-chosen examples and check students' understanding with appropriately challenging questions. Teachers establish good relationships with their students, are enthusiastic about their subject and have high expectations.
266. In a Year 12 pure mathematics lesson, clear work on the factorisation of a general quadratic expression was followed up by good example work reinforcing technique and understanding. In some classes a lack of variety limits students' contributions to lessons and they become too dependent on the teacher for support. In a Year 13 class, work with the exponential function was appropriately challenging but students' involvement was limited, with the balance between support and challenge being too much towards support. Individual support by teachers is very effective in meeting the needs of students across a wide attainment range, but there are few additional resources in the department to support independent study.
267. Courses are well planned and effectively managed. There are detailed schemes of work with clear objectives and assessment strategies that are shared with students. Students' progress is regularly assessed and monitored and this information is routinely used to set targets. Teachers monitor attendance and punctuality carefully and work is marked regularly and returned promptly. Teachers are aware of students' skills in ICT and will suggest work that might be undertaken to reinforce understanding but there are no computers that can be used in lessons.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

Design and technology was sampled.

268. **Design and technology:** At least ten students follow design courses each year (22 in 2000). In recent years A-level results have been above average both for pass grades and grades A/B. In 2001 the percentage of A/B grades was lower in design and communications but the average points score was high in product design. Students do well in comparison with their other subjects. At AS-level in 2001, 92 per cent passed but none with grades A/B. Two lessons were observed during the inspection. Teaching was very good in a Year 12 systems and control technology lesson, as the teacher encouraged the students to work closely together. They applied their knowledge and technical skills well to solve some challenging problems in the design of pneumatic systems. Students demonstrated an impressive ability to draw on their GCSE knowledge of systems to answer questions. Teaching was good in Year 13 product design lessons. Analysing plastic products, students demonstrated a secure understanding of the production processes but less confident knowledge of the materials themselves.

BUSINESS STUDIES

Economics and business, business (AVCE and GNVQ intermediate) were sampled.

269. **Economics and business, business (AVCE and GNVQ intermediate):** provision is very good for students with a range of courses on offer. Strengths are the very good teaching and learning and the high pass rate overall. Last year's pass rates for the new AS-level and half-stage AVCE examinations were well above predictions and reflect good achievement related to students' GCSE results. They make particularly good use of work placements in GNVQ and AVCE lessons. They use a variety of ICT software packages and numeracy skills competently and well. One GNVQ intermediate student with special educational needs now works very well by himself, and is full of enthusiasm for his work. Accommodation is cramped for larger classes and the computers need to be replaced as they are not linked to the Internet. Teaching is very good: teachers support individuals closely, set targets in each lesson, and help students to develop teamwork and problem-solving skills. Thus learning is rapid. The subject is very well managed and staff work closely together as a committed team, well focused on securing improvement.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- Improved A-level results (likely to be above average in 2001). High standards.
- Teaching is equally very good and excellent. It is very well planned to develop conceptual understanding and practical application of theory in students' coursework.
- Computer equipment has been upgraded since the last inspection and students use it well for in-depth research projects involving a high level of technical expertise.

Areas for improvement

- A few Year 12 students on the AS-level course find the theory complicated. Teachers do not check their understanding enough as they go along.

270. Computer studies, only available at A-level, is open to all students regardless of whether they have taken the GNVQ course in Years 10 and 11. The course consists of theory components and a series of practical projects. In 2001 all students passed and one third attained grades of A/B. The average points score in computer studies was well above the school's average. In 2000, results were

slightly below average for the top grades, but well in line with students' results in other subjects.

271. Results are now much better than they were at the time of the last inspection, with the proportion of grades A/B rising steadily because of improved teaching techniques and more up-to-date equipment. Students are very well motivated and their attendance is good, so they keep up well with coursework. Students attain better than teachers predict according to their overall GCSE performance and, as several A-level students have not followed the GNVQ course in Years 10 and 11, their overall achievement is very high from where they start. Current students in Year 13 had lower GCSE results overall but they are still expected to achieve highly. This has been confirmed by their encouraging AS-level grades last year.
272. The work of students seen in lessons, and in their coursework portfolios, confirms that standards are high, and achievement over time is very good overall. Year 12 AS-level students develop good theoretical knowledge. They can describe iteration and have successfully experimented with loops. They have a good understanding of software back-up procedures in industry. Last year's Year 13 students' A-level coursework projects were very interesting, well presented and based on relevant investigations. The best student created a successful database system for a computer-dating agency. His system design and testing were very comprehensive, as was his user manual. The weakest project (with superficial evaluation), based on the school's own systems, was still of an average standard. Some less successful projects related more to the requirements of the real business user of the system than A-level examination requirements. Examining board reports confirm the high overall standards gained by students with the minimum of help from the teacher. No student reported any difficulty gaining access to the resources they need in school. Their results and extremely positive attitudes are the product of outstanding teaching.
273. Teaching was very good in two lessons and excellent in two lessons seen. The teacher's excellent subject knowledge ensured that the pace of theory lessons was fast, and that explanations of theory were well linked to practical examples. These were effectively illustrated by the teacher's own experience of higher education and industrial research. This enlivened topics that can initially be difficult to conceptualise, and helped maintain the interest of Year 12 students, most of whom had no previous experience of the subject. In introducing the concept of a software life-cycle and the need for rigorous design processes, the teacher tested concepts learnt from previous lessons through well-focused questioning.
274. As students take time to absorb difficult concepts, the quality of learning was not so high as the teaching in most lessons. Nevertheless, when studying data about cruise missile systems, the teacher made sure that students improved their understanding by making them compare their homework answers with his. Thus they developed their skills of critical understanding of data-flow diagram principles in a realistic context.
275. In Year 13 lessons, students learnt rapidly about the differences between process and program as an introduction to work on process management. The teacher

gave excellent theoretical explanations and steered some well-focused discussion. Key concepts such as loader, registers, page table, blocks and device drivers were well explored, so students began to develop a good grasp of the objectives of scheduling, although at this stage their understanding of theory is quite simple. Discussion was stimulated by the teacher's well-chosen personal anecdotes about his own research, but he was careful to keep to his closely-structured lesson aims as well.

276. In discussion, Year 13 students are well aware of their own strengths and weaknesses, as reflected in their previous year's AS-level results, which, though varied, reflect very good achievement from where they started. Their work is monitored regularly, and they have worked steadily to improve weaknesses in evaluation skills. Year 12 students in a large class are less sure of their day-to-day progress because many find the new concepts difficult and do not always have the opportunity to review their individual progress in acquiring knowledge and understanding at the end of a particular lesson.
277. Computer studies is very well led and managed. A well-organised system of recording individual results for each module, comparing current standards with previous attainment, and calculating predicted grades, is very successful for monitoring individual students' progress over time and identifying underachievement. This has led to improved standards over the last three years. The introduction of computer studies as an AS-level subject in 2000 has been popular, although only a small proportion of students continued on to the full A-level in the second year.
278. Several students took the subject as an additional AS-level, rather than with the intention of going on to A-level. Current Year 12 students have little or no previous computer experience because of the limited curriculum opportunities in Years 10 and 11. However, with the very good achievement observed in Years 12 and 13, and considering the above average standards already gained, the department is well placed for further improvements.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

The focus was on physical education, but leisure and tourism GNVQ was sampled.

279. **Leisure and tourism GNVQ:** Students following this course make good progress. Teaching is consistently good and teachers use PowerPoint presentations most effectively to engage and interest the students. They effectively relate the topics studied to their own experience of work, for example when discussing health and safety in the workplace. Students are certainly expected to develop reasoning and enquiry skills, and teachers encourage them to carry out independent research and to organise their portfolios clearly. Almost half way through the first term, a few students have not yet developed sensible working habits; evidence suggests they prefer to rely on their teacher or a book than think for themselves.

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

Strengths

- Students are achieving well in relation to their GCSE results.

- Students' attitudes are very good and they have very good relationships with their teachers.
- The attainment of current students is above average.

Areas for improvement

- Lack of a dedicated base to teach the theoretical aspects of the subject.
- A small proportion of teaching does not promote interactive independent learning.
- The monitoring of students' files and marking of tests and homework is not regular and thorough enough.

280. Results in A-level have varied over the last four years, but have been above the average pass rate between 1998-2000. In 2001, results fell well below this level. However, there was a direct correlation between these students' attainment at GCSE and their final A-level grades. Over time the number of grades A/B has been below average. The 2001 low AS-level average points score was below that predicated by the school. A lack of exemplar material from the board, especially about the content required for personal performance portfolios, hindered the students in this examination.
281. Practical and theory lessons were observed during the inspection, written work was examined and discussions held with students. The standards attained by the majority of present Years 12 and 13 students are above average. In both years about a sixth of students are working at the highest levels of attainment. Students are making good progress based on their performance in GCSE examinations and the present Year 13 students are on line to achieve better than their AS-level results indicate. They perform rotational skills in trampolining to a good standard and are able to recognise and improve upon their weaknesses after seeing video evidence. Students know a great deal about the sports in which they participate, for example cricket, hockey and basketball, but they do not always apply this to their theoretical knowledge. In a lesson on the principles of training, the teacher missed many opportunities to base students' understanding on their own experiences of their specialist sport.
282. Students in Year 12, only a little way into the course, are achieving well. They show good knowledge and understanding of anatomy and physiology. In the historical and contemporary unit, they have a good grasp of the classification of sport. Students are successfully moving on from their GCSE work and showing greater depth of knowledge and understanding. Students in both years work extremely well together co-operating on group tasks, for example when analysing the type and movement of joints.
283. Students are highly positive about physical education, and show a keen interest and enthusiasm for the subject. These attitudes are illustrated in the amount of time they spend in the department helping with clubs and lessons and assisting younger students. This helps their learning and gives them time to understand and apply the theoretical aspects of the subject in the practical situation.
284. The majority of teaching is good but there is a lack of consistency in teaching styles between the two teachers. Three good, one very good and one unsatisfactory lesson were observed during the inspection. In the very good

lesson, the teacher used a wide range of methods which motivated and challenged students. In these interactive lessons students quickly acquired new knowledge and increased their understanding of the theory of physical education. In the unsatisfactory lesson students were given no opportunity for independent research or investigation and were mostly taught by dictated notes. Teaching is spread over different rooms in the school and movement of equipment, books and audio visual aids is difficult and time consuming. This limits how some topics are taught and has a negative effect on students' learning.

285. The head of department makes careful analysis of students' prior performance and this has allowed teachers to focus their teaching on the individual needs of the group. Overall, the marking of students' tests and homework is satisfactory, with appropriately challenging comments. However, students' files are insufficiently monitored to ensure they provide students with a high standard learning resource for the future. More frequent record-keeping, marking and monitoring would provide students with a greater awareness of their progress. Students are encouraged to use ICT skills to research information for homework and then to share it with the group as an introduction to lessons. Students are expected to wordprocess their personal performance portfolio. The department does not have a computer linked to the school's intranet which makes record-keeping difficult. There is a limited range of books and other materials in the library and the head of department in liaison with the librarian aims to develop this further.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

BTEC childhood studies was sampled.

286. **BTEC childhood studies:** this particularly valuable course (introduced three years ago) is followed by about four students each year. Years 12 and 13 are taught together. A mature student in the second year of the course contributes much helpful information and a different perspective from the sixth formers. Two sessions were observed – teaching was very good in both. Students spend three days in school and undertake several relevant work placements. Their confidence and discussion skills are impressive. They use computers to produce well-presented documents (nearly as good as the teachers') and find information efficiently on the Internet. The room where they work is not suitable as it has no water supply. Teachers mainly bring in their own resources. In a lively debate on health and safety at work students sensibly weighed up how well these issues were addressed in the various nurseries, special schools and homes they had worked in. One Year 13 student attained grade C in AS-level history last year and is considering university, and another plans to take a nursing degree. This course gives students excellent preparation for a wide range of health-related studies.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The focus was on art, GNVQ art and design, and drama, but music was also sampled.

287. **Music:** the pass rate and average points score were above average in 2000. All passed in 2001 although the points score declined. One student attained grade C

AS-level in 2001, seven students are following the course now. Teaching was good in the AS-level lesson observed. The teacher has excellent subject knowledge, expectations are high and students are enthusiastic about their work, for example discussing and rehearsing the finer points of early music. The consortium arrangement with Stratton Upper School is effective so students make good progress.

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

Strengths

- Good teaching, which is particularly effective in one-to-one support and discussion.
- Practical work, particularly in two-dimensional studies.
- Attainment by GNVQ students.
- Students' very positive attitudes.

Areas for improvement

- Attainment in AS- and A level examinations
- Integration of critical studies into students' AS- and A-level work

288. With the opportunity to study AS/A-level art in Years 12 and 13 or GNVQ intermediate art and design in Year 12, students' choice is wide. Only small numbers of students follow the GNVQ course, 4 girls this year and one last year (who worked with the AS-level group for some lessons, to benefit from sharing ideas and group work). Such flexibility is a strength of the department. The current opportunity for GNVQ students to contribute designs for a crime prevention calendar (to be published for 2002), which involves outside contributors such as graphic designers, has also been offered to A-level students. They are benefiting greatly from this project.

289. Attainment in recent A-levels has been well below average. No students gained above a D grade in 2000, and several did not pass. 2001 results were better and more in line with expectations. All students passed, the majority with grades C and D. Numbers were small. AS-level students in 2001 showed a very uneven spread, with a minority attaining A/B grades and the majority with low D/E grades or failing to attain a grade at all.

290. Current work in both years shows attainment much more in line with expectations, particularly in two-dimensional work. Most Year 13 students who attained low AS-level grades have dropped the subject and those continuing with A-level are working well, making good progress on painting and drawing work which is often in very large scale. A few who attained low AS-level grades are re-sitting the subject hoping to attain a better grade now that their work has matured. Some of these are also studying for A-level simultaneously. In both years many students still show signs of the weakness noted in Years 9 to 11, that is difficulty

integrating their historical and critical studies into their own work effectively. They need far more opportunity to discuss these links in lessons in order to be able to demonstrate them securely in their work. In other aspects, in the first few weeks of the course, Year 12 AS-level students have made the progress expected from their different starting points.

291. The GNVQ group has made a very good start and their attainment is above expected standards. With increasing confidence they use a wider range of media. Work seen, for example, showed them making copper jewellery in a design and technology workshop, using machines such as drills, saws etc with increasing competence. In a project for a different unit of work, they are experimenting successfully using sewing machines for free stitching to produce cut, appliqué-style effects, with layers of different fabrics. Their design and research work for these projects are also above average.
292. Students prepared good questions about art as a career, which they then posed to visiting graphic design specialists with confidence and assurance. Students' involvement with these graphic designers and other agencies in the local crime prevention calendar project is proving to be extremely useful for their learning, as it integrates very effectively the notions of work in art-based jobs and their own design work for the course. These rich opportunities, including some very creative use of digital cameras and computers to produce distorted images, have helped students to make very good progress in the first weeks of their course.
293. Teachers have a very good understanding of the requirements of GNVQ courses and are well qualified to teach and assess it. Teachers' relationships with all students are very good and are an important factor in the harmonious, happy atmosphere noticeable in lessons. Students often stay in the department when they have free lessons as there are several small rooms where they can work independently. The single, 60-minute lessons are very unhelpful for the development of the necessary depth of study within a lesson. Given the large scale of some of the work A-level students have to set up, the lesson has ended before they can make much progress on their practical studies.
294. Groups are relatively small and so students benefit greatly from the challenging, focused, one-to-one sessions which they have with teachers. Teachers now need to examine why their advice and entreaties for students to integrate historical and critical work into their portfolios is not always fully effective. Assessment is good, often including such entreaty, but students frequently take too little notice of these important aspects. The department does not use available data relating to students' achievement and progress enough, so it cannot challenge them with specific grade goals. Such analysis is developing in the school and the department needs to become more involved in this.

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

Strengths

- A consistent 100 per cent pass rate at A-level.
- Good teaching: lessons are well planned with a wide range of activities in which all students can succeed.
- Students have very good attitudes and respond enthusiastically in discussions and practical work.

- The subject provides good opportunities for students' personal, social and cultural development.

Areas for development

- Too little structured development of drama management and production techniques, so less confident students do not always organise their independent activities efficiently.

295. Teaching is good and work is carefully planned to help all students to succeed. Students themselves enjoy the subject and are very well motivated. More girls than boys follow the course. A-level results in 2000 were average. In recent years the number of students has ranged from seven to twelve and all have passed. The percentage of students gaining grades A/B has varied from year to year. In 2001 it was higher (71 per cent grades A/B) than in previous years. Students did better in drama than in their other subjects. Students have usually taken drama at GCSE and so they have a firm foundation on which to build.
296. Current standards of work are average. The majority of Year 13 students achieve well overall. In the two lessons seen they were preparing presentations, based on fairy stories, to perform to local audiences. Students worked constructively in groups, and despite occasional differences of opinion, they willingly accepted the critical points put forward collectively during impromptu discussions. Most students assumed and sustained their characterisations successfully throughout the sessions. During the effective warm-up activity the teacher's advice on getting into character helped them to react convincingly in their formal introductions. For example, as characters who didn't get on with each other, they made the reasons plain in their dialogue.
297. Drama skills vary considerably. Higher attainers develop characters with ingenuity through different situations. For example, they convincingly portrayed people who had to tell each other about their secrets. They organise themselves well and are beginning to address some of the basic essentials of performance, such as effective scripting, efficient stage management and continuity. Middle attainers have a reasonable idea about how to develop a character and they are beginning to appreciate the responsibilities of production. A few students have difficulty sustaining characterisations and the majority need more structured support in the organisation of group work. Written work is of average standard. Coursework for AS-level contains several examples of good quality research and independent learning with perceptive notes on dramatists' use of language. Most students have a secure knowledge of their set texts and can explain the main themes clearly. A few students produce notes which are too brief and superficial.
298. Students in Year 12 are only a little way into their course but they are achieving well. In the two lessons seen they were exploring the play 'Our Country's Good'. This was to understand the ways in which performers interpret plays and ideas through drama. In the first lesson the students worked in groups and presented tableaux for key points in the play. Their improvisations showed that they had a good understanding of the play's themes. In the most effective presentations all were clearly audible as they gave a comprehensive description of the characters and explained the significance of their chosen tableaux. They paid close attention to the contributory effects of lighting, costumes, facial expressions, gestures and

positioning on stage. Other groups were less assured and missed some obvious points. Nevertheless, thoughtful comments were made on the symbolic power of lighting and staging. In workshops on the treatment the convicts on the voyage to Australia, students planned and organised their contributions well. They successfully created a sinister atmosphere by skilful use of movement, sounds and props. Although the teacher only played an advisory role in the lesson, this activity owed much of its success to good preparation in previous lessons.

299. Teaching, all by the head of drama, is consistently good. Students respond enthusiastically to her commitment to high standards and very good command of the subject. Her brisk and lively approach challenges students to think things out carefully and to give of their best. For example, activities in the Year 12 lesson on 'Our Country's Good' were well planned to develop the students' listening and speaking by collaborative work. The lesson moved forward purposefully. Students worked very productively and achieved well because the teacher had given them a clear understanding of what was required for different levels of attainment. The teacher used the final summary well, consolidating the key interpretation points; students were well prepared for their assessed task.
300. Students benefit greatly from working in well-appointed, purpose-built accommodation in which groups can rehearse in adjoining areas. The subject makes a good contribution to students' personal, social and cultural development as many sixth-form students are involved in extra-curricular drama activities such as school productions and workshops.

HUMANITIES

The focus was on geography and history, but psychology and religious education were also sampled.

301. **Psychology:** in 2000 six students attained above average AS-level results. A slightly lower points score was attained in 2001 - 11 out of 14 students passed but only one attained grade C. There have been significant changes in the teaching staff recently. One lesson was observed - students' attainment is high, particularly evident in the quality of their contribution to discussions. They are most attentive and participate actively. This is a popular course, chosen by 20 students (most are in Year 12). Teaching is very good, particularly in pace and expectations.
302. **Religious education:** one six-week part of the general studies course is about ethics. Apart from this no religious education is provided so the statutory requirements of the agreed syllabus are not met.

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

Strengths

- The percentage of higher A-level grades improved significantly in 2001.
- Students have a good grasp of geographical concepts in physical geography and a good and fluent geographical style of writing.
- Teaching is good and lessons are well structured. Guidance in the use of

textbooks helps students to build up their knowledge and understanding effectively.

- Students work well together with good relations all round.

Areas for improvement.

- Marking and feedback in over a third of the coursework looked at are not as consistent as they could be.
- Only a minority of students wordprocess their essays which limits the opportunity for redrafting.
- Coursework should be more sharply focused on reaching balanced conclusions.

303. In recent years A-level results have been close to the average. Results in 2001 showed a significant improvement in the percentage of students attaining the higher grades. In relation to their GCSE results students did as well as expected. Present standards of work are also average. During the inspection, work in both years was firmly focused on preparation for the imminent field trip to the Lake District, for both years. Year 13 students are achieving well in relation to predictions based on their GCSE results. In one of the lessons seen they explained well the impact of glaciation on the landscape of the French Alps and Snowdonia. The lesson structure and activities clearly focused their learning, with constant references on what to look out for in the Lake District the following week. Most students recall knowledge well and apply geographical techniques effectively in physical geography. Their written work on human geography does not always show the same level of confidence in reaching conclusions.
304. Students in Year 12 are achieving well and the standard of work seen in their files is consistently good. In one lesson the focus was on the characteristics of a river profile. Most students were confident in calculating data from graphical illustrations, such as explaining the hydraulic radius. They rose to the challenge of recognising the different processes of weathering and erosion, which are studied in depth in Year 13 but have to be covered in preparation for the field trip. Opportunities to use computers to calculate and present data are not frequent enough. As a result of staff absence, coursework in human geography has fallen behind.
305. Teaching was very good in three of the four lessons observed, and good in the other. Students learn well. Teaching was characterised by excellent specialist knowledge, and infectious enthusiasm. For example, the Year 13 lesson on glaciation included personal slides which demonstrated the physical features to be found in the landscape. These were interspersed by students checking how skilfully they could locate similar features on maps and extending their knowledge using textbook references. Students responded confidently to the activities and would have expanded on their own ideas if time had allowed.
306. Much of the coursework undertaken by students takes the form of investigation work which follows on from lessons. Students understand the grading system and strive to improve but only a minority redraft their essays using wordprocessing. Students need to write more concise and balanced conclusions to essays and investigation work. Some of the work in human geography remains unchecked and without regular consolidation and reassurance some students may lose confidence.
307. The independent work students undertake is very well prepared and course files are well presented and organised and neat. Students use a wide range of textbooks and information from the Internet confidently. They are not so confident using computers to

draw graphs. They work extremely well together and share ideas and material they find constructively.

308. As the head of department is absent, an assistant headteacher (who ran the department several years ago), is holding the fort - very well. His rich experience of running field trips and teaching A-level courses is invaluable, but inevitably students will have to catch up on the human geography topics in the future. New schemes of work effectively reflect the department's needs, which have been identified in its development plan. Target setting and analysis of data have been held back by the absence of the head of department.

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

Strengths

- Teachers' excellent planning.
- Teachers' excellent subject knowledge.

Areas for improvement

- The limited range of resources for students.

309. Since 1999 all students have passed history A-level. In 2000 half of the students, and in 2001 one third, attained grades A/B. The first AS-level results were good, 75 per cent of students attained grades A/B and the rest grade C. Present standards are above average. Students confirm that they are confident that both the courses and the teaching match their needs. They have clearly experienced intellectual development and have built on their previous knowledge and understanding, whether from GCSE or the AS-level course. Year 13 students' choices of topics for their individual assignments are confident and wide-ranging. They include Julius Caesar, Mary 1 and the Spanish Civil War. Students use an examination mark scheme as they design their assignments. They have a satisfactory grasp of the historical issues to be tackled and a good understanding of the level of analysis required for the higher grades.
310. Teachers help students to achieve the highest possible levels of analysis by using well-considered and searching questions, such as seen in a lesson on threats to the Weimar Republic between 1919 and 1930. Year 12 students assessed the seriousness of the events and used their detailed knowledge of the various political groupings to reach a considered conclusion. Their learning and understanding was deepened by the key questions posed by their teacher. These were also displayed on the board within a visually stimulating framework. Students demonstrated how well they extend their arguments in a lively debate about women's suffrage in 1900. The range of views they considered reflected how well the teacher had introduced the topic. Progress and achievement are good.
311. Students are also helped to learn as the teacher uses brainstorming techniques at the start of, and often during, all lessons seen. Simple notes, made from detailed reading or from the previous lesson's work help to reinforce prior learning and to offer a framework for later revision. Students' understanding of the nature of the subject is constantly extended, for example in the issue of inevitability posed by the collapse of the Weimar Republic.

312. All teaching was excellent in the four lessons seen. Teachers use time very effectively, and maintain a brisk pace throughout each lesson. They achieve a good balance between intervention (needed to advance students' thinking) and time for students to study and reflect (to ensure depth of understanding). The teachers' knowledge of the topics and of the students' capabilities is excellent. Teachers mark work thoroughly and give written and oral feedback which shows students how to progress, for example in structuring their essays.
313. The subject is very well managed. The advanced courses have been implemented efficiently within a clear scheme of work. Both teachers work in a similar way so students experience continuity and consistency. Resources are satisfactory and well matched to students' needs. Further depth and interest would be added if students read more periodicals and visited historical sites.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus was on English, but communication studies and modern foreign languages were also sampled.

314. **Communication studies:** A-level results were above average in 2000, and the 2001 and AS-level results are likely to be as well. The 2001 A-level results were disappointing but not unexpected as the attendance of the group had not been good and eventually only three students took the examination. However, students in the present sixth form say they enjoy the subject. The take-up in Year 12 has risen so sharply that more spacious accommodation is needed. Standards of work are above average in Years 12 and 13. During the inspection three lessons were observed. All were at least good. In one, the confident and well-informed group presentations were the result of the very good teaching in previous lessons combined with the students' very good attitudes towards the subject. Lessons are well planned and structured so students achieve successfully in a wide range of challenging activities which make a strong contribution to their personal, social and cultural development.
315. **Modern foreign languages:** few students choose to study foreign languages in the sixth form although a few more have chosen AS-level. Attainment in French and Spanish A-level (four students took each language) was below average in 2000. Similar results were attained in French in 2001 and higher ones in Spanish. No students took German A-level in 2000 and 2001. Standards were encouraging in French and German AS-level in 2001 but were not so strong in Spanish. Standards in French are testimony to the over-use of English in earlier years. Year 13 students' speaking skills are very low; in a lesson seen they were hesitant and made unsatisfactory contributions to a discussion. Their written work contains many inaccuracies. In contrast, speaking standards in a Year 12 Spanish lesson were good; students were comfortable speaking the language and, despite a range of attainment, all contributed to a lively discussion. Written work examined reflected this standard. German is taught in consortium with Stratton Upper School and arrangements are now working well. Teaching is good overall, presenting students with topic-based learning and placing high demands on their language skills. Learning in French falls short of expectations, largely because of poor speaking standards and the failure to place communication in

French at the heart of learning. Learning in Spanish is good because these factors are in place.

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

Strengths

- Previous success in the A-level course is now matched by equally good results in the new AS-level examinations.
- Teaching is good. Teachers have good knowledge of their subject and they share their pleasure in it very effectively with their students.
- The subject is well led and managed.

Areas for improvement

- There is very little on offer to enrich and extend students' experience beyond the classroom: no literary, writing or discussion clubs, theatre visits or visiting speakers.
- Work on Shakespeare relies too much on film or video in the classroom and students make a poor showing when reading scenes.

316. The school provides AS- and A-level language and literature and a re-sit course in GCSE English language, taught after school. Good standards are achieved in the advanced courses. In 2000 17 students took the combined English examination and 35 per cent attained A/B grades. In 2001 there were 18 entrants and although the A/B percentage dropped (23 per cent) all students passed. The 20 students who took the new AS-level examination in 2001 attained very good results. All passed and half gained A/B grades.
317. A slight decline in the numbers taking A-level English, from 29 in 1999 to 18 in 2001, may be due in some part to the success of the A-level communication studies course, which is taught by members of the English department. English is a more popular subject with girls, as seen nationally. Usually twice as many girls as boys take the subject, reflecting their performance in Year 9 tests and GCSE. Although they are fewer in number, boys are now doing equally well.
318. Standards of work seen during the inspection were good. In the classes observed students of all abilities responded with keen interest to the discussion of literature and to the exploration of aspects of language. Some impressive skills of appreciation and critical analysis of literary texts are evident in the Year 13 folders and students' contributions to discussion. In a Year 12 language class, students at the start of their course were already acquiring the appropriate terminology to analyse features of spoken English and discuss the differences between scripted and unscripted talk. In a Year 13 language session, a lively investigation of the nature and value of commentaries took place, with students thoughtfully weighing up problems and possibilities.
319. In another, AS-level class, students considering war poetry readily shared views and responses and read aloud with sensitivity and understanding. It was surprising that a group of Year 13 students were not able to do the same with a scene from their Shakespeare play, when their reading was both reluctant and lacking any real feeling for the lines as lively dialogue. There was little difference between the work of male and female students in the classes seen, and in the AS-level class discussing war poetry, the three boys in the group of twelve made significant contributions to the discussion.
320. Teaching is good and teachers are well qualified and experienced. Four lessons were observed, written work was read and a group of Year 13 students was interviewed. One lesson was very good, two good and one satisfactory. In every lesson the teachers' enthusiasm and good subject knowledge were evident. The sessions had been well planned, with careful attention to syllabus requirements and a determination to engage

and involve all students. The objectives and direction of the lessons were made clear so students knew what was expected of them. However, Year 13 students, working on their Shakespeare play, needed more guidance on reading and interpretation, and the video clip they watched did not contribute very much to this. The quality of teaching is also shown in teachers' responses to, and evaluation of, students' work. Essays are marked carefully, with comments that often set up a constructive dialogue with students. They also give them a clear idea of their strengths and weaknesses and how they can improve.

321. The use of small teaching rooms in which students sit with the teacher in a circle, makes discussion and interaction the norm. Students appreciate this and respond to it well and it was a pleasure to sit in all these classes and to see students and teachers relating so positively to one another. In interview, students had warm praise for the teaching and learning styles, and the interchange of ideas which these made possible. They also have access to a good school library and the support of a librarian who liaises well with the department. There is scope for the department to offer better support to students outside the timetabled lessons. The courses are seldom enriched by theatre visits or talks by visiting speakers. English does not contribute to the school's extra-curricular programme by offering clubs for discussion, debate or creative activities. Such opportunities would be valuable for students of other subjects in the sixth form as well as those taking English, and they could also involve students in the main school.
322. Leadership and management are good and sixth-form work is well co-ordinated. Departmental evaluation is thorough, with some precise analysis of strengths, weaknesses and needs in the development planning. The head of department's knowledge of and interest in his subject make him a very effective leader of the A-level teaching team.