

INSPECTION REPORT

SALE GRAMMAR SCHOOL

Sale

LEA area: Trafford

Unique reference number: 106371

Headteacher: Jennifer Connelly

Reporting inspector: David Morton

13154

Dates of inspection: 10th – 14th December 2001

Inspection number: 230050

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Grammar (selective)

School category: Community

Age range of pupils: 11 to 18

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Marsland Road
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Appropriate authority: The Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Nigel Payne

Date of previous inspection: October 1996

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17556	Michael Miller	Sixth Form Co-ordinator		The school's results and students' achievements How well is the school led and managed?
30512	Margaret Bailey	Team inspector	Chemistry Physics	
12825	Niall Carr	Team inspector	Business studies Psychology	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
29849	Karen Cowley	Team inspector	Geography	
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Sale Grammar School is a coeducational, selective community grammar school for pupils aged 11 to 18 with 1300 pupils on roll, of whom 316 are sixth-form students. It is significantly bigger than other secondary schools. The school is situated close to the town centre; it serves pupils from the environs of Sale where the mixed socio-economic background is in keeping with the country overall. Pupils have passed the local authority's test at the age of 11; they start in Year 7 with a level of attainment that is well above the national average. The school's population is stable, only 0.6 per cent of pupils joining or leaving the school except at the usual times. The percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals, four per cent, is below the national average. The percentage of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds, 8.2 per cent, is about average. The percentage of pupils for whom English is an additional language, 2.3 per cent, is a little higher than average, although only one sixth-form student is at a very early stage of acquiring English. The percentage of pupils who have special educational needs, including statements, 2.8 per cent, is well below the national average; pupils with statements, 0.7 per cent, is well below the national average. Over three-quarters of pupils enter the sixth form, which also attracts around ten per cent of its students from other schools, and nearly all of these move on to higher education at the age of 18. The school has met requirements for Investor in People status on three occasions.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Sale Grammar School is a very good school with a very good sixth form. This is owing to pupils' very positive attitudes to learning and good teaching in Years 7 to 11. Equally, sixth-form students learn very effectively in response to very good teaching. Throughout the school achievement is good in relation to pupils' earlier attainment. The leadership and management of the school are good and contribute significantly to the achievement of very high results in tests and examinations. The school provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- Results in tests and examinations are very high.
- The leadership and management of the school are good and their key focus on learning and teaching has led to achievement of a high standard in all aspects of school life.
- Pupils and sixth-form students have very positive attitudes to their learning; relationships are very good.
- Teaching in Years 7 to 11 is good and frequently very good; teaching in the sixth form is very good.

What could be improved

- Some individual subject teachers do not set targets in relation to pupils' past attainment or track success in the progress pupils make. This contributes to the reasons why a small minority of pupils do not achieve their full potential.
- The provision of information and communication technology (ICT) is unsatisfactory. The use of ICT does not meet statutory requirements in some subjects.

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 October 1996 and since that time has improved well overall. Standards have risen steadily whilst results have been sustained at very high levels in GCSE, AS and A-level examinations. Teaching and learning are now significantly better; this is partly due to more effective management by heads of faculty and tutorial support by pastoral heads. Matters of concern raised in 1996 have been tackled with mixed success. School planning is now more inclusive of all partners in its design and implementation; the length of the school day is now closer to that usually found nationally. However, concerns about the use of ICT and the provision for personal, social and health education, although under review, have not been satisfactorily resolved. The school still does not meet statutory requirements for a daily act of collective worship.

STANDARDS

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

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

Key

well above average A

above average B

average C

below average D

well below average E

The A* grades in this table indicate that results place the school amongst the top five per cent of schools in the country. There are not sufficient similar schools to make a valid comparison.

Results in 2001 and the previous three years in National Curriculum tests taken at the age of 14 have been consistently very high in English, mathematics and science. Results in mathematics have been better than those in English and science. Overall, pupils have achieved well in relation to their attainment on entry to the school at the start of Year 7. Girls have performed better than boys, especially in English. The school's improvement in results in all three subjects has been broadly in line with the national trend of improvement.

Similarly, results in GCSE examinations taken at the age of 16 in 2001, and in the previous three years, have been consistently very high. The school exceeded the challenging targets set. Results have improved in recent years at a more rapid rate than that found nationally. Results in all subjects far exceeded national averages, the best of all being in religious studies, expressive arts and geography. In comparison with these subjects French, German, history and physical education were relatively weaker. Girls have performed better overall than boys, although the school has been successful in improving boys' results in recent years. Overall, pupils' achievement is good in examinations, but with some underachievement, notably in science, amongst a small minority of pupils. Pupils for whom English is an additional language achieve at levels in keeping with other pupils.

At AS and A-level, results in 2000 were well above average and in 2001 were very high. Achievement is good and adds value from its starting point at the start of Year 12. Results in 2001 were highest in English Literature, mathematics, art and design, performance studies,

business studies, religious studies and sociology. Results in chemistry, French and geography are relatively weaker, yet overall provision is good.

Standards of work seen during the inspection in Years 7 to 11 are well above average. Pupils are on track to maintain the very high results usually achieved in tests and examinations. However, there is some underachievement in lessons amongst a small minority of pupils in Years 10 and 11. Overall standards in the sixth form are well above average. Achievement is good throughout the school as high standards are sustained as pupils move from stage to stage.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Pupils have very positive attitudes to their work and almost always seek to do their best.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. The school is a pleasant and purposeful place in which pupils behave with a sense of responsibility. Exclusions are few.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Relationships are very good between pupils and between pupils and members of staff. Pupils grow in responsibility and maturity at a fast rate.
Attendance	Good. Attendance is above the national average. There is some lack of punctuality of students because of movement between the two sites.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Years 7 – 9	Years 10 – 11	Years 12 – 13
Quality of teaching	Good	Good	Very 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 and learning are good throughout Years 7 to 11; teachers are knowledgeable and enthusiastic and pupils are encouraged to work hard. Pupils want to find out things and this brings a liveliness to their work and illustrates their readiness to undertake independent study and research. They show a willingness to stick to tasks they find hard and a feature of their achievement is the quality of discussion they bring to their learning, including making presentations to their classmates. Pupils respond well to questions asked by teachers, often structured to make increasing demands upon their thinking and analysis. Pupils are good at recalling previous learning and applying it to new situations. Teaching and learning in the sixth form are generally very good. Sixth-form students want to contribute ideas and make good use of research. Energetic teaching responds to the thirst for learning shown by most sixth formers. A variety of teaching and learning methods are used, teachers have high expectations of students and know what they can achieve. Lessons are conducted at a swift pace and take account of the learning needs of differing groups of pupils.

Pupils learn well because teaching is good. In almost nine out of ten lessons teaching is good or better. Teachers plan and structure their lessons carefully, aiming to meet the differing learning needs of all pupils, including those with special educational needs. The teaching of English and mathematics is almost always good or better, but that of science sometimes

lacks pace and drive and expectations are too low. The development of skills of literacy and numeracy is a clear focus and pupils are learning effectively; teachers have responded well to the new demands placed on the improvement of basic skills introduced at the start of the current term for Years 7 to 9. Older pupils use these skills effectively in a range of subjects, notably the use of extended writing in English, geography, history and religious education. However, opportunities to use ICT to enhance learning are not always taken in some subjects.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good. The school provides an appropriate and balanced programme of study for all pupils. The curriculum is responsive to the learning needs of pupils and the aspirations of sixth formers. Pupils and students undertake a wide range of extra-curricular activities. However, arrangements for personal, social and health education, whilst under review, are not well organised at present. ICT is not used in some subjects; this is a breach of statutory requirements.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. Pupils with special educational needs do well as a result of teachers' awareness of the targets set to meet their needs.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Good. Less than five per cent of pupils learn English as an additional language and all but one speak English fluently. The work of all is monitored and appropriate support given.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good. Overall, provision for pupils' personal development mirrors the school's aims. The opportunities provided for spiritual reflection and cultural development are very good, whilst those for moral and social development are good. The school has a 'good feel' about it as a result of the importance it places on pupils' personal development.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Good. The pastoral concern shown for pupils is a feature of the school. Setting individual targets helps pupils and sixth-form students strive for and achieve high standards. Arrangements for the welfare and protection of pupils are good.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Good overall. The headteacher provides very good leadership and has a clear vision of the school's future development. She is well supported by other members of the senior management team. The management of the school is good; it's focus is the continual improvement of teaching and learning and raising standards further. Heads of faculty are effective in sharing good practice that leads to purposeful and enjoyable learning.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Good. The governing body is supportive, knowledgeable and tries to make sure that initiatives are well conceived, planned and relevant to the school's needs and priorities.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Very Good. The effective management is successfully encouraging an ethos of self-evaluation that leads to a consistently improving school.
The strategic use of resources	Good. Resource management is effective and financial planning is good. The school applies principles of best value well when making purchases.

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 school and make good progress. • The school expects pupils to work hard and teaching is good. • They think behaviour is good. • The school is helping children to become responsible and grow in maturity. 	<p>A minority of parents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have concerns about the amount of homework, • do not feel they know how their child is getting on, • the school does not work closely enough with parents.

Inspectors agree with the positive views of parents. However, they judge that the amount of homework is about right although it is not always set consistently in keeping with the homework time-table. Inspectors are convinced that the school does all that can reasonably be asked in informing parents of their child's progress. The school endeavours to involve parents in appropriate aspects of school life.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

With 316 students, the school's sixth form is much larger than most. It is over-subscribed. Most students stay on from Year 11 and there is competition for any additional places. Entry requirements are high and attainment on entry in Year 12 is well above average. There are more female than male students. Around eight per cent of students come from ethnic minority backgrounds. The wide range of 24 subjects offered in the curriculum provides a very good variety of learning opportunities. Collaboration with a local college enhances some of the provision. Although there are no vocational courses, the governors are satisfied that the school meets the aspirations of the students well. The majority of students stay until the end of Year 13, following which most go to university or some other form of higher education.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The school has a very good and cost-effective sixth form, which is popular with the students and their parents. A-level results for students in Year 13 in 2001 were well above average when compared with all maintained schools and all post-16 institutions. Standards have risen satisfactorily in line with the national trend. These high standards are achieved because of the very good teaching and learning in the sixth form. Teaching and learning are very good; this represents an improvement since the previous inspection. The leadership and management of the sixth form are very good. The school provides very good levels of intellectual, creative and artistic challenge for its students.

Strengths

- Overall sixth-form provision is very good.
- The results achieved by students are very high.
- The sixth form curriculum is good and offers a good range of opportunities.
- Teaching and learning are very good.
- The leadership and management of the sixth form are very good.
- There are very good procedures for assessment, diagnosis and support of students' academic progress.
- The very good attitudes of students reflect their maturity, independence and motivation.

What could be improved

- Standards and achievement in chemistry and French could be better and more in line with other subjects in the sixth form, especially amongst students capable of higher attainment.
- Provision of ICT resources throughout the school is inadequate.
- Library provision is inadequate and does not provide sufficient support for students' independent learning.

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.

Subject area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	Good. Consistently good teaching and learning leads to students gaining results well above the national average. Achievement is good. Students gain grades at least as good as can be expected from their GCSE passes. Lessons are well structured to ensure students learn at a good rate.
Chemistry	Good. However, examination results are just at the national average. The good teaching and learning seen, and the good student attitudes to work, lead to good progress in lessons.
Physics	Good. Standards are above the national average and have improved since the previous report. Good teaching and learning, and the students' positive attitudes, lead to good achievement.
Design and technology	Good. Teaching is consistently good and as a result students make good progress and achieve well. Students' attitudes to their work make a significant contribution to the above-average standards being attained. The very good planning by teachers and their logging of student progress is very supportive of the learning taking place.
Business studies	Very good. Teaching, learning and achievement are very good. Students understand the integrated nature of the business world and its integration within a broader society. Students can present and organise economic ideas in support of an opinion or conclusion.
Physical education	Very good. Standards have improved since the subject was recently introduced into the sixth form and are now well above average. Teaching and learning are good and students achieve well. The curriculum link with a neighbouring sports college has a positive impact on standards and the quality of provision.
Art & Design	Very good. Standards are well above the national average and the department promotes a very positive atmosphere for learning. Achievement is very good. Teaching and learning are very good. Courses are well planned and taught effectively. The high quality of individual support fosters very good relationships.
Performance studies	Very good. This is in response to teaching that is good overall. Learning and the achievement of students are good. Learning is enhanced owing to the excellent attitudes students show towards the subject.
Geography	Good. The curriculum is well planned. Achievement is good. Teaching and learning are very good.
History	Good. Teaching and learning are good overall. Standards are above average and students' achievement is good.
Religious studies	Excellent. Teaching and learning are very good overall, and sometimes excellent. Standards are well above average and students achieve very well.

Subject area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Sociology	Good. Standards are well above the national average, and there is a good climate for learning. Achievement is good. Students make good progress in acquiring knowledge and understanding and developing analytical skills. Teaching and learning are good. Class activities are well planned and encourage focused discussion of key subject issues.
Psychology	Very good. Teaching, learning and the achievement of students are very good. Students develop good skills of analysis, interpretation and evaluation.
English literature	Very good. Students enjoy English courses and the quality of their learning is very good. Achievement is very good. Students make very good gains on GCSE English passes in A-Level final grades, for these are well above average. Teaching is very good.
Spanish	Very good. Standards are well above average and achievement is good. The qualities of teaching and students' attitudes are consistently high. Learning is consequently very good.

In addition to the above sixth form focus subjects, lessons were sampled in French and economics. Results in the language are below average. There is some underachievement. This has resulted from some staffing difficulties. Provision, standards and achievement in economics are very good. This is because teaching and learning are very good. Effective lesson plans allow topics to be taught logically. Teaching methods take account of students' differing abilities. Students are regularly informed of their progress. Targets are identified to enable further progress. Students have a good knowledge and understanding of the tools of economic analysis, and of their application. Students can use a good range of statistics and diagrams specific to economics.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Very good. Pastoral support and guidance is available for all students. Careers guidance is good. The school makes very good use of data to set target grades for students. There is a very good system to identify and address any under-achievement at an early stage.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Very good. The leadership provided by the head of the sixth form is effective. The heads of Year 12 and 13 ably support him. The overall management and organisation of the sixth form is very efficient. There is a strong emphasis on the provision of pastoral as well as academic support. This is well focused on the monitoring of the learning opportunities provided for the students.

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"> • Subject choices suit their talents and aspirations. • Information about course choices is clear and helpful. • Year 12 in particular feel they are well taught and challenged, teachers are accessible for help, they are helped to study independently and their work is thoroughly assessed. • Students enjoy their life and work in the sixth form and would recommend it to others. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Year 13 felt the school had not helped them to settle sufficiently well to life in the sixth form. • Students felt they were not sufficiently well informed about their progress. • They felt they were not sufficiently well advised about their future options. • They felt that they were not always treated sufficiently responsibly as young adults and that the school was not always responsive to their views.

The inspection agrees with the students' positive views. Further discussions with staff and students indicates that concerns about settling into their new life in the sixth form mainly arose from the pressures and uncertainties of the new AS level courses in 2000/2001. A very effective system of student progress records has been established to enable tight monitoring and support for students. The inspection finds that good information and guidance are provided to enable students to make informed choices about their future careers or education. The feeling that the school is not always responsive to their views appears mainly concerned with difficulties of transport between the main school site and the Claremont Centre.

COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

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

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Results in tests and examinations are very high.

1. Results were very high in national tests for 14 year olds in 2001, being amongst the top five per cent of schools in the country in tests in English, mathematics and science. These high standards have been maintained over a number of years. Making comparisons with other grammar schools is difficult; many are single-sex schools and, especially significantly, the percentage of pupils allocated places in grammar schools varies in different local education authorities. Between 35 and 38 per cent of the full age group win grammar school places in Trafford, so to compare its schools with those where, for example, only ten per cent win grammar school places, is of limited reliability. However, such comparisons do suggest that despite the significant success of the vast majority of pupils, a very small minority of pupils do not achieve their fullest potential in tests at the age of 14. Mapping the achievement of individual pupils at GCSE in relation to their attainment on entry to the school, or at the end of Year 9 two years earlier, supports this judgement. However, in relation to their attainment on entry to the school, which is well above average, the large majority of pupils add value in achieving very high overall results in these tests. Their achievement, therefore, is good. Overall, the trend of improvement over the last five years has been broadly in line with that found nationally.

2. Results in GCSE examinations for 16 year olds in 2001 were also very high overall and amongst the top five per cent when compared with all schools in the country. The school met the demanding targets set by governors. The trend of improvement has been above the national trend over the last five years. Pupils sustained the high levels attained at the end of Year 9, maintaining, therefore a good rate of achievement. The proportion of pupils achieving the highest A* and A grades, 44 per cent, is very high and significantly higher than the national average for all schools, 15.9 per cent. Only three per cent of total results were below grade C. Good results in GCSE examinations have been a feature of this school for many years. Nonetheless, in science especially, in Years 10 and 11 a small minority of pupils underachieve when their individual GCSE performances are compared with their attainment in tests and assessments at the end of Year 9.

3. There are some special features to be found in the high standards achieved by the school. Pupils' literacy skills are well developed. The quality of written work is well above average and pupils read fluently, accurately and with understanding, a wide variety of texts. Pupils' writing is detailed, substantial and largely accurate. Its presentation when hand-written could be better, especially that of boys, is not always good. However, accomplished use of ICT in the presenting of work is evident in the work of some pupils. Pupils write successfully in a variety of forms; this is seen in the writing of almost all pupils, not just the highest attainers. Pupils' listening and speaking skills throughout the school are very good; girls and boys play a full part in discussions and talk fluently and purposefully in a range of situations. For example, in a Year 11 English lesson, pupils worked in small groups preparing presentations on poetry. Their reading levels were very high and their knowledge and understanding of the meanings and poetic styles of six poems were very secure. They talked about the poets' choices of language and the use of humour. Pupils could articulate clearly their preferences amongst the six poems, giving informed reasons for their decisions. Teachers ensure that pupils of different levels of attainment take a full and active part in discussions.

4. The quality of work produced by pupils is usually well above average; pupils' learning is secure. In a geometry lesson with Year 11 about vectors, pupils showed clear

understanding of the theory and could apply it to real situations, recording their findings accurately in graphical form. Pupils for whom English is an additional language work to the same range of levels as others in classes. In a Year 10 science lesson about enzymes, pupils worked accurately with a clear sense of purpose. They analysed the results of experiments and explained fluently the significance of graphs; if results were anomalous, they examined the evidence for inaccurate working or variables of control methods. Pupils practised effectively their manipulative and observational practical skills and consolidated and extended their knowledge of how enzymes work. The small minority of pupils who have special educational needs achieved good support and achieved well in the lesson. The support given to pupils with special educational needs is good across a number of subjects, especially English, mathematics and science. As a result these pupils make good progress in lessons.

5. Higher-attaining pupils in a Year 11 biology lesson achieved highly and learned quickly. In a lesson about genetic engineering, pupils appreciated the place of scientific knowledge in society and the moral, ethical and social implications of scientists' work. Pupils were preparing presentations to an imagined select committee of the House of Commons. They used role-play to present different points of view to an argument, for example as a scientifically aware group of large-scale cattle farmers. Pupils had worked independently in researching their presentation at school and through homework, including the use of the Internet. Care was taken in the nature and variety of presentation and the detail of argument; these were carried out with a buzz of interest resulting from the pupils' thorough preparation and commitment, as a group, to present arguments lucidly and fluently. The work was challenging and at a fast pace; pupils enjoyed meeting such a challenge. Confident teaching helped highly achieving pupils to talk and learn confidently.

The leadership and management of the school are good and their key focus on learning and teaching has led to achievement of a high standard in all aspects of school life.

6. A significant reason for the established success of the school is the very good leadership of the headteacher. She has a clear sense of what the school should seek to achieve and has skilfully put in place measures necessary to ensure that the school is successful. Her style is unobtrusive, yet astute; through delegation, key members of staff have the opportunity to decide key objectives and set out to achieve them. They know that the freedom and respect afforded them demands successful outcomes. The headteacher is skilful in raising this expectation in her colleagues and in evaluating how well it is realised. The headteacher's openness and gentle approach do not imply casual leadership or lack of rigour; she leads the school with a drive for excellence and brings out the best in pupils, sixth-form students and staff. She does this with a compassion and sensitivity for the well-being of the community of the school. The school is one in which pupils and staff are learning partners and this leads to the creation of shared values. The overall ethos of the school ensures that pupils develop values and attitudes that are securely based in their understanding of the community of the school and of their place in wider society. Thus, the headteacher promotes attitudes to work that always strive for excellence, whether it is the way teachers teach or pupils learn. The results achieved in examinations are evidence of success. Equally, the quality of work, for example, in the performing arts is further evidence of striving for excellence. The musical concert held one evening during inspection week encouraged pupils to show their achievements as instrumentalists or vocalists, the development from young beginners and accomplished performers being clear. Students of performance studies demonstrated imagination and high standards in street theatre in response to three paintings by Lowry.

7. The headteacher and senior management team are at the centre of a commitment to maintain and improve further what the school has already achieved. Developmental planning and actions taken have clear purposes. For example, senior management tries to ensure that procedures, policies and self-evaluative processes that make teaching and learning as effective as possible are active parts of their jobs and not simply words on a page. Teachers are supported through regular classroom observation and the sharing of good practice. Members of the senior management team maintain a balance between delegation and holding colleagues to account. They have a good grasp of the strengths and areas for improvement in teaching and learning and lead the school forward through their work with heads of faculty. The senior management's own development, through regular target-setting for its members, includes leading other staff to be self-evaluating and committed to self-improvement. The headteacher has a guiding influence but expects her senior colleagues to fulfil their own goals; she measures the success of the school's senior management by the ways in which pupils and staff develop in relation to their previous best. Through empowering them and other leaders in the school, she encourages staff to do their best for the sake of their own professional pride.

8. The school is always seeking to improve on its previous best. It is an ambitious, self-evaluating organisation that is never complacent but seeking to be better still. It undertook the demanding steps that led to its current Investor in People status. It is now seeking to obtain an Artsmark and arts college status. Governors share the school management team's desire for high standards in all aspects of the life of the school. The governing body is supportive yet asks challenging questions when new initiatives are planned, playing a full role in the strategic development of the school. For example, before making decisions it evaluates the effectiveness of the developmental planning in meeting the priorities of the school and monitors the application of available funding. As a result, guided by the business manager, the school's financial planning and investment is prudent.

Pupils have very positive attitudes to their learning; relationships are very good.

9. Pupils have very good attitudes to their work and are keen to learn. It is rarely necessary for teachers to cajole them. Attitudes and motivation are features of the commitment that pupils show to all aspects of school life. These are important factors in their good achievement and very high results in tests and examinations. These characteristics are apparent whether pupils are working as a direct response to the teacher or with each other in group activities. The very good relationships between pupils and between pupils and staff are a key to the success pupils achieve.

10. Pupils respond purposefully to good and frequently very good teaching. They welcome challenge and the high expectations teachers have of them. Their behaviour is very good and they willingly take responsibility for their own learning when opportunities to work independently are provided. There is a secure yet demanding learning atmosphere. Throughout the school attendance is very good. Pupils develop well towards being mature and responsible young adults.

11. Pastoral heads and heads of faculty track carefully the overall well-being and development of pupils' in their work and relationships in school. There is a strong correlation between the attitudes pupils bring to school, well supported by parents, the care shown for pupils by staff and their high attainment and good achievement. They persevere at difficult tasks, help each other, are curious and anxious to do well for its own sake as well as for success in examinations. Parents are pleased their children are expected to work hard and pupils respond by wanting to give and achieve their very best. Most pupils have a thirst for knowledge and do much to enable lessons to run smoothly. In religious education with Year 9, for example, pupils identified closely with the difficult Christian concept of judgement

and love. They evaluated an episode of 'The Simpsons' in Christian terms and other aspects of popular culture met with similar rigorous debate. Pupils indicated a very well developed concept of morality and moral codes. They explored the nature of relativism and different standards of 'judging', recognising the difference between 'judgement' and 'pre-judgement'. Pupils' fluent discussion shows their readiness to appreciate more than one point of view. For example in a Year 8 history lesson about the Gunpowder Plot, pupils expressed and shared personal views and opinions of the validity of the 'story' against the reality of the intricacies and implications of the political protest behind the plot. In an art and design lesson with Year 10, pupils showed clearly their commitment to doing their best when working independently at personal research at home. One girl, for example, studying David Hockney's California pool series of paintings, presented her own study to the rest of the class. She had imaginatively and creatively experimented with similar interpretations by taking photographs with a digital camera of her local swimming pool in order to produce a final piece of work. Year 10 expressive arts students persevered with demanding dance choreography as part of a planned production involving an extract from 'Annie', determined 'to get it right' and in the appropriate style for that period of musical theatre. The quality of learning in Years 7 to 11 for most pupils is good and frequently very good; as well as reflecting the quality of teaching, it is evidence of the very good attitudes pupils bring to their learning.

Teaching in Years 7 to 11 is good and frequently very good.

12. In almost eight out of ten lessons the teaching is good or better; in four out of ten it is very good and occasionally excellent. The quality of the teaching is a key reason for the school being successful. It reflects the priority given to its improvement and development in the school development plan, the monitoring and support programme undertaken through the management structure of the school and the professional development opportunities provided for staff. Teaching at the time of the previous inspection was described as a strength of the school. It is better still now.

13. Teachers know their subjects well, are enthusiastic about them and present them to pupils in a lively and motivating manner. They establish excellent relationships that lead to effective learning. Teachers have created very good learning environments in which pupils develop intellectually, physically, socially and creatively. For example, in a design and technology graphics lesson with Year 11, pupils were encouraged to consider the psychological impact of different menu designs for a café or restaurant. Learning was well supported by teaching that used criteria of assessment in discussions about the design choices available to pupils and the scope for improving initial design ideas and research requirements, for example into art deco styles. In a geography lesson with Year 10, pupils considered the advantages and disadvantages of different farming systems and they had to decide which was the best for a particular set of circumstances. Pupils showed examples of previous learning by using, with understanding, technical language such as 'shifting cultivation' or 'agroforestry'. The teaching of this lesson went along at a fast and demanding pace and pupils were involved, interested and challenged. After discussion with partners pupils were given responsibility to work effectively on their own. They were told what the aims of the lesson were and that there would be a final assessment of whether these had been achieved. The teaching motivated them to strive to be successful.

14. Effective teachers set challenging homework as an extension activity requiring demanding use of research skills on the Internet, in textual sources or through library research centres. The consistently imaginative approaches that teachers bring to teaching and learning are a feature of the school. It reflects planning designed to meet the different learning needs of individuals and groups of pupils; it gives direct support when necessary and offers opportunities for independence for the majority of pupils who are ready for such responsibility. Pupils are not spoon-fed. They are required to think and make decisions about their learning. Pupils and teachers work well together in striving for high standards.

15. A further feature of the very good and excellent teaching is the high expectations the best teaching has of pupils. Teachers use questioning skilfully to extend thinking and check understanding. They expect answers to be thorough and comprehensive. As they move through the year groups, pupils' facility to respond in depth in discussion increases and is a very significant feature of effective learning. For example, in a religious studies lesson with Year 11, pupils had completed a unit of work on human rights and this lesson looked at issues surrounding abortion. After careful consideration of matters of law and how the Abortion Act came into existence, the class looked at a video about a woman's right to choose. Pupils approached this lesson seriously and responsibly. A poem was skilfully used following the video and this led to the teacher asking pupils for their opinions. Pupils responded sensitively to the issue, were articulate and boys and girls showed respect for the views being expressed. The perspectives of different religious groups were especially well managed by the teacher, eliciting carefully considered responses from pupils. The lesson was successful because the teacher had researched the material carefully and presented it in a challenging yet sensitive manner. The readiness of these pupils to discuss the issue was well judged.

16. A key reason for the examination results being high is the consistently good and often exceptional teaching. The most successful teachers are hardworking, committed, knowledgeable, imaginative and enthusiastic. There is an intensity of endeavour in the best lessons, whether working on a dance sequence in the hall or trying to be accurate in analysing the result of experiments to do with enzymes in science. Teachers assume that pupils will do well and this is realised in their efforts and attainment. The school has high expectations of pupils and teachers; both respond well to this challenge. Teachers have clear objectives for their lessons and the best share these with pupils. Good lessons end with a check on whether these objectives have been achieved and that learning has been effective. Pupils are helped to understand what they must do to improve their work. The marking of work in the best instances indicates areas for improvement in a helpful way. In some cases, for example in design and technology and the expressive arts, pupils are asked to assess the effectiveness of their own work and that of their classmates.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Some individual subject teachers do not set targets in relation to pupils' past attainment or track success in the progress pupils make. This contributes to the reasons why a small minority of pupils do not achieve their full potential.

17. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed during the inspection. The overall quality of the teaching was good and often very good and sometimes excellent; this teaching sets a marker for all teaching, especially that deemed to be satisfactory, to aspire to emulate. Satisfactory teaching usually leads to satisfactory learning; this is not good enough for the school since it aims to achieve the highest standards. When teaching and learning are no better than satisfactory, the degree of achievement is no better than satisfactory and the rates of progress pupils make in lessons falls short of the school's goals and contribute to underachievement in a minority of pupils.

18. In satisfactory lessons there is less evidence of the essential strengths of energy, enthusiasm, high expectations and perception of learning needs based on a clear knowledge of what pupils know, understand and can do. When these needs are not taken carefully into account, appropriate teaching methods are not consistently used during lessons and learning becomes less effective. Insufficient attention is given to identifying pupils' individual learning needs and then planning work to meet them. Learning ends up being satisfactory rather than fully effective and demanding. Pupils do not achieve their potential in the short or longer term. For example, activities are the same for the whole class and too often led entirely by the teacher; sometimes with teachers telling pupils what they should know and understand rather than using questions and expecting full answers. There are too few examples in this teaching of independent but structured study to help pupils identify with the teacher the key features of their learning. This can also lead to pupils working at levels below those of which they are capable. This in turn leads to insufficient concentration and application and the focus of the lesson becomes hazy rather than sharp.

19. If the teacher is more fully aware of pupils' prior attainment and plans work to meet resultant learning needs it is more likely that pupils will achieve their potential. However, there are examples of day-to-day assessment not always being used to inform modifications to medium-term planning. There is sometimes a need to revise and consolidate before moving on; on other occasions the need is to move more quickly to the acquisition of new knowledge or skills because previous learning is secure. In such circumstances achievement is limited even though the quality of the lesson overall is sound.

The provision and use of ICT is unsatisfactory.

20. Whilst there are examples in some subjects of the successful application of ICT to support and enhance learning, it is not being used by all teachers in all subjects when the opportunity is there to do so. Members of staff do not appreciate that the implementation of ICT requirements is the responsibility of all staff. As a result, statutory requirements are not met in some subjects. ICT is only taught as a discrete subject in Year 9.

21. There are a number of features that require attention as resources and priorities allow. Much of the provision of hardware for ICT is second-hand and out-of-date. Many pupils are using more up-to-date equipment at home. The school's development planning is tackling this issue and the school has taken out a loan from the local authority to implement a process of refurbishment. About a third of the staff has attended training in the use of ICT; plans are in place for the remainder to follow suit, although some have an immediate need for very basic training. The school has not yet fully identified the particular skills needed for curricular areas. At present, there is no record of how ICT is being used across subjects. There is no common format for assessing the skills in ICT of different groups of pupils. In nine of the fifteen subjects that were the focus of the inspection in the sixth form the provision or use of ICT are inadequate, because the school has not yet prioritised the level of provision needed on its sixth-form site.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

22. In order to maintain and improve further on the already high standards and quality the school provides, the headteacher, governors and staff should give attention to:

- (1) ensuring that all pupils achieve their full potential by:
 - taking steps to require all subject teachers to set targets in relation to pupils' prior attainment and track the success they make,
 - sharing good practice with a focus to improving learning and teaching even further,
 - helping all staff understand how data is used to identify learning needs and set approaches to work to achieve them,
 - planning lessons and units of work for pupils with differing learning needs with clearer learning objectives;(Paragraphs: 1, 2, 17, 18, 19)
- (2) improving the provision and use of ICT through its implementation as outlined in the school improvement plan.
(Paragraphs: 20, 21)

Sixth form

- (1) improving standards and achievement in chemistry and French of pupils capable of higher attainment by:
 - more rigorous monitoring of teaching methods in these subjects,
 - providing greater opportunities for a variety of activities within lessons to meet the needs of students of differing abilities,
 - providing greater challenge for higher attaining students,
 - providing greater opportunities for the development of independent learning skills,
 - ensuring a greater proportion of students achieve higher grades in examinations;(Paragraphs: 26, 65, 66)
- (2) improving provision and use of ICT resources.
(Paragraphs: 20, 21, 27, 38, 54, 63, 71, 79, 108, 131, 145, 160, 168)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	44
	Sixth form	62
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		44

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 7 – 11							
Number	2	15	17	10	0	0	0
Percentage	4.5	34.1	38.6	22.8	0	0	0
Sixth form							
Number	2	26	32	2	0	0	0
Percentage	3.2	42.0	51.6	3.2	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 as each lesson represents more than one percentage point in Years 7 to 11 and more than two percentage points in the sixth form.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	984	316
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	53	N/A

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	1	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	34	3

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	30

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	7
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	10

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	4.1
National comparative data	7.7

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.1
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)

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	88	93	181

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	87	87	87
	Girls	91	92	90
	Total	178	179	177
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	98 (100)	99 (100)	98 (99)
	National	64 (64)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	93 (94)	98 (98)	90 (95)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	88	88	88
	Girls	93	93	93
	Total	181	181	181
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	100 (100)	100 (100)	100 (100)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	94 (96)	100 (98)	89 (87)
	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	89	104	193

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	88	89	89
	Girls	103	104	104
	Total	191	193	193
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	98.5 (97)	99.5 (99)	99.5 (99)
	National	49.8 (47.4)	86.6 (90.6)	94.5 (95.6)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	58.21 (58)
	National	39.1 (38.4)

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

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

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	46	84	130

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	23.9 (23.7)	23.2 (23.6)	23.4 (23.6)	N/A	N/A	N/A
National	16.9 (17.8)	17.9 (18.6)	17.4 (18.2)	N/A	N/A	N/A

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	5
Black – African heritage	9
Black – other	7
Indian	14
Pakistani	10
Bangladeshi	1
Chinese	10
White	1194
Any other minority ethnic group	50

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	11	0
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	81.2
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.0

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	14
Total aggregate hours worked per week	361

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	71.2
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	26.7
Key Stage 4	21.3

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000/2001
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	£
Total income	3 326 454
Total expenditure	3 269 446
Expenditure per pupil	2 521
Balance brought forward from previous year	(9 307)
Balance carried forward to next year	47 699

Figures in parentheses indicate negative values

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	16.4
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	15.1

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	15.1
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	1300
Number of questionnaires returned	420

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	42	50	6	2	1
My child is making good progress in school.	42	52	3	2	2
Behaviour in the school is good.	30	57	6	1	6
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	23	60	14	2	2
The teaching is good.	26	62	5	1	7
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	24	50	19	3	4
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	41	45	9	3	3
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	60	36	3	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	16	52	19	6	7
The school is well led and managed.	27	53	7	2	11
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	34	55	6	2	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	25	45	13	2	14

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

Strengths

- Results achieved at GCE A-level or AS equivalent examinations, when compared with all other schools and post-16 providers, are very high.
- Standards of work seen during the inspection are well above average.
- Results at A-level results in religious studies in 2001 were very high.
- Sixth-form students' achievement is good in relation to their starting point at the beginning of Year 12.

Areas for improvement

- Results attained by a minority of higher-attaining students in chemistry, geography and French are not high enough.
- Standards in ICT are too low.

23. In 2001, results obtained by Year 13 students taking two or more GCE A-level or AS equivalent examinations, based on average point scores, were well above the national average for all other schools and post-16 providers. Students typically achieved some five points above the average. Male students achieved approximately one point better than female students overall. Since the previous inspection, results have risen satisfactorily in line with the national trend. Of the subjects that were the focus of the inspection, the results for religious studies in 2001 were very high, placing the subject in the top five per cent of schools across the country. Overall results for, English literature, mathematics, sociology, Spanish and physical education were well above average. Those for art and design, business studies, geography, history, performance studies and physics were above average. Those for chemistry and psychology were average, and design and technology was below average. Of the subjects sampled, economics was above average and French below average.

24. However, standards seen during the inspection are well above average in art and design, business studies, English literature, mathematics, psychology, religious studies, Spanish and physical education. They were above average in chemistry, design and technology, geography, history, physics, sociology and performance studies.

25. Standards expected of students entering the sixth form are high, with the majority having attained well above average standards at GCSE. These high standards are maintained; consequently students' achievement overall through Years 12 and 13 is good. The inspection evidence shows that student achievement in the focus subjects is excellent in religious studies and very good in art and design, business studies and psychology. It is good in chemistry, English literature, design and technology, geography, history, mathematics, physics, sociology, performance studies, Spanish and physical education. In the subjects only sampled briefly, achievement is very good in economics but there is some under-achievement in French. Overall, achievement is good in relation to students' starting point on entry to the sixth form; thus the school is adding value in relation to GCSE results at the end of Year 11. All but a small percentage of students stay on into the sixth form and complete the two years.

26. Standards and achievement in relation to prior attainment seen during the inspection were better in design and technology than recent examination results would suggest; this represents good improvement. Standards are beginning to improve in chemistry but, as with

geography and particularly French, further improvement is necessary to match other subjects in the school. Students generally make good progress towards the targets set for them individually. Governors have set realistic targets for departments. In the main, the school achieves the appropriate targets it sets itself. In the sixth form, the divide between the performance of male and female students narrows compared with that in Years 7 to 11. However, male students' writing and presentation is often below standard, although some overcome this by word-processing their work. Lower-attaining students are few and their performance is only lower in a relative sense. However, teachers are aware of differences in learning needs and plan work to try to meet such differences. In some subjects, for example, geography, chemistry and French, higher-attaining pupils do not achieve standards of which they are capable. Students from ethnic minority backgrounds consistently perform as well as other students across all subjects.

27. Throughout their time in the sixth form, students are expected to develop the key skills of communication, application of number and ICT. Standards of literacy and communication in the sixth form are well above average. Students have well developed writing skills. Their essays and notes are fluent, clear and well shaped. The range and depth of students' reading are impressive with good evidence of extensive background reading. Standards of numeracy and application of number are above average. However, development of ICT is restricted because of the unsatisfactory provision of resources. It is not yet sufficiently well integrated into the work and practices of all subjects of the sixth-form curriculum. This is having a negative impact on ICT key skills standards as well as opportunities for learning and student independent research. The school is currently over-reliant on students' self-taught ICT skills using home computers

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

Strengths

- Students show maturity and very good attitudes in lessons.
- Students are confident, responsible young adults with strong independent learning skills
- Students successfully reflect on and discuss their knowledge, feelings, beliefs and opinions.
- Attendance is good.

Areas for improvement

- Punctuality to lessons is a problem due to site transfer time.
- ICT provision to support independent study is unsatisfactory.

28. Students' attitudes, values and personal development are very good and a strength of the sixth form. These attitudes ensure a very positive level of learning. The vast majority enjoy sixth-form life and would recommend it. They are always interested and involved in lessons and listen very carefully to teachers. They often carry out their own extensive research to supplement their learning in lessons. The involvement of students in school life has been restricted in recent years due to the extra pressure of time put on students by the new AS level examinations. However, students are still involved in many aspects of school life including theatrical productions, orchestra and sporting events. During independent study time all students show very good attitudes in the planning of their own work and use this time effectively. However, facilities for private study at the Claremont Centre and access to computers at both the centre and in the main school library are limited. This restricts opportunities for further independent study. In lessons observed, students were very cooperative and always worked together well. Students are able to debate and discuss issues very confidently. They offer their opinions and listen carefully to the views of others showing a very good level of maturity. In discussion, students are clear about their long-term goals and are committed to ensuring that they try their best in order to achieve them.

Attendance is good throughout the sixth form and contributes greatly to their learning. However, due to the two-site location of the sixth form, students sometimes arrive late for their studies and this can affect their opportunities to be fully involved in these lessons.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

Strengths

- Teaching and learning are very good, especially in business studies, art and design, geography, religious studies, psychology, English literature and Spanish.
- Teachers know their subjects well and present them enthusiastically. As a result pupils are motivated to learn.
- Teachers have high expectations of students and make suitable demands of them. As a result learning is very effective.
- Lessons are well prepared and planned to meet the learning needs of students.
- There are clear objectives for lessons, well linked to the demands of examinations.
- Students are encouraged to research their work and study independently.

Areas for improvement

- Planning does not always take account of ways of encouraging responses in lessons from less confident students.
- Too few teachers are using ICT to support learning.

29. In the sixth form teaching and learning are good or better in well over nine out of ten lessons. In nearly half of all lessons teaching is very good and occasionally excellent. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen in the sixth form.

30. A key reason for examination results being very high is the consistently good and often very good teaching. The most successful teachers are hardworking, knowledgeable, imaginative and enthusiastic. Sixth-form students show a clear appreciation of these qualities when talking about the quality of teaching they experience in the school. There is an intensity of endeavour in the best lessons characterised by the desire of students to do well; this motivation is usually generated by the enthusiasm of teachers.

31. For example, the teaching of chemistry to Year 13 is supportive and geared to the needs of the group. It is well-focused, structured and moves at a demanding pace. Clear objectives are known by the students and their success in achieving them is discussed and checked. Well-directed questions ensure that all students participate fully. Good relationships are a feature of this teaching and most other teaching in the sixth form. For example, in geography with Year 13, good relationships, time management and effective choice and use of good resources are features of teaching that lead to effective learning and good examination results. In Year 12 a further feature of effective geography teaching is the timely intervention of the teacher to help students probe more deeply into their area of enquiry, taking increasing responsibility for finding their own answers to challenging tasks.

32. Teachers know well how their students are performing at key stages of courses. In psychology, for example, with Year 12, the teaching identified learning difficulties experienced by some students and responded with the use of innovative presentation and well-developed questioning techniques. On rare occasions, as in an otherwise good chemistry lesson with Year 13, opportunities were missed to elicit responses from less confident students struggling with aspects of a demanding lesson. Examples are evident in chemistry and physics of teachers sometimes taking insufficient care to meet the differing learning needs of students. However, these shortcomings are not usually found. For example, lessons in business studies are characterised by good planning that takes account of students' prior learning. In performance studies the teaching is lively and demanding but always geared to

the reasonable physical and emotional demands that can properly be made of students. Teaching and learning in mathematics are always linked to previous learning and common errors or difficulties tackled before moving on, often through skilful use of appropriate examples.

33. Good use of resources is a feature of much of the teaching, especially in religious studies and in geography and history an excellent range of resources is well used for personal research. Their selection shows teachers' good insight into students' learning needs. In business studies effective discussions are held based on well selected and presented data such as spider charts and, in art and design, a combination of resources found by the teacher or students is used effectively for some projects. Discussions about the relevance of materials is an important part of this effective learning. In all teaching, the activities are designed to meet the lesson objectives or demands of the examination; in the best lessons resources are carefully selected to support such learning and teaching. Some teaching is outstanding in the imaginative approaches it brings to learning through the use of a variety of teaching methods. For example, questions are posed carefully in ways that require students to find their own answers. Discussions are purposeful, well managed and involve all students, at best demanding intellectual rigour, for example as seen in textual study in English in Year 12. In performance studies, the students were effective in devising a piece of street theatre that required them to embrace a wide range of disciplines across art forms, using a wide variety of styles of presentation.

34. As a result of very good teaching and the very positive attitudes of students, learning in the sixth form has a number of distinctive features. In practical work, students understand clearly what is required of them and stick to tasks that are often challenging. In physical education students are well aware of psychological and biological factors that emerge in physical endeavour. Textual and background knowledge are well used to support arguments in presentation in English literature lessons in Year 12. In all subjects, wherever possible, students are encouraged to draw upon their own experiences, for example, in moral and social contexts arising in religious studies. Year 13 students are prepared to challenge and debate and bring their own experience to bear on issues. Students of art and design respond well to opportunities to develop their own styles of working after studying the work of a range of established artists. In a similar way, students of business studies relate previously learned data to new situations. These students are successful in organising and communicating their findings, often to an excellent level, as witnessed in work presented by a small group of male students in Year 13. Effective learning is reflected in the pride students take in presenting work well, whether orally or through display. For example, one small group of psychology students produced an excellent series of revision wall charts to use by all students in the year group. These were the outcome of careful reading and research and led to wide-ranging, purposeful discussion. Similarly, in sociology, students were prepared to persist in identifying key points to help with the consolidation of learning across a module of work. In history, Year 12 students have opportunities to analyse sources of information and show confidence in reporting on the relevance of these to other students in the group. Geography students in Year 13 successfully identify, select and collect appropriate quantities and quality of evidence from primary and secondary sources using maps and other source material well. Students are willing to seek, listen to and act upon the advice of teachers.

35. The provision and use of ICT are inadequate in art and design, chemistry, English literature, history, physics, psychology, sociology and Spanish. All of these were focus subjects agreed for the inspection. Although a third of teachers have attended training courses and more are to follow, the overall ICT capability of staff is inadequate. The situation is aggravated by the poor provision of computers in the school. Much of the stock is second-hand and close to being obsolete. However, there is a thorough improvement plan for the

development of ICT in the school and this aspect of learning now has a higher priority than it has been given in the past.

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

Strengths

- The quality and range of the sixth-form curriculum are very good.
- New requirements, under Curriculum 2000, have been successfully managed.
- A good range of extra-curricular activities is pursued by a majority of students in the sixth form.
- Students have good opportunities to work independently.
- Arrangements for pupils' personal development are good.

Areas for improvement

- The development of ICT at the Claremont Centre is inadequate.
- Links with local employers are not sufficiently developed.

36. All students follow four AS courses in Year 12 leading to three A2 courses in Year 13 plus general studies and key skills. The school has managed most of the recent changes of Curriculum 2000 efficiently and effectively. Three-quarters of Year 11 pupils, and a good number from other schools, elect to continue their studies in the school's sixth form. Students feel part of the school community and appreciate that each has a contribution to make. The curriculum on offer is accessible and of equal value to male and female students. There is no discrimination because of gender. Schemes of work reflect the interests of both sexes. Work is set in a familiar context to which all students can relate. Resources available for sixth-form courses are up-to-date, and factually accurate. Students are provided with opportunities for discussion and the exploration of opinions on relevant subject issues. This is sometimes less effective for more reserved students when groups are larger than is desirable in a sixth form subject. The sixth-form curriculum is well managed. Students appreciate the range of opportunities provided and cope adequately with the split-site operation; however, some are casual in their movement between sites and punctuality is not a positive aspect of some students' day.

37. There are no vocational courses, although the school has considered their appropriateness. At present it is felt that the school meets the aspirations of students and their parents. However, in considering the performance of some students, for example male students and those who respond to practical application and short-term goals, a thorough examination of the potential for students of all abilities in mixing and matching their portfolio, merits more detailed consideration and an analysis of specifications, especially at GNVQ-Advanced. Work-related learning generally is under-developed. The links with local business and commerce are limited, although there are examples of effective work experience placements.

38. The time allocations to subjects match specification requirements. There are some large class sizes in Years 12 and 13. The large classes mean the adoption of more traditional approaches to teaching and learning in a few cases. The sharing of ideas is managed but debate is not always possible. Students can demonstrate good levels of achievement in the key skills of number, communication and ICT. Additional sessions are arranged to prepare students for their key skills examinations. The course is planned within tutorials, as part of general studies and personal, social and health education. A wide range of topical issues and religious education is also covered. There are visiting speakers who make a positive contribution to the raising of students' social and economic awareness. Careers education is effective. Some 80 per cent of all students move to higher education after A-levels. Approximately ten per cent seek employment.

39. The programme of extra-curricular opportunities is very good. Examples are the Youth Volunteering Scheme, Amnesty International and Trafford Community Liaison Group. These activities promote an understanding of self, other people, moral behaviour and thought as well as cultural differences and similarities. However, the pressures on time caused by the AS levels in Year 12 have diminished this contact between the lower and upper school. There is some support given by the sixth form to younger pupils, but not as much as at one time.

40. Through work in art and design, performance studies, geography, history, religious studies, modern languages and educational visits abroad and locally, students' cultural development is strong, enthusiastically entered into and a feature of the school.

41. Provision for students' personal development is good overall. Arrangements for their spiritual and cultural development are very good, although the sixth form does not meet the requirement to hold a daily act of collective worship. It does meet requirements for religious education in that all parents have exercised their right to state they do not require it for their sons and daughters. Most subjects seek opportunities to enhance personal development during the course of their lessons. For example, in a Year 12 Spanish lesson, students discussed the morality of bull-fighting. In a Year 13 physical education lesson, students considered the appropriateness of the media's presentation of football hooliganism and began to form their own moral perspective. Values in relation to environmental issues are developed in geography. In religious studies, Year 13 students remarked how moving, spiritually, they found the school's memorial service, especially in the context of the events of 11 September and their follow-up. The role of women in Spanish society provoked lively debate between male and female students in a Spanish lesson with Year 13.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

Assessment

Strengths

- Very good assessment procedures ensure that students know how well they are doing.
- The extensive use of assessment data informs the management of monitoring processes.

Areas for improvement

- Some students are not fully aware of how to use assessment to improve their work.

42. Assessments are made of each student's achievement every seven weeks. These are well informed, detailed and accurate. Target grades are set for each student in each subject. Assessment, combined with good knowledge of individual students, provides a very firm foundation for these targets. Students know what it is they are expected to achieve. Teachers regularly inform students as to their progress towards these targets. The process is successful and ensures that most students achieve their potential.

43. The school has recently developed a very extensive system to analyse assessment data. This computerised system provides teachers and students with detailed information. This is especially useful for any student not making the expected level of achievement. Pastoral heads are provided with very detailed information on such students. Key staff members interview any student not making the expected progress. Contact is made with their parents. Records are maintained of all interviews and advice. As this is a new system, not all students, as yet, appreciate the full purpose of this monitoring.

44. Assessment data is used to monitor performance of subjects and teaching groups. As the system develops it is increasingly providing greater information to enable better curricular planning. It has been successful in raising standards and improving results.

Advice, support and guidance

Strengths

- There is good careers guidance for students.
- Procedures for monitoring attendance are very good.
- The personal support and guidance of students is very good.

Areas for improvement

- None identified.

45. Students are given very good advice and guidance prior to joining the sixth form through interviews during Year 11 and where necessary follow-up discussions after receiving their GCSE results. During their early stages in the sixth form, very good guidance is offered to students on independent study skills, time management and effective reading skills. These help students to settle quickly into new study practises. The use of the students' progress record tracking system, 'mapper', helps teachers and form tutors to track and monitor students' progress on a regular basis. It provides a very effective early warning system prior to difficulties occurring and students are offered very good guidance when necessary.

46. Careers guidance is particularly designed to support students going on to higher education. This includes interviews with career guidance advisers and many students also carry out independent research of their proposed careers using the suitably stocked careers library. The schools provide very good opportunities for them to undertake work experience. In addition the provision of work-shadowing opportunities during the summer holidays offers students further career experiences. Students receive good advice on preparation for university; for example visitors from universities, and former students return to discuss their experiences.

47. Monitoring of attendance for sixth formers is very good, students are expected to sign in and out of school and a late book is in operation. Students carry out these procedures sensibly and a good level of trust exists between them and staff. The majority of students are very keen to attend lessons and form tutors ensure that any exceptions to good attendance are closely monitored and given appropriate pastoral support to promote improvement. Controlled supervision of study periods both in the library and at the Claremont Centre ensure

students use their time effectively and helps to support them in understanding the skills and discipline required to become an independent learner.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

Leadership and management

Strengths

- There is very good leadership by the head of sixth form.
- The pastoral and academic support provided by the heads of Year in the sixth form are very good.
- The sixth form management team provides demanding levels of challenge to staff and pupils.
- There is a high retention rate of students on sixth-form courses.
- Good planning and cost effectiveness contribute to good value for money in the sixth form.

Areas for improvement

- The provision for ICT resources throughout the school is weak, particularly for those students based at the Claremont Centre, and does not fully support independent learning and research by sixth-form students.

48. The sixth form is very well led, managed and administered. The head of sixth form is part of the school's senior management team and works closely with the heads of Year 12 and 13. Management roles, policies and responsibilities are clearly defined. The sixth-form leadership team, both academic and pastoral, works cooperatively and effectively. It provides informed and clear educational direction for the students. Most students feel secure in their pathway towards life beyond the school. Consequently, the aims and values of the school are reflected well in the life and work of the sixth form. The headteacher and senior management team play a full part in the monitoring of sixth-form effectiveness and provision. The governing body fulfils its role appropriately and sets considered targets for sixth-form performance.

49. A particular strength of the sixth form management is in its support of teaching and learning. The head of sixth form ensures that teaching is well monitored through lesson observations and performance management of teachers' effectiveness. This approach contributes to the overall very good standards of teaching in the sixth form. Indeed, in discussions with students the quality of teaching is a matter of particular comment. They see the mixture of teaching methods, strategies and the friendliness and approachability of staff as a primary strength of the sixth form. The sixth-form management challenges staff as well as students. Potential is recognised, well supported and there are high expectations of outcomes. Priorities for development are therefore clear, appropriate and well supported through planning.

50. The monitoring of learning in the sixth form is thorough. A system of student progress records, commonly known as 'mappers', is being effectively used as a management tool in the support of students. Through this system, the sixth-form leadership team is not only able to effectively track individual student progress and achievement but gain a good over-view of the standards being attained within departments. This is one of a number of analytical tools being used by the headteacher and senior management to maintain the drive for high standards and to ensure systems of accountability. The school is keen to ensure that the performance of pupils at GCSE level is developed and improved upon as they become sixth formers and eventually in AS and A2 examinations.

51. The very good range and variety of learning opportunities enrich students' lives. As well as examination courses, features include the Youth Volunteering Programme, which enables students to use their skills and interests and contribute positively to the life of the community. Very few students drop out of their sixth-form courses. When this happens the school is active in following up and offering continued support. Of the eleven Year 12 leavers in summer 2001 only one student failed to respond to such offers. Most used their sixth-form experience, or AS level qualifications, to undertake other further education or vocational courses elsewhere, or to gain employment.

52. Financial planning for sixth-form provision is good and well balanced. Principles of best value are well applied. Planning is properly linked to areas of priority identified for development within the sixth form. The sixth form is cost-effective and does not draw staff or other resources away from provision in Years 7 to 11. The sixth form gives good value for money.

Resources

53. There is a good range of texts and support material in English and, in mathematics, all students have copies of new texts and access to necessary ICT packages. A good range of materials is available in design and technology. Computers and their software are up to the design standards found in industry. Up-to-date texts are provided in history and these are supplemented effectively by worksheets produced within the school. The use of ICT is strong in physical education and the facilities shared with a neighbouring college ensure that overall resources are good. In performance studies, students benefit from a good range of lighting and sound equipment and a range of software for research purposes. In these instances the quality of resources has a direct and positive impact on the standards achieved by students or the breadth and depth of curricular study.

54. In some other subjects the opportunity for such breadth and depth is more limited and enhancement through the use of ICT is less apparent. In physics, there are not enough computers and some are close to being obsolete. They do not meet the demands of sophisticated software and so cannot enhance learning. In addition, the library stock is inadequate, particularly in science. There is uneven access to the specialist resources held in geography rooms. There is no library provision at the Claremont Centre for example, to meet the demands of the psychology course. Poor ICT facilities at Claremont and the library on the main site limit opportunities for research and independent learning.

55. The match of teachers and support staff in the sixth form is very good. The adequacy of the accommodation for the needs of the sixth form is satisfactory. However, obvious difficulties arise from the split site and the use of the Claremont Centre, which falls short of the quality of provision found on the main site. The building does not belong to the school which is, therefore, less able to enhance provision, such as the wiring for computer networking.

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

In the inspection, fifteen 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
Chemistry	1	100	43	-	5	1.0	0.8
Mathematics	4	75	62	25	15	1.8	1.5
Other Sciences	10	100	78	60	27	3.5	2.3

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
English literature	34	100	95	71	37	7.9	5.9
Mathematics	38	95	87	58	43	7.2	5.8
Chemistry	22	95	90	36	43	5.8	5.9
Physics	20	95	88	35	40	6.0	5.7
Art and design	27	96	96	59	46	7.5	6.6
Business studies	27	93	92	63	32	7.2	5.5
Design and technology	7	86	91	-	30	2.9	5.4
Geography	22	91	92	41	38	6.1	5.7
History	25	96	88	32	35	6.2	5.5
Modern languages: Spanish	1	100	89	-	39	6.0	5.7
Other sciences	24	96	90	38	30	5.9	5.2
Other social studies	10	60	87	-	34	3.0	5.3
Performing arts	11	100	-	54	-	6.9	-
Physical education	11	100	92	36	25	6.4	5.1
Psychology	24	96	-	38	-	5.9	-
Religious studies	13	100	92	85	38	8.6	5.8
Sociology	9	100	86	78	35	7.8	5.3

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

The focus was on three subjects: mathematics, chemistry and physics but further mathematics was also sampled. In further mathematics, one student sat the examination in 2001. He gained a grade A. Currently 10 students take further mathematics. One lesson was observed in which the teaching was very good. The teacher introduced a new module in a stimulating manner. He skilfully brought in new terminology so students were using this naturally by the end of the lesson. Students were very keen to make suggestions. They shared a high level of debate with the teacher, increasing their learning.

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- Students attain high standards.
- The teaching is good.
- Leadership of the subject ensures very clear direction and purpose.
- Students have confidence in their teachers.

Areas for improvement

- The standards of some teachers' comments on work is not always as good as that of the best in the faculty.
- The skills of the lower-attaining students are insufficient to produce the same standards in tests as they do in classwork.

56. Standards of work seen during the inspection are well above the national average. These standards are achieved because teaching is good. Students' achievements in relation to standards at the start of the sixth form are good. Students' very good attitudes also contribute to the good quality of their learning in mathematics. Students make good progress as they move through the sixth form.

57. Large numbers of students opt to study mathematics in the sixth form. This means they can be grouped according to their learning needs and offered some choice of modules in Year 13. More male than female students take the subject. Students enter the sixth form having attained standards at GCSE which are well above the national average. These standards provide a very firm foundation for their work. They use prior learning well. One example was a Year 12 student who readily used a technique he remembered from GCSE work when starting work on polynomials.

58. In 2001, A-level results were well above the national average both for the average points score and for the proportion of students gaining grades A or B. The proportion of students gaining grades A to E was also above the national average. All students completed the course. At AS level results were above the national average for the proportion of pupils grades A to E, the proportion gaining grades A or B, and the average points score. These A and AS level passes represent good achievement for students based on the results they gained at GCSE in mathematics. There is no significant difference between the results achieved by male or female students. Results over time have been maintained at a consistently high level. At the very highest levels, the school regularly sends students to Oxbridge to read mathematics.

59. Standards are high because teaching is good. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen during the inspection. All teaching was good, and very good in one lesson. The good teaching features appropriate choice of task. Students move on quickly to the next stage in learning. They do not spend time unnecessarily practising skills already learnt. This was seen to good effect in a Year 12 group starting work on polynomials. Very good teaching expertly develops knowledge and competence. This was superbly demonstrated in a lesson to a Year 13 group being introduced to implicit differentiation. The teacher increased the complexity of the examples whilst requiring the students to do more of each example themselves. This leads to students very quickly mastering this new technique. Good teaching develops students' mathematical thinking by discussing ideas for solutions to problems. A good example was seen in Year 13. Students made suggestions of how to calculate velocities of projectiles. They based their ideas on work done previously in one dimension.

60. Students respond positively to mathematics. They work at a good rate. They complete the work set quickly, so that they can move on to new learning. In Year 13, students confidently differentiate and integrate a full range of functions. They readily apply the chain rule. They apply appropriate tests to statistical data. In Year 12 students make a sound start on calculus and apply Newton's Laws of Motion. Students display good note-taking skills in lessons. This shows good independence in their learning. In 2001, these positive attitudes led to a high proportion continuing from AS level to take A2 courses. Some students chose to do so, in spite of gaining higher results in other subjects, because of the enjoyment they gain from mathematics. Students speak of enjoying the challenge! One female student delighted in the way mathematics had developed her ability to think. Students are very methodical in recording their work. Because of this, they are far less likely to make careless errors or ones which reflect a lack of logic.

61. Teachers mark work regularly and so students have very good knowledge of the progress they are making. Students are quickly informed if there is any check to achievement and swift, effective action is taken. Students speak highly of the advice and support given by teachers. One example is a tutorial, run in the teacher's own time, to help students re-sitting a module. One student stated how highly he valued teachers' frankness. The best level of comment is highly informative. It shows students the exact point of any error and details the correct steps. Not all work is marked to this standard and so not all students benefit from this very good aid to learning. Students are provided with high quality information, which they value, on university courses in mathematics.

62. Students are tested very regularly. This increases their confidence and prepares them well for examination. Most students produce work in tests equal to that of their classwork. This is less frequently the case for the lower-attaining students. Even more preparation for tests would help them achieve higher grades in examinations.

63. Good use is made of ICT. Examples include examination of the graphs of functions. However, not all students and teachers use ICT to the same extent. Further usage could be made, for example, to reduce repetitious calculation of product moment coefficients.

64. The management of mathematics is very good. The head of faculty monitors teaching and the progress made by students very effectively. She ensures that the subject reflects the high academic standards of the school and that teachers ensure students achieve highly. Improvement since the previous inspection has been sustained owing to the desire of the department to always improve on its previous best.

Chemistry

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

Strengths

- Teaching and learning are good; teachers have a very good knowledge and understanding of chemistry enabling them to explain concepts clearly.
- Good relationships between teachers and students provide a positive working atmosphere in lessons, which enhances learning.
- Good practical skills are developed in a structured way.

Areas for improvement

- Some students underachieve because a narrow range of teaching approaches does not meet individual learning needs.
- There are insufficient opportunities for the development of independent learning skills.

65. Standards of work seen during the inspection are above average, but there is room for improvement in examination results that are average overall. The achievement of most students in chemistry is good, but some students underachieve in relation to their prior GCSE performance. Good teaching and students' positive attitudes to work contribute to a quality of learning that is good overall.

66. The A-level examination results have improved since the previous inspection, yet are still no better than average overall. In 2000, the results were close to the national average. In 2001, the percentage pass rate was above the national average, although the percentage of higher grades, A and B, fell below the national average. There was no significant difference between the performance of male and female students. In the new AS examination in Year 12, just over half the students gained the higher grades A and B. Three out of the forty-six students entered for the examination did not pass. Thirty-four students continue to study chemistry in Year 13 for the A2 examination.

67. The standard of work of current students is above average. Good teaching supports students, boosting their confidence. This has enabled them to adjust successfully to the standard of work required. For example, in a Year 12 lesson, students were doing a practical to determine the molar enthalpy change of neutralisation. Before they began the teacher checked that the students understood the theory behind the reaction and knew exactly what they were doing. The teacher's encouraging manner meant that the students gained confidence in their own ability and experienced success.

68. Students' experimental skills are developed in a structured way and by Year 13 they are good. In another Year 12 lesson, students had completed an experiment and were practising the skills of analysis and evaluation. They were able to interpret the information obtained from the experiment and recognise patterns and trends. Lower-attaining students had difficulties in assessing the reliability of their data and how they could increase their accuracy. In a Year 13 lesson, students practised the skill of planning the preparation and purification of an organic compound. Planning skills of most students are good, although the actual plans of lower-attaining students lack detail.

69. Carefully structured teaching builds on previous knowledge enabling students to develop their understanding of chemical concepts. This was seen in a Year 13 lesson on mass spectroscopy. The lesson was well planned and structured with a focused pace. Students were involved throughout. They gained confidence during the lesson and worked hard, and this resulted in good learning. The quality of teaching and learning in all the lessons seen was good or better. A key strength of the teaching is the teachers' good knowledge and understanding of chemistry shown in clear exposition and skilful questioning. Teachers communicate their own enthusiasm for chemistry, which motivates students to work harder.

The very good relationship between teachers and students engenders a positive attitude and interest in chemistry. Teachers are supportive, making good use of praise to encourage student confidence. Written work is marked in detail and students are told where there are inaccuracies and where their answers lack depth.

70. Students have good listening skills and sustain concentration well. Their work is well organised and presented. Students are cooperative and support each other well in group work. Students' learning is insufficiently enhanced, for example, through development of research in order to present information for class discussion.

71. The teaching methods seen during the inspection involved whole-class teaching and were usually dominated by the teacher with insufficient opportunities for students to progress at different rates dependent on their learning needs. Teachers' expectations are generally appropriately high but in some lessons tasks are the same for students of all attainment levels so that higher-attaining students are not challenged sufficiently and, in consequence, make less progress. ICT is not used to enhance student learning because of the lack of computer resources in the science department.

72. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory, with an improvement in examination results. Monitoring of teaching methods and students' progress is insufficient to give a sharp focus on developments needed to raise standards and ensure maximum impact on students' learning.

Physics

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

Strengths

- A-level examination results have improved significantly in the last few years.
- Teaching and learning are good; teachers give good support to help individual students develop their knowledge and understanding.
- Good practical skills are developed in a structured way.
- Good relationships between teachers and students provide a positive working atmosphere in lessons; this enhances learning.

Areas for improvement

- There are insufficient opportunities to develop independent learning skills.
- There are insufficient approaches that challenge the higher-attaining students.

73. Standards of work seen during the inspection are above average. These standards are attained because of good teaching and learning and students' positive attitudes. Students' achievement relative to their prior performance at GCSE is good.

74. The A-level examination results have improved significantly since the previous inspection. In 2000 the results were in line with the national average. In 2001, the percentage of higher grades A and B fell to below the national average but the percentage of pass grades rose to above the national average. The number of female students studying physics is very small and so any comparisons of relative attainment by gender are invalid. In the AS examination at the end of Year 12, over half the students attained grades A and B. Five out of the thirty-seven candidates failed to attain a pass grade. Nineteen students have continued to study physics in Year 13.

75. Standards seen during the inspection are above average, and reflect the recent improvement in the examination results. Students in Year 12 are well supported in making the

leap from GCSE work to the greater depth required in the AS course. In a Year 12 mechanics lesson the teacher had planned well for the fact that the knowledge of students who had done three separate sciences at GCSE was greater than that of the dual award students. The teacher introduced enough new ideas to move all the students forward while not 'scaring off' those with less prior knowledge. Well-focused teaching allowed all the students to achieve success. The teacher's clear and confident explanations and the students' positive attitude and interest in the work increased their learning. In another Year 12 lesson, students were applying Newton's Laws to solving problems concerning bodies on an inclined plane. The teacher gave good support to individuals, developing their knowledge and understanding by discussion. Students gained confidence during the lesson as they practised examples and their learning was good.

76. Students' experimental skills are developed in a structured way and by Year 13 they are good. Students plan an experiment in detail, have good manipulative skills and take accurate measurements. The lower-attaining students find the analysis of experimental evidence and the evaluation of their procedures difficult in spite of good teaching on error treatment.

77. Students learn well as a result of good teaching. All the lessons seen were good or better. Lessons are well structured and proceed at a brisk pace. Teachers have good subject knowledge and understanding and explain concepts clearly. They skilfully use questioning to build on students' answers so that they have to clarify their thinking. The very good relationship between students and their teachers motivates them to have a positive attitude and interest in physics; this enhances their learning. In a Year 13 lesson on circular motion, the teacher recognised that students were making mistakes because they were cutting corners in working out problems. Students gained confidence, as the teacher showed them the need for structured step-by-step writing out of their working. The teacher's stress on the need for precision in physics led to very good learning.

78. Students' written work is well presented and organised. Marking is detailed and students are shown how they can improve their work. They show an enthusiasm for physics and enjoy their studies. They sustain their concentration well in lessons and persevere with tasks, even when they find them difficult at first. There are not enough opportunities for students to research and present information for class discussion. Wider reading around the subject, including greater use of their own textbooks, would further develop their intellectual skills.

79. Teachers' expectations are generally appropriately high, but in some lessons tasks are the same for students of all attainment levels so that higher-attaining students are not challenged sufficiently and, in consequence, make less progress. ICT is not used to enhance student learning because of the lack of computer resources in the science department. This needs to be remedied as soon as possible. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. Good leadership and management are reflected by the significant improvement in the examination results and in the improvement in the monitoring of student progress.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

The school offers one course in this curricular area: design and technology product design. It was inspected as a focus area.

Design and technology

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

Strengths

- Students' attitudes to their work make a positive contribution to standards attained.
- Teaching is good: lessons are very well planned.
- Activities effectively help students apply their design skills in the development and manufacture of good quality products.
- This subject area is very well led and managed. High quality cooperative planning underpins all aspects of the subject.

Areas for improvement

- Recent examination results have not been good enough.

80. Standards of work seen in the sixth form during the inspection are above average. These standards are achieved because teaching and curriculum planning are good. Students' very good attitudes and very positive motivation also make a significant impact on their learning in design and technology. The recent change to a new GCE course also plays an important part in their success. As a result, the students' learning and achievement are good.

81. The standards of students' work in the current Year 12 and 13 reflect recent AS level examination results and the high standards of planning and teaching in both year groups. Students in Year 13 have a secure understanding of design and technology principles and demonstrate this through their product study. Higher attainers have detailed understanding of design processes that is exemplified in the quality of research in major project work. They apply their knowledge successfully in the communication of design ideas through sketching and annotation. For students at all levels of attainment, understanding of the design principles is clearly present in all aspects of their work.

82. Although students in Year 12 are only in the early stages of their course, they are achieving well. Students work productively and respond well to the different learning styles that teachers provide. When students discuss their sketches, they show understanding of the need to reflect in their designs the specific needs of people. They show good knowledge and understanding of the design and manufacturing principles and the need for modification of design ideas.

83. Higher-attaining students in Year 13 show an imaginative approach to investigation in earlier portfolio work, for example, the 'dream catcher' CD holder. These students are skilful in drawing on their previous technological experiences in Year 12. Good design work, good rendering of ideas and fresh and spontaneous designs are the hallmarks of the quality of their work. The above-average standards achieved in product design are a direct reflection of the good teaching and student motivation. Achievement over time is progressively good and shows imagination and flair. However not enough is made of the role and responsibility of the designer within society.

84. Students have ample opportunities to use and develop key skills. Numeracy is good. Students are very competent in communicating design ideas orally, in writing, and through the use of ICT. For example, a Year 13 student very confidently discussed research into the new technologies required for aeroplane 'bridge' design; another considered the art of Modrian when designing modern cutlery. Portfolios provide good evidence of the use of computer-aided design (CAD) to support their work effectively. Students in both Years 12 and 13 have very good skills that enable them to work independently.

85. Teaching is good overall and as a result students make good progress in lessons and their learning is good. The knowledge of the teachers is a strength as is the good cooperative teaching and planning. Teachers have very high expectations of all students and they have

very good, productive relationships; this makes for effective progress. There is a high expectation of students in the use of accurate and specific technical language to describe skills and processes as well as their understanding of product design. This, students do very well. They are challenged intellectually by the work, yet are supported in areas of uncertainty. Teachers work very hard to ensure that there is a successful transition from Year 11 into the sixth form. Teachers spend time discussing work individually and are impressive in their detailed logging of strengths and weaknesses and further areas for development. Reporting of progress in product design to parents is excellent. The breadth and depth of the report is highly focused and provides a detailed profile of progress and learning to date.

86. In GCE A-level design and technology, examination results were below average in 2001. However, most students did well, and some very well in relation to their GCSE results and their previous experiences in design and technology. Over sixty percent of students had only completed a short course in graphic products and none had experience of resistant materials in Years 10 and 11. The effect of approximately six per cent of curriculum time in Years 10 and 11 only allows for short course design and technology. Students wishing to complete a full course use their own time to complete the extra hours during pre-arranged sessions. The department now has effective strategies in place to improve future examination results. In 2001, examination results for Year 12 students in GCE AS level at grades A-E were above the national average.

87. The very good management by the head of faculty and the subject teachers makes a significant impact on the standards being achieved in the sixth form. The strong working partnership between the teachers of this course also makes a considerable contribution to the quality of student understanding of the principles of design technology. Standards have improved since the previous inspection. There is an increase in numbers of students now studying design and technology.

BUSINESS

The inspection focus was on business studies, which is being offered in Years 12 and 13. Economics was sampled in Year 12 and 13. The quality of provision in economics is very good. Students have a good knowledge and understanding of the tools of economic analysis and of the problems to which these tools are applied. Students can use a good range of statistics and diagrams specific to economics.

Business studies

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

Strengths

- Teachers provide accurate assessment and effective moderation procedures.
- Teachers know the subject well and this has a positive impact on standard.
- The quality of teacher-student interaction in lessons is good.

Areas for improvement

- Industrial and commercial links are underdeveloped.

88. Standards of work seen in the sixth form during the inspection are well above average. These standards are achieved because the teaching is very good. Students' knowledge of business theory causes the quality of their learning to be very good. As a result, students' achievements overall, in relation to their standards when they began in the sixth form, are very good.

89. Standards in Year 12 are above average. Students gain a critical understanding of the economic market and business environment. Students use ICT within a business context. They focus on relevant theories and concepts. Teachers use case studies and stimulus materials to enhance understanding. The higher-attaining students show their talents by researching and investigating in depth. The few students with relative learning difficulties are provided with extra assistance; this raises the standard of their work. Male and female students make good use of relevant economic and business terms and methods and recognise the strengths and limitations of the ideas used. Students explain the basic economic problem and how the ideas of scarcity, choice and opportunity-cost relate to all situations where decisions have to be taken over the allocation of resources. Students of both genders perform equally well in class.

90. Standards of work in Year 13 are well above average. Students apply their knowledge to address economic problems and issues. Their selection, organisation and interpretation of information is good. Female students are better at writing clear prose than males. Their spelling, punctuation and grammar are nearly always appropriate. Male students spell, punctuate and use the rules of grammar with reasonable accuracy. They use a wide range of specialist terms adeptly and with precision. Students are developing an awareness that economic and business behaviour can be studied from the perception of a range of stakeholders. Students analyse, explain and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the market economy and the role of citizens, businesses and governments within it.

91. Examination results at AS level in 2001 were well above average at the end of Year 12. They were well above the national average for the grades A to B and A to E. Students make good progress from Year 12 to 13. The results at the end of Year 13 are above average for grades A to B. The proportion of students gaining grades A to E is also above average. There is value added at both Years 12 and 13 in relation to the standards students had achieved on entry to the course. Throughout the course male and female students perform at much the same level.

92. The quality of teaching is very good. Teachers show an appropriate interest in current economic, business and political affairs. They plan their lessons effectively to develop an understanding of relevant economic and business concepts and theories and show how to apply them to a range of real world issues. Teachers are good at helping students to analyse, explain and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the market economy. Teachers provide good opportunities to develop and apply ICT skills during lessons. Students are

taught to plan, carry out and report their findings from an investigation or project. They are given time to practise their skills. There is a good working relationship between students and teachers which allows them to explore, develop and exchange information and derive new information.

93. Teachers select and use appropriate methods to illustrate findings, show business and economic trends and make comparisons to examine critically and justify economic decisions. The strength of teaching lies in the accurate and reliable information taught to students. Good pace of lessons, sufficient work for all students and the inclusion of whole class dialogue are other strengths.

94. Since the previous inspection good improvement has been made to aspects of teaching and learning. They now provide a sounder basis of factual knowledge of business and economics. Students are encouraged to develop a facility for self-expression, not only in writing but also using statistics and diagrams. Students are encouraged to read critically to gain information about the changing economy. Teachers demonstrate an ability to organise and present economic ideas and statements in a clear, logical and appropriate form.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

The focus was on a single subject in this area: physical education.

Physical education

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

Strengths

- Standards are well above average and have improved in the two years since the course was introduced.
- Students achieve well; they use their theoretical knowledge effectively to improve their own practical performance.
- The teaching is good.
- The curricular link with a neighbouring college contributes well to the standards achieved and the quality of the provision.

Areas for improvement

- Marking of students' written work is inconsistent.

95. Standards of work seen in the sixth form during the inspection are well above average. These standards are achieved because the teaching is good. Students' positive attitudes ensure that their learning is effective. The resources, made possible by the school's curricular link with a local sports college, also cause the quality of learning in physical education to be good. Consequently, students' achievement overall, in relation to their already above average standards when they enter the sixth form, is good.

96. Physical education has only recently been introduced as a subject for advanced study in the sixth form. 2000 was the first year in which students sat the A-level examination. Results overall were average in comparison with other schools although a smaller proportion of students obtained the higher A to B grades than was the case nationally. Results improved in 2001 when four of the eleven candidates obtained an A grade. Overall results were well above average in comparison with all other schools. No student has yet failed to obtain at least a pass. No significant differences are evident between male and female students although the small numbers involved make reliable comparison difficult.

97. All students in Year 12 are making good progress though they find the transition from GCSE to AS level challenging because of the increased demands which it places on them. In particular this relates to physiological and psychological concepts in the analysis of practical activity. Nevertheless, they are well motivated to learn. They appreciate the way their performance in their chosen activities can benefit from the fitness programmes which they have devised. These are based on a good understanding of their individual strengths and weaknesses. However, as yet, they do not fully appreciate the way that test results can be influenced by the circumstances in which they take place. In a lesson devoted to tests of their own fitness, some anxieties were evident after analysis of results from a battery of fitness tests. These indicated inconsistent improvement over time for some of the students involved. This was very well handled by the teacher. He quickly intervened and, as a result of his questioning, worries were eased and the students gained valuable insights into the reliability of testing. Research skills are generally good. These benefit from the information gained from the computers made available in the resource area. Whilst embryonic, this resource is being created to support the work of sixth form students.

98. The levels of attainment of students in Year 13 is a relatively narrow spectrum, almost all having already obtained a grade C or better at AS level. The inspection evidence indicates that they are now producing work that is well above average with little variation, other than in the organisation of work and the quality of notes and files. Some of the personal exercise programme files are of a high quality. Students' progress through the fitness programmes are carefully recorded and monitored. The links to theory are well established, though this tends to be more thoroughly explored in aspects of physiological rather than psychological features. The outcomes of programmes are carefully evaluated. In discussion, students confidently explain their improved performance, for example, due to work on stamina and upper body strength in a rugby player. They also explained apparent lack of improvement, showing a good understanding of components of fitness and the nature of skilled performance in invasion games. Theoretical knowledge is utilised well in experiments and students gain a good understanding of what is required for reliability and validity in testing. For example, their understanding of energy pathways was used well in analysing the results of an experiment that recorded the changes in the body's response to work. This made good use of the fitness testing resources of the local link college. ICT was used effectively and with some confidence by students to record, analyse and display the results of the experiment; they cooperated well with each other in negotiating roles and responsibilities.

99. Students are enthusiastic about physical education and sport and keen to learn as well as improve their own levels of fitness and performance. Many have been encouraged by their experiences so far to consider actively further study or possible career paths within the broad area of physical education. These attitudes owe much to effective and challenging teaching that provides interesting learning activities, making use of students' own experience of society. For example, some have explored the moral and sociological perspectives of football hooliganism. Many students hold representative honours in school teams and some at county or national levels; this contributes to their confidence and develops skills in their chosen activities.

100. The subject is well led and managed in the sixth form. Strengths and weaknesses are well understood. Students' performance is closely monitored and decisive action taken where needed in order to improve overall standards or those of individuals. Students' work is regularly marked but there is some inconsistency of focus between teachers within the department, especially in how marking might show students how to improve. The introduction of the A-level course has revived interest in extra-curricular sport in the sixth form. This helps to improve standards and is of general benefit to students. The department has made good improvement since the previous inspection.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The focus here was on two subjects: art and design, and performing arts.

Art and design

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

Strengths

- Teaching is very good. The teachers' expertise, enthusiasm and commitment inspire and challenge students.
- The high expectations of the department have led to the attainment of students being well above the national average.
- Attitudes of students are very good; they are very well motivated and keen to take responsibility for their own independent learning.

Areas for improvement

- The lack of resources for ICT in the department limits the student's facility to develop and extend their work.

101. Standards of work seen in the sixth form during the inspection are well above average. These standards are achieved because the teaching is very good. Students' very good attitudes also cause the quality of their learning in art and design to be very good. As a result, students' achievement overall in relation to their standards when they began in the sixth form is very good.

102. The standard of work of students in Year 13 is well above average because their independent decision making skills and their knowledge and skills in art and design are very good. Much of the work is conceptually adventurous, grounded in a very good understanding of how to undertake purposeful preparatory studies. Students work with a high degree of individuality and most show in-depth analysis and exploration of ideas and styles. This results in some work being of an exceptional standard. For example, studies based on Aboriginal art demonstrated an excellent understanding of the cultural use of surface decoration. They were presented in a highly innovative way, using interesting fabric bonding techniques and culminated in wall hangings and reliefs, which reflected a very high level of personal response. Technical skills are of a high standard. Students use a wide range of media very confidently and competently. Standards of literacy are good; written work demonstrates a skilled critical analysis of images and texts.

103. Achievement in the sixth form is very good. In Year 12, students successfully move on from their GCSE work into new areas and rapidly build on the challenge of individual study and interpretation. This is a result of the well structured course that gives students of all abilities the skills and confidence to achieve their best. For example, in their first term students produce a detailed recipe book of a wide range of different research techniques that can be referred to throughout the course. Students successfully build on their understanding

of artists' styles and selectively use the knowledge gained to influence their own work. A higher-attaining student working on a theme of portraits, researched the style of Early Renaissance artists and produced very high quality drawings of friends in a classical form, which led to an innovative final piece of work in a contemporary style. Fewer male than female students choose to study art and design in the sixth form. However, in the lessons seen they were achieving at an equal level. Positive strategies are in place to encourage more males to choose the subject and the number in Year 12 has risen this year.

104. For the three years prior to 2001, A-level results were well above the national average. In 2001, the entry was larger and results fell slightly, however they are still above the national average. The achievement of most students was good in relation to their starting point. Three students who had not studied art and design at GCSE all gained a pass, two with top grades. Results at AS level in 2001 were well above the national average for the average points score, and for the number of students gaining grades A and B.

105. Teaching in the sixth form is a significant strength in the subject; it is very good and students learn very well as a result. Expectations are high and teaching methods well chosen. A major strength is the emphasis given to independent thought and learning. The high quality of individual attention and knowledgeable advice play an important role in developing and raising standards. For example, a Year 13 student was inspired to develop his textiles work into three dimension after the teacher suggested he visit Bankfield Museum to see the work of the artist Michael Brennand-Wood, who uses unusual wooden fretwork structures in designs. Support is well managed because individual needs are well identified. Good systems of assessment are in place with an emphasis on students taking personal responsibility for their learning. Students know exactly what they are expected to do, the standard required and how to improve in order to achieve even higher standards.

106. Relationships between teachers and students are very good and based on mutual respect. This is particularly evident when areas of improvement are negotiated individually. At these times the quality and range of art vocabulary is very high and the breadth and depth of knowledge is very much appreciated. Students expressed the opinion that they felt that the teachers' expertise and enthusiasm for the subject and the challenging tasks set, made them think beyond the easy and obvious routes to develop their own creativity. This was evident in a lesson observed where the teacher emphasised how to create a personal response through mystery and surprise. After being shown an interesting exemplar, where drawings were hidden in the secret pockets of a sketchbook, students had to build this aspect into their work.

107. The impact of the high standards of teaching on students' work and attitudes is fully apparent in lessons and portfolios of work. This is especially so with the highest attaining students. Students arrive for lessons enthusiastically; they are highly motivated and appropriately self reliant, visiting exhibitions and galleries in their own time. For example, one student had attended a talk by the artist Anthony Green, after seeing examples of his work. Portfolios and sketchbooks are very well kept and reflect high degrees of pride and commitment. The teachers' enthusiasm for the subject encourages students to be receptive to new ideas and fresh viewpoints and students positively consider views and beliefs other than their own. They support and help each other effectively and talk and listen to each other's ideas and confidently contribute to discussion. Students are confident in themselves as artists and what they can achieve. A significant number go on to study the subject at a higher level.

108. The independent work students undertake is well prepared and tasks complement the content of the lessons. Teachers frequently bring in their own resources to make sure students have access to a wide range of media, books and artefacts. However there are no resources for ICT within the department and this is severely restricting and impacting on the students' ability to use it for research and creative purposes. For example there is a lack of opportunity for students to use a digital camera, scanner and up to date software to design and to manipulate imagery. Since the previous inspection staff have had some ICT training but further is needed to develop their confidence in its use.

109. The department is very well led and managed and the very good teaching and learning are a direct result of this. Since the previous inspection, standards have remained consistently high and good levels of improvement sustained. There is a strong determination to maintain this and planning establishes a strong link between improving provision and raising standards. The involvement of students in projects such as workshops with artists in residence and exhibiting work in the Portico Gallery and in the Lowry Centre, is a significant factor in raising achievement. The high quality of display in classrooms and areas of the school strongly contributes to the ethos of the subject and acts as an inspiration to students.

Performing arts

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

Strengths

- Effective learning occurs as the result of consistently good and sometimes very good teaching.
- The attitudes of students to their development in the practice of the arts are excellent.
- Results of examinations over recent years and standards in day-to-day work on the course are well above average and consistently amongst the best in the school

Areas for improvement

- The quality of presentation of some work in files, especially amongst male students.

110. Standards of work seen during the inspection are well above average. This is owing to good teaching and the excellent attitudes that students bring to their work. Students, as result, learn effectively and achieve well. They develop the performance discipline necessary for the performing arts to be successful.

111. Students begin the performance studies course having usually attained well above average results in the GCSE expressive arts examination in Year 11. In this they were required to work in the same arts disciplines as they follow in the sixth form. Their achievement in the sixth form in sustaining high standards is, therefore, good. For example, immediately prior to the inspection, Year 13 students completed a piece of street theatre that combined a range of performance styles and arts disciplines. Video evidence is sufficient to indicate that the standard of this work was well above average. Students know themselves the range and depth of their learning; they are good judges of their own standards and achievement. They show the essential qualities of self-appraisal and a generosity and astuteness in appraising the work of others. They have developed an attitude of always seeking to improve on their previous best.

112. Results in 2001 AS examinations were average overall and those at A-level GCE were above average. Most students added value to their GCSE results, improving better than might be predicted. These results have maintained a tradition of achievement that is amongst the best in the school and has been in place since the previous inspection in 1996.

113. Students in Years 12 and 13 bring maturity to their work with demanding material. They display excellent attitudes in their approach to practical work. They might be making presentations about early twentieth century musicals that include social and cultural issues surrounding the role of black actors beginning to work on shows such as 'Porgy and Bess' and 'Showboat'; on other occasions their focus is on working out dance sequences and performance ideas to more modern British pieces of musical theatre such as 'My Fair Lady'.

114. Students combine personable humour with a rigorous concern to 'get it right'. For example, 'The Big Picture', a piece of street theatre, required research into three of A S Lowry's paintings and some of his terse writing - 'I feel I don't belong to this life'. They analysed and used some of Status Quo's 'Pictures of Matchstick Man', experimented with vocal work reflecting graphic scores and movement work on rhythms, drones and rap music. Much of this has a humorous side to it that students enjoyed, but as art it has something to say about the human condition in Salford early in the twentieth century. In a different way students also made connections with their own times and the combative youth culture featured in the media today. The serious sub-text of much of this piece required social understanding if the piece of theatre itself was to work for fleeting audiences. Students showed an awareness of this and realised their research in carefully devised and rehearsed performances.

115. This piece provides an example of the good and effective learning of students following this course. They respond to the demands of the specification that they should work in the same way as established practitioners in the three art forms. They achieve well because the teaching is consistently good and sometimes very good. The team of teachers and an artist in residence are themselves effective practitioners and know their subjects well. Their enthusiasm and energy are respected and reflected in the students. In a study of contemporary theatre where students made small presentations of their research into plays significant in this country since 1956 – such as 'Look Back in Anger' and 'Accidental Death of an Anarchist' – students maintain their interest in difficult concepts owing to the energy of the teaching. Students identified key features in a lively and engaged way. This was in part due to the confidence that emanated from teachers and the support and respect that their work received. Teachers help students to learn to be self-evaluative as they themselves are as they appraise the effectiveness of units of the course. Teachers' planning takes account of the range of attainment represented in the two groups; it seeks to meet the learning needs and aspirations of individual students. Female students outnumber males significantly so that comparisons of gender are not possible other than that the practical work seen had the same range of qualities across both male and female students.

116. Work in students' file reflect clearly the objectives of the course. Notes of preparation for practical work are usually clear and accessible, female students presenting more readily than male. Essays on set texts or theatrical representation are variable, but generally above average in quality. However, the work of a minority of male students suffers from an untidy presentation. Some do not show the same respect for theoretical work as they do for its practical application. However, all students exhibit a facility to use the key skills of communication and sometimes ICT effectively, and in their choreographic work show an applied use of numeracy skills in dance notation and more complex musical rhythmic work. Files show students to be effective at personal research and working independently. There are lively links between the arts disciplines without losing focus and depth in individual disciplines. Much of the work of the course enhances students' cultural and spiritual

development; several were clearly moved by the black musicals studied as part of the history of musical theatre.

117. Standards have remained well above average since the previous inspection but the overall richness of the work of the department shows a good level of development. Teachers work well collaboratively and the course is very well managed. Students benefit from frequent visits to arts events and experience of artists in residence in school. There has been good improvement on already high standards since the previous inspection.

HUMANITIES

Five subjects were inspected within humanities: geography, history, religious studies, sociology and psychology.

Geography

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

Strengths

- Teaching is very good and teachers use their own subject knowledge to structure work appropriately and to provide stimulating resources.
- Monitoring and assessment are thorough, consistent and support students in their learning.
- The teaching of practical skills is very effective and gives students the tools to undertake independent enquiries.

Areas for improvement

- The higher A-level grades are not being obtained by enough students.
- Not enough demand is made of higher-attaining students.

118. Standards of work seen during the inspection are above average. These standards are achieved because teaching is very good. Students' very good attitudes and the quality and variety of resources selected by the teachers also cause the quality of learning to be very good. Students' achievement overall, in relation to the standards when they began in the sixth form, is good. Provision in this subject has improved significantly since the previous inspection.

119. The quality of teaching is very good therefore students make very good progress in lessons. All students start at the beginning of Year 12 with above average attainment at GCSE. The standards of work of the current Year 13 students are above average. Most students are achieving targets in line with their GCSE grades but some higher-attaining students are working below this level. This is an area for improvement.

120. Year 13 students are doing well as a result of effective teaching. Groups of students took part in a simulated land-use planning enquiry. They worked collaboratively in their respective teams to prepare detailed reports, which were based on evidence collected from a range of secondary sources and Ordnance Survey maps. The students were confident and articulate in giving their opinions, which were soundly based on evidence and good locational knowledge. They demonstrated good listening skills and challenged the accuracy of facts or opinions proposed by opposing groups. Some individuals made informed references to the national and global effects of the proposed change of land-use, showing they were aware of the complexity of human decision making processes. The lesson was successful because of the range and quality of secondary source material provided by the teacher and because of

the teacher's high expectations of the students. The progress of the students was advanced at each stage of the lesson by the teacher's skilful interventions and good time management.

121. Students in Year 12 are at an early stage of the course but are achieving well as a result of effective teaching. Students are making convincing progress from GCSE into new areas and have already learned how and when to use a wide range of practical skills to collect and analyse data. These they apply in investigations both inside and beyond the classroom. The standard of fieldwork reports prepared by Year 12 students, only a few weeks into the course, was above average. The students formulated their own hypotheses about the expected changes along the course of a river. They then selected appropriate techniques to test the validity of the hypotheses and finally to present the results of the investigation. They demonstrated sound graphical skills and could use a range of statistical tests. Some of the higher-attaining students modified their hypotheses in the light of results and could identify the limitations of the investigation. Through fieldwork and classroom investigations, students competently develop the key skills of communication, application of number and the use of ICT.

122. Teachers have good specialist knowledge and are able to introduce new and challenging material to students in a carefully structured way, which builds on previous knowledge and understanding. Teachers have high expectations of their students. All the lessons observed had clear objectives and a brisk pace. The students concentrated well and covered a lot of new ground in each session. The lesson on coastal processes, for example, reviewed the learning of much new specialist vocabulary. This introduced new learning about tidal processes and ended with an analysis of tidal data in order to draw conclusions about the extent of coastal erosion at different locations. Teachers give clear expositions of new concepts and, through skilful questioning, ensure that all students understand and can apply their knowledge and make connections with other aspects of geography.

123. Much of the work seen was focussed on examination questions. The thorough and constructive marking of assignments, together with written feedback to students, helps them to make progress. Students are also expected to carry out independent small-scale investigations, such as the origin and distribution of burglary in urban environments. If students can gain access in their free time to one of the specialist geography rooms, where the geography sixth form notice board is found, or to the computer room, they can locate references to much extended reading. This is either provided as photocopied extracts, or as links from the shared geography folder on the school computer network. Students in Year 12 have several opportunities to collect and use primary data on fieldwork days or on the residential field study and from the automatic weather station. Currently there are fewer opportunities for Year 13 students to use primary data.

124. Students learn well because they are well motivated and hard working. They have good relationships with their teachers and each other. They are used to working independently and also in groups, when they behave sensibly and thoughtfully. They are confident in offering their own opinions. From the feedback they get on assignments and tests they have a clear idea about their own achievement and know what aspects of their learning need further improvement.

125. The A-level results in 2001 continued the upward trend in improvement since 1997, particularly in the higher grades, A and B. The school's overall results in geography are close to the national average but in the higher grades are slightly below. All students completed their courses. The GCE AS level results for 2001 are above average and approximately three-quarters of the students progressed to start A2 courses in geography. Male and female students achieved equally well. In relation to their GCSE results students' achievement is good.

126. The good teaching and learning result from work in the subject being well led and managed. There is a commitment to improving standards through regular review of the department's work and the monitoring of student progress. The scheme of work covers all the subject requirements and gradually develops the students' abilities to understand connections between the different aspects of geography. The teaching of practical skills is effective because it is well integrated into the course. The students use good, up-to-date textbooks. There is unequal access to specialist rooms for different teaching groups and staff in the department. This is an obstacle to students wishing to do extended reading and research, which is essential at this level. Nonetheless, the department has made good improvement in its development since the previous inspection.

History

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

Strengths

- The most recent results were above the national average.
- Teaching and learning are good overall.
- The subject is well managed.

Areas for improvement

- Teaching does not involve a sufficiently wide range of students in debate and discussion in Year 12, owing to groups being too large.
- The use of ICT to support research is inadequate.

127. Standards of work seen during the inspection are above average. These standards are achieved because the quality of the teaching is good and the majority of the students who choose to take history in the sixth form have previously attained good GCSE results. The students' achievement and effectiveness of learning overall, in relation to their standards when they began in the sixth form, are good.

128. History is well led and managed. Recent changes to the management of the subject have a positive effect. Good analysis of examination performance has resulted in the introduction of strategies which are leading to improvements in results. Not enough is done to monitor teaching through lesson observation designed to make it possible to share good practice and for teachers to learn from each other. Nevertheless, the overall quality of teaching is good with particular strengths in the way that teachers use their specialist knowledge effectively to question students and allow them to draw out understanding for themselves. Marking clearly identifies the strengths and weaknesses in the students' work and gives clear guidance on ways in which it can be improved. The highest-attaining students are challenged to do even better. In some lessons, the teaching is insufficiently energetic and persuasive in drawing out the more reluctant students rather than relying on the most enthusiastic to dominate, or provide the answers themselves.

129. History is a popular subject and, although there has been some fluctuation of numbers in A-level classes in recent years, the number choosing the newly introduced AS course confirms the subject's popularity. However, this has resulted in the creation of teaching groups of above 20. This makes it difficult to provide some of the learning experiences crucial to sixth-form work, particularly in debate and student presentations. Teachers normally do what they can to ensure the active participation of as many students as possible in lessons. However, many of the students themselves feel inhibited to an extent which they do not find in their other subjects, where numbers are smaller. Students currently in Year 13, where class numbers are less than 15, enjoy debate and feel that they benefit

from the experience. They generally appreciate that they are well taught and are helped to improve. Subject retention rates are high.

130. Results in the A-level examination since 1998 have fluctuated between average and well above average in comparison with all maintained schools. In 2000, they were average and improved to above average in 2001. This was largely due to the increased proportion of students who obtained the higher A and B grades, which had been below average in 2000. Differences in results between female and male students have not been significant other than in 2000 when male students' results were better. However, the disparity in numbers of male and female students who sat the examination in this year make comparisons unreliable. Results in the AS-level examination in 2001 were broadly average although a slightly smaller proportion of students obtained the higher A and B grades than found nationally. The school offers two different courses at AS and A-level and similar results have usually been obtained in both.

131. Standards are above average and achievement is good in relation to their levels of attainment on entry to the sixth form. Good teaching enables students to maintain their above-average standards in the more demanding learning environment at A-level. Students analyse historical sources critically and in Year 13 are beginning to adapt to the extra demands made by the A2 course. This is illustrated, for example, in their capacity to compare different attitudes to the same event and evaluate them in the light of their own knowledge and understanding of events. In a good lesson, which examined the views of the government and TUC during the General Strike, the teacher skilfully drew out their understanding. In Year 12 they analyse sources effectively. Their capacity to do this is improving due to the teacher's extra emphasis on this aspect of their learning. This was in response to an analysis of students' performance in earlier tests, which identified some weaknesses. Students following the early modern history course have a good understanding of events in the Sixteenth Century. They use it well in arguing, for example, whether the course of the Reformation might have changed if Elizabeth 1 had not survived to the age she did. Their understanding of the broader picture of these events is greatly enhanced by very good teaching. This goes beyond the confines of the subject specification, and enables them to appreciate the way in which current attitudes and ideas have been determined. Students' make good use of their sources of information and their writing is well structured to support their conclusions, for example in writing about the career of Lloyd George. Knowledge is detailed and used well in arguing at length. Higher-attaining students select language particularly well to give colour to their opinions. There is some use of ICT but this is mostly limited to word processing and there is little evidence of it being used to aid research. Students are supported well by their teachers in establishing realistic parameters for their chosen area of extended study. Their study skills are encouraged by the use of techniques such as the highlighting of notes, creating diagrams, and the use of a good framework for planning essays, which clearly identifies the criteria on which they will be marked. All in all, the department has developed well and shown good improvement since the previous inspection.

Religious studies

Overall, the quality of provision in religious studies is **excellent**.

Strengths

- Students achieve very well; results in examinations have been very high in recent years.
- Teaching is very good and broadens students' horizons.
- Students contribute well to lessons.
- The subject is very well led and managed.

Area for improvement

- Whilst the department can always improve on its previous best, currently there are no significant areas for improvement.

132. Standards of work seen in the sixth form during the inspection are well above average. These standards are achieved because the teaching is very good and the subject is very well led and managed in the sixth form. The excellent attitudes of the students, most of whom have already obtained very good results in their GCSE religious studies examination, also cause the quality of learning in the subject to be very good. As a result, students' achievement overall in relation to their already very good standards when they began in the sixth form, is very good.

133. Students have enjoyed religious studies at GCSE and their experiences have encouraged them to continue to study the subject in the sixth form. This, together with the subject's reputation for very high results at A-level, accounts for the strong take up and high retention rate which currently prevails.

134. The teachers have an enthusiasm for learning, not only for the subject, but also in the broader sense. This is made evident by their continual attempts to encourage students to look beyond the confines of the subject specification. This is appreciated by the students, who respond well, and feel that their thinking is challenged and their horizons expanded. This was very well illustrated in an excellent lesson, which examined the problem of evil as a challenge to theism. The lesson covered wide-ranging ground and gave the students very good opportunities to use their experiences and general knowledge of current events to illuminate the philosophical arguments. The debate also explored the way in which the problem occurs at an emotional level, using a brief but very well chosen clip from "Schindler's List" to stimulate thought and discussion. The students were prepared to challenge the teacher and each other in the ongoing debate and discussion. Their arguments were thoughtful and they made very good use of their knowledge, for example, of St. Paul's writing on the subject as well as the work of modern philosophy. The teacher brought the strands skilfully together in the summary, and in addition to the high quality of the learning, the lesson also contributed well to the students' spiritual and moral development.

135. Examination performance in the last two years has been very high in comparison with other schools and has improved since the previous inspection when it was already above average. During this time, no students have failed the A-level examination and the proportion obtaining the higher A and B grades has improved. In 2001, all but two of the 13 candidates obtained the higher A and B grades and none were lower than a C, overall results being very high. Females considerably outnumber male students, which makes comparisons in their performance unreliable. Overall, students' performance in religious studies was better than in their other subjects. A very good start has also been made with the AS examination. The majority obtained the higher A and B grades and over half the 37 candidates obtained A grades. No student failed the examination. Far-sighted planning for the changes to content

required by the subject specification has also contributed to the successful start to the AS examination course.

136. The inspection evidence indicates that these standards are being maintained. The vast majority of students begin their advanced level studies having already gained very good results at GCSE. Very good teaching together with their own excellent attitudes to learning ensures that they are able to achieve well in the sixth form. Students are adept at taking notes and make good use of the well-prepared notes provided by the teachers. These they annotate and add to during the lesson. They have the confidence to ask probing questions in order to clarify and deepen their understanding. Students in Year 12 have made very good initial progress. Their knowledge and understanding of Buddhism is very good and they use its technical vocabulary well. They are interested in the philosophy underpinning Buddhist belief. Teachers capitalise well on this interest. For example the teacher adapted the original lesson plan to include a discussion to which all students were keen to contribute. He recognised that some had struggled to fully understand the concept of Dukkha in a previous lesson. Consequently, interest was sustained and this allowed understanding to be clarified and consolidated. As a result there was a firm base for new learning. Students cope well with difficult texts in analysing and assessing the validity of form criticism of the synoptic gospels.

137. Good working habits developed in Year 12 are evident in the work of Year 13 students. Their files are generally well organised, and they make detailed notes in addition to those provided by the teachers. Essays show some evidence of wider reading. For example, in analysing the classic texts which expound opposing views on the ontological argument for the existence of God. Students refer not only to philosophers and theologians such as Leibniz, Kant and Aquinas, but also add evidence from modern astrophysics. However, evidence of wider research through use of the Internet is more limited and could be developed further. A secure knowledge base enables students to present their ideas and arguments with confidence, clearly and at length, for example in analysing arguments in the debate about the possibility of life after death. Students appreciate the help which they receive from the department's very good practice of providing a detailed evaluation of essays. The careful marking shows students how to improve their work further and provides good motivation through the short term measurable targets which the students are required to set for themselves.

138. The subject is very well led and managed in the sixth form. The two teachers involved in teaching the courses work well together and share ideas. Good arrangements exist for students and staff to experience a variety of revision and other study courses. The department has productive links with the local Buddhist centre, which benefit both staff and students. Resources are adequate but the major contribution to students' learning comes from those produced by the teachers themselves. Insufficient use is made of information available on the Internet. However, overall, good developments have occurred since the previous inspection.

Sociology

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

Strengths

- Results in A-level examinations are well above average, resulting from the good climate for learning created by teachers.
- The proportion of students completing their course has significantly improved due to good management and teaching.

Areas for improvement

- Access to and use of computers within the subject does not meet the desirable needs of the course.

139. Standards of work seen during the inspection are above average and students are in line to maintain results at levels that are well above average. This is due to good teaching, the very positive attitudes of students and very good use of effective learning resources. Consequently, the quality of learning and students' achievement are good.

140. Results in the 2001 GCE A-level examinations were well above the national average. The number of entries for this subject is small and meaningful comparisons more difficult but this performance is broadly similar to 2000. The average grade point score per student shows an improvement between 1999 and 2001 and the majority of those entered achieved either an A or B grade. Sociology has traditionally attracted predominantly female students which reflects the national picture. Staff are aware of this and have put in place effective strategies, including revising the specification content, to achieve a more appropriate gender balance in Year 12.

141. In the AS examination in 2001, grades attained were above the national average with half of the candidates achieving grade C or above and a large proportion achieving an A grade. This has been achieved despite significant staffing difficulties.

142. The improvement in standards since the start of the course in Year 12 arises from a combination of more effective teaching and a clear vision for the subject. This has anticipated aspects of study difficulties and has also clarified course expectations of the knowledge and skills required of students.

143. Higher-attaining students can identify the critical theoretical distinctions between liberal, radical and Marxist feminists in their studies of the family. They are confident in determining the features of social constructs in the analysis of families in other societies. In addition, they are more likely to recognise the implications of specialist terms such as stereotype and kinship. Similarly, these students can identify the strengths and weaknesses of different research methodologies such as the effectiveness of participant-observer research in studies on adolescence. Lower-attaining students have correspondingly greater difficulties in selecting relevant information, for example in work on the influences shaping the development of education in Britain. There is often less depth of understanding of theoretical perspectives in covering the work of writers such as Althusser, Bowles and Gintis dealing with 'the hidden curriculum'. All students have good note-taking skills and the standards of presentation in folders is similarly good though coursework is not routinely word-processed.

144. The quality of teaching and learning is good. There are well planned opportunities for peer group learning which has had a positive effect on oral skills. In particular this is reflected in the ability to debate issues, for example in the study of the family and crime and deviance. Underpinning the good teaching is the teacher's enthusiasm for sociology. Lessons are

conducted at a very good pace with plenty of challenge, for example in timed brainstorming sessions dealing with adolescent behaviour. There is a good emphasis on continually cross-linking both the content and research methodologies associated with particular topics, for example in the development of education systems and work on the family. The quality and use of ongoing assessment is generally satisfactory. However, one-to-one sessions dealing with individual target setting for students have only recently been introduced and this approach needs to be sustained if attainment is to continue to improve. Overall, however, students are aware of what they must do to improve, for example in understanding how to match appropriate research methodologies to particular issues being investigated.

145. Teaching methods are effective but the use of ICT is not planned for adequately. As a consequence, students are less confident in analysing statistical data or in framing and testing hypotheses. Homework is set regularly and supports the work in class, for example in terms of extended reading and writing. Nevertheless, students make insufficient use of both journals and relevant websites on the Internet. They make effective use of newspapers and course texts. Students generally make good progress, particularly in Year 12, and their ability to discuss the subject and write about the principal debates in sociology improves as their studies proceed.

146. Behaviour is at least good and sometimes very good and there is a positive atmosphere for learning, particularly in group work. Attendance is generally satisfactory and good for the current Year 12. Some sporadic absence restricts the progress of a minority of students between Years 12 and 13. There are good relationships between students and they are prepared to work collaboratively in pairs and groups when called upon to do so, for example in work observed dealing with the causes and consequences of divorce. This enables good study practice, for example in recording skills, to be disseminated well.

147. Leadership and management are good. There are regular faculty meetings and minutes and action points made clear. There are good links with relevant priorities in the school development plan, for example in raising the attainment of male students. Staff development is well focused and there are good opportunities for maintaining subject knowledge. This helps to sustain and develop student interest in the subject. The quality of schemes of work is good and they are well matched to the needs of students, particularly when judged against eventual higher education and employment destinations. There are very well written student guides which address key study issues and subject content. As a consequence of these factors, retention rates between Years 12 and 13 have significantly improved. Sociology is an increasingly popular subject.

148. The subject was not separately reported on at the previous inspection but analysis of students' performance data indicates that improvement has been good.

Psychology

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

Strengths

- Teaching ensures that the aims of lessons are clear to students; their successful achievement is monitored.
- Students participate effectively in lessons and learn very well.
- Knowledge and understanding of psychology are well developed in students.
- There are positive working relationships.

Areas for improvement

- Use of computers to find, explore, develop and present information at the Claremont Centre is inadequate.

149. Standards of work seen in the sixth form during the inspection are well above average. These standards are achieved because the teaching is very good. Students' attitudes, knowledge of theories and research, and their appreciation of the range and limitations of psychological practice also cause the quality of their learning in the subject to be very good. As a result, students' achievements overall, in relation to their standards when they began in the sixth form, are very good. Students are developing skills of analysis, interpretation and evaluation.

150. The standard of work in Year 12 is above average. Students are aware of the range of psychological theories and research findings and their applications. Most male and female students identify and describe the outcomes of psychological investigations. The above average student relates these findings to relevant theory. The average student knows appropriate theoretical models. Female students write more clearly than males when evaluating psychological methods. Both genders understand the ethical implications of psychological research. Again, females have a greater facility for self-expression when writing on ethical issues. Males match females when using statistics and diagrams. All students have developed good practice in using reference works as a source of information specific to psychology.

151. The standard of work in Year 13 is well above average. Students interpret and apply psychological theory with confidence. They collect, present and interpret experimental and empirical data on cognitive, social, child development and the psychology of atypical behaviour. Male and female students appreciate the scientific nature of psychology. They develop key skills throughout the course. Males show skills in numerical, investigative, scientific work. Females have greater linguistic skills and competencies. The reports on the testing or piloting of research work written by female students are clear and accurate in terms of their analysis and interpretation of the findings. Male students can more clearly clarify the process of sampling through stating the sample size, technique and frame. Both genders are able to consider ethical, legal and safety issues with sensitivity, and respect the rights of confidentiality and anonymity of those who contribute to the investigation.

152. Students make good progress from Year 12 to 13. Recent examination results in 2001 at the end of Year 12 are close to the national average. Females do better than males in gaining the higher A and B grades. There is value added in examination performance. The Year 13 results are in line with national average. There is equally good attainment by both genders. Achievement is very good. There is value added in the grades attained at the end of Year 13. Standards seen during the inspection indicate that students are being well prepared for examinations and teachers anticipate that results will eventually match the quality of work students produce week by week.

153. The teaching of psychology is very good. All students are fully integrated into the teaching and learning process. Teachers demonstrate a good knowledge and understanding of psychology. They use accepted and analytical techniques to explain psychological behaviour. They present their explanations, ideas and arguments in a coherent and logical form. Teachers enable students to become familiar with the breadth and depth of psychology by a study of the integrated nature of psychology problems allowing them to develop their skills of analysis, evaluation and synthesis in a psychology setting.

154. Lessons explore the relationship between psychological knowledge, theories and their impact on social, cultural, scientific and contemporary issues. Teachers are enhancing students' critical and evaluative skills in relation to empirical studies. Teachers hold a good knowledge of the various definitions of abnormality and an appreciation of the attempts to define abnormality in terms of statistical infrequency, deviation from statistical norms, a failure to function adequately and deviation from ideal mental health. Students are taught to identify anorexia and bulimia nervosa. Teachers' knowledge of the research studies into conformity and minority influence is excellent. Students can explain why people yield to majority (conformity) and minority influence.

155. Activities are well presented and managed. There is an effective beginning and end of each lesson. The pace is good. The timing of activities is appropriate. The teaching responds flexibly to students' needs. Good use is made of teaching resources and equipment available. As a result, learning is very good.

156. Since the previous inspection report there has been marked improvement and development in the subject's provision. Psychology was not inspected in 1996.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

In this area English literature and Spanish were the subjects of focus. Results in A-level English language were above national averages in 2001. Results in English have been consistently good in recent years. They compare very favourably with results in other subjects. Although the focus of the modern foreign languages inspection was on Spanish, work in French was also sampled. One A-level French lesson was observed and teaching and learning was satisfactory. A-level results in French in 2001 were below average and were similar to 2000. Numbers taking A-level French in recent years have been low and very few students have achieved the higher grades A and B. With the introduction of the AS course in 2000, numbers increased significantly. Results in the AS examination in French in 2001 were below average and some students did not achieve as well as expected.

English literature

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

Strengths

- Students enjoy English courses and gain well above average examination grades that indicate very good learning has taken place.
- Teaching is very good. Teachers know their subject very well, have high expectations of students and encourage them to be independent learners.
- Achievement is good. In final A-level grades students make mostly good gains on their levels of attainment on entry to the sixth form.

Areas for improvement

- Levels of interaction between students in class discussion are not as fulfilling as they should be.
- The use of ICT is inadequate.

157. Standards of work seen during the inspection are well above average. Teaching is very good. Students are enthusiastic about English literature and their learning is quick and very effective. They show good achievement in relation to standards on entry to the sixth form.

158. Set against their levels of attainment on entry to the sixth form students achieve well in English literature. Results in the 2001 AS and A-level GCE examinations were well above national averages. Value added data, which measures the progress that students make over time, indicates that during the two years achievement is good and that these examination results are above expectations. There is no significant difference in the performance of male and female students.

159. Work is consistently well above average. Students give confident and detailed oral presentations to the class. A very good example was seen when a Year 12 student analysed William Blake's poem, 'The Chimney Sweeper' from 'Songs of Innocence'. Her clearly expressed thoughts on important themes of the poem were perceptive and mature. All students, as a result of very good teaching, were able to explore symbolic and political interpretations of the poem and make further very good gains in knowledge. Year 13 students in another very good lesson talked in pairs to the class about conflicting interpretations of Christopher Marlowe's play, 'Edward II'. Here again, the level of discussion was high and learning very good. All students have very good textual knowledge and their range of language is consistently impressive. When describing characters, for example, students in the same lesson showed the wide range of their vocabularies as they used in passing the words 'peevish', 'hedonistic', 'xenophobic' and 'flippant'. In a Year 12 lesson on Shakespeare's 'Hamlet' a student ventured the observation that the prince was 'not overtly religious but deeply bound into a Christian background of ethics and morals', which again showed well above average language skills. In their reading students respond with enthusiasm to modern novels such as Alice Walker's 'The Colour Purple' and J D Salinger's 'The Catcher in the Rye'. They articulate clear views that express strong personal responses and good understanding.

160. Students make sharply focused and methodical notes on literary texts. One very good example was the work by a Year 12 student on the importance of 'kingship' to contemporary audiences for Shakespeare's 'Measure for Measure'. In another instance students prepared for their reading of Mary Shelley's novel, 'Frankenstein' by making an excellent background study of biographical and scientific aspects. Essays are equally impressive. They consistently show clear lines of argument moving towards an effective conclusion. In most

cases students make less than average use of ICT in the preparation and presentation of their work.

161. Teachers have very good knowledge of the subject. They encourage students to apply intellectual rigour to their background work on set texts. Lessons, for example, on William Blake's poems consider the social, political and historical issues that inform his writing and, as a result, the depth of students' understanding is increased. Relationships with students are always very good and teachers are concerned to involve students actively in lessons. However, the seating arrangement of students in most lessons does not encourage good interaction in class discussions. Teachers make sure that all students are clear about their progress both through marking and departmental profiles, in which students record assessment grades, set targets and evaluate their strengths and weaknesses. Marking is conscientious and teachers often give detailed comments that help students to improve their work. As they move through Year 12 students develop their analytical skills and write essays that are increasingly assured as their knowledge increases. Students are fully involved in most lessons and the pace is usually brisk so that they make very good progress.

162. English literature is a very popular subject that attracts large numbers of students. Levels of attendance are high and very seldom do students fail to complete the course. They are very positive about English literature courses. They consider staff to be very helpful and teaching mainly excellent. They are very clear about their progress and usually find marking helpful, although in a few instances they would prefer more detailed comments. They like the relaxed approach of teachers, who they feel treat them like adults.

163. The leadership and management of sixth form English are very good. A sixth-form coordinator effectively manages the organisation of teaching programmes and arrangements for assessment and examination entry. Sixth-form matters are frequently discussed at English department meetings so that all staff are well informed. A strength of the department is the involvement of all full-time teachers in sixth-form teaching. Schemes of work are well shaped to meet the demands of examination specifications. Good improvement has taken place since the previous inspection. Teachers now give students more responsibility for their own learning and the pace of learning is now invariably brisk. That students achieve their very good examination results is in part due to the efficient way in which sixth-form English literature is organised.

Spanish

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

Strengths

- Standards are well above average.
- Teachers have excellent subject knowledge.
- Students' respond positively to very challenging work.
- Homework is well used to develop independent learning.

Areas for improvement

- The use of ICT is insufficient.

164. Standards of work seen in the sixth form during the inspection are well above average. These standards are achieved because the teaching is very good and students have very good attitudes, which ensures they learn at a fast and effective rate. Students' achievement overall in relation to their standards when they began in the sixth form is good.

165. A-level results in Spanish were well above average in 2000 and were similar to results in the previous two years. The proportion of students achieving grades A and B each year is high. AS results in 2001 were well above average and 8 of the 10 students entered for the examination achieved grades A or B.

166. Standards in Year 13 are well above average. Students respond very positively to rigorous and demanding teaching and they learn rapidly as a result. They develop their language skills to a high level and are very well prepared for all aspects of the external examinations. Their command of structure and knowledge of vocabulary is such that they can speak confidently and fluently on a wide range of topics and issues. They express their ideas clearly and succinctly and they can defend their opinions when challenged. This was clearly demonstrated in their various oral presentations, for example, about raising environmental awareness or about a topical news item and in their prompt and thoughtful response to follow-up questions posed by the rest of the class. They show very good understanding of challenging authentic texts and tapes and readily engage in lively discussion of matters arising from materials studied. In a lesson about the changing role of women in Spain, the students showed good understanding of the key points and were able to analyse and discuss the reasons behind the changes in a mature fashion.

167. Although only a short way into the AS course, Year 12 students have progressed considerably since GCSE, particularly in comprehension. They are beginning to show good understanding of tapes and texts on cultural and social issues and are dealing well with more complex language. With gentle encouragement from the teacher, they are gaining in confidence orally and starting to use a richer variety of expressions in their responses.

168. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Key strengths of the teaching are teachers' subject expertise, their good knowledge of individuals, and their effective day-to-day assessment of students' work and progress. This helps to ensure effective learning. Students learn well because they have very good attitudes towards their studies, work very hard and are very keen to do well. They apply themselves diligently in class and put much time and effort into the completion of homework tasks. Sometimes they use the Internet to research an aspect, although their use of ICT in general is rather limited. They have a clear understanding of their own progress and know what they must do to improve further.

169. The subject is well led and managed. Since the previous inspection teachers have worked extremely hard to ensure that very high standards are maintained.