

INSPECTION REPORT

THE ASTLEY COOPER SCHOOL

Hemel Hempstead

LEA area: Hertfordshire

Unique reference number: 117552

Headteacher: Mrs A Smithers

Reporting inspector: W Keast
1522

Dates of inspection: 4th - 8th March 2002

Inspection number: 222361

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 - 18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	St Agnell's Lane Hemel Hempstead Hertfordshire
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr D W Morris
Date of previous inspection:	6 March 2000

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
1522	W Keast	Registered inspector		The school's results and students' achievements. How well are students taught?
31758	E Tipper	Lay inspector		Students' attitudes, behaviour and personal development. How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
24142	S McConville		English	
1839	M Edwards		Mathematics	
3242	M Newman		Science Biology	
2495	B Munden		Design and technology Information and communication technology	
2501	R Allison-Smith		Art Equal opportunities	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to students?
25073	S Jordan		Geography	
3674	G Marriott		History Religious education English as an additional language	
2496	T O'Sullivan	Sixth form co-ordinator	Modern foreign languages	How well is the school led and managed?
7854	R Crozier		Music	
30800	B Colley		Physical education	How well does the school care for its students?
23487	P Kitley		Special educational needs	
10391	V du Plergny		Drama and theatre studies	
18072	J Stephens		Mathematics (sixth form)	

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

The Astley Cooper School is a smaller than average, mixed comprehensive for 11 to 18 year old students in Hemel Hempstead in Hertfordshire. It has 747 students on roll including 88 in the sixth form. The proportion of students (4 per cent) from minority ethnic backgrounds is a little higher than in most secondary schools, though very few are at an early stage of learning English. The school has a very small number of Traveller children and refugees. The proportion of students claiming a free school meal (10.4 per cent) is below the national average and does not reflect the significant deprivation of the area in which most of the students live. One third of the students, an above average proportion, are on the special needs register - of these, half have emotional and behavioural difficulties, a quarter have moderate learning difficulties and a further 15 per cent have dyslexia. Two per cent of the students have statements of their educational need. The turnover of students is much higher than average, with over 120 joining or leaving the school during the last academic year. Approximately four-fifths of the students in Year 11 continue into further education and most of these stay on into the school sixth form. About half the students in Year 13 continue on to higher education. Attainment on entry to the school is improving. The students in Year 11 joined the school with well below average standards, whereas the current Year 7 were close to the national average. The school did not meet the targets that it set because they were unrealistic for the cohort of students. In the last year the school has experienced difficulties recruiting teachers and, at the time of the inspection, had five teachers whose training qualifications were either gained outside the United Kingdom or were relevant to further education.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

The Astley Cooper School is rapidly improving and provides a sound education for its students. Standards at the end of Years 9 and 11 are below average but improving and the achievement of students, in relation to their starting point, is satisfactory. Standards in the sixth form are close to average and students are achieving well. Teaching has improved. It is satisfactory in Years 7 to 11, and good in the sixth form. Leadership and management are now very strong and provide an excellent educational direction for the school. There is a clear commitment by teachers and governors to improvement and the school is very well placed to continue to improve. The school provides sound value for money.

What the school does well

- Achieves above average standards in music and history at the end of Year 11
- Provides very good careers and personal, social and health education
- Makes very good provision for extra-curricular activities
- Provides very good leadership and management
- Provides good care for students and has very good monitoring procedures

What could be improved

- A more planned and consistent development of students' literacy by all teachers in every subject
- The development and implementation of a strategy to develop students' numeracy
- The opportunities for students to develop as independent learners
- The certainty that all students experience their entitlement to information and communication technology in Years 10 and 11

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in March 2000 and improvement since that time has been good. The proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE grades A*-C has fallen but the average total point score is similar. These results reflect the earlier attainment of the different year groups and students' achievement is satisfactory. Sixth

form standards have risen. Previous strengths have been maintained. All the key issues raised in the last report have been tackled. Teaching has improved and is at least satisfactory in all subjects. Students' attitudes and behaviour have improved and teachers have better ways of managing poor behaviour. Curriculum weaknesses have been removed. There are improved opportunities for students' spiritual and cultural development. Leadership and management are now very strong and much more effective. The school has developed an effective social inclusion unit (ACCESS).

STANDARDS

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

Similar schools refers to schools with a similar proportion of students entitled to a free school meal.

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

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

The results in 2001 of the Year 9 national tests in English, mathematics and science were well below both the national average and the results of similar schools. Nevertheless they were satisfactory because the attainment of this year group was well below average when they joined the school and students reached standards similar to those achieved nationally by students with the same earlier attainment. Boys performed better than girls in science and mathematics but they were similar in English. The overall trend is rising slowly, as it is nationally. Currently, standards at the end of Year 9 are at nationally expected levels in mathematics but are below in English and science. Achievement is good in mathematics and satisfactory in the other two subjects. Standards in practical and creative subjects are at expected levels, but are below expectations in more academic subjects. Standards in Years 7 and 8 are higher than in Year 9, reflecting the higher standards on entry.

GCSE results in 2001 were well below the national average and the average for similar schools. However they were broadly in line with the performance nationally of students who achieved similar results in Year 9. Students gained more than the average number of grades A* to C in mathematics and science, than similar students nationally, but fewer grades A* to C in English. When the results in different subjects are compared, students did best in art, drama, history and geography and worst in English, mathematics, French and single award science. The trend in results over the last four years has been steady, reflecting students' attainment on entry, whereas the national trend has been slowly rising. On average over the last three years, boys and girls perform equally well but, in 2001, boys performed better than girls. The school did not meet its targets for 2001 but these had been set unrealistically high and took little account of students' previous attainment. Targets for 2003 are more realistically based upon what is known of students' attainment. Current standards at the end of Year 11 are, overall, below nationally expected levels. Standards in practical subjects are generally higher than in more academic subjects. Standards in mathematics are at expected levels and in music and history they are above. Overall, the achievement of current Year 11 students is satisfactory.

In 2001, the results of students following two year advanced courses were similar to those nationally. Boys' results were above average while girls' results were below. Results in art and drama were well above average while those in English were well below. In the subjects that were a focus in the inspection, current standards are well above expected levels in drama, above in mathematics, at expected levels geography and biology, and below in English. Achievement is satisfactory in English and good, or very good, in the other subjects.

Throughout the school, the low standards of literacy of many students have a detrimental impact on the standards they reach, particularly in those subjects which rely heavily on written responses. Standards in numeracy are satisfactory. Students with special educational needs or for whom English is an additional language make satisfactory progress overall.

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Good, for most students in the main school and very good in the sixth form.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good. The school is calm and most students are courteous. A minority of students can be disruptive in some lessons where teachers are not as good at managing behaviour
Personal development and relationships	Good. The main school provides good opportunities for students to take responsibility which they accept with confidence. Relationships with adults and between students are good. The personal development in the sixth form is very good.
Attendance	Attendance throughout the school is below average. The school has, however, introduced a very good system for monitoring attendance which is beginning to show an improvement in the figures. A small number of sixth form students with poor attendance records are receiving encouragement and support to enable them to continue their studies.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Teaching has improved since the previous inspection. In the core subjects, teaching in English and mathematics is good in Years 7 to 9 and satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. In science teaching is satisfactory overall. In other subjects teaching is at least satisfactory and good throughout the school in art, geography and music. It is good in Years 7 to 9 in information and communication technology and very good in history in Years 10 and 11. In the sixth form, teaching is satisfactory in English, good in mathematics, very good in geography and biology and excellent in drama. Where teaching is good, so is learning. Most teachers have good subject knowledge and are enthusiastic, particularly in the sixth form. This leads to well-planned lessons with a common strategy in which what has been learnt is reviewed at the end of the lesson. Explanations are clear and expectations are generally high. Students generally respond well, work hard and learn. When teaching was unsatisfactory it was related to inexperienced teachers lacking subject knowledge or teaching outside their specialism, and to weakness in their strategies to manage students' behaviour. Many students throughout the school were too dependent on their teachers for their learning and this was a comparative weakness.

The skills of literacy are satisfactorily taught in English but, given the low standards, there is too little consistency in the development of these within and between other subjects. Skills of numeracy are satisfactorily taught in mathematics and standards do not hinder work in other subjects. Nevertheless, these skills are not yet systematically developed across the curriculum.

The school generally meets the needs of its students well. ACCESS is effective in supporting those who might otherwise be excluded and re-introducing those who have been excluded. Students with special educational needs are well supported in Years 7 to 9. The school monitors the progress of students who speak English as an additional language, Traveller children and those from ethnic minorities, effectively. Single gender teaching groups are being trialled to tackle recognised differences in attainment and higher-attaining students are generally well supported and challenged by the setting used in many subjects.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum is satisfactory overall with strengths in the arts and in the vocational courses offered as an alternative to GCSE. Statutory requirements are not met for information and communication technology in Years 10 and 11, and for religious education in the sixth form. The withdrawal of another school from the sixth form consortium has affected the curriculum, but a number of strong courses are well supported. The very good range of extra curricular activities are well attended by all year groups.
Provision for students with special educational needs	Satisfactory overall. Students' needs are identified carefully and they receive good support from adults, especially in Years 7 to 9. ACCESS, and whole school changes in assessment and monitoring are having a positive impact on the quality of provision.
Provision for students with English as an additional language	This is well managed and the good support enables these students to make progress at a similar rate to other students.
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	This is good in terms of developing the students' appreciation of the moral and social aspects of life and satisfactory in relation to the development of their spiritual awareness and understanding of their own and others' cultures.
How well the school cares for its students	The monitoring and support of students' academic performance and welfare are very good. Teachers know their students well and the students value the support they receive. Assessment procedures are good. The pastoral structure, criticised in the previous report, is now very effective. The only relative weakness is that new staff or support staff are not fully aware of the child protection policy.

Parents have a generally positive view of the school and the provision made for their children. The school works hard to encourage more parents to be more involved. The recently formed parents' council and the questionnaires at parents' evenings are ways in which the school seeks parental views. The partnership is satisfactory and developing.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher provides excellent leadership. She has built a strong and highly effective management team which, with the full support of the governors and all staff, is driving the school's improvement. The school has appropriately identified teaching and learning as its key priorities and pursues them in an environment in which all students are welcomed and supported. Financial planning and the use of resources are very good.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governors play a very effective role in shaping the school's educational direction through their overall involvement in the life of the school and through the close monitoring of progress. However the governors have not ensured that the school fully meets statutory requirements for the curriculum.
The school's evaluation of its performance	A strong culture of monitoring, evaluation and review has been established. The school reviews all aspects of its performance rigorously and effectively.

Aspect	Comment
The strategic use of resources	The school plans its budget carefully, consistent with its development priorities. Specific grants have been well used to improve resourcing and the learning environment.

The school applies the principles of best value very well. The development plan is well-focused, students' attainment and progress are carefully monitored, and outcomes are carefully evaluated. Resources are used prudently.

Staffing, overall, is satisfactory although at the moment there is some difficulty in attracting sufficient well qualified staff to meet the needs in some subjects. Accommodation, both of a specialist and general nature, is good. The provision of learning resources is also good overall.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children like the school • Their children make good progress • The school has high expectations of its students • The approachability of the school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behaviour • Homework • Closer co-operation with the school

The inspection team supports the positive views of parents. Most behaviour is good, but in a minority of lessons parents' concerns were justified. There is inconsistency in the way homework is set across the school. While the team accepts that many parents have found it difficult to form an effective relationship with the school in the past, it felt that the school was now making considerable efforts to resolve this situation and these were proving successful.

ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM

THE ASTLEY COOPER SCHOOL

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

With 88 students, the sixth form is smaller than most. Approximately four-fifths of students continue into the sixth form from Year 11. A small number of students join the sixth form from other schools. A recent decrease in student numbers is due partly to the ending of the consortium and partly to the smaller Year 11. The sixth form has an open entry policy in that it will try to provide a suitable course for any student who wishes to continue education. This means that, overall, attainment on entry to the sixth form is below the national average. The student population broadly reflects the ethnic mix in the neighbourhood although the gender balance fluctuates. The partner school in a local consortium withdrew, at short notice, last summer. Astley Cooper honoured its commitment to students who had enrolled on courses, but could not provide the full range of additional activities and courses which normally enhanced the curriculum. The school offers A-level choices in 14 subjects, Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) in information and communication technology and business education, and an intermediate GNVQ in leisure and tourism. The school is working, in a new consortium, to broaden the base of courses offered so as to attract a wider range of students.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

This is an effective sixth form. Overall, standards are at normally expected levels and results have improved since the previous inspection. Standards vary between subjects and, with generally small numbers, are very dependent on the students who choose a particular course. Students are achieving well in relation to their attainment at the start of their courses. The quality of teaching and learning are good. Teachers are enthusiastic and relationships are very good. Circumstances this year have restricted the enhancement of the curriculum beyond the formal

subjects so that the provision might be achieved within the resources generated by the number of students. The sixth form is very well managed under the strong leadership of the newly appointed head of sixth form. The needs of current students are adequately met by the range of courses available. There are plans to increase those of a vocational nature. The sixth form is cost-effective.

Strengths

- well above average standards in art and drama and theatre studies
- good achievement overall
- good teaching and learning
- good opportunities for personal development
- good support and very good guidance for students
- good leadership and very good management

What could be improved

- re-instate into the curriculum the range of extension and enrichment activities

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

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

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

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	Good. Current standards are at an average level for the course, and students' achievement is satisfactory. Teaching and learning are good overall. The teaching team is well-qualified and has good subject knowledge.
Biology	Very good. Attainment matches A-level expectations. Attainment of Year 13 students has improved over the course. In their investigative coursework, which is a strength of the subject, they match A-level expectations. Very good achievement is a direct result of very good teaching and resourcing and exciting links with biological industries. Students are positive about the support and guidance they receive.
Drama and theatre studies	Very good. Students attain standards above the national average, as a direct result of their own hard work, and the commitment and effectiveness of the teacher.
Geography	Good. Results have exceeded expectations based on previous attainment. Standards are in line with course expectations and achievement is good. Very good and enthusiastic teaching results in a very positive response from students who work hard and learn well. The subject makes a very good contribution to developing students' literacy skills.
English	Satisfactory. Standards are low but achievement is satisfactory given students' previous attainment. Students are well supported by teachers, but were sometimes over-dependent. There is a lack of materials on biography and literary criticism to meet the wider reading demands of the examination.

The work seen and the teaching observed in other subjects across the sixth form were at least satisfactory in all courses. Lessons were characterised by enthusiastic teachers, aware of their students' strengths and weaknesses and good, positive relationships between students and teachers. Standards of literacy for a number of students remain low and restrict their attainment which, at this level, is very dependent of the quality of written answers. Some students remain too dependent upon their teachers.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	The school has very effective procedures for monitoring students' attainment. They are well informed about their progress and development as a result of regular reviews. Students' work is assessed thoroughly and targets agreed. Teachers provide very good support, guidance in choosing courses and in preparation for employment or higher education.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Very good. The head of sixth form has been an agent for significant change and development. Students' work, progress and personal development are very well monitored and a strong sense of community and responsibility to the school has been created. The breadth of the curriculum is being increased progressively to provide for all students who want to continue their education in this sixth form.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the support and guidance received • their involvement in decision-making • the responsibilities which they can take • the curriculum meeting their needs • their views are respected 	

These very positive views are endorsed by the inspection team.

COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

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

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

- 1 The attainment of students who took the national tests at the end of Year 9 and GCSE in 2001 was well below average when they entered the school. These standards were noticeably lower than earlier or following year groups of students. The attainment of the Year 7 students who joined the school in 2001 was close to the national average although admissions since then have lowered the standards, particularly in English.
- 2 Results in the end of Year 9 tests in 2001 were, overall, well below the national average and well below the average for similar schools.¹ English, mathematics and science were all similarly well below these averages. Nevertheless, students' achievement was satisfactory as they reached similar standards to those achieved nationally by students with the same previous attainment. When results for boys and girls are considered separately and compared with national averages, in mathematics and science, boys did better than girls, whereas in English there was no difference between the performance of boys and girls. The trend, over the last five years has been broadly similar to the national trend, that is rising slowly.
- 3 The standards of work of students currently at the end of Year 9 are below the nationally expected level in English and science and are at the expected level in mathematics. These standards are higher than the previous results partly because the year group started from a slightly higher level and partly due to the improved teaching they have received. Students' achievement is satisfactory in English and science and they are achieving well in mathematics. Standards in art, music, physical education, information and communication technology, and design and technology are at nationally expected levels. In other subjects they are below. In relation to their attainment when they came to the school, students' achievement is satisfactory. It is good in art, geography, information and communication technology, and physical education.
- 4 GCSE results in 2001 (based on comparing the average total point score²) were well below the national average and the average for similar schools. Approximately a quarter of students gained five or more grades A* to C compared with the national figure of just under half. Ninety four per cent of students gained at least one pass; this was below the national and similar schools averages. However, the results were broadly similar to those gained by students, nationally, who had obtained similar results in their Year 9 national tests. Students gained more than the average number of grades A* to C in mathematics and science, than similar students nationally, but fewer grades A* to C in English. When results in different subjects are compared, students did better in art, drama, history and geography and worse in English, mathematics, French and single award science. The trend in results over the last four years has been steady, reflecting students' attainment on entry, whereas the national trend has been slowly rising. On average over the last three years, boys and girls perform equally well but, in 2001, boys performed better than girls. The school did not meet its targets for 2001 but these had been set unrealistically high and took little account of students' previous standards. Targets for 2003 are more realistically based on what is known about students' previous attainment.

¹ Similar schools means those schools in which the proportion of pupils entitled to a free school meal lies between 13 and 21 per cent.

² A students' GCSE total point score is calculated by scoring a grade A* as 8, a grade A as 7, etc

- 5 Standards of work of students at the end of Year 11 are higher than those indicated by the previous results. This is partly because this year group had higher standards when they came to the school and partly due to better teaching. Standards are above the nationally expected level in history and music and at the expected level in mathematics, art, design and technology, geography and physical education. They are below expected levels in English, science, information and communication technology, modern foreign languages and religious education. In comparison with their earlier standards, students are achieving very well in history, well in art, geography and music, and satisfactorily in all their other subjects except information and communication technology. Their achievement in this subject is unsatisfactory, overall, because there is no programme to ensure that all students cover all the requirements of the national curriculum or that standards are increasing as they move from Year 10 into Year 11.
- 6 Students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress overall against their clearly recorded starting points. Younger students are mainly supported in subject lessons, but there are some small withdrawal groups for literacy and numeracy *Catch Up* programmes. Learning support for students in Years 10 and 11 is less focused, but they make good progress in history and music where teaching methods are well matched to their needs. In some subjects, for example geography and art, students make good progress through all years. Students who attend ACCESS make good progress both academically and socially. Students with English as an additional language make progress at a rate which is comparable with other students. Those who are fully bilingual often do well at GCSE though the numbers in any year are too small to make comparisons reliable. The children of travellers' families make satisfactory and sometimes good progress overall.
- 7 Overall, students' literacy skills are below average. Standards of reading are average, though few students read widely or for pleasure. Higher-attaining students reach a good standard in writing and draft their work well. The standard of writing for most students, however, is below the national average. Students demonstrate similar writing weaknesses in most other subjects. Poor spelling and limited vocabulary hold back their learning. Standards of numeracy are now average. Students not only calculate using a greater range of mental methods but also gain in understanding by explaining their methods to other students. In geography and science lessons, students draw graphs and interpret them accurately. They can apply a test for correlation and understand what it means. In physical education lessons students evaluate their own performance using timed measures. In design and technology, food is weighed and measured correctly using the metric system and patterns and templates are drawn accurately for later cutting out and making.

Sixth form

- 8 Nationally, to allow easier comparison between all providers of post-16 education and training, results are now reported differently. This means that direct comparison between the school's 2001 results and previous years is not possible. In 2001, (based on the average point score³) results were close to the national average. Boys did better than girls as their results were above average.
- 9 Many subjects had fewer than six candidates so national comparisons for the subject are not statistically meaningful. Results were well above average in art, and drama and theatre studies. They were average in media studies, below average in mathematics and business studies and well below average in English. Students did better in art and media studies and worse in business studies and mathematics than in their other subjects. Their achievement in these examinations was satisfactory because their results were similar to those gained nationally by students with the same GCSE scores.

³ A students' A-level point score is calculated by scoring a grade A as 10, a grade B as 8 .. etc

10 In the subjects which were a focus for the inspection, current standards in drama and theatre studies were well above the level expected for the course. Standards in mathematics were above, in geography and biology were at, and in English they were below expected levels. Students are achieving very well in biology, and drama and theatre studies in relation to their attainment at the start of the course. They are achieving well in mathematics and geography and satisfactorily in English.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

11 Overall, students' attitudes towards the school and the provision it makes for them are good; a considerable improvement since the last inspection. The school is, in the main, a very orderly community with good behaviour in the dining hall, the assembly hall and in other public areas. In particular, students generally move about the school in a purposeful yet calm manner. In lessons, behaviour is at least satisfactory and often good except in a small minority of cases where teachers lack the appropriate behaviour management skills. Bullying and other types of harassment occur but the school has well-defined procedures for dealing effectively with incidents and they are not seen as an issue by students, parents or teachers. The incidence of permanent exclusions is low for a school of this size and the number of fixed-term exclusions has reduced dramatically, from 49 in Autumn 1999 to 11 in Autumn 2001. This improvement reflects the training teaching staff have received, recently involving the LEA behaviour support team, and the introduction of ACCESS.

12 The majority of students develop mature relationships with their teachers and other adults within the school and are confident and courteous in their approach to visitors. They work well with one another and students with special educational need are fully integrated within the life of the school. There is a high level of participation in most lessons, and the many extra-curricular activities held at lunch-time and after school are well-attended. Students explore the effects of their actions on others and discuss the importance of respecting their values, feelings and beliefs during personal, social and health education (PSHE) lessons and through the spiritual aspects of subjects such as religious education and history.

13 The majority of students attend school well, but a significant minority do not, with the result that the overall level of attendance is below the national average. In 2000/1, attendance was 87.5 per cent. Figures for the autumn term of 2001 show an increase to 90.3 per cent reflecting the increased emphasis being placed on the importance of attendance. The problem of absence is being tackled positively by the school and the importance of good attendance is stressed in communications to parents. While most students demonstrate positive attitudes and enthusiasm towards school, a minority do not and they show this by, for example, the failure to attend punctually at the beginning of the morning and afternoon sessions.

Sixth form

14 The majority of students demonstrate very good attitudes towards the school, seeing themselves as its ambassadors to the wider community where they seek to promote the many positive aspects of the school. They have very positive views of what the school does for them and are particularly appreciative of the support and guidance they receive in both an academic and pastoral sense.

15 Students have developed very good relationships with their tutors and especially with the head of the sixth form, and relish the responsibilities they have been given. The way they organise the school council is a good example of how they carry out such duties in a successful manner. They have also developed very good personal and learning skills which enable them to communicate well and plan their individual programmes of study.

- 16 Most students attend school regularly. The school is working closely with a very small number to ensure they persevere with their studies. Punctuality is unsatisfactory with a proportion of students failing to arrive promptly at the beginning of the school day.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

- 17 Since the previous inspection the school has focused on monitoring and developing teaching. This has had a positive effect and has resulted in improved teaching. Teaching is satisfactory. Just under half was good. One in every four lessons was very good or excellent, and a similar proportion were satisfactory. Only one lesson in every twenty was unsatisfactory. This is a great improvement from the last inspection, particularly in Years 7 to 9. Teaching in English and mathematics was good in Years 7 to 9 and satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. Teaching in science was satisfactory overall. In Years 7 to 9, teaching was good in art, geography, information and communication technology and physical education. In Years 10 and 11, it was very good in history and good in art, geography, music and physical education. In all other subjects in these year groups it was satisfactory.
- 18 The majority of teachers are enthusiastic about their subject and want to engender a similar enthusiasm in their students. Many lessons have a common structure in which the lesson begins with a clear statement of what the students should learn and ends with a group session in which this is reviewed. Getting students used to this pattern has helped all teachers in their management of students and the behavioural problems that a minority create. The structure helps all students to be clear about what is expected of them and the final group session helps them to recognise and confirm what they have learnt. The majority of the teachers have good knowledge of their subject which enables them to plan lessons carefully to match work to the needs of the students. It enables them to give clear explanations and demonstrations of new work and to extend students' understanding through good use of questioning.
- 19 In many lessons teachers' planning is a strength. In English, for example, this involves an efficient use of learning support assistants and providing clear structure to lessons; in mathematics activities relating to the National Numeracy Strategy are always incorporated and in French, lesson detail is carefully matched to each class's needs. As a result, students are helped to learn most effectively. In Years 10 and 11 teachers prepare students well for examination by helping them to understand what will gain them marks. Generally students' work is marked well with helpful comments which guide students towards ways in which they can improve. Students are well aware of the National Curriculum levels or GCSE grades that they ought to be reaching but they are not always as clear about exactly what they should do to reach them. In the better teaching, higher-attaining students are challenged by the work and, for example in science, are able to show what they can achieve when they are given the opportunity to work independently. The teaching strategies being developed in geography also encourage independence and students taking more responsibility for their own learning. This is not always the case in other subjects, for example English and mathematics, where students are often too dependent on their teachers for their learning. In many lessons teachers achieve good pace, for example by setting time limits for the completion of tasks, by quick change of activity in French or by continuing challenge from the teacher in history. Students work hard and put effort into their work. Relationships in the classroom are generally good even when teachers are working hard to manage some lower-attaining groups. In art, these good relationships lead to a calm, purposeful atmosphere in which discussion and dialogue take place in which students' contributions are valued. As a result, students are very keen to learn, little time is wasted and they concentrate well.
- 20 When teaching was unsatisfactory it was for two main reasons. In some cases, teachers lacked subject knowledge or understanding because they were inexperienced or teaching outside their main subject. In all the unsatisfactory lessons teachers lacked the management skills to handle students'

challenging behaviour. In a few lessons the students exploited weaker teaching. The behaviour and attitudes to learning of a minority of students was unsatisfactory in about one in every ten lessons. This was generally managed well but even experienced teachers had to work hard to achieve this on occasion. Much work has been done to support teachers in this area and this continues to be necessary for a very small number.

- 21 Students with special educational needs are well supported by an experienced team of support teachers. Trained learning support assistants work closely with teachers to ensure students achieve satisfactory outcomes from their lessons. Teaching staff receive detailed information, including targets, for those students with an individual educational or behavioural programme. Some departments, for example geography, modern foreign languages and religious education, make good use of this information to prepare well-targeted resources that support students' learning. In art, music and drama students are fully engaged in well-planned activities that motivate them, and they work to the limit of their ability. When teaching methods or learning materials are not adapted, in subjects such as science, design and technology and information technology, students' work is of a lower standard and often left incomplete. Teachers and learning support assistants show great skill in managing students who cannot cope in some or all lessons and work in ACCESS. Most work is provided by mainstream class teachers to assist students to return to lessons. This is especially important for students preparing for public examinations. Teachers are given good guidance on how to support Traveller children and those with English as an additional language.
- 22 Literacy skills are satisfactorily taught in English. The development of these skills is, overall, unsatisfactory. With a literacy policy in the process of being developed and implemented, practice within subjects is varied. There are examples of good practice. In history and geography, for example, teachers make students' literacy a priority by using word banks, word cards, frameworks to write in, and regular drafting of work. Their reading is demanding and expectations are high. Similarly in drama, students learn how to take notes efficiently and receive help in drafting their essays. This results in work of a very good quality. In science and religious education the development of subject specific vocabulary is supported by an emphasis upon understanding and using key words correctly and students' writing is supported through the use of writing frames. However, in most subjects, there are inconsistencies in teacher expectation and approach.
- 23 The mathematics department has successfully introduced the National Numeracy Strategy across all teaching groups. Students not only calculate using a greater range of mental methods but also gain in understanding by explaining their methods to other students. Provision in mathematics is satisfactory but, without a whole school numeracy policy, the development of skills is not yet co-ordinated across all subjects. Plans are secure to implement such a policy this year and there are good plans for the associated professional training of all staff.
- 24 The use of information and communication technology to support learning in other subjects is developing. It is a strong feature in some subjects, for example graphics, business education and the GNVQ options in Years 10 and 11. Other subjects use word processing to enhance presentation and in a number of subjects, including history and religious education, students make good use of the Internet for research. The use of these skills, well taught in specialist lessons in Years 7 to 9, to support learning in all subjects needs further developing. In Years 10 and 11 there is no co-ordinated programme to ensure that all students experience the full range of information and communication opportunities to which they are entitled or that their skills in any aspect, for example the handling of information by using spreadsheets, are being continually developed.

Sixth form

- 25 Overall, teaching is good. There was a higher proportion (approximately forty per cent) of teaching which was very good or excellent than in the earlier years, and there was none that was unsatisfactory. In the subjects that were a focus of the inspection, teaching was excellent in the drama and theatre studies course, it was very good in geography and biology, good in mathematics and satisfactory in English. Teaching in these subjects was better, overall, than in the lessons which were sampled in other subjects.
- 26 A characteristic of teaching in the sixth form is the enthusiasm of the teachers for their subject. This results in lessons which are interesting and demanding. Students rise to the challenge and work hard. In geography, students are expected to take a greater responsibility for their own learning than at the time of the previous inspection. Tasks involving enquiry and research contribute well to this development. In science, a wider range of investigations than is usual is achieved through very effective links with local industry. Lessons are very well planned, carefully structured to develop understanding, and incorporate a good range of teaching strategies. Explanations are clear and discussion is used well to draw out and extend understanding. As a result of the good teaching, students are engaged by the tasks they are given, they are attentive, take pride in their work and learn well.
- 27 Students' work is generally carefully marked well and good guidance is given as to how it might be improved. The return of marked work is often a time for discussion and provides opportunities for clarifying understanding. Students are very clear about examination requirements and are prepared well for these. The current staffing problem in English has led to the literature course being taught by relatively inexperienced teachers. Their enthusiasm has maintained students' motivation but their expectations of what students need to do are generally not high enough, and their marking tends to be over-generous.
- 28 Although the school does not teach a key skills programme, students have ample opportunity to extend and use their skills in information technology. Their numeracy skills are developed well in mathematics and, where necessary, in the work in other subjects. The comparatively weak literacy skills of many students are not currently being systematically addressed this year because the general studies course is not operating in the restricted curriculum being run this school year.

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

- 29 The curriculum in Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory and meets statutory requirements. In addition to the National Curriculum all students in Years 7 to 9 have a weekly drama lesson which is a valuable and important aspect of their development; heightening listening skills and developing confidence and social skills. The basic skills of literacy and numeracy are satisfactorily taught in English and mathematics. The school is in the process of producing a strategy to develop literacy skills within other subjects. At the moment this is limited to promoting the use and understanding of subject specific vocabulary. There are examples of good practice in the use of writing frames to support students' writing, in the use of discussion to develop skills in listening and speaking, and in helping students learn how to make notes and extract information from their reading. With the many issues needing tackling, following the previous inspection, the development of effective strategies to teach and develop numeracy skills has not been the highest priority but is planned to begin in the near future.
- 30 The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 has many strengths. The options system is deliberately flexible, enabling as many students as possible to follow their first choice of courses. Whilst there is no work-related or college-based provision for the lowest attaining students, vocational courses in manufacturing, health and social care and leisure and tourism offer an alternative to more traditional

GCSE subjects. These courses suit the learning needs of some students well. Arts courses within the curriculum are particularly strong. Drama, music, art and design, physical education - including dance, are popular with students and option courses recruit well. Since the previous inspection, a food technology course has been introduced as part of the design and technology programme. A graphic products course was offered but was not supported by students' choice. Approximately half the students in each year group do not have to take either a modern foreign language or a design technology course. Whilst all the procedures have been followed, the school is considering whether the organisation of these procedures, including meetings with careers officers, students and their parents, can be improved for the future. Opportunities for students to develop their information and communication technology skills and to use them to support their learning in other subjects is good in some subjects. However, the overall provision is not coordinated, planned and assessed against National Curriculum requirements and all students do not cover all aspects or receive their statutory entitlement. To this extent, the curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is unsatisfactory.

- 31 In all year groups students are able to take part in the very good and extensive programme of extra curricular activities. Weekly clubs include music practice sessions, dance classes and various sporting fixtures. In addition, the school offers catch-up clubs, mathematics master classes for the very able and talented and homework sessions where students can get help with their work and use computers to research and complete coursework tasks. In response to students' requests and suggestions courses in child care, babysitting and first-aid have run. Large numbers of students take part in school productions. Most recently *Grease* has played to full houses. Regular but less frequent activities include day trips to London art galleries, visits to Paris and Normandy and geography field trips. These and many other activities contribute to the broader range of learning opportunities currently in place both within, and in addition to, the formal curriculum. Improving the range was a key point for action in the last inspection and the school has made satisfactory improvement. The activities provide added depth and breadth to the curriculum and make a significant contribution to students' social and cultural development. In the week of the inspection some 300 or so boys and girls took part in extra-curricular activities at lunchtime or after school.
- 32 Curricular and extra-curricular opportunities for students with special educational needs are good. The school focus is on providing most teaching within supported mainstream lessons. When students are withdrawn from lessons, or are in ACCESS, work is designed to help them catch up and return to main school lessons. Older students benefit from smaller teaching groups and an amended curriculum in the form of GNVQ foundation courses. However, with limited learning support available for this group of students, some find it difficult to complete their coursework. The school is in the process of developing an amended curriculum that will prepare older students for employment. Students with English as an additional language and Traveller children have good access to the curriculum. Equality of opportunity is effectively promoted and monitored in a variety of ways. Option choices, results of setting and banding, and tutor groups are all closely checked for gender imbalances and adjusted where appropriate. The use of setting in most subjects adequately meets the needs of the highest attaining students. As a result of the analysis of examination data, some single gender groups have been introduced for English and science, and performance is being monitored. The school is very aware of, and actively working to remove, the barriers that prevent some students from achieving their potential.
- 33 The school makes very good provision for students' PSHE. A very detailed scheme of work is well taught by a small team of teachers. The programme scheme covers the required elements of sex and drugs-awareness education and includes aspects of citizenship. The teaching strategies used help students to make informed decisions on such matters, as they encounter them in their personal lives, and on other moral and ethical issues such as those involved with the environment. The programme is particularly well planned so that each topic is presented to the students in a manner appropriate to their emotional development and physical maturity. For example in a good Year 8 lesson on the topic of

smoking, the teacher skilfully enabled the students to discuss the many issues involved fully and helped them, through a series of group role-plays, to explore these and to come to their own opinions.

- 34 The quality of careers education is very good, beginning as part of the PSHE programme in Year 9. The school is part of a nationally pilot scheme that concentrates on basic skills, monitors progress and recognises achievement through certification. The programme in Years 10 and 11 includes visiting speakers, a careers' convention and the active involvement of the local careers advisory service. Some students with special needs are supported by the Connexions personal adviser from Year 8 to Year 10. All Year 11 students follow a well monitored and managed work experience programme. A well-resourced careers room provides students with ready access to information and the careers teachers keep subject teachers well informed.
- 35 Good links have been built up with local primary schools, with termly meetings having a specific focus. The transfer process is well organised with joint events, for example sports tournaments, to ease transition. Most of the linked primary schools have access to the swimming pool and are invited to dress rehearsals of school productions. Students' friendship groups, parental wishes and primary teachers' views are taken into account when allocating new students to their learning centres. Following the collapse of the previous consortium arrangement, new consortium arrangements have been initiated and are well underway for operating from September 2002. Links with the local community are satisfactory and enhance the curriculum. Local industry assists with placements for students on work experience. Links with the local leisure and ski centres, developed by the physical education department, are used to support other courses, for example the GNVQ health and social care course. The strong links developed between the science department and industry have been of great benefit to students through the involvement with curriculum development and the provision of some sophisticated items of equipment. The school works closely with higher education partners for the initial training of teachers.
- 36 Overall, the provision of opportunities for students' personal development is satisfactory and has improved since the last inspection. Provision for spiritual development has improved and is satisfactory. Students are taught to explore and value the ideas of others and to reflect upon the impact of their own and others' actions, particularly through the PSHE programme. In art, they are able to compare their feelings with what the artist may have intended, and similar opportunities for reflection can be found in religious education, geography and history and during some assemblies and tutor sessions. In a good wall display, under the title *What made me say WOW*, students had demonstrated their appreciation of the wonders of the natural world and had expressed their feelings towards them in a clear manner. Assemblies are a good educational experience and may make a contribution to spiritual development. The school does not meet statutory requirements for collective worship. There is no clear policy to ensure the development of a spiritual ethos through all the teaching within the school.
- 37 Provision for moral development is good. The school has a clear code of conduct supported by a classroom charter, drawn up with the involvement of students, which is displayed in every classroom and is in the student planners. The values of honesty, fairness and the respect for truth and justice are built into in the PSHE curriculum and reinforced by the example set by adults in the school. Students discuss ethical issues such as those concerned with the environment. In geography, for example, Year 8 students discuss the local and global impact of deforestation by multi-national companies.
- 38 Provision for social development is also good. Social skills are introduced to students through PSHE lessons and reinforced by their dealings with adults throughout the school. The majority have developed mature relationships based on mutual respect. Students work co-operatively in pairs and small groups in most subjects. Students, particularly in the sixth form, have opportunities to take responsibility. The school council is a particularly good example. Monthly meetings of the council,

consisting of two representatives from each tutor group, are run by the school prefects. The views of tutor groups on subjects as varied as school catering and litter bins, are determined through discussion and then brought to the council. The prefects co-ordinate very lively discussions in year groups before the whole council agrees a consensus view. These views are presented to the headteacher, for consideration by the leadership group, and have resulted in, for example, the provision of more benches around the playground. A sports council is run on similar lines by the physical education department. Year 10 students act as mentors for new students in Year 7, having undertaken an external training course, and also each spend a day helping in reception where they carry out tasks such as taking messages and showing visitors around. Groups of students are involved in the selection process for new teachers and their views are taken into consideration by the interviewing panel.

- 39 Provision for cultural development has improved and is satisfactory. Students develop an appreciation of their own traditions, mainly in English, music, art and drama studies, through visits to the theatre, art galleries and museums. In modern languages, every student is given the opportunity to experience a foreign culture on a trip to France or Germany. A group of students of Nigerian ethnic origin has performed in a school assembly. In music, students are introduced to the music and instruments of other cultures and in art, for example, Year 7 students carrying out a project on mask-making are taught how some societies use them for disguise while others use them for decoration. Overall, however, there is no whole-school policy for the development of cultural awareness across the school. In particular, the opportunities for students to explore the ethnic and cultural diversity of British society are limited.

Sixth form

- 40 The sixth form curriculum is satisfactory, having many strengths as well as some weaknesses. The breadth and balance of the curriculum provision has temporarily been affected by the collapse of the consortium arrangements. It leaves the school, in the short term, having to address as best it can some of the gaps that this has caused. Whilst a new partnership arrangement is being negotiated the interim provision, although far from ideal, broadly meets the needs of the current sixth form students. Students benefit from support, good advice and encouragement and they value the chance to prove themselves. The school strongly promotes a socially inclusive sixth form and provides well for equality of opportunity. Sixth form students play an important part in the life of the school. Some contribute to the overall curricular provision by taking part in, and arranging, some extra curricular courses and clubs for younger students
- 41 Some fifteen A/AS-level courses are on offer and whilst they meet many students' needs, the school recognises that it is not providing enough vocational courses. Some students are therefore accepted onto advanced courses with low qualifications and they struggle to keep pace with the demands, particularly for wider reading and independent study. This year, there is a very small amount of time for personal, social and health education and the general studies is not offered. Development of the key skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology and independent learning are reasonably provided within many subjects but, given that a number of students have limited qualifications and standards in literacy are low, the majority of students would benefit from additional support. The statutory requirement for the teaching of religious education is not met, and to that extent the curriculum is unsatisfactory.
- 42 The quality of examination courses offered is generally good and some are very good. There are particular strengths in, for example, the biology course, where the industrial links provide good breadth and relevance to students going on to university. The art and graphics courses are very popular and students achieve high grades in examinations. Theatre studies is a very good course that makes a strong contribution to the cultural life of the school and adds to the extra curricular provision.

- 43 Without a strong partner establishment the school is unable to fund the curriculum it feels students would most benefit from - given their prior attainment. Governors are rightly cautious in negotiating the terms of the new partnership and are keen to ensure that students are well provided for. However, the renegotiation of the consortium arrangement is a useful point at which to plan strategically for the future and governors recognise the value of reassessing overall provision.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

- 44 The school has good procedures for caring for students. Teachers support students well. They offer a friendly, safe, yet disciplined environment in which students may progress academically and personally. Parents value this and know whom to contact if they have a concern. Student planners are a good communication link between home and school. A strong pastoral system results from the stability created by the learning centres, supported by tutor groups. All students, when asked, felt that there was somebody on the staff they could turn to if they experienced problems. Teachers know their students well. Satisfactory procedures for the health and safety of students are in place. The child protection policy meets requirements although support staff, and staff new to the school, should be made more aware of procedures. Matron, a qualified state registered nurse, has care of ill or injured students.
- 45 The school's expectations of good behaviour are well documented, as is the policy for dealing with incidences of bullying or other unacceptable behaviour. Appropriate records are maintained and offending individuals are monitored carefully. The school has provided general professional development on strategies to manage students' behaviour and has supported individual teachers in managing what can be the challenging behavioural problems exhibited by some students. Students' behaviour is effectively monitored and, where necessary, a more focused monitoring programme is followed. ACCESS is effectively used to tackle the problems of students who might otherwise be excluded either permanently or on a fixed term basis. Individual behavioural plans, with appropriate targets, are devised, implemented and monitored. ACCESS also forms the base through which excluded students are re-introduced to school and for providing education for the occasional school phobic student. A number of students who are casual admissions, that is who come to the school part way through a term, are integrated into the work of the school through this unit. These actions have been very effective in reducing the impact of the poor behaviour of a minority on the learning of the majority, and in creating air of calm within the school and an environment in which students feel safe. This is an improvement from the previous inspection.
- 46 The school has very good procedures for monitoring students' personal development, operated by form tutors and the heads of centre, and these provide very good support. Students are well known to their teachers who are kept informed of any personal problems which may affect students' progress. The school ensures that a counsellor is available to help and support students when necessary. Good links with the Travellers' Education Service supports the school in its work with what can be a transient group of students. Annual reports include records of personal responsibility and commendations. The monitoring of students may lead to a daily report which is effective, for many students, in promoting good behaviour or more consistent effort and thus personal development. A very good system of rewards and sanctions assists students' learning and encourages achievement as well as promoting good behaviour and attitudes. Success, in whatever form, culminates in a celebration assembly for each learning centre at the end of each school year and in an annual presentation evening.
- 47 The procedures for monitoring attendance have improved considerably since the last inspection. The introduction of an electronic system of registration has enabled the school to identify more readily patterns of poor attendance and any internal truancy. Form tutors receive weekly reports on

attendance and punctuality, and identify students with persistent absences from school, whether authorised or not. Parents are contacted on the first day of absence and again on the third day if no explanation has been given. Persistent absentees are referred to the educational welfare service. The school makes improving attendance a high priority. The importance of good attendance to a students' education is strongly emphasised in the prospectus and form by form attendance figures are prominently displayed. A system of incentives for high attendance has been introduced and is proving effective for many students. Attendance and punctuality are included in students' annual reports.

- 48 Procedures for assessing and recording students' attainment and progress are good and are applied more consistently than at the time of the last report. Overall, these are better in Years 10 and 11, but there are weaknesses in English where there is inconsistency between the teachers. The school policy is flexible enough to allow faculties to develop systems that meet their requirements. This works very well. These systems are monitored rigorously and very effectively by the appropriate assistant head, together with the heads of faculty. Teachers' mark books contain much detail and evidence of regular and thorough marking. Attainment is recorded accurately against National Curriculum criteria and/or course requirements in mathematics, modern foreign languages, religious education, history, and music. The assessment requirements of the National Curriculum at the end of Year 9 and of the public examinations in Year 11, are met in full.
- 49 The monitoring of students' academic performance and personal development is very good. The school has collected and collated assessment data for some years. This information is shared with all teachers at the start of each year and is readily accessible via electronic systems. The progress of students is measured against 'base lines' established using this information. Departments make good use of such assessments and information to track students' progress. Procedures for the setting of individual targets are now used effectively in all subjects. Form tutors conduct regular reviews using the collated information. This has made students much more aware of their standard of work and what they need to do to improve, which are the two objectives which underpin the school's policy.
- 50 Assessment information has been used, at a school level, to modify the curriculum, to group students for teaching and as a trigger for the trialling of some single gender groups. Some departments have used the information to guide their curriculum planning. For example, the mathematics department has used profiles to identify areas for development, and changes have been made to groupings in science on the basis of such evidence.
- 51 The special needs co-ordinator maintains comprehensive records for students identified as having special educational needs. Information on these students is made available to all teachers. There are clear systems for identifying new areas of concern, and confidential information is handled sensitively. Statutory reviews are carried out and recorded. It is unfortunate that some parents and carers do not wish to attend these meetings. The introduction of new whole school assessment and monitoring procedures will improve systems for tracking the academic progress of special educational needs students. The targets for students working in ACCESS are a particular strength because they make clear to students and staff what is to be done in the immediate short-term to help students make progress. The special educational needs base and the new ACCESS unit provide welcoming and supportive environments. Students seen working in them were often confident and gaining in independence and social skills. The provision for students with English as a second language is well co-ordinated and their progress is carefully monitored. The procedures for managing the education of Travellers children are also good. They enable the students to settle quickly into school and maintain as much continuity of education as possible.

Sixth form

Assessment

- 52 The monitoring of students' academic performance and personal development is very good. Procedures for assessing students' attainment and progress are very good overall and the outcomes are known to and understood by students. Only in English were they unsure about their progress or what to do to improve. The assessment, verification and moderation procedures of awarding bodies are met in full. Thorough and regular marking provides information that informs the frequent reporting of progress. Tutor group reviews take place weekly and students meet with tutors each half term to discuss their progress against predicted and target grades. The tutors monitor and guide students equally well in terms of both their academic and personal development and, where necessary, judgements are available to others with an interest, such as parents.

Advice, support and guidance

- 53 Tutors and other sixth form staff know their students well, they are aware of their learning needs and provide effective support throughout their studies. Students recognise the value of such support and the rigorous monitoring, yet are keenly aware of their own responsibilities. They believe that a 'success culture' is developing in the sixth form; a view supported by the evidence of the inspection. Relationships between students and teachers are very good.
- 54 Students value the very good information, advice and guidance they are given in relation to decisions they have to make at the end of Years 11 and 12. This information is both comprehensive and objective. The school seeks to place students on courses on the basis of what is best for them and this generally works well. For example, science modules are chosen on the basis of both the attainment and interest of students. Advice of a similarly very high standard is provided as students move to higher education or employment. Parents value the advice provided and, like the students interviewed, appreciate the support that ensures they are able to settle to post-16 work. This is particularly important where students do not always come with the skills necessary for advanced study. For example, in English male students do not have the breadth of reading or vocabulary required.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

- 55 The relationship the school has with its students' parents has improved since the last inspection. The majority of those who attended the pre-inspection meeting or returned the parental questionnaire were positive in their views of the school but a significant number felt that the school was not working closely enough with them. The school is actively tackling this situation. A parents' council, consisting of volunteers representing each year group, has been set up and meets termly. Parents are continually being invited to activities and events held at the school. The high levels of attendance at recent meetings indicate that it is having some success.
- 56 The school produces a range of information for parents which is of a good quality. Students' annual reports are, generally, very thorough and informative although the quality of targets set by subject teachers is variable. In addition to subject progress, they include reporting on behaviour, effort and attendance. Students review their reports with their form tutor and agree and record specific personal targets. Parents additionally receive brief half termly reports on effort, behaviour and attainment which include the review of previously set targets and setting of new. Consultation evenings follow annual reporting and parents also have opportunity for information and discussion on National Curriculum tests and option choices. Opportunity is taken at all these events to seek parental opinion through questionnaires and to review and act upon the outcomes.

- 57 The prospectus is very detailed and informative, as are the monthly newsletters. These provide a clear and interesting insight into what is happening within the school in terms of its academic and social life, as well as the achievements of former students. The diary of forthcoming events and the regular contributions by the head of the sixth form, the school nurse and the kitchen manager provide valuable information to parents. Parents and carers of students with special educational needs are kept well informed at all stages of their child's education but do not always attend meetings and reviews. The school works hard to keep Travellers and the parents of pupils who have English as an additional language informed about their children's progress and involved in discussions about their education.
- 58 The School Association is run by an enthusiastic group of parents and friends and the social and fund-raising activities they organise are well supported. Parents are welcome to participate in the life of the school and a number assist with reading and acting as examination invigilators.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

- 59 The headteacher was appointed shortly after the previous inspection. She has provided excellent leadership both in addressing the key issues arising from the inspection and in changing the public perception of the school. She has brought a calm and highly focused influence to bear on staff and students, emphasising the school's core function of providing a good education based on effective teaching and successful learning. At the same time, she has fostered the school's aim of providing a caring, orderly and supportive environment for students. She has proved equally effective as a manager. The senior management team has been restructured to make best use of its members' interests and aptitudes through negotiation of their roles. The team has been enhanced by the appointment of an assistant headteacher with specific responsibility for developing and implementing the school's inclusion policy.
- 60 The school's management is structured to provide clear lines of communication and accountability. The line-management structure has provided improved two-way communication of information and ideas and, together with the headteacher's maintenance of dialogue with all levels of management, has created a cohesive management system with a clear and united sense of purpose. The second-tier 'leadership group' of heads of centre and the sixth form has proved very effective in promoting the school's aims with students and staff. The overall quality of management of subject departments is good, with particular strengths in mathematics, art and geography. Despite the current lack of heads of department in English and history, these departments are satisfactorily managed. Power and responsibility have been very well delegated to all levels of management.
- 61 The governors are a capable and highly committed body who fulfil their responsibilities very well. The committee structure, led by members with appropriate expertise in areas such as finance and construction, has proved very effective in monitoring progress of the school's development and post-inspection action plans. The committees have supported the school strongly and effectively in both the fulfilment of its aims and in the practical steps it has taken to secure extra funding to support change and development. The relationship between the headteacher and the chair of governors is very positive: the chair has participated fully in the LEA Core Project Group which has monitored the school's progress since the last inspection. Governors visit the school regularly and are developing their links with subject departments. They show considerable loyalty to the school and, in discussion, convey a real sense of common purpose and partnership. Governors have proved generally very effective in holding the school to account on educational standards and overall progress, but have not picked up two specific statutory issues – the provision of religious education for all students in the sixth form and the provision of opportunities for all students to develop and use their information and communication technology skills across the curriculum in Years 10 and 11.

- 62 The need to improve the rigour of monitoring teaching and professional appraisal, a key issue from the last inspection, has been very successfully tackled through the introduction of wide-ranging monitoring of teaching and learning at all levels of management. Processes and procedures are clearly detailed in the school's very good monitoring handbook and the evidence of the inspection shows that they are being very effectively applied across the school with a corresponding benefit to standards. The findings of monitoring have been shared with governors and this has provided an extra layer of critical evaluation of the effectiveness of the procedures. The school's procedures for performance management were judged to be good in a recent external assessment. The school's Investors in People status is due for review shortly: the view of senior management is that the school has progressed well beyond the level of effectiveness which originally led to the award. The school has very good procedures for monitoring and evaluating performance and taking action to foster the professional development of staff to the benefit of standards.
- 63 The director of ACCESS and the special needs co-ordinator work closely together to ensure that provision for students with special educational needs is well managed throughout the school. An effective team of learning support assistants has been developed by the experienced learning support teacher. Links with outside agencies are extensive and their effectiveness monitored in termly reports. In-service training makes provision for all staff, including the learning support assistants. At present the chair of governors is acting as link governor. The governing body and senior management team attach a high priority to special educational needs provision. They welcome the introduction of the school action phase of the new Code of Practice as part of their aim for a fully inclusive school. The provision for students with English as an additional language, and for Traveller children, is similarly well-managed.
- 64 The previous inspection provided the school with a challenging series of issues to address. In the two years since the inspection, the school has effectively tackled all the issues through detailed action planning which has identified priorities, explicit targets and lines of accountability. In addition to the action plan, which was a statutory response to the inspection findings, internal action planning at both whole-school and department level has been developed with the same rigour and detail and, like the action plan, is subject to regular review and scrutiny by senior management and governors. Development planning, monitoring and evaluation are combined effectively to create a climate for improvement and the culture of shared aims and commitment to their fulfilment has been a key factor in the good progress the school has made.
- 65 The school manages its finances effectively with good support from the governors' finance committee. Development planning is carefully costed. Governors monitor expenditure with due rigour through regular finance committee meetings. In addition to a basic allowance of resources, departments are able to bid for additional funding, with the proviso that bids are carefully justified in terms of their impact on standards and learning. The school has been successful in attracting extra grants for improvement and the development of facilities for example, the ACCESS unit and swimming pool. The use of these grants has been carefully monitored. The principles of best value are effectively applied to all expenditure.
- 66 The school makes very good use of new technology in the management of its administration and data-handling systems. For example, the Bromcom registration system has proved very effective in monitoring attendance and punctuality. All staff now have easy access to detailed and comprehensive information about the progress of individual students and use the system to analyse results and predict grades. The information gained usefully complements the other systems for monitoring teaching and learning and has helped to improve the monitoring of students' academic progress. The school has been less effective in developing the broader use of information and communication technology across the curriculum, particularly in Years 10 and 11.

- 67 Procedures for the induction of both staff new to the school and newly-qualified teachers are very good. These include an induction programme and the allocation of a mentor. Newly-qualified teachers feel very well supported by the school. The school has a history of successful and sustained involvement in initial teacher training. Trainees who have had placements at the school have been appointed to permanent posts.
- 68 The teaching accommodation is good, overall. There are sufficient general classrooms and specialist areas to teach effectively. Physical education is particularly well provided with a good swimming pool, a hall which is good for dance, good storage areas and access to extensive playing fields. A programme of refurbishment and replacement is in hand so that flat roofs and asbestos panels may be repaired or replaced as soon as is practicable. Plans for a new drama studio are well advanced. The school's large open site is generally well cared for.
- 69 The provision of resources to support teaching and learning is good. The school has sufficient information and communication technology equipment and software to meet National Curriculum requirements and since the last inspection much hardware and software has been updated. The library provision is good although the accommodation is small. Newspapers, magazines and Internet access provide good support for learning. Since the last inspection, resources for teaching music have been much improved.
- 70 Overall, staffing is satisfactory. The previously reported lack of a full time music teacher has been resolved and staffing in this subject is now good. Two foreign language assistants are a valuable resource for the development of students' modern foreign language skills. The current difficulties in recruiting appropriate teachers in English and science are having a detrimental effect on students' learning in these subjects.

Sixth form

Leadership and management

- 71 The head of sixth form was appointed in September, 2001 – previously this had been a shared responsibility. Showing very good leadership, she has proved to be a highly effective agent for change. This has resulted in a strong sense of community and commitment to the school among the student body. Students express considerable satisfaction with the changes in the atmosphere and culture in the sixth form.
- 72 The head of sixth form manages the team of tutors very well. Procedures for personal and academic monitoring and target-setting are carried out consistently. Her membership of the management leadership group ensures good communication and accountability to senior management. Management of the five subjects which were the main focus of the inspection is strong with the exception of English which currently has no head of department.
- 73 The response to the challenge created by sudden, late withdrawal of the partner school in the consortium was good. Some elements of the curriculum, notably work on key skills and the enrichment programme, have been curtailed. The head of sixth form has shown ingenuity in putting together special events involving outside agencies and speakers to compensate for the cuts. The academic curriculum offered to students was effectively protected. A new consortium arrangement with two other local schools is at an advanced stage of planning and represents an opportunity for a broader and richer curriculum that has the potential to be more cost-effective.

- 74 The headteacher and governors are very committed to the sixth form: it is perceived as meeting the needs of an increasingly broad spectrum of students and increasingly successful in the standards students attain. A range of initiatives, for example the school council, promotes sixth form students' personal development and is of benefit to the wider school community. The sixth form is monitored and evaluated with the same rigour as the rest of the school.
- 75 The development plan clearly expresses the vision to broaden the student body and meet their needs by increasing the number of vocational courses offered, whilst consolidating the academic curriculum. A key aim being to increase students' independence and their capacity to be role-models and leaders within the school community. Recruitment to the sixth form has increased, but significant expansion is envisaged. Standards currently achieved and the positive attitude of students indicate that the sixth form is improving.
- 76 The sixth form is cost-effective: staffing costs are well matched to available funding, despite small teaching groups in some subjects. Sixth form provision is well monitored for its effectiveness through analysis of results.

Resources

- 77 The sixth form is well resourced. A designated suite of rooms provides both for their social needs and smaller teaching groups. Those teaching in the sixth form courses are generally well qualified and experienced. Specialist teaching rooms are readily available and are particularly good in science. A small study room attached to the library is of benefit for quiet working. Students always have ready access to computers to support their learning. Learning resources are at least adequate in all subjects. They are exceptional in biology.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

- 78 The school has been implementing a very detailed development plan which has led to the good improvement since the last inspection. These planned actions should be continued so that their longer term impact, particularly on improving standards, can become apparent. In addition to these actions, to raise standards of attainment and further improve the education provision, the governors and staff should:
- (1) agree a formal literacy policy and ensure that the strategies it describes are used consistently and effectively by all teachers in all subjects;
(paras: 7,22,29,85,87,88,89,103,116)
 - (2) agree and implement a formal numeracy policy with strategies which will require and allow all subjects to make an appropriate contribution;
(paras: 23,29,98)
 - (3) develop ways in which students can be encouraged to be more independent and take greater responsibility for their own learning. This will have implications for teaching methods and resources, particularly the library;
(paras: 19,90,100,114,175)
 - (4) ensure that all students in Years 10 and 11 have access to all aspects of information and communication technology and are able to apply the full range of knowledge and skills to the other subjects they study; and that attainment in all aspects of ICT is assessed
(paras: 5,24,30,61,66,110,145)

Sixth form

- (1) re-instate into the curriculum the range of extension and enrichment activities so that, in particular, the development of students' literacy skills may be supported and the statutory requirement for teaching religious education is met.
(paras: 40,41,61,73)

79 In addition, the governors and school should consider addressing the following less important, but significant, issues in their action plan:

- (1) meeting statutory requirements for collective worship;
(para:36)
- (2) developing whole school policies to promote spiritual and cultural development;
(paras:36,39)
- (3) developing some teachers behaviour management strategies;
(paras: 20,107,109,125,168,175)
- (4) improving students' punctuality.
(paras:11,13,16)

SEN ASSESSMENT

- 80 At the time of the previous inspection, procedures for assessment, recording and reporting for students with special educational needs met statutory requirements. However, use of this information was not consistent throughout the school. As a result, support for students was insufficient in some subject areas, and they made unsatisfactory progress in unsupported lessons. The recent appointment of an assistant head with specific responsibility for this aspect has improved consistency in the use of whole school systems. This means that the focused monitoring and support now taking place is having a positive impact on the quality of provision for students on the special educational needs register and most are receiving more targeted support in the classroom. The school is assessing the effectiveness of its school based initiatives as well as support provided by outside agencies.
- 81 Improvements in the collation of assessment data, shared with all teachers at the start of each year, mean that students' progress can be measured against clear starting points. Staff training has developed teachers' understanding of individual educational plan targets. Many departments effectively adapt learning materials for this group of students as a result of the whole school focus on assessment. However, in subjects where there has been unavoidable staff disruption, such as science, less progress has been made to ensure that support is effective and that students are making progress. The annual learning review day is of particular benefit to students with special educational needs. It involves staff from the learning support team, in discussion with students and their form tutors, monitoring progress over a range of subjects. The strengthening of the links between academic and behavioural monitoring benefits this group of students because they are now supported throughout the school rather than being the sole responsibility of the learning support department.
- 82 The opening of the social inclusion unit, ACCESS, has improved provision for the group of students who find it difficult to work in mainstream lessons. Each student is offered a timetable negotiated by the head of centre with teaching staff and parents. Students are integrated into mainstream lessons where possible and their progress is discussed regularly with subject staff. They receive effective support from learning support assistants in many lessons and their personal target report sheets encourage them to monitor their own progress. When they work in ACCESS, the responsibility for collecting appropriate work from the subject teacher of their mainstream lesson helps their personal development. The unit is designed to re-integrate students into full time lessons. Its structure is based on close monitoring of students' progress towards achievable targets, both behavioural and academic. It is effective.
- 83 The head and senior management team have introduced a unified and coherent approach to monitoring that has resulted in improved attainment for all students. As a result, there is closer involvement of teaching staff in planning work for students in ACCESS and liaising with learning support assistants to provide support for students with individual educational plans in lessons. This improved use of assessment and monitoring procedures since the last inspection is having a positive impact on the progress made by students in many unsupported lessons.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 - 11	114
	Sixth form	28
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		48

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 7 - 11							
Number	1	26	50	31	5	1	0
Percentage	1	23	44	27	4	1	0
Sixth form							
Number	3	8	8	9	0	0	0
Percentage	10	29	29	32	0	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	659	88
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	78	0

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	14	1
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	237	10

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	31

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	51
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	71

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	87.5
National comparative data	90.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	2.7
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2001	55	59	134

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	23	31	29
	Girls	31	26	22
	Total	54	57	51
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	47 (70)	50 (62)	45 (46)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	13 (23)	25 (30)	16 (16)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	26	32	33
	Girls	35	30	25
	Total	61	62	58
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	54 (41)	54 (65)	51 (55)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	19 (10)	26 (26)	22 (18)
	National	31 (31)	42 (39)	33 (29)

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	53	55	108

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A* to G	1 or more grades A* to G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	15	45	50
	Girls	11	46	52
	Total	26	91	102
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	24 (34)	84 (82)	94 (91)
	National	48 (47)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	27.9
	National	39.0

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	32	53
	National		n/a

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

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	11	26	37

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Male	Female	All
School	Number of candidates	11	26	37
	Average point score per candidate	15.4	15.9	15.8
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	18	17.5

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS examinations			For candidates entered for Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	Number of candidates	11	26	37	1	0	1
	Average point score per candidate	15.4	15.9	15.8	0	n/a	0
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.9	17.4	9.8	11.4	10.6

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	13
Black – African heritage	8
Black – other	8
Indian	6
Pakistani	9
Bangladeshi	2
Chinese	3
White	544
Any other minority ethnic group	1

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	9	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	5	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	75	4
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	45.6
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	19
Total aggregate hours worked per week	359

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	76
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	24
Key Stage 4	21

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000/1
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	£
Total income	2191442
Total expenditure	2097425
Expenditure per pupil	2789
Balance brought forward from previous year	91180
Balance carried forward to next year	185197

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	28
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	24

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	5
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	5
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	747
Number of questionnaires returned	80

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	35	55	9	1	0
My child is making good progress in school.	44	47	6	1	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	18	44	20	10	9
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	15	61	16	4	4
The teaching is good.	23	59	11	4	4
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	27	57	10	4	3
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	46	46	6	1	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	51	41	5	1	1
The school works closely with parents.	26	55	14	3	3
The school is well led and managed.	32	48	9	3	9
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	22	64	8	1	5
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	42	42	8	1	8

Summary of parents' and carers' responses

Parents, at their meeting, were very supportive of the school. They felt that improvement since the previous inspection had been good. They highlighted the improvements in the sixth form, in the range of extra curricular activities, and in leadership and management. They commented very favourably on the commitment shown by the teachers to the school and to their children. They believed that the previous, negative perception of the school had changed, that the local population recognised an improving school and that mentions in the local press were now positive.

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 **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- teaching, especially in Years 7 and 8, based on good planning and making good use of time
- relationships which recognise effort and success

Areas for improvement

- standards in national testing at the end of Years 9 and 11
- students' literacy skills, especially improving spelling and extending vocabulary
- teachers' consistency in marking and assessment to support students' progress

- 84 In 2001, the results of the tests at the end of Year 9 were well below average compared to schools nationally and to similar schools. Girls did better than boys but by a smaller margin than nationally. Results were similar to those in mathematics and science. These students joined the school with knowledge, skills and understanding which were well below average and, in relation to this attainment, their achievement was satisfactory.
- 85 Standards seen in lessons and in the work of the current Year 9 are still below average, but better than indicated by last year's results. Standards are higher because teaching clearly identifies lesson objectives and this focuses students' learning. Students show confidence in their oral work; most contribute willingly and politely to class discussions and group work. Although students are often hesitant in reading, low standards are improving as a result of regular practice in class and for homework. A significant number of students have trouble writing accurately. Spelling is a particular weakness. They also have difficulty arranging and developing their ideas into paragraphs and do better when teachers provide frameworks for their writing. Students' achievement is satisfactory in relation to their attainment at the start of Year 7. Students who entered the current Years 7 and 8 came with higher standards than previous years and their achievement is good. The newly introduced literacy strategy in Year 7 ensures good learning on a well-structured course. For example, a Year 7 class began the lesson with the same poems, but worked at many different levels on a variety of increasingly difficult tasks. Students in Year 8, working on *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*, linked specific language study with a range of reading styles, followed by interesting oral and writing tasks.
- 86 GCSE results in 2001, as indicated by the percentage of grades A* to C, were well below average compared to schools nationally and to similar schools. A larger proportion than nationally took the examination and the percentage that achieved grades A* to G was slightly above the national average. When compared to students with similar Year 9 results, the proportion of grades A* to C was below average. As in Year 9, girls performed worse than boys when compared to gender differences nationally. The results of the students entered for English Literature were also well below national averages, the girls' results significantly so. The results of both examinations were the lowest for the last five years but reflect the students' low attainment on entry to the school.
- 87 Standards seen in lessons and in the work of the current Year 11 are below average, but have improved on the previous year. Students do best in lessons that are sharply focused with a variety of short tasks. Their use of information technology has improved and many word-process their work and some use the Internet for research. Most do less well in open-ended exploratory work where they have to plan independently and rely on their initiative. Standards of reading are average, though few

students read widely or for pleasure. Higher-attaining students reach a good standard in writing, make good plans in spidergrams or lists, and draft their work well. Some produce work of a high standard and respond well to the extension tasks they are given. The standard of writing for most students, however, is below the national average. While they communicate their ideas fluently and sometimes at length, students continue to make basic spelling and punctuation errors. Without teachers' guidance at every step, students' vocabulary and sentence structure remain at a simple level. Their achievement is satisfactory in relation to their attainment at the start of the course.

- 88 The rate of progress in the development of different aspects of English varies. As students move through the school, they develop their speaking and listening skills in response to good questioning and, when opportunities are available, discussion in pairs and groups. Competence in reading grows steadily each year. Skills in writing, however, develop too slowly and in their written work, many students in Years 9, 10 and 11 underachieve. Some lower-attaining students in these year groups are also disaffected. Students with special educational needs make sound progress, and good progress when given effective extra support.
- 89 Students demonstrate similar writing weaknesses in most other subjects. Poor spelling and limited vocabulary hold back their learning. Teachers across the school have no agreed strategies to help students overcome their difficulties, and this was also the case at the time of the last inspection. However, the school does recognise the need and is working towards a policy to bring about concerted action. Some subjects develop literacy skills well. For example, in history and geography, teachers make students' literacy a priority by using word banks, word cards, frameworks to write in, and regular drafting. Similarly, in drama, students learn how to take notes efficiently and receive help in drafting their essays. This results in work of a very good quality. However, in most subjects, there are inconsistencies in teachers' expectations and approaches.
- 90 Students' attitudes to English are satisfactory but generally passive. They respond willingly and quickly to instructions. However, they show little independence in their learning. Only the higher-attainers have the enthusiasm to follow up ideas or find things out for themselves. Relationships with the teachers are strong, because teachers manage the lessons well and set appropriate work in which the students can achieve success. Behaviour has improved since the last inspection. It is usually good and teachers work hard to make it so.
- 91 All teaching is at least satisfactory with some very good teaching in Years 7 and 8. This represents a good improvement since the last inspection. Lesson planning is always good. It involves an efficient use of the learning support assistants and provides a clear structure for students. Teachers focus strongly on learning objectives in every lesson, and this usually results in a good pace. Returning to the objectives at the end of the lesson enables students to reflect on their learning and for the teachers to judge the success of the work. When teachers give short timed tasks, students, girls as well as boys, concentrate more. Teachers are paying more attention to examination skills; they have produced a good revision booklet, backed up by extra GCSE classes after school. They have written national curriculum levels in language students can understand, though these have not yet been given to all students. Teachers provide helpful guidelines on presentation but do not consistently adopt these or other strategies to support students' learning. Marking, for example, varies from being very detailed with grades, good features noted and targets for improvement, to an unhelpful, cursory tick. Whilst there are very good school procedures for assessment, teachers do not yet use the data well to help identify weaknesses, or track students' progress. This means that students are not always sure how well they are doing or what they must do to improve. Teachers occasionally confuse giving help and guidance with doing too much for the students, and this results in students making the minimal effort and becoming over-dependent.

- 92 The department is currently well managed in the hands of an acting head of department. New initiatives are in abeyance. The strong commitment of the English team is overcoming temporary staffing difficulties. The department has worked hard to respond to the last inspection report and improvement is satisfactory. They have gained confidence from their many improvements, especially in teaching, and have a determination to see standards rise.
- 93 The library is small but well used. Two rooms attached to the main space are reserved for silent reading and careers resources. A shortage of books is currently being addressed by the school and out of date stock gradually replaced. Newspapers, magazines and the Internet offer good support to students' learning. Access for students is good except when the library is used for class teaching. It is excellently staffed by a new librarian who approaches her job with imagination and flair.

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths

- leadership and management of the department, especially the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning leading to action plans that are raising standards
- good and very good teaching and learning in the majority of lessons
- attitudes of students towards the subject
- use of the assessment system to create and track student profiles, enabling their progress to be carefully monitored

Areas for improvement

- the range of teaching methods in classrooms so that students' involvement in their learning and their independent learning skills improve

- 94 Results in the 2001 tests were well below average compared to schools nationally and to similar schools. They were similar to results in English and science. Boys performed better than girls, whereas nationally performance is similar. The trend in the results fluctuates over the last 3 years and does not yet match the nationally improving picture. These students had well below average standards when they joined the school.
- 95 The standard attained by students at the end of Year 9 is close to national expectation and is a marked improvement from the previous year. This is because the teaching has been much more focused and monitoring of progress is more secure. High-attaining students confidently use algebra to determine the n^{th} term of sequences, and extend their ideas considerably in the application of mathematics to problems solving. Average-attaining students use the index function on their calculators efficiently to evaluate quadratic and cubic algebraic expressions, given the value of x . They calculate with decimals, fractions and percentages correctly. The majority successfully apply these skills to evaluating areas and perimeters of circles. Low-attaining students collect statistical data and compare correctly using a variety of graphs. They are not yet confident in evaluating linear algebraic expressions using single digit numbers, and work in books is not always completed. All students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress in mathematics, especially when supported by teaching assistants. Students are achieving well in relation to their attainment at the start of Year 7.
- 96 GCSE results in 2001, based on the percentage of grades A* to C, were well below average for schools nationally and for similar schools. However, this percentage was above average for students with similar results at the end of Year 9. The percentage of grades A* to G was close to average for schools nationally. These results were an improvement over the previous year.

- 97 The standard of work at the end of Year 11 is at nationally expected levels. This is because it is a different cohort of students and as a result of the more effective teaching. High-attaining students use the sine and cosine rule to find missing sides and angles in triangles and can apply these skills to problems involving bearings. Average-attaining students consolidate their understanding of decimal and fractional calculations by correctly solving past examination questions. Low-attaining students are not yet confident to plot and interpret scatter graphs. Their work is often poorly presented and ruler constructions not accurately drawn. Standards of presentation are often much better in girls' than boys' books. Students' achievement is satisfactory in relation to their attainment at the beginning of the course.
- 98 Standards of numeracy are now satisfactory. Provision in mathematics is satisfactory, but not yet co-ordinated across all subjects. There is no whole school numeracy policy but plans are secure to implement these this year. There are good plans for the associated professional training of all staff. The mathematics department has successfully introduced the National Numeracy Strategy across all teaching groups. Students not only calculate using a greater range of mental methods but also gain in understanding by explaining their methods to other students. Students use their numeracy skills in geography lessons to draw and interpret graphs. They can apply a test for correlation and understand what it means. Most calculate position using latitude and longitude measurements accurately. In physical education lessons students score accurately and evaluate their own performance using timed measures. In design and technology lessons, food is weighed and measured correctly using the metric system. Patterns and template are drawn accurately for later cutting out and making. In PSHE lessons, proportional representation calculations are correctly applied and in science, graphs are used well to explain rates of reaction and enzyme studies.
- 99 The use of information and communication technology in mathematics is satisfactory overall with good use when students use and apply their mathematics in practical and investigational situations. Spreadsheets are effectively used and make a good contribution to standards of numeracy. The associated graphs not only enhance the quality of the work but provide a good basis for later work. A Year 11 student investigated the storage of wine bottles under the cellar stairs and determined, algebraically, the limits of the storage depending on the angle the staircase made with the horizontal. Very good use was made of spreadsheet software to analyse the data and draw graphs to illustrate the results.
- 100 Teaching and learning are good. They are good or better in the majority of lessons and are having a positive impact on raising standards. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen. Teachers' knowledge and understanding of mathematics is very good and this promotes a strong emphasis on students understanding what they do. Planning is good and always incorporates activities related to the National Numeracy Strategy. Students' knowledge of methods of calculation and recall of number combinations improves as a result of these activities. Where teaching and learning are at their best, there are very high expectations of both behaviour and learning. Students are challenged to learn quickly, and do so. Students know their target grades for the examinations and teachers monitor this effectively during the lessons, indicating the next step for success. However in many lessons, student involvement in their learning is insufficiently prominent and their independent learning skills are limited because teachers provide too much direction and instruction. In a Year 8 class, students were extending their skills in algebraic manipulation. Starting with a quick mental test that set high expectations, students were then asked to calculate the value of a variety of algebraic linear expressions, involving fractions using single digit numbers, in their heads. Students drew and explained what happened to these functions when plotted graphically, between given limits. By the end of the lessons, nearly all gained a very good understanding of how to graph and interpret inequalities. This showed very high attainment and progress for this age group.

101 Leadership and management of the mathematics department are very good. Teamwork is highly valued and there is a strong commitment and capacity to improve. The vision for mathematics teaching and learning in the department handbook is well articulated, and monitored and evaluated effectively. Teachers receive regular feedback on their work, and students' books are checked for consistency. These evaluations form the basis for development and action planning and have led to a very good range of strategies for raising standards. Termly assessment of progress has led to rising standards. The curriculum is good, well-balanced across the required areas and is enhanced by good provision for the gifted and talented students. It meets legal requirements. Parents support the summer school numeracy work for the new intake. There has been good improvement since the previous inspection. These improvements, although not yet reflected in the examination results, are very evident for the younger students in the school.

SCIENCE

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

Strengths

- good or very good teaching where students learn well in a very independent way, where the quality of practical investigation is good and strong emphasis is placed on the teaching of literacy
- well-managed GCSE coursework which contributes to students' achievement and gives them good information about how to improve
- management is good
- the department is well organised and well supported
- resources which are enriched by good links with the community and with industry

Areas for improvement

- the temporary staffing crisis is resulting in some teaching that is unsatisfactory either in planning or in behaviour management
- in a minority of classes, students' behaviour and attitude to work are unsatisfactory
- the work of some students in lower sets is incomplete and marking does not always give them enough guidance on how to improve

102 In 2001, the results of the tests at the end of Year 9 were well below average compared to schools nationally and to similar schools. They were similar to the results in English and mathematics. There was no significant difference between the results of boys and girls. The trend over the last five years has been static, apart from a dip in girls' performance in 2001. These students joined the school with attainment which was well below average. The attainment of students who have joined the school this year is broadly average although with more students at the lower than average Level 3, than in most schools.

103 The standards seen in lessons and in the work done by current Year 9 students over the year, are higher than the previous results indicate because the year group is generally higher attaining. Students respond well to challenging work in chemistry, handling chemical formulae and making predictions of the likely outcome of chemical reactions. They identify organisms by the use of keys, predict reactivity and understand balanced forces. They produce independent work in response to questions. Higher-attaining students were able to structure investigations on genetic diversity in plants with mature understanding. Lower-attaining students were able to predict reflection off a plane surface, and recognise echoes as examples of reflection. However, overall, even the higher-attaining groups have difficulty with spelling and there is not sufficient independent, quantitative and investigative work to

meet expectations for curriculum coverage. Overall, students' achievement is satisfactory in relation to their attainment at the start of Year 7.

- 104 In Years 7 and 8, there is evidence of higher standards reflecting the improvement of attainment on entry. For example, Year 7 students can specify fair test and variables, understand proportionality, balanced forces, friction and upthrust. In a Year 8 lesson, students showed good knowledge of chemical reactions and were able to identify thermal decomposition, neutralisation and displacement reactions. Thus, attainment is improving, but there is also some work of unsatisfactory standard in the classes where the teacher changed during the Christmas term.
- 105 Overall GCSE results in 2001, based on the percentage of grades A* to C, were well below average compared to schools nationally and to similar schools. The majority of students followed a single award course. The results of the minority of students following a double award course were similar to national results. However, results were above average for students with the same attainment at the end of Year 9. Both boys and girls were well below average and there is, as yet, no upward trend. The attainment of these students was well below average when they entered the school.
- 106 The standard of work of students currently at the end of Year 11 is below nationally expected levels but better than the results suggest. This is because more students are studying double science and an increased emphasis on coursework which counts for a quarter of the final marks. Students can make calculations about electrical resistance and, with help, balance chemical equations. They can use graphs to present information, for example about the effect of caffeine. In some lessons, students worked independently to put together presentations about the electrolytic production of aluminium. These were of high quality. Overhead projector transparencies were accurate and students matched properties of aluminium and its alloys to their industrial uses and commented, with insight, about industrial location. Overall, students' achievement is satisfactory in relation to their attainment at the start of the course.
- 107 In Year 10, there is evidence of improving attainment. Higher-attaining students collect information and present it well and their understanding, for example in work on electron shells, is good. Lower-attaining students demonstrate good achievement in collecting and presenting information about the solar system, and in calculating frequency and wavelength of radiation. In a top set, students summarised the structure and functions of blood, using advanced as well as GCSE texts. In a lower boys' set engaged in practical work on electricity, students showed good achievement by predicting current and voltage in different parts of electrical circuits. On the other hand, achievement in one low-attaining girls' set was undermined by poor attitudes to work.
- 108 The quality of teaching is sound overall from Year 7 to 11 but varies from very good to unsatisfactory. Teachers' subject knowledge is in general good. Where teaching is good or very good, there is a good balance of practical and investigative work. When students were given the opportunity to work independently, for example in a Year 9 lessons on plant variation, in a Year 10 on human physiology and in a Year 11 on industrial chemistry, students responded very well, with good pace and their attitudes and learning were good or very good. Good teaching challenged more able students and allowed them to show what they can do. Both boys and girls were fully included and both showed interest. Students with special educational needs also did well. Good teaching in Years 7 and 8 allowed students to develop good practical skills, for example in working out the reactivity of metals in Year 7 and defining a range of chemical reactions in Year 8. Good practical teaching in a Year 10 low-attaining set resulted in good learning about electric circuits, with all students learning the core objective and some pursuing the work further.

- 109 However, a proportion of teaching was unsatisfactory. In a Year 8 lesson, planning was inadequate and timing was so badly out that the practical activity was never reached. In a Year 11 lesson, planning was good but inadequate behaviour management techniques allowed unsatisfactory behaviour to undermine learning. The attitude to work of a disruptive minority, often concentrated in lower-attaining sets, remains a concern for the department. In some lessons even the stronger teachers had difficulty managing unsatisfactory behaviour, and were not always able to prevent it from affecting the learning of others.
- 110 In most lessons, teachers emphasise literacy. The use of key words and their highlighting in students' work is widespread. In the best lessons students were helped in pronunciation and given experience in speaking to their colleagues. The use of computers for coursework led to better learning, with aids to literacy, such as writing frames, being used to good effect. The library contains a small but good selection of scientific books and a range of texts were used well in the lessons with good independent learning. Teaching of numeracy is less well emphasised but soundly addresses the curriculum demand of the GCSE syllabus. Other uses of information and communication technology are still being developed. Marking is thorough, and suitable for students with good attitudes to work. Lower-attaining students are generally guided well but occasionally otherwise good teaching does not provide sufficient support for less well-motivated students with the result that their work falls behind. Their recorded work is often incomplete and marking chiefly consists of the pointing out of gaps.
- 111 Management of the department is good. Policies and schemes of work are thorough. Assessment and target setting are good and the department produces good quality information that is used to improve the curriculum. The weaknesses in teaching result from a short-term crisis in the recruitment of suitably qualified teachers. Although temporary teachers are given good quality monitoring, feedback, support and training, reduction in the quality of outcomes remains. A particular management strength lies in the development of links with the wider community which enrich the curriculum and resources.
- 112 Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. Achievement has improved, the curriculum has been improved and community links further developed. Management remains good and the accommodation has been improved by the refurbishment of three laboratories.

ART AND DESIGN

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

Strengths

- teachers' knowledge and understanding of the subject are excellent.
- the subject makes a very strong contribution to students' spiritual and cultural development.
- much of the teaching seen was very good and students achieved well.
- very good development of information and communication technology in all years and particularly in the graphics course.

Areas for improvement

- strategies for questioning students and involving them all in extended written and oral responses.
- strengthening the links between objectives for learning and assessment, and making these clearer to students.

- 113 When students arrive in the school their attainment in art and design is well below average. The majority have limited experience of different art materials and working processes, and have not kept a sketchbook. In 2001, the above average standards recorded by teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 were over generous and did not fully reflect the low standards of critical and contextual

understanding that are linked to low standards of literacy. Attainment of students currently in Year 7 is still below average but higher than in previous years.

- 114 Attainment of students currently in Year 9 is broadly in line with the standards expected for their age. Given their low starting points, all are achieving well. All students, including those with special needs, respond very positively to the firm and fair discipline that provides a very good climate for learning. The strategies being adopted to improve literacy are beginning to have a very good impact on students' ability to make independent on-going evaluations of their work and on their progress. As a consequence they are more confident, better able to gather together information, discuss their ideas and refine and modify their work. In lessons where students made significant gains in knowledge and understanding they were prompted to give extended answers to questions. All students, even those who were initially reluctant to take an active role in discussions, exchanged ideas that they were then able to apply in their practical work. Very good examples of this were seen in Years 7 and 8, for example in the making of sea creatures and masks. Where skills of independent learning are less well-developed students rely too heavily on the class teacher. They are less involved in the decision-making and consequently less interested in the outcome.
- 115 Art and design results in examinations are the combined results of examinations in graphics and art and design. Prior to 2001, GCSE results had been broadly average. In 2001, results fell to below average. Changes in staffing left some students ill-prepared for the examination and, in particular, to fulfil the requirements of changes in the way work was assessed. As a result, although the graphics results maintained previous high standards, the art results fell causing the combined results to fall below average. Many of the boys chose to take graphics rather than the art option and their results were average when compared with boys' results nationally.
- 116 The standard of work of students currently in Year 11 is, overall, broadly average and better than that indicated by previous results. As in previous years the graphics work is of a particularly high standard. Significant numbers of students are working at lower levels but all are achieving well given their starting points. There is very good achievement by many students, including some with learning difficulties. Across the subject as a whole, most students are maintaining a good rate of improvement and are on track to exceed their target grades. The standard of literacy and students' abilities to analyse and critically evaluate their own and others' work, is the weaker element and hampers higher levels of attainment. Some who start the course struggle with homework routines and the discipline required for keeping a sketchbook. Those opting to take art or graphics find it particularly hard to pursue independent enquiry and achieve the same level of success in the examination as they do in their coursework. The graphics course is a popular option, particularly for the boys. Using computers is an attraction for many and getting a quick result, then building up layers of images and effects, is very satisfying and motivating. Success builds confidence and develops positive attitudes to learning. Students could demonstrate their increasing knowledge of and familiarity with different software packages and their ability to manipulate images and evaluate the outcome.
- 117 The subject makes a very strong contribution to the development of wider spiritual, social and cultural development. Opportunities created for students to reflect on artists' work, consider why it was made as it was and the impact it has on the viewer, contributes very effectively to spiritual development and students' understanding of different cultural traditions.
- 118 Teaching and learning are good overall. There are many strengths that contribute to the high proportion of very good teaching seen during the week of the inspection. As yet, this teaching is not reflected in examination results and end of Year 9 assessments because many of the teachers are new. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and expertise and share very high expectations of work and behaviour. A feature of the very good teaching is in the methods used to create a calm and purposeful

working environment. This enables teachers to lead discussions, ask searching questions and establish a dialogue where students' contributions are highly valued. The relationships that exist between teachers and students are very supportive and help to underpin students' very good attitudes to the subject. As a result they are very keen to learn, little time is wasted and they concentrate well. In older years, positive approaches to learning are enhanced through visits to galleries and extra-curricular activities. They serve to widen students' understanding of art and design and foster increased enthusiasm for study that leads some go on to advanced and higher education. Individual and whole class teaching was generally very effective and worked best where objectives were sharp and clearly explained, and reviewed at the end of the lesson. In the future, and as the scheme of work develops, the links between what is planned and what is to be assessed needs to be strengthened and shared with students.

119 The management of the subject is very good and improvement since the last inspection is sound. There is very effective teamwork and a commitment by all staff to continue to improve what is already a very successful department. Newly-qualified teachers are given very good support and are making an excellent contribution to the development of the subject. Strengths of the teaching lie in the willingness of staff to reflect on the impact of their teaching and to adapt and to modify it as necessary. The monitoring of students' work needs to be developed further in order to build a shared understanding of National Curriculum levels. Book provision in the library and in the department is inadequate, although the department has adequate resources to support the use of information and communication technology.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- the standards being achieved in resistant materials at GCSE
- the attitudes and behaviour of most students
- the developing schemes of work, which provide good access to designing and making activities in Years 7 to 9
- the accommodation and resources available

Areas for improvement

- schemes of work for Years 10 and 11 to aid lesson planning
- aspects of student management
- the sharing of good practice in planning and teaching to raise standards

120 The standards, as reported by teacher assessment, at the end of Year 9 were slightly below those reported nationally. The standard of work of students currently at the end of Year 9 is broadly at nationally expected levels. Students develop knowledge about materials, components and ingredients but their retention of this is relatively low. They carry out research, relate knowledge to the development of design ideas and produce final ideas that are evaluated. Standards of written work and drawing are generally satisfactory. Higher-attaining students, working in groups where the learning opportunities are well organised and presented, produce good folder work. For example, they produced well-drawn, individual designs as part of their project on bookends. However, attainment is more limited where learning activities are less well planned and expectations of students' work are not sufficiently high. In relation to their attainment at the start of Year 7, the achievement of all students, including those with special educational needs, is satisfactory.

- 121 Overall results in GCSE have been steadily improving and in 2001, were in line with the national average. Boys did particularly well in resistant materials and results for this subject were above the national average. The results for graphic products remained well below average. All students gained at least a G grade.
- 122 Current work in Year 11 indicates that standards, overall, are in line with those expected for students of this age. The structured approach used to address course work is enabling most students to meet the requirements of the examination well. In the best folders, the quality of research, analysis, and development and evaluation of ideas is very good. Students taking resistant materials have a good range of knowledge and skills and understand how materials and components can be used safely, effectively and sometimes creatively, in the development of their own ideas. However, knowledge retention is relatively weak for many students and the standards being achieved by students taking graphic products are low. Practical work is satisfactory overall and, together with presentation of their work, is good for higher-attaining students. There is increasing use of computers for research and presentation of work. Overall, all students, including those with special educational needs, make satisfactory progress but the progress and achievement of students taking the graphic products course is unsatisfactory.
- 123 Teaching in Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory overall with both good and unsatisfactory lessons. Teachers have good subject knowledge and in better lessons, planning is good, appropriate teaching methods are used and expectations of behaviour and performance are suitably high. This enables students to acquire knowledge and skills, and use these effectively by working at a good pace. Students generally show high levels of interest and concentration in both their folders and their practical work. In the best lessons, management of students is a strength and time is used well, enabling most students to work in a controlled atmosphere and demonstrate high levels of commitment to their work. Where teaching was unsatisfactory it was due to a lack of sufficient detail in the planning for a successful practical lesson resulting from inexperience, or the inability to manage the difficult behaviour of a small group of students. Greater use could be made of homework.
- 124 Teaching overall, in Years 10 and 11, is satisfactory but again varying from very good to unsatisfactory. The teaching of resistant materials is well structured and enables students of all levels of ability to address the requirement of the examination. Teachers' knowledge is good and this enables good demonstrations and support for individual students. As a result, students are quick to engage in the activities set and keen to do well. Students demonstrate satisfactory levels of concentration and commitment to their work. When teachers' planning does not provide suitably encouraging learning activities and positive working relationships with students have not been established, learning is seriously affected and is poor. The teaching of literacy, numeracy and the use of computers are satisfactory overall.
- 125 Students' attitudes and behaviour are good overall. Almost all students respond very well to teachers' high expectations of behaviour and are keen to do well in their work. A small but significant minority of students, if not well-managed are inattentive, unproductive and disruptive and this has a significant negative effect on the learning of others.
- 126 Curriculum time is used well in Years 7 to 9 with good, developing programmes of work that provide good coverage of National Curriculum requirements. Not all students take a design and technology subject in Years 10 and 11. There are no recorded schemes of work for Years 10 and 11 work and thus little support for lesson planning.
- 127 Assessment procedures are operating effectively and the regular assessment of students' work, together with good individual support in lessons, keeps students informed about their progress and

enables them to improve their work. Although many of the teachers are new to their role or the school, there is a clear educational direction for the department and a shared commitment to improve performance. There is a need to develop and share good practice in the planning and delivery of lessons in order to improve teaching and raise the standards currently being achieved. Resources and accommodation are good and used well. There is developing use of computers and associated equipment. Improvement, since the previous inspection, is satisfactory.

GEOGRAPHY

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

Strengths

- good quality of teaching and learning
- good achievement of students
- very good leadership and management of the subject
- above average attainment of students in Years 10 and 11
- the development of students' literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology skills

Areas for improvement

- consistency in the quality of teaching in Years 7, 8 and 9
- setting of more specific, short-term targets
- the number opting for this subject at the end of Year 9
- development of greater independence in students' learning
- the reliability of teacher assessments at the end of Year 9

- 128 Students join the school with knowledge, skills and understanding which are below average, particularly in terms of their literacy skills. In 2001, teacher assessment reported standards at the end of Year 9 below those reported nationally. The reliability of these teacher assessments should be improved by the use of exemplars and increased moderation. The difference between the attainment of boys and girls was less than that reported nationally.
- 129 The standard of work of students at the end of Year 9 is below nationally expected levels. Students are able to apply a developing range of skills in their studies of places and themes. The work of all Year 9 students reflected a clear understanding of the physical conditions that affect density of population and the mechanisms of natural population changes. All students in Year 8 use atlases most effectively, for example, to name capital cities and build-up sketch maps. Year 7 students can construct accurate graphs using rainfall and temperature data. Students in Year 9 are achieving well in relation to their attainment at the beginning of Year 7.
- 130 GCSE results in 2001 were above average for all schools although a smaller proportion than nationally, took the examination. Results have been maintained since the significant improvement reported at the time of the last inspection. All students gained a grade in the range A* to G and exceeded the target set by the department. The difference between the attainment of boys and girls has varied widely over the last three years, but the numbers taking geography are too small to make comparisons reliable.
- 131 The evidence of students' work and the lessons observed show that standards at the end of Year 11 are certainly in line with those expected nationally. Students are achieving well in relation to their attainment at the start of the course. The work of Year 11 students studying 'Urban Issues' shows a good understanding of terms and processes, for example those concerned with migration, which were

applied effectively in a case-study of Calcutta. The work of Year 10 students shows good understanding of indices of development. Higher-attaining students providing accurate explanations of demographic transition. All have the skills necessary to produce effective diagrams and maps using data and atlases.

- 132 Students with special educational needs make good progress, as seen in a Year 9 lesson where students drew maps of Brazil and recognised the impact of physical factors on the distribution of population. They achieved well because the teacher was aware of their individual requirements and, with the help of learning assistants, adjusted the teaching accordingly. There was no evidence in the lessons observed, or in students' completed work, of the lack of challenge for higher-attaining students reported last time. Departmental initiatives, for example the distribution of students with behavioural problems among all groups, ensure the inclusion of students who might otherwise fall by the wayside.
- 133 Overall, the teaching and learning of geography are good, though stronger in Years 10 and 11 where all teachers have very secure subject knowledge and effective classroom/student management skills. For example, in a Year 11 lesson, the teacher's informed description and clear explanation of international migration enabled students to appreciate how geography can help their understanding of global issues. Teachers have a clear understanding of the National Curriculum, examination requirements and what students need to do to succeed. This makes their teaching particularly effective at all stages. They provide content that is accurate and reflects current information, as when Year 10 students interpreted statistics to appreciate the different ways in which levels of development could be identified and measured. The teachers have high expectations of students whose attitudes and behaviour are good overall and often very good. The presentation of work has improved significantly since the last report. Questioning at the beginning and end of each lesson checked understanding and linked the work with that done previously. The consistent emphasis on developing literacy skills, for example the use of key words and the careful definition of meanings, was a feature of all lessons. This helps students to use geographical vocabulary more confidently when answering questions and in writing.
- 134 In the majority of lessons the interest generated by the teaching ensured that students were able to sustain their concentration and to complete a considerable amount of work. Homework is set regularly and used to develop enquiry skills. Changes in teaching strategies are encouraging increased independence, so that students are able to organise and manage their work. This was seen in an excellent lesson on the de-forestation of the Amazon with Year 8 students. Teachers mark students' books regularly and thoroughly, maintaining good records, but the practice of setting short-term targets that might encourage further improvement is under-used.
- 135 The contribution of information and communication technology to learning in this subject and the opportunities for students to practise their numerical skills are good. These, together with opportunities for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are written into the schemes of work.
- 136 Geography is managed very well. The head of department provides very good leadership and the teachers work very well together. Reliable data is being used to set targets, to monitor the progress of students and, with the observation of lessons, to evaluate teaching. New detailed schemes of work have been introduced in order to improve standards and raise levels of motivation. The resources are good and a wider range is being compiled in order to meet better the needs of all students. The head of department has clear priorities and a commitment to improvement that is shared by the team.

HISTORY

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

Strengths

- above average GCSE results for the last three years
- teachers have good knowledge and understanding and are enthusiastic
- teachers use assessment well to raise standards
- the teaching in Years 10 and 11 is particularly good

Areas for improvement

- standards in Years 7 to 9 are not as high as they are in Years 10 and 11
- the scheme of work for Years 7 to 9 does not give teachers enough support and guidance
- teachers' marking of students' work in Years 7 to 9 is not consistent enough to promote high standards

137 The standard of work of students currently in Year 9 is below average, but given their attainment when they join the school this represents satisfactory achievement in Years 7 to 9. The work on topics such as the slave trade in Year 8 and on Victorian Britain in Year 9 showed that students acquire a satisfactory level of knowledge and understanding of events and the contribution of different people. The quality of oral work is better than the written work. Some of the discussion on the First World War which was stimulated by the poetry of Wilfred Owen, showed considerable sensitivity and understanding. Teacher assessment of work in previous years also shows below average attainment.

138 GCSE results were above average in 2001 as they have been for several years. All students gained at least a pass grade and students gained better grades in the subject than in most of their others. This is the opposite of the situation in most schools, where students' history grades are usually worse than those for their other subjects. Current Year 11 students are also working to a good standard and are achieving very well. Their work on the history of medicine showed good insight into the way in which medicine has changed and developed over the centuries. Their work also showed good knowledge of events in Germany after 1918. The students were rather less secure in analysing documentary and picture sources and applying what they knew to questions based on evidence.

139 Students generally enjoy history and their attitudes and behaviour were never less than satisfactory and usually good. They listen with reasonable attention to teachers and to each other, taking part sensibly in whole class discussions. In Years 7 to 9 they are not always willing to do more than the minimum asked of them without considerable encouragement. In Years 10 and 11 they are better motivated and work hard.

140 The overall quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11. Teachers are knowledgeable and enthusiastic about the subject and are keen to share their enthusiasm with their students. The difference between the teaching of different age groups lies in the teachers' expectations. These are significantly higher for students in Years 10 and 11 than they are for those in Years 7 to 9, though the best lesson seen was in Year 9. Here the use of poetry caught students' imagination and the quality of questioning and the level of challenge resulted in very significant development of knowledge and understanding of the impact of the First World War. The satisfactory teaching did not make as many demands on students and the resultant work was much more superficial. In all classes the explanations are clear and the whole class question and answer sessions help to ensure that students fully understand what is expected of them. In Years 10 and 11 the challenging tasks are closely linked to the requirements of the examination syllabus.

141 Students' work is regularly marked but the quality of marking is too variable. In Years 10 and 11, and in a few classes in Years 7 to 9, marking is constructive and the feedback to students on how well they have done gives them clear guidance on how to improve. Praise is used carefully to boost

confidence. However, the marking of work in other classes in Years 7 to 9 does not give enough guidance. In contrast, the use of assessment information is good. Teachers have a very clear idea of what their students have achieved and what their potential is for improvement. This is shared with students who have a clear view of the progress they are making and what they need to do to improve. Students, particularly in Years 10 and 11, are encouraged to be self-critical.

- 142 History provides good opportunities for improving and practising literacy skills. Teachers give good attention to helping students to learn and use key words. Techniques such as writing frames are often used well to guide students in improving the structure of their writing. There are fewer opportunities for students to develop their number skills. The use of computers is developing well. Information and communication technology has been incorporated into the scheme of work for Years 7 to 9 and students in all year groups regularly use the Internet for research. The library is used well for research.
- 143 Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. GCSE results have been maintained at an above average level and the emphasis on developing literacy and information and communication technology has been good. Schemes of work for Years 7 to 9 need revision as they do not give enough guidance to new or inexperienced teachers. The school has been unable to replace the previous head of department but the head of faculty has a good knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses in history through his systematic monitoring. The arrangements made to manage the department on a temporary basis are satisfactory.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- the teaching programme in Years 7 to 9
- teaching in Years 7 to 9, which leads to good learning and achievement for students of all ability levels.
- developing good practice in the use of computers in other subjects

Areas for improvement

- the provision of a structured experience for students in Years 10 and 11
- the monitoring and coordination of the computer based work developing in other subjects
- the development of assessment procedures that regularly record students' attainment in the subject wherever it occurs

- 144 In 2001, teacher assessments reported standards at the end of Year 9 that were well above those reported nationally. The evidence of observation and students' recorded work is that standards at the end of Year 9 are currently at nationally expected levels. Students have suitable experiences in most aspects of the subject but their use of computers for measurement and control is limited. Most students show confidence and competence in using computers for different purposes. They learn quickly and use prior knowledge and skills to enter data, text and pictures into spreadsheets, word processed documents, posters and slide presentations. For example, Year 9 students researched recycling on the Internet before producing a multi-media slide presentation for use in a school assembly. Students join the school with a varied, and often limited, experience but they make steady progress and their achievement is satisfactory.
- 145 There are no examination results to report in 2001. There is no separate course in the subject in Years 10 and 11. The use of computers in other subjects is developing well throughout the school and most departments now include elements of computer-based work in some of their learning activities. In many cases this uses only a limited range of knowledge and skills for word processing and for presentational purposes. More extensive and extending work, for example using the Internet for research, modelling through use of spreadsheets and the manipulation of screen images, is taking place in business studies, office applications, GNVQ, history, geography, religious education, mathematics and art. This provides good opportunities for many students to use the skills they learned in information and communications technology lessons in years 7 to 9. However, not all students in Years 10 and 11 have a planned, coordinated and monitored programme of information and communications technology and their progress and achievement is inconsistent and their access to higher-level computer skills is limited.
- 146 Teaching in specialist lessons in Years 7 to 9 is good. Teachers have good subject knowledge, which enables them to plan their lessons well and, because student management is good and expectations suitably high, students show good levels of concentration and work at a good pace. Teaching methods are generally effective and as a result students' learning is good. However, because all students are given the same task, work is not always sufficiently matched to individual and group needs. The well-structured programme of work enables all students to acquire a good range of knowledge and skills and use these effectively in the exercises set. Students are confident in using computers and accessing programmes. Most, of all levels of attainment, are keen to do well, show good levels of concentration and work at a good pace. A small minority, if not managed well, can be negative in their approach and responses and affect both their own progress and that of the rest of the group. Students' literacy and numeracy skills are effectively developed by their work. Good, ongoing assessment provides good

individual help and advice to students during the course of most lessons and their work is marked regularly. With no separate course in Years 10 and 11 the teaching of information and communication technology comes through what happens in other courses and subjects.

- 147 Leadership and management are good in Years 7 to 9. Resources and accommodation have been improved to a good standard and professional development has improved the confidence and competence of teachers. The shared commitment to improve both provision teaching need result in a clearer coordinated programme for information and communications technology across the school, particularly in years 10 and 11. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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

Strengths

- the consistency in the quality of teaching
- lessons which are well planned to meet students' differing needs
- students' positive attitudes to language study
- the department is well led and managed

Areas for improvement

- results which have been well below national averages
- the standards attained by middle and lower-attaining students in Year 9 are not high enough

- 148 In 2001, teacher assessments reported standards at the end of Year 9 which were well below the average reported nationally. They were a slight improvement from the previous year. The standard of work of students currently at the end of Year 9 is below the level expected nationally. The improvement is a result of the more effective teaching. Higher-attaining students are reaching standards close to expected levels. They can speak and write using past tenses, though this is not practised with sufficient regularity. They read a reasonable range of texts and have frequent opportunities to develop their listening skills. Other students work at a more basic level: they can give short, spoken responses and write paragraphs on, for example, their preferences in television programmes. The achievement of all students is satisfactory in relation to the below average attainment at the start of Year 7. Students in Years 7 and 8 are achieving well and many in Year 8 are already working at the national benchmark for Year 9. For example, the work of higher and average-attaining Year 8 students featured good writing using past tenses in a very good account of a holiday in the United States. This is because their attainment on entry to the school is rising and is also due to the impact of the much improved teaching they have experienced.

- 149 GCSE results in French in 2001 were well below average, continuing a downward trend since 1999. Boys performed significantly less well than girls and worse than the difference reported nationally. However, all students who have taken GCSE French since 1999 have achieved a pass grade A* - G, which is above the national average. In the current Year 11, evidence of the inspection and the results of the GCSE modules already taken in French show that standards are much closer to the national average, though still somewhat below. This is as a result of the more effective teaching. In a Year 11 class, students used their listening and reading skills in combination to work with demanding material describing people's personal characteristics and the good or bad influence they can have on others. Their written work included business and social correspondence as well as writing on personal themes. The gap between boys and girls was much less pronounced than past results suggest. Students' achievement is satisfactory in relation to their attainment at the start of the course.

- 150 In previous years, German has been offered as a second foreign language to more able students. Staffing difficulties have resulted in there currently being only a single group in Year 11. Standards in this class are in line with the national expectation and module results so far indicate that some two thirds of students will achieve grades A* - C, which is slightly above the national average. In the lesson seen, students tackled the topic of health and fitness, combining their listening, speaking and writing skills effectively. They use information and communication technology as well as a range of texts to develop their reading and writing skills.
- 151 Teaching is satisfactory overall. This is a significant improvement since the previous inspection. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen and there were good features in the majority of lessons. Planning is a particular strength: lessons are planned in detail to suit the needs of individual classes. Teachers produce much original material to supplement published courses. There is good variety and an emphasis on active learning through practical and relevant tasks which are proving successful in improving the motivation of boys. In the best lessons seen, the teachers' approach was dynamic and engaging: students were enabled to learn through good presentation and modelling of French and opportunities for copious practice, backed with encouragement and support. Students are given good guidance on examination requirements and techniques. Their work is thoroughly marked and, through the sharing of assessment and National Curriculum criteria, they are given clear indications as to how to improve their performance. Teachers manage students well, notably in lower-ability sets where attitudes and behaviour could pose problems. The overall improvement in teaching has brought about an improvement in standards in the past year, though this has not yet been fully realised at examination level. In teaching which was satisfactory, less successful aspects of teaching seen were failure to exploit topics in sufficient depth to promote higher achievement, for example insufficiently regular use of a range of tenses in Year 9, and insufficiently high expectations of higher-attaining students.
- 152 Students learn effectively in the majority of lessons: they respond well to teaching which engages them and enables them to make progress with support. Their work is routinely displayed in classrooms and public areas of the language department, increasing their motivation and self-esteem. They show the ability to listen attentively, maintain their concentration through a range of tasks and work well together in pairs or groups. They develop their literacy and information and communication technology skills through language learning and are aware of both the progress they have made and of what they have to do to achieve higher standards. In Years 7 to 9 in particular, they are given opportunities to be imaginative and creative in their production of French. Students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress in response to teaching which is targeted sensitively and effectively at their needs.
- 153 Students' attitudes to language study are positive and have improved significantly since the last inspection. Their behaviour in the lessons seen was never less than satisfactory and was mostly good. Relationships with their teachers and each other are good. Many take advantage of opportunities to visit France with the school.
- 154 The languages curriculum is well balanced and soundly planned. Assessment and the recording of students' progress are good. The department is well managed and works as a cohesive team. The French and German assistants provide good linguistic and cultural support. Library provision is satisfactory, including a good range of fiction. Since the last inspection, teaching, learning and students' attitudes and behaviour have improved. Better use is made of information and communication technology and lower-attaining students and those with special educational needs are better supported. Standards in examinations and reported assessments are still below average, but students' achievement is improving. The department has made good progress and has the capacity to maintain this.

MUSIC

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

Strengths

- the significant improvement in provision since the last inspection
- effective teaching which includes all students
- enthusiasm and enjoyment through active participation.

Areas for improvement

- increasing the availability of information and communication technology to support students' learning

- 155 Students join the school with knowledge, skills and understanding which are in line with or just below average. By the end of Year 9, standards are in line with national expectations for students of a similar age. Students demonstrate a sound knowledge of musical terms and understand basic rhythmic notation. Composition, improvisation and performance work centres appropriately on the use of keyboards and classroom percussion instruments. Listening is essentially a whole class activity. Students perform with limited technique and their composing and improvising skills are often good or better. In a Year 7 lesson they sang an unaccompanied African work song confidently and with enjoyment. Students' achievement is satisfactory in relation to their attainment at the start of Year 7.
- 156 GCSE results, for 2001, were above average for schools nationally, as they have been for the previous two years. However, the number of students taking the subject is small and statistically comparisons have little significance. The standard of work of students currently at the end of Year 11 is generally better than expected from students of a similar age. Students apply their knowledge, skills and understanding in practical activities that integrate performing, composing and appraising. Good relationships are developed between teachers and students. This results in a conscientious approach from students to their work. The higher-attaining students are developing the ability to hear the sounds that they are notating. Standards achieved in extra-curricular activities are good. There is no significant variation in the standards achieved by girls and boys nor by those students with special educational needs.
- 157 The majority of students in Years 7 to 9 work hard in lessons, and effective co-operation and collaboration is a feature of group work. Students are familiar with keyboards and a limited range of classroom percussion instruments, but have restricted access to musical sound sources from other cultures. Most students persevere with tasks, involving improvising, composing and instrumental performing. In Years 10 and 11, students demonstrate a positive attitude to their work and are able to help one another with study tasks. Many play a full part in the musical life of the school. Students' attitudes and values in years 10 and 11 complement those found in the earlier years.
- 158 The quality of teaching is good overall. Music is well taught by hard-working and committed teachers. Schemes of work take account of the requirements of the National Curriculum, as do the procedures for the assessment of students at the end of Year 9. All teachers have secure knowledge of their subject and lesson objectives are made clear to students, especially in the early years. Rapport with students is very good and instances of poor behaviour are very rare. In Years 10 and 11, teaching has a positive impact on the students' learning. Here, the strengths of the teaching lie in the quality of planning, in the challenge of work, some of which inspires students, and in high musical expectations. Students enjoy their lessons, have positive attitudes, show initiative and take responsibility for their own work.

- 159 Instrumental tuition, provided by teachers from the local education authority's music service, is available at the school. More than one in ten of students receive lessons, a proportion which is a little above the national average. The subject is well managed and the work of visiting instrumental teachers supports the curriculum aims of the department.
- 160 A comparatively large number of students take part in the regular extra-curricular activities which include a pop choir, a madrigal group, a brass group and a group learning to play steel pans. During rehearsals of the pop choir, students worked on music by Queen that gave them an appropriate challenge and plenty of fun! The commitment demonstrated by staff and students to such activities is commendable.
- 161 There has been a very significant improvement since the last inspection. Music is now part of school life for all students. Standards achieved at the end of Year 9 have already improved, and the challenge and rigour of the teaching is reflected in the positive response of the students. In order to improve further, there is a need to enhance access to resources, particularly to information and communications technology. This should ensure that all students maximise the benefit of study in this subject.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- teaching and learning is good.
- students' attitudes to learning and their achievement are good.
- extra-curricular activities enhance learning opportunities.

Areas for improvement

- opportunities for students in Years 7 to 9 to target and improve learning by being more aware of their attainment.

- 162 Students enter the school with skills and understanding which are below average in physical education. In 2001, teacher assessments reported standards at the end of Year 9 which were similar to those reported nationally. There was no significant difference between the standards of boys and girls.
- 163 The standard of work of students currently at the end of Year 9 is at nationally expected levels. In basketball, students build on previous learning to improve attacking techniques. High-attaining students have good spatial awareness which helps them achieve good dribbling skills in preparation for the lay up shot. Low-attaining students' have weak hand/eye coordination so that dribbling is not so effective. In Year 7, students' awareness and experience of dance is below expected levels; they have to be led by the teacher's examples. Students gradually acquire the skills and understanding to improve their performance so that in a Year 8 gymnastics lesson students were more imaginative and could link movements of their own choosing together into sequences. Students achieve well in relation to their attainment at the start of Year 7.
- 164 GCSE results have improved since the last inspection. In 2001, results were average in comparison with schools nationally. These results were better than in 2000 but fewer students took physical education. The numbers are too small to make meaningful comparisons between boys and girls.
- 165 The standard of work of students at the end of Year 11 in the GCSE course is at the nationally expected level and, overall, students make satisfactory progress in relation to their attainment at the start of the course. The standards of boys are better than girls' in games. In a core curriculum lesson,

boys demonstrated standards of heading and ball control in football that were at expected GCSE standards. This was good progress for these students. The standard in a girls' examination group playing netball, was well below expected levels as the students showed insecure footwork and ineffective dodging to get free of an opponent. Poorly directed passes resulted from weak body position. Their progress was unsatisfactory. Girls achieve better in the newly introduced GCSE dance course. In Year 10, standards are above national expectations and higher than those, indicated by results, of girls in the physical education course. Students have a sound dance vocabulary. They understand how to use different levels and make effective use of gesture. High-attaining students demonstrate good control in balance and transfer of weight although low-attaining students lack the same extension, tension and fluidity of movement.

- 166 The progress of gifted and talented students is good because they are given more challenging work and set higher targets to extend their knowledge and improve their standards. Students with special educational needs achieve satisfactorily because of the individual attention they receive. Teachers are clear in their explanations and demonstrations. This is useful for all students but particularly for low-attaining students or those with special needs.
- 167 Overall, teaching and learning are good. Teaching is particularly effective in dance. For example, in a very well-planned Year 10 lesson, learning objectives were clear and students quickly understood the value of repetition and evaluation in improving their work. The lesson was enjoyable and students responded well. Learning was less effective when teaching did not place sufficient emphasis on the important points. For example, in a Year 8 swimming lesson the teacher demonstrated closed fingers in the arm stroke of front crawl but did not emphasise this in his teaching with the result that some students did not follow his demonstration and reduced the effectiveness of their arm pull. There were also too many objectives for the time available in this lesson.
- 168 Students' attitudes and behaviour are good. Teachers insist on good behaviour, and good relationships existed in the lessons seen. In a Year 10 GCSE table tennis lesson, students helped one another to succeed by giving feedback after a critical analysis of each other's spin shots. The behaviour of some non-participating students is poorer because they are not engaged sufficiently in the lesson. They talk, are off task and are not fully involved in the group's learning.
- 169 The development of literacy and numeracy, apart from in a few lessons, is incidental rather than planned and there is little opportunity for student' to access computer facilities. Opportunities for learning are enhanced by the very good provision of extra-curricular activities. Students are offered a wide range of activities including competitive matches and games. Teachers check the balance of teams to ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to participate.
- 170 The department is well led and managed. The good learning resources include books and internet access for research in the library. The good accommodation includes a swimming pool, a gymnasium, extensive playing fields and outdoor floodlit courts. Teachers make the best use of the facilities available. They work well together as a team, provide good role models, share expertise and work to their strengths.
- 171 Improvement since the last inspection has been good. The areas for improvement in the previous report have been effectively tackled. Standards and results have improved. The Year 10 and 11 curriculum has been modified to allow more success for girls. Participation rates have increased and the non-participants are more actively involved in lessons. New assessment processes monitor students' attainment in Years 7 to 9 but students need to be more aware of their attainment to set their own targets and improve. Teachers monitor one another's teaching and share expertise.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- religious education makes a good contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development
- subject planning is good
- consistency in teaching across the year groups

Areas for improvement

- improving the motivation of students
- raising standards
- achieving a better match of planning and teaching

- 172 Religious education provides students with good opportunities for developing spiritual, moral and social awareness. It also helps to develop their understanding of other cultures. Students' knowledge is below expectations when they join the school. In Years 7 to 9, standards are below the expectations of the Local Agreed Syllabus. However, students are achieving at a broadly satisfactory level compared with their starting point. They learn about the main beliefs of Christianity and other world religions such as Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam and begin to understand why many people think that religious belief is important. They learn about the role of symbols, artefacts and places of worship in religion.
- 173 In each year group students talked about their ideas quite confidently though their vocabulary tends to be limited. The quality of students' writing is below expectations and many students find it difficult to write at any length. At various stages, students learn to apply spiritual and moral ideas to their own lives. In Year 7 for example, students were interested to learn about a local church and its role in the community. Year 8 students were working on understanding the meaning of parables, such as the story of the Good Samaritan, and their application to their own lives. Year 9 were considering how it might feel to be part of a minority group in a country whose language they did not understand.
- 174 The current Year 11 is the first year to take the GCSE short course and therefore there are no results to compare with national standards. Students are working at a standard which is below the expectations for GCSE religious education. However, their achievement is satisfactory. In Years 10 and 11, work is closely matched to examination requirements. Students learn the required topics very thoroughly and develop well the skills of answering written questions. Many students were able to discuss issues sensibly, for example when Year 11 students were looking at extracts from the Koran and explaining the extent to which they agreed with the principles. They generally listened quietly to what others had to say but had to be prompted to think in any depth.
- 175 Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Worksheets and other resources are of good quality and carefully chosen to extend understanding. Teachers place great emphasis on helping students to develop good literacy skills, making sure that students understand key words and providing writing frames to help them develop a good written style. The use of information and communication technology in religious education is developing well. Students use the Internet for research and word processing for presenting their work. The main weaknesses in teaching relate to the match of planning and teaching, and to motivating students to achieve higher standards. The activities are well-planned, varied and interesting, but students were often reluctant to do more than the minimum and they did not always respond well when more was expected of them. Minor disciplinary issues were not always dealt with effectively enough. Learning support assistants are effectively deployed to support students and in one case a support assistant with specialist knowledge was able to make a very valuable

contribution to a lesson. Teachers mark exercise books regularly and thoroughly, often giving good guidance on how to improve but there is relatively little indication that the comments have been acted upon.

- 176 The management of religious education is satisfactory. The subject is organised by a knowledgeable subject specialist who has prepared a sound scheme of work. This, together with good lesson plans, helps to support the work of the non-specialist teachers. The schemes of work reflect the requirements of the Local Agreed Syllabus and GCSE board, and work is well planned to develop knowledge and understanding of religious education. It is also planned to extend and develop students' literacy skills.
- 177 The improvement in provision for religious education has been satisfactory. Senior managers and external advisers have helped the head of department to improve standards and teaching in religious education. Teachers receive good formal and informal support and the teaching is better than at the time of the last inspection. The school meets statutory requirements for religious education in Years 7 to 11.

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

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

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

GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	2	50	62	0	15	0.5	1.5
Business studies	3	0	76	0	12	0	1.7

GCE A level and AVCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	6	83	87	17	43	4.0	5.8
Chemistry	3	33	90	33	43	2.7	5.9
Biology	2	100	88	50	34	5.0	5.3
Physics	3	67	88	33	40	3.3	5.7
Business studies	18	100	92	22	32	4.3	5.5
Art and design	15	100	96	60	46	8.1	6.6
Music	1	100	93	0	35	4.0	5.7
Drama	6	100	99	67	38	7.7	6.6
Media studies	16	88	93	13	31	5.0	5.5
Geography	2	100	92	0	38	6.0	5.7
History	3	100	88	33	35	5.3	5.5
Sociology	4	75	86	50	35	5.0	5.3
English	19	95	92	5	30	3.6	5.3

Intermediate vocational qualifications

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		Average point distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Business	9	78	n/a	78			
Leisure and tourism	7	57	n/a	0			
Health and social care	4	100	n/a	100			

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

178 The school curriculum covers seven subject areas. Five subjects were inspected in detail in the areas of mathematics and sciences; English, languages and communication; visual and performing arts and media; and humanities. All other subjects were sampled with the exception of advanced vocational business studies and GNVQ leisure and tourism.

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

179 The focus was on mathematics and biology, but chemistry and physics were also sampled. Too few students took physics or chemistry in 2001 for meaningful national comparisons to be made. The physics lesson seen was satisfactory. Students' good attitudes led to sound learning on the optics of the eye. Preparation of materials was good: they were made available to students in advance by e-mail. In the chemistry lesson seen, sensitive and knowledgeable teaching allowed students to make sound progress in understanding new material – extraction of elements from their ores.

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- teachers are good mathematicians with confident subject knowledge.
- a good range of teaching approaches is employed.
- students work well together and with their teachers.
- students are very positive about their learning experience.

Areas for improvement

- students' notebooks need to be checked carefully for correctness of content.
- there is a need for individualised target-setting, sharply focused on learning goals.

180 The inspection covered the AS and A-level courses offered by the school, and focused on A-level. The re-sit GCSE course for those who did not gain grade C in Year 11 was not inspected as there were currently no candidates.

181 Results at A-level in 2001 were below the national average, and significantly below the students' performance in their other subjects, in comparison with national figures. However, some of this small group of students were weaker mathematically and studied other subjects which were not typical of those chosen by mathematics students nationally, for example art and design. This had an adverse effect on the comparison of the group's performance in the subject when compared to that in the other subjects studied.

182 The standard of oral and written work seen in lessons and in students' folders is at least satisfactory and often good and reflects a different group of students. Students collaborate well with each other and with their teachers. Male and female students perform equally well. Their mathematical understanding is sound and they make effective use of previous work when introduced to new material, for example when applying Prim's and Kruskal's algorithms for the first time, and in learning how to differentiate functions defined in a variety of ways. Each student is encouraged to maintain a notebook containing definitions and worked examples. Some of the notebooks inspected contained errors.

- 183 Teaching is good overall and some very good practice was seen. Lesson objectives are clearly stated and are achieved. Teachers use a good range of different methods and approach their teaching with enthusiasm. Their subject knowledge is good and they place appropriate emphasis on examination technique. Most marking is meticulously carried out and is used as an opportunity for dialogue and further teaching. Lessons are carefully structured with variety in activity for the students. For example, a good Year 12 lesson included the teacher's introduction, productive student explorations of problems provided, careful questioning by the teacher, advice on assessment, appropriate practice of techniques and a summarising plenary. In a very good pure mathematics lesson students were challenged to visualise the changing gradient of $x^2 + y^2 = 25$. Extra lessons have also been provided outside the normal teaching period.
- 184 Learning is good overall. Students are very attentive and responsive to their teaching. They show confidence in the application of their knowledge. In a good Year 12 lesson they discussed fruitfully their varied answers to a problem, gaining collective understanding. Year 13 students all knew the product and chain rules for differentiation, how to chart the movement of the tangent to a curve, and how to differentiate implicitly-defined functions.
- 185 Students are very positive about their experience of sixth form mathematics. They are aware and articulate about the future usefulness of the subject, and happy with their choice of the subject. They are very appreciative of the efforts of their teachers and the constructive feedback that they receive. They are very confident to ask for help and advice from their teachers.
- 186 The subject is well managed. The sixth form teachers are well-qualified, experienced and committed. They share the teaching of the subject and collaborate to provide a well integrated learning experience within which students are working towards long-term targets for achievement. Supplementing these with short-term target setting and review, based on careful analysis of student performance and focused on specific learning goals, would help to enhance performance.

Biology

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

Strengths

- achievement of students is very good
- coursework investigative projects are imaginative and of high quality
- teachers' knowledge of the subject and of syllabus requirements is very good
- support and guidance to students is very good
- the curriculum is enriched by links with biological industries
- students' attitudes to the subject are positive

Areas for improvement

- there are no significant areas for improvement

- 187 Results in 1999 were average but in subsequent years student numbers have been too small to allow comparisons with other schools or to indicate trends.
- 188 Attainment on entry to the sixth form was well below average for both Years 12 and 13. Attainment in the first AS module examination sat by current Year 13 students was well below average. Over the course of the year, their attainment improved to a level just below average in the July AS module examinations. The investigative projects produced by Year 13 are innovative, have been moderated by the examination board and fully meet national standards.

189 Standards in the work seen meet national expectations. Students produce good accounts of practical work, well linked to theory. Data is well analysed and the quality of statistical and graphical work is good. These standards and the quality of notes, essays and laboratory notebook indicate the teacher's target grades are accurate. Students can identify organelles, produce high quality drawings, deal with the spatial reasoning required to interpret electron micrographs, work out scales, and relate organelles to ultracentrifuge fractions. They can also prepare presentations very quickly and, in some cases, introduce them with good oral skills. In comparison with attainment on entry, the achievement of Year 13 students is very good.

190 Investigations cover a wider range than usual. This includes gel electrophoresis of DNA, flow rates over immobilised enzymes, calculation of V_{max} for Catalase and a wide variety of non-parametric statistics in seashore ecology. This is an indication of very good teaching and leads directly to student achievement. The quality of marking and guidance in general is very good. Students have a good sense of their achievement and the steps needed to increase it. They feel well supported. In particular, overseas students pay tribute to the efforts of the school to settle them in, and minority ethnic students are achieving very well. Sensitive and thorough marking, particularly of assessed coursework make a contribution to literacy and computers are used to good effect. Information and communication technology is used to improve the presentation of both text and data and a flexicam, donated by local industry, is used effectively to promote learning about cell structure and ultrastructure.

191 The curriculum is particularly enriched by community links. During the inspection week, a project in association with Biorad, Homerton College, the SATRO and other Hertfordshire schools used donated kits to splice fluorescent jelly fish genes into *Esherischia coli*. This project drew very good learning from students in Years 12 and 13 at the forefront of biological technology. It made an excellent contribution to their curriculum, fostering very good attitudes to work and very good learning. This aspect of the course would be an ideal challenge to gifted and talented students.

192 The subject is managed well. Because there is only one teacher, there are no problems with monitoring and consistency. Resources, curriculum and industry links are exceptional. The previous report did not make separate reference to sixth form subjects, but very high standards have been maintained and further community links have enriched the course. Improvement is therefore good.

BUSINESS

193 AVCE business studies was not sampled.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

194 The Year 12 lesson seen was good. Students were given very good advice on testing procedures and showed good understanding of their work. They were well motivated and keen to succeed.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

195 A lesson in the new physical education AS-level course was sampled. Teaching and learning were satisfactory, though students could have been more involved in learning through discussion. Their attitudes to the subject were good.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

196 The focus was on drama and theatre studies, but art, graphics, media studies and music were also sampled. Results in art and graphics were well above average in 2001. The Year 13 art lesson was very good. Students of broadly average ability learned very well and achieved good standards in response to very good teaching. The Year 12 graphics lesson was very good. Very good teaching enabled students to build progressively on their achievements: they manipulated images and employed critical decision-making, adapting and reforming their solutions to tasks appropriately. Results in media studies were in line with national averages. In the Year 12 lesson seen, students learned well in response to good teaching on computer-generated images in cinema. Their attitudes were very good and they worked to the standards expected on the course. Previous examination groups in music have been too small to make comparative judgements about results. The Year 13 lesson seen was very good. Students attained above-average standards as they explored the process of composing music for film scores. Teaching and students' attitudes were also very good.

Drama and theatre studies

Overall, the quality of provision in drama and theatre studies is **very good**.

Strengths

- students attain at above average levels within a very wide range of curricular opportunities
- the quality of teaching is very good overall and excellent in lessons seen
- the students work very hard, take responsibility for their own learning and thrive in the group learning situation which exists for them
- the teacher and students show their commitment to the subject and to the school through the time they give to helping with the extensive range of extra-curricular productions

Areas for improvement

- there are no significant areas for improvement

197 Results in 2001 were well above average for schools nationally. Standards of attainment by students in the sixth form are above average in lessons seen. This represents excellent achievement by those students who did not take GCSE drama, and very good achievement by those who did.

198 Students study a wide range of texts, including Greek tragedy, and the theatre of the absurd. During the inspection one lesson was spent analysing the design, construction and effect of a production of *Trojan Women* by Euripedes, which the group had seen five days earlier. This revealed the above average depth of understanding within the group. Not only did all students have a very clear grasp of the plot and characterisation, but also were also able to interpret and translate quite complicated dramatic techniques. The level of their commitment to their subject was remarkable. The discussion was mature, considered, balanced, and very moral. For instance, when they decided that the set was very much akin to Ground Zero after September 11th last year, there was some discussion as to whether it was legitimate to portray a scene like that so soon after the tragedy. They understand that knowing what is going to happen in a production is not the same as knowing how it might happen, and that is another dramatic technique for sustaining interest and tension. In another lesson, students worked extremely well as a group to form themselves into a range of inanimate objects, such as sliding and revolving doors. They do this very well, and this is the students' initial response to the work they will do on Jarry and his play *Ubu Roi*, as part of the theatre of the absurd.

199 The quality of teaching is consistently very good, and was excellent in the lessons observed during the inspection. The strengths of the teaching are the teachers' subject knowledge and commitment to the students and to the subject, the demand for better and higher standards, and a very highly developed sense of dramatic timing which enables lessons to proceed at a brisk, but always appropriate, pace.

The hallmark of this teaching is the real and highly contagious enthusiasm for the subject. Assessment within the subject is very good – and students have a very clear idea of how they are doing. The teacher knows the abilities and learning styles of the students very well indeed, and as a result all students are stretched to the limit of their abilities, whatever they might be. This, together with the real commitment of the students, is the precise recipe for raising attainment in the subject. There is also a consistent demand for careful attention to the examination requirements, and students clearly respond positively to this aspect of their work.

- 200 The attitudes and behaviour of the students are worthy of considerable comment. They critically evaluate their own work and that of their peers. They show extremely positive attitudes to their teachers, their peers, and to themselves as learners. They sustain interest, concentration, generosity and engagement for lengthy periods of time. They take very significant levels of responsibility for their own learning. They trust each other. They well understand the corporate nature of the work, and the necessary sense of ensemble. In the lesson on physical theatre, the level of co-operation on the basis of informed decision-making and an excellent sense of visual theatre was very high. The commitment of the students is shown obviously and overtly by their work in the extra-curricular sessions, but also less obviously sometimes. There are drama prefects, and students in the sixth form regularly help and mentor students further down the school. This is to everyone's benefit.
- 201 The A-level basis of the curriculum is extended by the extra-curricular activities, which run over and above the 'standard' performances for their course. Many students, including those studying drama or theatre studies, were involved in the most recent school production of *Grease*. The school productions almost always play to packed and enthusiastic houses. There is very strong support for the subject from the senior managers of the school, including the governors, and the rest of the school. The newly arrived modular staging is a very useful acquisition, and has been provided by the Parent Teacher Association. The proposed development of a new drama studio with associated specialist spaces is very exciting, and comes at the precise time when plans need to be made as to how best to extend this very successful department
- 202 Drama and theatre studies in the sixth form was barely mentioned in the last report. However, it is possible to say that with the quality of teaching and learning being so very good, and the attainment consistently improving, that very good improvement in the provision has taken place.

HUMANITIES

- 203 The focus was on geography, but history was also sampled. In 2001, the three candidates all achieved pass grades, though only one at a higher level. The lesson seen was satisfactory. Students were well motivated in an initial lesson on Fascism, though there was limited depth to their discussion.

Geography

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

Strengths

- the achievement of students
- the quality of teaching and learning
- the management and leadership of the department
- the response of students to the teaching
- the relationships between students and teachers

Areas for improvement

- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• allowing all students to develop the skills necessary for independent learning• the literacy skills of students |
|--|

- 204 The department does very well for its students. In 2001 only two students were entered for the A-level examinations, too few to allow reliable comparison with national figures. Both attained C grades, well above the levels predicted on the basis of GCSE performance. The numbers of students on this course have increased over the last two years. The majority of students studying this subject in Year 12 continued into the second year. Students do better in this subject than in their others.
- 205 The standard of work seen in lessons and in students' folders is in line with course requirements. Written work is of a satisfactory standard, despite the fact that the literacy skills of a significant number of students are not as good as might be expected at this level. However, teachers exploit opportunities to develop key skills, for example challenging resources are provided that demand careful reading for understanding. The work shows that students acquire an appropriate range of advanced subject skills. These they apply effectively to consolidate their understanding. The analysis and interpretation of data collected in the field, and the frequent use of statistical methods, provide many opportunities for students to practise their numerical competence. There are frequent opportunities for students to apply their information communication technology skills.
- 206 Overall, the teaching is very good. Students are expected to take a greater responsibility for their learning than at the time of the last report, however, in some lessons the level of support provided by the teachers constrains students' independence. As a result of the high quality teaching, learning is very good. The teachers' enthusiasm and very good knowledge of the subject were evident in all lessons and resulted in the very positive and frequently enthusiastic, response of the students. For example, in a lesson where Year 12 students compared current urbanisation in less economically developed countries with 19th Century developments in the United Kingdom. An appropriate range and variety of teaching methods are used. In the better lessons the emphasis placed on enquiry met students' needs and contributed to their increasing independence; as when they interrogated web-sites and scoured printed resources to compare rural issues in the United Kingdom with those of the United States of America.
- 207 The very good arrangements made for the curriculum underpin the high quality of topic and lesson planning observed and the continuity in learning. For example, the very clear links between fieldwork and physical and human modules. Students are aware of the learning objectives and the requirements of the courses. Teachers have appropriately high expectations of students who, almost without exception, respond positively to this challenge. Students work diligently and show a pride in their work. Relations are very good indeed.
- 208 The marking of students' work is of a high standard across the department and students are given very good guidance as to how they might achieve further improvement. Students agree that their academic progress is monitored rigorously.
- 209 The management and leadership of the department are very good. The team shares a commitment to further improvement and priorities are clear. The development plan makes clear how improvements are to be achieved and the changes that will indicate their fulfilment. The monitoring of teaching by the head of department and his line manager is most effective. This management of performance is sensitive to the training needs of the individual and the demands of departmental improvement. The department responded very positively to the last report and has achieved a good improvement.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

210 The focus was on English. French and German were sampled but no students sat these examinations in 2001. In French, lessons were well prepared and resourced and taught effectively through the target language. Students showed positive attitudes and achieved in line with course expectations. Staffing difficulties in German mean that the German assistant is used in a tutorial role. The lesson seen was satisfactory: students made clear gains in knowledge of German politics and worked willingly in response to clear, well-prepared teaching.

English

Overall, the quality of provision in English literature is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- students feel well supported and value the opportunities to talk to staff outside lessons
- courses are enriched by visits to the theatre and conferences
- the school offers the course to students whom they believe will benefit

Areas for improvement

- greater support for relatively inexperienced teachers
- students' lack of wider reading and independent work
- resources for literary criticism needed to meet the demands of the examination

- 211 Results in English Literature in 2001 were below the national average, though the small numbers involved make comparisons insecure. Results from the larger group, who took a combined English Language and Literature course, were well below the national average. The decline in results over the last three years is related to staffing instabilities. Unlike previous years, when students did better in English than in other subjects and results were in line with national averages, they did less well in 2001. Girls outnumbered boys and girls' results were higher. All seven students who took English Literature finished with at least a pass.
- 212 Standards in English Literature seen in the current Year 13 reflect the standards of the examination results last summer. Most students are working at a level below the nationally expected level. The combined Language and Literature A-level operates with a very small number of students only in Year 13. Students who achieved high grades in GCSE English demonstrate confidence and good preparation in their analysis of literature. They read many kinds of text, can compare them and make articulate and perceptive comments in the fine detail required at A-level. Their writing shows fluency in structure, accuracy in specialist vocabulary and depth in content. The majority of students, starting from an average grade at GCSE, can discuss and write about character and plot. They are less clear about impact and effect and, for them, the leap to A-level style of writing is difficult. Literacy weaknesses are apparent in poor spelling, grammatical errors and simple sentence structures. However, given their prior attainment, the achievement of all students is satisfactory and reading skills in particular improve. Students starting from a higher level make faster progress and their work indicates average to good standards.
- 213 Students' attitudes are satisfactory. They like English Literature and appreciate the commitment of the teachers in giving them extra time. They work supportively together in pairs and groups and good relationships are a strength. However, few students take enough responsibility for their own learning. Most students rely heavily on teachers to provide contextual and critical material. They do not read widely enough to extend their own responses or interpretations, and that affects the level of their learning.
- 214 The teaching of English Literature is satisfactory, but has weaknesses. Recent staff changes have created difficulties in continuity and consistency, though the enthusiasm of the current teachers for literature has partly overcome the difficulties and has kept students motivated. Teachers' careful planning and focus on specific learning objectives ensures lessons are well structured. However, a lack of experience has an impact on what teachers expect of students working at this level, particularly on accepting superficial reading and a passive response in discussion. Teachers' marking is prompt but gives insufficient attention to students' prose style or where students need to add more detail. Teachers' grades for finished work tend to be too high. Assessment data is insufficiently used to track

progress or target individual weaknesses. Teachers collaborate well. During the week of the inspection, they organised a visit for students in Year 12 to a conference on Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*, and this was successful in improving students' understanding. There is regular enrichment of the A-level curriculum through theatre visits and outside speakers. The department and library stock lacks sufficient resources in literary criticism and literary theory. The library provides ready access to the Internet, and teachers and some students use it regularly for research, though not all students make good use of the material.

- 215 The current lack of leadership is the main weakness, and is unsatisfactory. The school has addressed this difficulty and a new head of department takes up post shortly. The level of improvement since the last inspection is unsatisfactory. A-level results have declined. Good relationships have been maintained, but teaching, considered good two years ago, suffers from staff changes and some lack of experience. Students do not take enough responsibility for their own learning, including reading widely beyond the set texts. The school reviews the separate courses annually, which leads to a thorough, self-critical analysis. This indicates a determination to overcome weaknesses and the capacity to improve.