

INSPECTION REPORT

**NEATHERD HIGH SCHOOL
and DEREHAM SIXTH FORM COLLEGE**

Dereham, Norwich

LEA area: Norfolk

Unique reference number: 121182

Headteacher: Mr John Horsfield

Reporting inspector: R Peter J McGregor
3525

Dates of inspection: 3 - 7 December 2001

Inspection number: 243002

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Community

Age range of pupils: 11 - 18

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Norwich Rd
Dereham
Norfolk

Postcode: NR20 3AX

Telephone number: 01362 697981

Fax number: 01362 698463

Appropriate authority: The governing body

Name of chair of governors: Mrs D Buck

Date of previous inspection: 30 September 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
1522	R P J McGregor	Registered inspector	Physics	Teaching and learning
9537	C Marden	Lay inspector Sixth form		Students' attitudes, values and personal development.
19653	E Dickson	Lay inspector Short report		
22426	J Lovgreen	Team inspector	Theatre studies	
2501	R Allison-Smith	Team inspector	Art	
1292	V Foster	Team inspector	Mathematics	
3525	W Keast	Team inspector	Computing	
31139	J Judson	Team inspector	English	
27719	P Metcalf	Team inspector	Further mathematics	
30433	C Corp	Team inspector	Chemistry	The school's care for its students
2496	A O'Sullivan	Team inspector	French	Curricular and other opportunities for students
30800	B Colley	Team inspector	Sports studies	
22042	J Challands	Team inspector	Geography	
30893	M Currie	Team inspector	History	
2495	B Munden	Team inspector	Design and technology	
10761	P Willan	Team inspector	Sociology	
2396	M Davidson	Team inspector	Biology	
1352	J Carnaghan	Team inspector		Results and students' achievements. The effectiveness of leadership and management in the sixth form

The inspection contractor was: e-Qualitas Ltd
Langshaw
Pastens Road
Limpsfield Chart
Oxted
Surrey
RH8 0RE

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Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Neatherd High School provides education for pupils in Years 7 to 13. It is a Beacon school, and has been for three years, providing support and examples of good practice for other local schools. Most pupils transfer from local feeder primary schools but a high proportion come from some distance to the school, arriving by bus. The school is bigger than most other comprehensive schools with 1105 pupils, 145 of them in the separate sixth form college. The school has increased greatly in size over the past five years as it has expanded to take most of its pupils from the age of eleven rather than twelve and as the school has increased in popularity. Very few pupils are from ethnic minority backgrounds and no pupils are at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils identified as having special educational needs is broadly in line with that found nationally, nineteen per cent. A small proportion is at the higher stages of need. The proportion of pupils with Statements, three per cent, is broadly similar to that in other schools. Special educational needs are mainly learning difficulties, including dyslexia, and emotional and behavioural issues. The number of pupils taking free school meals in 2001, about five per cent, is below the national average of seventeen per cent. Judgements made in this report about results in national tests taken in Year 9, and in GCSE examinations, sometimes refer to similar schools: these are schools with between five and nine per cent of pupils taking free school meals. Nine pupils joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission last year and eleven left. Pupils of a full range of ability attend the school. Generally, standards are above average on entry, but with an average number of high attainers. The area around the school is socially and economically mixed and average overall. Significantly more pupils have been accepted into the school than the agreed admission number over the past few years, as all pupils who gave Neatherd as their first preference were accepted.

Neatherd and Northgate High Schools share and jointly manage Dereham Sixth Form College. Many of the pupils, after successfully completing their GCSE work, go on to take AS, A2, AVCE and GNVQ courses at the college. Staff from both schools teach the courses, using the specialist facilities available at this separate site

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Neatherd High is a very good school with some outstanding features. Examination results at GCSE are very good and good in the sixth form. Teaching is very good overall and particularly strong for fifteen- and sixteen-year-olds. Behaviour is very good and improves as pupils progress through the school, learning to accept school rules and systems. Pupils want to learn and do well and know that staff are keen to help them. Staff provide an excellent range of extra-curricular activities for pupils aged eleven to sixteen. The excellent support and guidance systems are the bedrock of the school's success, built on clear understanding between pupils and staff, and high quality professional relationships. The leadership provided by the headteacher is excellent. He is supported by a very strong team of senior manager colleagues with complementary skills, including the director of the sixth form, and a very good governing body. All work very effectively together in the complex arrangement of the eleven to sixteen main school, and shared sixth form college. The cost per pupil is broadly average. Overall, the school provides very good value for money.

What the school does well

- Well above average and improving standards at GCSE, where pupils of all abilities do well
- Staff teach very effectively, particularly in Years 10 and 11, which results in very enjoyable learning for the pupils
- Excellent care and guidance is provided that results in pupils with very positive attitudes, who are polite, considerate and work conscientiously
- Very good heads of department and heads of year who focus on pupils achieving high standards by the age of sixteen
- High quality computer facilities that are used to very good effect by pupils in a range of subjects
- Highly effective headteacher and senior managers who ensure that developments take place, such as the excellent response to the key issues of the last report, and the induction of the many new staff who have been appointed as the school has grown in size

What could be improved

There are no major weaknesses in the main school for pupils aged eleven to sixteen. The school will wish to continue to tackle the issues which have already been identified by the school and are mentioned in the text of the report. In the sixth form, subject management needs to improve and this is referred to in the sixth form report.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

At the time of the last inspection, in October 1996, the standards pupils achieved and the quality of education provided were judged to be good; the climate for learning provided and the quality of leadership and management were stated to be very good. Over the past five years, strengths have been maintained and the areas for development have been very successfully dealt with. Standards are now higher and well above average at GCSE. Good standards have been maintained in the sixth form. The quality of teaching is much better, with no unsatisfactory lessons seen in this inspection and a much higher proportion of good and very good lessons. The curriculum has improved, with a substantial increase in teaching time available in Years 7 to 11. The climate for learning is excellent with much improved target setting and use of data, as well as very effective tutor support. Management strengths identified five years ago have been used to very good effect and have resulted in this very effective school. The six key issues for action identified in 1996 have all been dealt with very well, all now being good or better. Substantial improvements have been consolidated. Marking and assessment are now much better and good overall, although a few inconsistencies remain. Information and communication technology (ICT) is now a major strength, with great investment in modern high quality facilities throughout the school and college. Pupils accept the value of ICT in all areas and use it very well. Some staff, in a few subject areas, have yet to appreciate its full potential, however. Investigative and reasoning skills are now a strength in several subjects, for example science and geography. Subject teams share expertise and most heads of department are very effective in monitoring the quality of teaching and learning, although this remains an issue in the sixth form. The school has worked with the local education authority to improve the buildings, which are now very good in most areas. Overall, the school and college have made very good improvement since 1996.

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	B	A	A	B
A-levels/AS-levels	C	B	n/a	

Key

well above average A

above average B

average C

below average D

well below average E

The school's GCSE results were well above the national average in 2001, with 62 per cent of pupils attaining five or more subjects in the A* to C range. Almost all pupils gained five or more subjects in the A* to G range and all attained at least one subject pass. These proportions of pupils attaining A* to G results are very high and place the school in the top five per cent of all schools nationally. Good and very good results have been achieved for several years with a trend of improvement above that achieved nationally. When these GCSE results are compared with those gained in similar schools, results are above average, indicating good achievement over time. Standards currently are well above average with the school on track to exceed its GCSE target of 68 per cent attaining five or more A*-C grades in 2002. For the past two years the school has exceeded its targets of 63 and 59 per cent attaining this standard. Pupils' achievements are generally very good as a result of the very good teaching and extremely positive attitudes of the pupils. When account is taken of the capabilities of the pupils taking each subject, pupils achieved very highly in 2001 in science, German and design and technology. Results indicate some underachievement in GCSE physical education and art courses.

Results in the sixth form are reported in more detail in the sixth form report. They were above average in 2000, and results in 2001 were similar. Students' achievements are good and standards are currently above average.

Boys' and girls' results vary greatly from year to year in GCSE and sixth form examinations. These variations, with a stable teaching force, indicate differences in students' capabilities rather than strengths and weaknesses in teaching.

In national end of Year 9 tests taken by fourteen-year-olds in English, maths and science, pupils' results have not been as high overall as in GCSE. Science results in 2001 were well above average and very good compared with

similar schools. This is an improvement on 2000, and back to the very good results of earlier years. In maths, results were above average and similar to those attained in like schools, as they have been for several years. In English, results fell in 2000 to an above average standard but below those achieved in similar schools. In 2001, English results fell again, to below average and well below those achieved in similar schools. Current standards in science and maths are similar to those attained last year, with very good and appropriate achievement respectively. Standards in English have improved and are now higher than reported in the past two years, as the focus of teaching has changed to meet the requirements of end of Year 9 assessments. Pupils' current attainment is average in English, and achievement is satisfactory and improving. Taking all subjects into account, current standards are above average, indicating sound achievement over time but with signs that pupils are beginning to achieve better than expected.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Enthusiastic, hard working learners. Confident and happy to be at the school.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. Sensible, friendly and polite. Behaviour improves as pupils progress through the school. Very high quality in the sixth form.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Respond very well to responsibilities given to them. Successful pupils are looked up to and respected, whether the success is in sport, music, exams, or in providing support for others.
Attendance	Very good. Well above average attendance and very low unauthorised absence.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Teaching is very good overall. All lessons observed were satisfactory or better: about four in every five were good or better and one in every three very good or excellent. The quality was highest in the GCSE years, with virtually all lessons good and many very good or better, resulting in very effective and enjoyable learning. The quality of teaching of Year 11 was exceptional. Teaching in the sixth form was good, with much that was very good. In Years 7, 8 and 9 the quality was good but it lacked the challenge and demand that often distinguishes very good teaching.

In lessons seen in the main school, the quality of teaching was very good for science, good for English and satisfactory for maths. The best teaching observed of other subjects was for design and technology, history, French and physical education. Teaching strengths included: teachers' very good subject expertise and knowledge of examination requirements; the use of an effective range of techniques to retain interest and motivate pupils; rigorous questioning of pupils to ensure they understood what was being taught and very good teacher/pupil relationships. Pupils responded with interest and application, often exhibiting excellent learning skills. In the few satisfactory lessons observed, teachers tended to dominate with insufficient pupil involvement. At times chatter rather than learning resulted from unclear objectives or work not well enough matched to pupils' prior knowledge and needs. In a few lessons, insufficient was demanded of high attainers.

A good focus on literacy is provided in a range of subjects. Key words are identified to ensure that important vocabulary is learnt. Pupils remarked that their spelling and grammar are often marked in other subjects as well as English. Opportunities are provided for pupils to speak at length and present their ideas to the class. Numeracy is less openly taught in a range of lessons, but good opportunities are provided in design and technology, science and physical education to use and reinforce pupils' number skills.

Pupils of all abilities are effectively taught and all learn well. Teachers show patience and understanding of pupils with special educational needs, who make as good progress as their peers. Teachers know pupils' individual education plans well and work to them.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Very good. Broad and balanced in Years 7 to 9, and very good in GCSE years. Sixth form option choice very wide and appropriate. Very good 'preparation for adult life course' (PAL) and good use of the excellent ICT facilities. Curriculum designed to meet pupils' needs. Some very good subject planning in science and modern foreign languages. Excellent extra-curricular activities for 11-16, both range and number available. Meets all statutory requirements except the teaching of religious education in the 6th form.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Very good. Good support. Good individual education plans that are understood and worked to by staff. Statemented pupils are supported well. All are very well integrated
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	No pupils are at an early stage of learning English.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good overall, stronger in main school than in sixth form. Excellent provision for social and moral development. Provision for spiritual development satisfactory. Very good examples of assemblies, but not many of a reflective approach in lessons. Good emphasis on aspects of British culture, and on European cultures through modern foreign languages, but few references to today's multicultural society.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Excellent. Strong, committed and very effective pastoral team providing outstanding support for pupils aged eleven to sixteen and very good support in the sixth form. Induction into the school in Year 7 very thoughtfully planned and helpful. Rigorous attendance checks. Tutors throughout the school and college are very effective. Good systems for dealing with child protection issues.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Excellent. Great commitment to improve the school and college further by the headteacher, all senior staff and governors. Very good systems with very effective delegation to the senior team and other managers, who appreciate their autonomy. School and college benefit from this. High staff morale and positive attitudes, reflected in the way staff work with pupils and students.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Very well indeed. Well informed with a very good committee structure. The sixth form management committee enables the separate sixth form college to function well, though subject management responsibilities are not yet clarified. Governors hold the school to account for what is achieved. They are involved in deciding the direction for the school, but do not interfere with day-by-day management. They have a great range of expertise that they use for the benefit of the school. Statutory duties are met.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Excellent. A very good school development plan with clear, well-considered objectives, but with some unclear success criteria. A very good response to the issues raised in the last report, identifying and resolving unsatisfactory or underdeveloped areas. Very good monitoring of teaching and learning by senior managers and effective monitoring by heads of department of main school work. Some inconsistencies in evaluation in the sixth form. Information on pupils' performances is analysed with care and used to very good effect to raise standards further.
The strategic use of resources	Very good indeed. The school has planned for and improved facilities over many years, and all are used very effectively for the benefit of the pupils and students. Very good computer facilities provided throughout the school and college. Sufficient resources in all subject areas and very good library facilities. Very good games fields and specialist accommodation, with the exception of design and technology and photography in the sixth form and the inadequate canteen for pupils

	in the main school which results in unsatisfactory eating habits for some pupils.
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The school applies 'best value' principles in providing the education that it does. Examination data is evaluated by departments as well as compared with that of other schools, to ensure that pupils and students are getting a good deal. The main school courses are planned to meet the needs of the pupils, and sixth form college courses are similarly planned taking into account other local college provision as well as the needs of the two main schools that feed into the sixth form. The school responds quickly to parents' concerns and students have a strong voice through their school council. Financial procedures are very thorough and regularly monitored in practice by governors, to ensure that budget plans are followed.

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 • their children make good progress at school • behaviour is good • teaching is good • they feel comfortable about asking questions or raising problems • the school has high expectations • the school is well managed and led • the school helps their children to become mature and responsible young people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the right amount of homework is not set • the information they receive about the progress their children are making

The inspection team agrees with all the very positive comments made by parents. There are inconsistencies in the amount of homework set by different departments and by different staff within departments, but pupils' homework diaries indicate that homework policies are generally followed. The school is aware that parents would like better information on the standards their children are achieving and has introduced additional reports this year to provide a clear statement of their attainment levels.

The parents of sixth form students painted a positive picture of the college, the details of which are given in the sixth form report. Although generally not as positive as the main school, parents identified great strengths in behaviour, expectations and the quality of relationships. Homework was not considered to be a weakness, but in addition to the lack of information about progress, a minority of parents said they were not sufficiently involved and few found the extra-curricular provision acceptable. Here too, improved information is already being provided but there are no college-based sports teams for sixth formers.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

Two Dereham 11-18 schools, Neatherd and Northgate, jointly run Dereham Sixth Form College and provide most of the students. The college is based on a separate site and has specialist facilities for most subjects. The management committee, comprising equal numbers of governors from each school and with both high school heads and the director of the sixth form in attendance, has overall management oversight of the college. It is managed on a day-to-day basis by the director who works to both high school headteachers. Both schools pass on all their post 16 funding to the college, ensuring that it functions as a relatively autonomous unit. Ten teaching staff work only at the college, and they provide the tutorial support available as well as teaching across a range of subjects. Most staff travel in from the two high schools. The students are nominally on the records of one of the two high schools, but all spend almost all of their time in the college. Currently there are 285 sixth formers, 157 girls and 128 boys, with 170 in Year 12 and 115 in Year 13. This represents a stay-on rate from the two high schools of about 55 per cent. About 16 per cent of students have joined the college from other schools. The sixth form size has been between 250 and 300 students for some years. No sixth formers have English as an additional language. Very few students have special educational needs. Students can join the sixth form if they can gain from following one or more of the courses available. The range of courses available consists of 29 at AS level, 26 at A2 for Year 13 students, and three Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) two-year courses. Other local colleges provide a broader range of GNVQ and similar vocational courses and a number of students move to these at age sixteen from both schools. All students follow a key skills programme of taught ICT, communications and application of number. The other three key skills of working with others, study skills and problem solving are not accredited, but taught within lessons and tutorial time. Most students starting at the college have GCSE B grades or higher in the subjects most closely associated with their selected sixth form courses, although the college minimum entry requirement is four or more A* to C passes at GCSE. Few leave mid-course; about ninety per cent of students who started courses in the past three years have completed them. About half the students leaving at the end of their courses go on to higher education, about a quarter into employment, and about a quarter take a gap year.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

Dereham Sixth Form College is successful, very well managed and cost effective. Students achieve well, attaining above average standards. Teaching is good, resulting in effective learning, and students have very positive attitudes to their studies. A very good range of AS and A2 courses is available. Induction into the sixth is good. The 1:1 tutorial system is very good, providing students with very good support as well as clear targets for improvement. Student - teacher relationships are very good. Since it was last inspected, the college has maintained and developed its strengths and responded very well to all issues from the report, apart from that of clarifying subject management.

Strengths

- good standards in many subjects
- good teaching, with particular strengths in staff subject expertise, which results in good learning
- excellent student behaviour; most students have positive attitudes to their work and are keen to do well
- very good care and guidance provided for students
- a broad and balanced curriculum with some very good planning
- very good day-by-day leadership and management by the director of the college

What could be improved

- lack of clarity in the roles of subject co-ordinator and heads of department, leading to inconsistencies in:
 - the manner in which subject leaders manage their areas, particularly the monitoring of teaching and learning
 - assessment and recording practices
 - the planned use made of information and communication technology in subject teaching

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

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

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

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	Good Results are above average. Staff subject knowledge and expertise lead to effective teaching and learning.
Further mathematics	Good Current standards well above average. Teachers' very good subject knowledge results in good teaching and learning.
Biology	Good Good teaching helps students to learn well. Students work hard and most reach, or exceed, the standards expected of them.
Chemistry	Good with some very good aspects . The teaching in chemistry is good and this results in good achievement by the students both at AS and A level. The teachers are enthusiastic and well qualified. Students and teachers have good relationships and work together well
Physics	Good Teaching is good. Staff are enthusiastic physicists, have good subject knowledge and explain work clearly to students. High and middle attainers in physics achieve well. All students listen attentively. A small number of lower attaining students find the work involved in AS level physics too difficult and do not achieve well.
Design and technology	Good Current standards are above average and students are achieving well as a result of good teaching. Regular and rigorous marking is particularly effective in enabling students to improve their work.
Computing	Good Good teaching and high quality resources lead to students achieving well. They make comparatively better progress in the subject than other students, nationally, with similar GCSE attainment.
Sports studies	Good Examination results are above average because teaching is good and students have very good attitudes towards their work. Targets and marking are well focused on achievement.
Art	Satisfactory . Results in 2001 were well below the average. Standards are higher in the current Year 13 and average. Achievement is satisfactory relative to students' starting points – some have not taken a GCSE art course. Teaching and learning are good and one-to-one reviews are effective in helping students see where improvements are needed.
Theatre studies	Satisfactory . Results have been very variable in recent years. Satisfactory teaching results in students having a sound grasp of drama theory and a good appreciation of the writer's craft. They are less skilled in interpreting scripted drama and exploring alternative presentations.
Geography	Very good . Results were above average this year with most students achieving standards expected or better than expected. Students are achieving well as a result of their very good attitudes and very good teaching. Monitoring of performance throughout the course is very effective.
History	Good with some very good aspects . A-level results are well above average. Teaching and learning are good overall. Students' skills in understanding, interpreting events in history are good but their ability to analyse and evaluate sources is less developed.
Sociology	Good Results in 2001 were well above average. Students make good progress over the two years of the course and achieve well.
English - language and literature	Good Results were well above average in 2001 with above average value added from GCSE in many cases. Schemes of work are thorough and well planned. Teaching and learning are good overall.
French	Good with some very good aspects . A-level results are well above average. Teaching is good with particular strengths in curriculum planning and assessment. Students have very positive attitudes to the subject and learn well.

Lessons were sampled in photography, electronics, classical studies, philosophy of religion, Spanish, government and politics, business studies, psychology, law, English literature, AVCE information technology and health and social care. All the teaching was satisfactory or better, with several lessons good or very good, resulting in effective learning. It was particularly good in electronics, Spanish and health and social care where students made very good progress, achieving very well in the lessons seen.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Very good quality support and guidance is maintained throughout Years 12 and 13. Students are inducted well into the sixth form. A well-structured tutorial system and regular, very good 1:1 interviews between tutors and students are very helpful. Assessment data is used to provide targets for students to help raise achievement. Most students believe they are well informed about career options and opportunities beyond school.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	The staff who are responsible for the sixth form are very well led and an effective team. The director works tirelessly to bring together teachers at all levels from the two high schools and to ensure that all students have equal opportunities. His task is a complex and difficult one, welding together staff who are mainly 'part-time' in the sixth form from two different schools, working with and for two headteachers. The committee of governors responsible for the college, including the two headteachers, is very effective and provides very good support. The director has high expectations of the students and monitors both their academic work and their participation and contribution to the life of the college. Inconsistencies in working practices and in the quality of teaching remain, however, and management of subjects, often taught by staff of both schools, is too variable. The director is working to find ways to improve upon the current arrangements.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • they were well informed about the college and its courses • they enjoy the subjects they are studying • they are taught well and given good support by their teachers • good advice and help is given about their choices when they leave college • the college takes notice of their views. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the provision of extra curricular activities • the information given to them on their progress

The inspectors spoke to many students, both formally and informally, who were very positive about the college, even though a number had completed a questionnaire about the college with some negative responses. Students made it clear that help was always available and it was their responsibility to ask for it. The inspection team supports the positive views of the students and agrees, to some extent, with their suggestions for improvement. There is some inconsistency in the quality of information students receive from individual teachers about how well they are doing. Students have good opportunities for visits associated with their courses, including work experience abroad for those who want it. No sports clubs – including sports fixtures - are available, however, and, even though the majority of students hold part-time jobs time out of school hours, several believed they would benefit from them.

COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

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

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Well above average and improving standards at GCSE, where pupils of all abilities do well

1. Over the past four years, between 60 and 70 per cent of pupils have attained five or more GCSE passes at A* to C, well above national average figures. In 2001 the figure was 62 per cent where the national figure was 48 per cent, and the school's results are set to rise again in 2002. The trend of improvement in GCSE, based on the average points score for each pupil (which takes account of all the subjects each pupil is examined in) is above the national trend, showing that results are continuing to improve.

2. Pupils of the full range of ability do well at age sixteen. In 2001, 16 per cent of the grades were at A* and A, compared with a national figure of 13 per cent. Almost all pupils gain five or more A*-G passes and all gain one or more A*-G passes, including pupils with learning difficulties. These pass rates for the full range of grades are in the top 5 per cent of those attained in all secondary schools in the country, showing that low attainers as well as the most capable do very well at Neatherd High School. These results are achieved with an ability on entry to the school that is above average overall, but with an average proportion of higher attaining pupils.

3. The highest standards attained in 2000 were in science, history and design and technology, and pupils also did better overall in geography and mathematics than in their other subjects. Results in physical education, art and design, and French were not as high as in other subjects but were, nevertheless, above national averages. Girls outperformed boys in 2000, but both genders did well in science, history and design and technology. Boys' results were lower than those of girls in French and business studies, though current work shows more equal achievement. In 2001, the three strongest subjects were again science, history and design and technology, with the addition of German. Art and design and physical education were still less successful than others but French results improved. Girls again outperformed boys at the higher grades, particularly so in English language. Differences between results in subjects reduced, however, indicating how the school's monitoring and support systems are helping to make improvements.

4. Current attainment in Year 11 is well above average and pupils are achieving very well when account is taken of their capabilities. Attainment is as good as it is because of the very good teaching and the very positive attitudes of the pupils, both boys and girls.

Staff teach very effectively, particularly in Years 10 and 11, which results in very enjoyable learning for the pupils

5. Many of the lessons observed in Years 10 and 11 were very well taught and the pupils benefited greatly. Two in every three seen were very good or excellent and this proportion was even higher in Year 11 – an exceptional situation.

6. Teachers not only know their subjects very well but also what is required by the examination boards, and can therefore prepare the pupils most effectively for their GCSE examinations. A Year 11 science lesson exemplified the excellence seen. The pupils were keen to start the lesson and settled quickly. The teacher's intentions were made very clear to them, "to understand and enjoy as well as to learn", a point very much appreciated by the pupils. The range of teaching strategies ensured that pupils' interest and motivation were retained for the full hour, and resulted in outstanding progress and achievement. Excellent use was made of one of the school's computer rooms. A detailed presentation on the chemistry of the Haber process for the preparation of ammonia ensured that every pupil understood the factors affecting the equilibrium involved, before starting to work using a very good computer software simulation program. They worked very enthusiastically and quickly in pairs, discussing the impact of their suggestions, and showed very good ICT skills. Relationships between the pupils and the teacher were of the highest standard as pupils were questioned on their understanding of what they were doing. The presence of an ICT technician also helped the pupils, resulting in improvements in their computer skills.

7. In a Year 10 history lesson, progress and achievement of a similarly high standard were seen because the quality of teaching was so good. This lesson, where pupils were learning why prisons emerged as the principal means of

punishment, resulted in very well-motivated pupils who made very good progress in their understanding. A very good range of teaching techniques was used. The work was very well explained and this captured the pupils' interest. Small group discussions and pupil presentation of findings to the class ensured that all were involved. Perceptive, probing, open questions from the teacher challenged this high-ability class.

8. Other lessons, where the focus was on revision, were of a similar quality. In a French lesson, boys and girls made equally good progress. Likely GCSE grades were shared with individuals and ambitious but realistic targets were set. Pupils responded with interest and application. Their attitudes to learning were excellent. In a design and technology revision lesson, excellent use was made of the very good ICT facilities. Again, the teacher's knowledge of the subject and examination board requirements played a key part in the success of the lesson. Pupils had great confidence in their teacher and relationships between all in the class were very good indeed. The pace of the lesson was maintained by very effective questioning of individuals, ensuring that each progressed through the planned work.

9. Fewer high quality lessons were observed for pupils in Years 7 to 9, although there were some. Strengths in lessons always outweighed weaknesses but a combination of pupils with weaker study skills and less focused teaching sometimes resulted in satisfactory, rather than good or very good, learning. In Years 10 and 11, some teaching is also not as effective as it could be. For example, in an English lesson the learning objectives were not made sufficiently clear to the pupils at the start. The approach was calm and unhurried, helping the pupils to relax and enjoy learning, but the pace of work was rather slow at times.

10. The quality of teaching in the sixth form was similar to that seen for Years 7 to 9 rather than the GCSE years, with a similar range of strengths and weaknesses.

11. Where teaching was of a good or better quality, the teachers adapted their techniques to suit the different approaches of pupils in different years and classes. The whole-school approach to developing pupils' learning skills takes time to become embedded in ways of working. Some staff make inappropriate assumptions about pupils' study skills, particularly younger pupils, and this restricts achievement. In the very good overall picture of teaching and learning, a challenge for the school – through its programme of monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning – is to improve the satisfactory teaching and, through this, improve standards even further.

Excellent care and guidance is provided that results in pupils with very positive attitudes, who are polite, considerate and work conscientiously

12. The care and support systems of the school are the bedrock upon which the school's success is based. The process of teaching the pupils to develop learning skills, to have high standards of behaviour and to enjoy life at Neatherd, starts as soon as the pupils join the school - they experience a very good induction programme. Before they join, pupils are given a typical lesson, meet their tutor and are shown round the school. For their first week in school, they are guided to their lessons. Older pupils talked of how easy the transition was from primary school and how welcome they felt. The pupils keep their own tutors as they move from year to year through the school. Pupils believe they are very well known by their tutors and that they have easy and rapid access to them. Tutors are the first 'port of call' for each pupil and they appreciate that heads of year are the main disciplinarians who deal with them, not their tutors. This system leads to progressive improvement in pupils' attitudes and behaviour, to the excellence seen in Year 11.

13. Tutor time is seen by the pupils as a useful and pleasant start to the day, where student 'filofaxes' or diaries are checked to ensure homework is being recorded and completed, discussions can take place and information can be relayed. Parents and pupils believe that the weekly diaries provide a very good means of communication between home and school, ensuring that each party is kept fully informed of important issues. Tutor times, and the four assemblies which take place each week for year groups, help to provide an exceptionally strong ethos for the school. The very high standards of behaviour set at these times are maintained around the school in general, as well as in lessons. Teachers and pupils know what is acceptable and what is not and work towards common goals. The outcome is polite, hard working and enthusiastic pupils who behave very well. Virtually all the pupils spoken to said how much they appreciated being taught at Neatherd and how much they enjoyed coming to school.

14. The moral and social messages given to pupils through assemblies are taken seriously. In one assembly attended, two computers made by the pupils themselves were presented to young autistic people and their carers. Year 11 prefects help to organise their peers in assembly, and are respected as colleagues who will carry out their responsibilities fairly, efficiently and effectively. In a Year 11 assembly, new prefects were issued with their ties in front of the whole year group as well as several parents. Those receiving the ties knew they were accepting a

significant responsibility and said how they wanted to live up to the standards set by their predecessors. The school council, recently rejuvenated, with elected representatives from each year, takes its role seriously, and pupils believe they have a voice in the running of the school. Pupil council members said that the headteacher holds himself to account to the pupils, always giving reasons if he cannot implement a recommendation of the council. Pupils develop a good understanding of cultural issues in Britain today, and an understanding of Europe, but multi-cultural issues have less prominence in lessons than they could have. Pupils are thoughtful and reflective but this spiritual characteristic is not developed as thoroughly through lessons as in other areas of school life.

15. Tutors maintain good records on their tutees' academic progress. They monitor individuals' progress, particularly in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form, ensuring that each pupil or student is on track to achieve predicted examination success. The pupils and students do not see this as an added pressure but as a means of helping them to be successful. Each teacher is known to have his or her own style, but each works in a similar manner, reflecting a whole school approach. Pupils are provided with good clear guidance on their option choices and movement on to GCSE and AS sixth form courses is said by many of the pupils to be 'seamless'. Careers education is taken seriously and pupils are made aware of the consequences of their decisions.

16. All pupils aged eleven to sixteen experience a very good course – referred to as PAL – in which they discuss social and moral issues, as well as citizenship today. Those lessons seen were good with some outstanding aspects. In an example of a very good lesson, pupils discussed teenage parenthood using up-to-date data from newspapers. The very well-taught session enabled pupils to share their views and to learn from one another. Several pupils learnt a great deal and all appreciated the opportunity that was provided to reflect, think and talk about such an important issue.

17. Many staff are involved in providing an excellent range of extra-curricular activities for pupils aged eleven to sixteen. Music groups, including orchestras, saxophone and choir groups, many sports teams, and a range of academic clubs such as for art and science are successful and appreciated. The art club involves pupils creating their own sculptures in the school grounds and the science club always starts with an expert presentation by a member of staff before watching an interesting film. Homework clubs are provided and mathematics booster classes. The booster classes are to help those who do not find the subject easy to improve their skills. A good number of pupils attend these activities, even with the large number who have to catch buses at the end of the day. School visits to places of interest as well as fieldwork and exchanges to improve pupils' modern foreign languages, provide further opportunities for pupils to meet together and with staff in different social settings. Pupils are aware of what is provided for them by staff and appreciate the time spent for their benefit. In the sixth form, the students are not as well provided for, particularly in sport, with no inter-college sports teams.

18. Pupils, parents and staff are aware that the school canteen is far too small for the number of pupils at Neatherd, and that its size – resulting in very rapid throughput of pupils during the lunch break - results in unsatisfactory eating habits for some. The places where pupils can eat their lunches are severely restricted and the situation is very difficult on wet and cold days when pupils cannot sit outside. The school manages the problem as well as it can and tries to minimise the impact on the high quality school ethos. A similarly difficult situation exists over the very restricted parking available for staff, and access to the school for buses to deliver and collect pupils. Arrangements for supervision of pupils as they get on and off the buses, and to look after pupils after the end of the school day because buses are often late, are very good indeed. The health and safety of the pupils is of paramount importance to the school. The headteacher and governors, working with the local education authority, are working to improve the accommodation available and so resolve both these problems.

19. The overall school experience is very enjoyable for most of the pupils and students and that is why they are so receptive to learning. Their very positive attitudes, politeness, consideration for others and hard work stem from their appreciation of what is provided for them.

Very good heads of department and heads of year who focus on pupils achieving high standards by the age of sixteen

20. The heads of department and heads of year spoken to during the inspection had a clear understanding of their roles as middle managers, supporting the school in its quest to maximise achievement and enjoyment in a secure, very well-disciplined environment. Their roles are key components in the pupils' success up to the age of sixteen. The most successful subject leaders, for example in science and modern foreign languages, have a clear vision of the future and work extremely hard in pursuit of their goals. Heads of year spoken to were equally focused and just as successful, showing that they have a very good knowledge of all the pupils in their year. They work to ensure that pupils' very good behaviour, as seen during the inspection, is maintained at all times. Middle managers understand the school ethos and work to further the success of the school. In the joint sixth form, some uncertainty

about overall responsibility for subjects results from the complex situation, where two heads of department from the two schools involved both have equal status.

21. The best heads of department carry out monitoring of teaching and learning thoroughly and systematically, enabling them to have a very good picture of where there are strengths and where weaknesses need to be rectified. The head of science, for example, even with the very high standards in Year 9 tests and GCSE results, is focused on raising expectations, improving the range of teaching and learning skills used, and making better use of the school's ICT facilities – he leads by personal example. The new head of English, with a much lower starting point than science, of unsatisfactory standards in Year 9 tests in recent years, has identified the cause of the problem and put in place good, measurable strategies to bring about improvements. New staff have been very well supported and improvements are already apparent with focused teaching, directed towards National Curriculum assessment requirements. In modern foreign languages, determined hard work over the past few years has resulted in improved attainment by the pupils and positive approaches to languages from both boys and girls – although this has not yet resulted in a significant increase in boys taking foreign languages at A-level in the sixth form. Not all departments are as successful as these, seen in the lower standards attained in art and design, for example. The very successful heads of department lead by example and teach very effectively. Senior managers appreciate the importance of these staff and value them.

High quality computer facilities that are used to very good effect by pupils in a range of subjects

22. Great improvements have been made since the last inspection, five years ago, in the quality and amount of ICT equipment available and in the use made of it in subject teaching. The school has planned very carefully over several years and invested heavily in staff, new computers, printers and interactive white-boards, in both the main school building and in the sixth form college. Pupils and students benefit greatly from this provision. Currently the main building has 140 networked modern computers available for pupil use, each with internet access. Computers are available between 8.15 in the morning and 5.30 each evening. Several areas such as design and technology and modern foreign languages have dedicated suites of machines, but there are also three suites of machines that are booked by departments. In the college, there are a further 60 machines. All pupils spoken to referred to the ease with which they could find a computer to use and how pleased they were to have such access, and to be able to print off quality copies of their work using the school's laser printers.

23. Newly qualified teachers are issued with laptop computers, to ease their workloads, which they can then purchase at the end of the year if they wish. Many staff are competent users of computers who appreciate the role that ICT now plays in their subject areas, but this is not universally the case. Pupils remarked that the extent to which machines were used was teacher dependent, and that they would like to make more use of them in some English and mathematics lessons. The use of ICT is now written into schemes of work, however, and in each department a portfolio of ICT work is available to show good practice and to ensure that National Curriculum requirements are fully met. In the sixth form, the lack of access to computer aided design and manufacture facilities causes some difficulties.

24. The management of ICT is very good indeed. The ICT manager has a reduced teaching timetable to enable support to be provided for subjects throughout the school. He is assisted by a technician. School staff maintain and repair all the school's machines and a club for Year 10 pupils enables individuals to build their own computers from purchased components. The ICT manager meets with all heads of department to discuss ways forward in each subject and provides in-service training for staff. Administrative staff and teaching staff benefit from in-service training in areas such as data analysis and assessment, provided by ICT staff. As part of the school's Beacon status, support is provided for other local schools in the use of ICT.

25. During the short period of the inspection, very good lessons involving ICT were observed in several subjects, including design and technology, science and modern foreign languages. Computers were heavily used during the lunchtime and a good number were used before and after school. The use of ICT is now an integral part of pupils' learning, as they access the internet and the school's intranet as a matter of course. Management at both a strategic and day-by-day level is very good indeed and all pupils and students are benefiting greatly from the implementation of the vision for ICT, established so clearly some years ago.

Highly effective headteacher and senior managers who ensure that developments take place, such as the excellent response to the key issues of the last report, and the induction of the many new staff who have been appointed as the school has grown in size

26. The leadership provided by the headteacher is excellent and he is given first-class support by the deputy headteacher, two assistant heads, and the deputy headteacher director of the sixth form college. Each has a very clear understanding of his/her role and how each relates to the other. Delegation is very effective. Management systems are very well thought through and work very well. Tasks are carried out thoroughly and quickly. The aim for the school, clearly stated in the school prospectus – “.. to give the very best possible education in a caring and disciplined environment so that our pupils/students can prepare for a rapidly changing world.” – is the essence of how the school works. The needs of the pupils are always given top priority in all decisions. The headteacher is the driving force behind this ethos and the success of the school and sixth form college.

27. Since the last inspection, effective progress has been made in all areas of school life. The significant strengths of five years ago have been maintained, and in some cases improved further. All five areas of weakness identified have been dealt with effectively. The previous section of this commentary, referring to the school’s high quality ICT facilities and the very good use made of them by pupils, is one example of several where substantial improvements have been made. Such changes have taken place because the headteacher has given them a high priority and has invested time and energy from the senior team in supporting the needed improvements.

28. School documentation, for example the staff handbook, is very useful, providing staff new to the school with detailed and helpful information. The school is very ‘open’, with very good communication between the staff. New staff feel welcome and well supported. Parents commented that, although the school has doubled in size over the past ten years, with the associated growth in staff numbers, a caring, welcoming ethos has been maintained. At the core of this success is the open-door policy of the headteacher and all members of the senior management team. Administrative, support and caretaking staff are key members of the staff team, and they are as successful in their areas as the teaching staff in theirs.

29. Effective monitoring and evaluation is carried out of all that takes place in the school. Examination and assessment data is analysed and used very well to inform managers about overall priorities and about the detail within each. The school is ‘data rich’, in so much that it holds a large amount of information, but managers are careful in their use of the plethora of information, not to overload departments. Information is interpreted carefully to ensure that messages are clear and helpful. Staff and pupils accept constructive criticism willingly, if not with enjoyment, aware of the best intentions of the evaluators. Lesson observation for eleven- to sixteen-year-olds is carried out rigorously in the knowledge that it will result in improved teaching and learning. In the sixth form, although some aspects of this monitoring are very good, subject management problems result in inconsistencies. The well-organised, structured programme in the main school is very effective. Heads of department, with the support of a line manager, have key roles in it. The relationship between the headteacher and his senior managers and governors is excellent. Governors are challenging and, at times, very demanding, but also very effective.

30. The headteacher, with the support of his governors and staff, continues to strive for excellence in all aspects of school life. Much has been achieved over the past five years and there is a clear agenda for the future. The school is bidding for language college status. The development plan shows that other focus areas are standards in Years 7 to 9, self-evaluation and responding to the needs of the gifted and talented pupils and students. With the present staff, school ethos and systems, there is great potential for still further improvement. The school’s success and parents’ very strong praise for the headteacher and his senior managers are indicative of the excellence in management and leadership of the school.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

31. There are no major weaknesses but a need to continue to tackle the issues which have already been identified by the school and which are mentioned in the text of the report.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

32. To improve further the quality of education and raise standards the school should:

Sixth form

- (1) tackle the lack of clarity between the roles of subject co-ordinator and heads of department that lead to inconsistencies in:
 - the manner in which subject leaders manage their areas, particularly the monitoring of teaching and learning
 - assessment and recording practices
 - the planned use made of information and communication technology in subject teaching

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 - 11	46
	Sixth form	56
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		60

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 7 – 11							
Number	2	15	19	10	0	0	0
Percentage	4	33	41	22	0	0	0
Sixth form							
Number	0	13	27	16	0	0	0
Percentage	0	23	48	29	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 these percentages as each lesson represents more than one percentage point.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	960	145
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	60	0

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	35	1
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	215	

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	5

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	9
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	11

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	6.6
National comparative data	8.1

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.3
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2001	101	108	209

<i>National Curriculum Test/Task Results</i>		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	49	81	88
	Girls	69	81	89
	Total	118	162	177
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	57 (69)	78 (79)	85 (83)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	25 (42)	48 (58)	60 (43)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	58	76	77
	Girls	75	78	80
	Total	133	154	157
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	64 (62)	73 (79)	75 (84)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	28 (36)	41 (61)	33 (40)
	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	66	75	141

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	43	67	67
	Girls	44	73	75
	Total	87	140	142
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	62 (67)	99 (97)	100 (97)
	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	44
	National	39

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	0	n/a
	National		n/a

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

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	72	60	132

Bill don't we include all the 6th formers here.....and again for av points etc, for all the reasons we have discussed?

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	18.7	17.1	17.8	3.0	2.8	3.0
National	17.7	18.6	18.2	2.6	2.9	2.7

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number in their final year of studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	0	n/a
	National		n/a

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	960
Any other minority ethnic group	0

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	22	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 – Y11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	73.2
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	15

Education support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	6
Total aggregate hours worked per week	141

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	78.1
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	24
Key Stage 4	21.5

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000/1
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	£
Total income	2697722
Total expenditure	2667195
Expenditure per pupil	2414
Balance brought forward from previous year	21979
Balance carried forward to next year	52506

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	20
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	32

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	3.6
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1105
Number of questionnaires returned	275

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	41	52	5	2	1
My child is making good progress in school.	45	50	3	0	3
Behaviour in the school is good.	40	50	1	0	9
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	20	53	20	3	4
The teaching is good.	42	55	1	0	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	25	48	19	3	5
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	57	37	4	1	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	67	32	0	0	2
The school works closely with parents.	28	52	15	2	4
The school is well led and managed.	56	38	1	1	5
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	49	46	2	0	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	28	46	8	3	16

Other issues raised by parents

Parents were very pleased with the improvements made in the school since the last inspection, particularly in the accommodation available and the higher standards the pupils achieve. They were also pleased that, even though it was much bigger, it remained a caring and disciplined school where their children were happy to be. Parents were unhappy with the small canteen, the poor parking area and lack of space for buses delivering and collecting pupils.

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

33. The school's A-level results in 2000 were above the national average for maintained schools and broadly in line with the average for all providers of sixth form education. Male students' results were above average on both these measures whereas the female students' results were broadly average. There was considerable variation between subjects. In 2001, results were very high in English language and well above average in biology, chemistry, the joint English language and literature course, French and history. They were above average in business studies, electronics, geography, mathematics and sports science. In computing, English literature and German they were at the national average. They were below average in physics, and well below average in art and design, classical studies, Spanish and design and technology. It should be recognised that the number of candidates in many of these subjects is small and therefore some comparisons are of doubtful significance. The students' average point score in 2001 was very close to that in 2000 but there are not yet any national comparators for the overall 2001 results. Comparative standards have fluctuated over the years 1998 to 2000, between average and above average. These standards are all the more noteworthy when the schools open admissions policy of four or more GCSE grades at A*-C is taken into account.

34. The value added, in the sixth form, to students' attainment at GCSE two years earlier, has been above national averages in three of the last four years; in 2001 it was marginally above average. Generally, this indicates that, in the last four years, students achieved well in their time in the sixth form. There is, again, considerable fluctuation between subjects. This is partly attributable to the very small numbers of students who take some of them. The most successful subjects in adding significant value were health and social care and English language and the least successful subject was design and technology.

35. As in all sixth forms, students sat examinations, in 2001, for the new AS-level courses at the end of Year 12. Thirty seven per cent of entries gained an A or B grade. With many more students following these one year courses, ten per cent of entries did not gain a grade A to E. There are no national comparators yet available for these examinations.

36. The standards being demonstrated by students currently in Years 12 and 13 are generally better than the expected levels for the courses being followed. They are in line with those in the previous year. Standards are well above average in history and further mathematics. They are at average levels in physics, art and design and theatre studies, and above average in all other subjects inspected. In relation to their attainment on entry to the course, students are achieving well in most subjects.

37. The very few students with special educational needs are supported well in their learning, and their achievement is good. At this age, students' linguistic and numerical skills are well developed. In the course of their education they have learnt to make good use of information and communication technology to support their work and help their presentation. The college has placed considerable emphasis on the development of key skills and teaching is directed towards accreditation. Insufficient information was gathered during the inspection, in this second year of the key skills programme, to make a judgement on the standard students are reaching in their key skills lessons. However, results for information and communication technology achieved by the Year 12 students in 2001 point towards sound achievement. Two-thirds of the students reached level 2, with one third at level 3, reflecting the range of competencies in this skill when students started at the college.

38. As well as the fifteen focus subjects, lessons were sampled in twelve other courses running in the sixth form. The standards being demonstrated were at least in line with those expected by the course for the age of the students. Standards were above the expected level in health and social care and well above in the Spanish lesson observed. In business studies, students show good skills in practical elements like researching and drawing graphs to show the nature of consumable goods. By Year 13 they can give confident and articulate presentations on their research but are prone to over-simplistic generalisations in their analysis; standards are broadly in line with expectations. Students studying health and social care have good understanding of the technical language required at this level and are able to test out theories, practically. One student worked in a local primary school, testing theoretical models of child development. In studying law, students demonstrate good understanding of the court system, identifying problems and suggesting why reform may be required.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

39. Students have very good attitudes to their work and this makes a significant contribution to their good achievement. In lessons, most confidently discuss issues with each other. In some lessons, however, a few students are passive and do not take an active part in class discussions. Students take great pride in their work. Their written work is accurate and well presented. Students' folders are well organised making them useful for revision.

40. Students are well motivated and work hard. The good relationships that teachers have with students effectively encourage them to work hard and try to produce their best work. Students get on with each other very well. They value each other's opinions and respond to the whole group in discussions.

41. The behaviour of students is exemplary both in lessons and around the college. Students are courteous to each other and to visitors. Attendance during the week of the inspection was low due to an outbreak of influenza. The school monitors individual attendance closely.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

42. The overall quality of teaching observed was good, resulting in effective learning for the students and good achievement. The quality was a little better in Years 13 than Year 12, with about one in every three lessons very good in Year 13 and one in six in Year 12. About three-quarters of lessons were good or better in Year 13, and about two-thirds in Year 12. All lessons observed in the college were satisfactory or better.

43. The best teaching was of geography, where the quality was consistently very good, resulting in interested students who worked hard and achieved very well in the lessons seen. Good teaching was observed in design and technology, history, computing, further mathematics, mathematics, French, physics, chemistry, biology, sociology and sports studies. The teaching strengths seen in lessons were also apparent in the work the students had completed over previous months. The quality of teaching seen in art, English language and literature, and theatre studies was generally effective, but with a combination of strengths and some weaknesses.

44. The greatest strengths in teaching were: teachers' subject knowledge; good planning for lessons, linked to syllabus and examination requirements; creating good working relationships with students; good quality assessment; high expectations of what the students could achieve; and the use of a varied range of teaching methods. Where a combination of these characteristics was shown, teaching was very effective and students learnt quickly and well, enjoying the tasks.

45. In a Year 13 computing lesson the teacher introduced a new programming language to the students using very interesting activities. The teacher's very good subject knowledge, the clarity of the explanation, and the enjoyable tasks resulted in rapid and successful progress. A teacher's enthusiasm for the subject was equally apparent in a Year 13 Spanish lesson where the entire lesson was carried out in the language. The lively interactive approach, which involved all students equally, and very careful planning, ensured that their achievements were very good. A Year 12 geography lesson and a Year 13 mathematics lesson were both carefully planned to build on the students' earlier learning. Teachers assessed their understanding before moving on to new work and provided feedback to individuals on their successes, ensuring that all made very good progress. A sociology teacher's very good subject expertise resulted in probing questions for a Year 13 class discussing a research questionnaire. The pace of the lesson was gauged carefully and students with the potential to achieve across the full range of A-level grades were challenged by the work and made very good progress. In each of these very good lessons, and others of a similar quality, the relationships between teachers and students were very good indeed enabling the best use to be made of the available time.

46. Few weaknesses in teaching were apparent, but where they existed they restricted sixth formers' achievements. In one or two lessons, teachers did not make sufficiently clear to the students what was expected of them. For example, too brief an explanation in a design and technology lesson resulted in a slow pace of work because students were not always sure what to do next. The same situation was seen in a theatre studies lesson, which resulted in social chatter, and in one or two English language and literature lessons, the pace flagged at times. Teachers' expectations of the students were too low in a few lessons and they did not involve the students sufficiently in what was being taught. In a mathematics lesson, the teacher talked for too long and gave the students too few opportunities to question or consolidate what was being taught. The same situation arose in a sociology lesson where the teacher talked and the students merely listened. The comments on marked work in art lacked clear guidance on how to improve. In each of these lessons the overall quality of teaching was satisfactory and students'

learning was always sound or better. The students' positive attitudes to their education and the respect in which they hold the teaching staff, as well as teaching strengths, were key elements in these and every lesson seen.

47. A strong emphasis on teaching the three main core skills of communication, application of number and information and communication technology, is enabling students to improve in each area. This takes place in subject lessons as well as through specific key skills sessions. For example, in a Year 12 physics lesson, students presented research findings to their colleagues on the positive and negative consequences of generating power in different ways. The opportunity to practice their oral skills was appreciated by the students who did well. They learnt how to improve their individual performance through hearing their peers in action. In modern languages lessons, students discussed their views openly and honestly as they used the target language. In all subjects, good quality presentation of written work was emphasised and accurate use of language. In a health and social care Year 13 lesson, an emphasis on using accurate technical language resulted in good understanding of the theory behind selecting tests to estimate pupils' cognitive ability. Application of number and communications lessons are both taught once every two weeks. No communications lessons were observed. The application of number lesson seen was satisfactory. Students worked on individual profiles, using work from their other courses. Good individual support was provided, particularly for students using statistics. Most students were aware of the importance of these key skills in their future careers.

48. Specific information and communication technology lessons are appreciated by the students in Year 12 and, in addition, many opportunities are found to use computers in a range of subject lessons. This was not universally the case, however, and greater use needs to be made of computers in some, particularly in teaching English, chemistry, design and technology and art.

49. The wider key skills of working with others, study skills and problem solving are all dealt with well in the best lessons, but where teaching is satisfactory there is often insufficient focus on these important learning skills.

50. The very small number of students with special educational needs were taught as effectively as their peers; targets within the students' individual education plans were known by staff. No students in the sixth form had been identified as being at an early stage in acquiring skills in English. High and middle attaining students generally do well, because teachers know their subjects well. They can respond to demanding questions and enjoy doing so. Occasionally, lower attaining students fared less well and work was not matched to their knowledge and abilities. In some cases the fault did not lie with the quality of teaching, however, because complex ideas could not be simplified further, but in the selection of the course by the student.

51. At the time of the last inspections of the two schools, the quality of teaching in the sixth form was judged to be good. Teachers had high expectations of Year 13 students, setting targets for examination success. The current quality is just as good. About nine in every ten students responding to the questionnaire about their school said that they thought the teaching was good, and that they were helped in learning how to study independently.

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

52. The college offers a broad and diverse curriculum of 29 AS-level subjects, three advanced vocational courses and 26 A-level subjects. In addition, all students follow a key skills course in both years of the sixth form and many convert their experience into qualifications in general studies or critical thinking. The curriculum is well matched to students' aspirations and fully reflects the college's aims and values. In the local context, the college has established itself as a successful provider of predominantly academic courses. It saw Curriculum 2000 as an opportunity to broaden its curriculum. New courses such as law have been introduced in response to student demand.

53. The curriculum is well planned in English language and literature, chemistry, physics, design and technology, sociology, sports studies, theatre studies, geography and information and communication technology. It is very well planned in modern languages. In other subjects, it is satisfactory, except for religious education, which is not taught sufficiently to comply with the Local Agreed Syllabus - a statutory requirement. The other weakness in an otherwise very good curriculum is insufficient planned use of information and communication to support learning in some subjects. It is well used in modern languages and sports studies. The small number of students with special educational needs is well provided for.

54. The college has made study of the key skills of communication, application of number and information and communication technology compulsory for all students. It further shows the importance placed on this programme by allocating weekly lessons, taught by teachers who are full time at the college, who also have responsibility for the tutorial programme. Teaching of each of the three key skills is supported by useful outline plans of what is to be covered in lessons. In addition, teachers of a good number of A2 subjects intend to incorporate elements of the key skills programme into their work. In this way, teaching and use of the key skills is being disseminated across the curriculum, thereby helping students to apply these skills in their A2 examination work. Another benefit of the key skills programme is that it provides for those students who wish to do so, the opportunity to enter for AS General Studies or Critical Thinking in Year 13. Most students have chosen to sit one or other of these examinations.

55. The composition of students' individual programmes of work is effectively monitored through the college's tutorial system. They have a high level of commitment of time to courses, and dropout rate is low. Equality of access to courses is generally good. There are a few instances of students embarking on courses for which they are not suitably qualified.

56. The college's curriculum enrichment programme covers a broad range of activities from Young Enterprise and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award (including an ambitious project to run a trek in Brazil in 2003) to exchanges with France, Germany, Spain and the Netherlands. A number of field trips and opportunities for work experience are offered in the period after the AS-level examinations and students are becoming increasingly involved in mentoring and other activities such as music and sport in the two high schools. The programme is of good quality overall, but does not offer students sufficient opportunities to play competitive team sports. The inspection team agreed with the views of students and parents on this issue.

57. The college has established a number of beneficial links with local commerce, industry and government. These provide a good platform for students to gain experience working in the community. Good links have been established with a local agricultural college and a university, which provide very good careers guidance relating to higher education.

58. The provision for social and moral development is good. Students enjoy positive and supportive relations across the school and involve themselves willingly in a variety of fund raising activities. They discuss issues such as gender, racism, apartheid and the holocaust with maturity and sensitivity. The school actively promotes the cultural traditions of its own area and trips abroad provide a European dimension to the work although there is less emphasis on the ethnic and cultural diversity of British society. Provision across the curriculum for spiritual development is underdeveloped. The college does provide an excellent opportunity for considering spiritual and moral issues, through the worship programme, although a very small number of students takes advantage of this.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

Assessment

59. Assessment and monitoring of academic performance is good. Students' prior attainment is used as a benchmark for measuring progress throughout the course. Realistic but challenging targets are regularly set for many subjects, and most subject staff carefully monitor progress through their marking and recording procedures, ensuring that students know what they must do to improve. This is still developing in art, English, physics and sports studies but is well established in many other subjects including modern languages and geography. These procedures are well supported by a very well structured tutorial system and regular 1:1 interviews between student and tutor, where assessment data collected from all subjects is used to clarify targets, and strategies to help raise individual student achievement are discussed. In most subjects, students are aware of their achievements, and their potential grades based on their previous attainments at GCSE. They are able to discuss with staff what they need to do to reach their potential and are set specific subject targets.

Advice, support and guidance

60. The students enjoy a very good relationship between themselves, their tutors and teachers. They appreciate the support and guidance given, both in lessons and during the fortnightly tutor periods. The students are given impartial advice on careers and further education choices while in Year 11. This process enabled the students to make informed decisions about the choice of courses in Year 12. All students meet with their tutors on a one-to-

one basis at approximately five-week intervals. During these meetings, the tutor is able to discuss achievements and progress in lessons, based on the data obtained from subject teachers and the student's self-evaluation. Students feel this process is worthwhile as it enables them to raise worries if they have them, and ensures that they maintain their efforts. The students also felt that these discussions emphasised the care the college take of their well being.

61. Students in Year 12 are given guidance on Year 13 choices and are supported to make decisions about further AS-levels or progression to A-level courses. Those students in Year 12 or 13, who are considering employment, are helped in a constructive manner by the careers staff and the local careers service. There is a well-planned, structured course for Year 13 students who wish to progress to university. The college is very supportive at all stages of the students' application for degree courses. The students were very complimentary about the help they receive at this important stage in their college careers.

62. The health and safety aspects of the college are good. The Norfolk health and safety policy has been implemented as a working document. A six-monthly safety audit is performed by a sub-committee of responsible governor and health and safety personnel from within college. The last audit was in June 2001. The detailed audit of all aspects is acted upon and reviewed effectively.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

Leadership and management

63. The director and small team of staff who only teach in the sixth form college make an effective and well-coordinated team. The director works very closely with the headteachers of the two schools. He displays outstanding discretion and skill in managing the large number of staff from both schools who teach in the college. His ability to appreciate the different philosophies of the two schools and to bring them together to provide a common purpose and philosophy, is another key feature of the very good leadership provided. This strength ensures that the joint sixth form provides a good deal for the students of Dereham. The sixth form management committee, which has representation from each of the school's governing bodies, provides useful support to the college. Staff generally work very well in collaboration, overcoming many of the potential geographical and other barriers. The director and his core team are closely involved in all aspects of day to day life in the college and they are always available to meet staff and students; they lead by example and as managers and classroom teachers they are very good role models.

64. Teaching and learning are monitored on a rolling programme by the director and his deputy. They also listen to concerns expressed by staff and students and take action. However, there are inconsistencies in monitoring between subjects. Each area is nominally the responsibility of the two heads of department from the high schools. In practice, the day-to-day co-ordination of subjects in the sixth form has discrepancies. For example, in French, teaching and learning are effectively monitored, whereas little monitoring is undertaken in art and design, physics or English language and literature. These variations reflect some inconsistent practice in the overall management of subjects, because co-ordinators have imprecise job descriptions and are uncertain as to the extent of their roles. Another factor is that a number of staff with responsibility for subjects have a heavy workload, with little additional time or financial reward to encourage them. Limitations in the management of some subjects result in a lack of strategic planning – for example a relatively large number of students take photography, yet they do not have enough specialist accommodation and no technicians.

65. The heads of each department from the two high schools meet the director each term to review their work and to keep each informed of developments. This is one element of a new management structure which is being put into place to try to remove some of the deficiencies already outlined. Students' academic work and their participation and contribution to the life of the school are carefully monitored. This results in an emphasis on achieving the highest possible academic standards. However, some of the information on standards held centrally, such as figures for the retention of students on courses and how they relate to GCSE results, is not used effectively by all departments to set targets for their students.

66. The sixth form development plan provides an effective method of ensuring the college continues to move forwards, particularly in raising standards. Its priorities are developed by listening to feedback from teachers and students, analysing information on standards and acting on local authority and national initiatives. While the outcomes desired are clearly expressed, with appropriate methods to suggest how they might be attained, a number

of the success criteria lack precision and could prove difficult to measure. For example, the schools' efforts to improve marking have not been entirely successful, as there are still inconsistencies in departmental practices.

67. The management of the college is flexible and creative in dealing with difficult issues. For example, they 'buy in' staff from the two high schools for only as long as required. Income for the sixth form originates from the two schools, but the college has considerable autonomy in deciding how to spend this money. There is a carefully worked out formula for determining how the college pays for staff and resources bought from the two schools. All the post-sixteen funding allocated to Neatherd and Northgate schools, with both schools' split site funding, forms the college budget. The college benefits from prudent planning of expenditure, which is essentially led by the requirements of the curriculum that is taught and priorities set by a committee of governors, the director of the sixth form and senior staff from each school. These mechanisms have enabled the college to provide good resources, overall. The school closely monitors its achievements, by comparing its work with other schools with a similar intake, and analysing the achievements of individual students. Analysis of the income and expenditure and the curriculum the school offers are all carefully calculated to ensure the sixth form operates within its budget and that best value principals are employed. The procedures for day-to-day financial management are effective and there are good checks and balances. The college has not been subject to an audit of its financial procedures since the last inspection.

Resources

68. The teaching staff is made up of teachers who travel from either of the two partner schools and teachers who are based exclusively in the sixth form college. There are many benefits to students of teachers combining their skills and expertise to teach jointly aspects of the same courses. Teamwork is good and together teachers share high levels of expertise and knowledge of the subjects and courses taught. However, the potential effectiveness of this arrangement is limited by weaknesses in the delegation of management responsibilities. Teaching areas are shared well between several teachers. Technicians and technical assistants provide very good day-to-day support although none is available in art and design. The college is very well administered by a team of clerical staff and site managers.

69. The quality and range of learning resources for the courses offered are good in most subjects and they are used well. The use of information technology resources in teaching is variable. For example, in sport studies, health and social care and in key skills lessons they are used very effectively. By contrast, in several other subjects too little use is made of computers. This is an area where senior managers recognise further development is needed, firstly to ensure the training is well matched to meet the needs of individual teachers and then to ensure information and communication technology is systematically planned for and used more widely within subjects and courses. The computer facilities available, however, are used very effectively by individual students for their own research and coursework, as they apply the skills they have learnt.

70. The governors have a very good understanding of the allocation of resources to the sixth form college and any accommodation issues. The building is kept clean and is generally in good repair throughout. Senior managers have been successful in finding ways around any accommodation difficulties that have arisen. For example, by sharing the workshops and facilities for practical work with the partner schools, the college is able to offer design and technology courses. Students attend lessons in both centres. Whilst the arrangement is not ideal it is made to work - with the goodwill and co-operation of the staff and students.

71. Photography is a popular subject, and large numbers of students enrol for the new AS-courses. However the quality and pace of learning and work output in lessons is limited by the facilities. The dark room facilities and accommodation are inadequate for the number of students in the classes.

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* 2001 RESULTS**

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	4	25	62	0	15	1.3	1.5
Computer studies	4	50	73	0	13	0.8	1.7
Art and design	1	100	74	0	23	1.0	2.3
History	1	100	n/a	0	n/a	3.0	n/a

***GCE A level and AVCE courses* 2001 RESULTS**

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	27	89	87	41	43	5.9	5.8
Biology	23	100	88	30	34	6.0	5.3
Chemistry	9	100	91	67	43	7.3	6.0
Physics	13	92	88	8	40	4.6	5.7
Other science	7	100	90	29	30	5.7	5.2
Design and technology	7	71	90	0	30	3.4	5.3
Business studies	14	100	93	50	33	6.3	5.6
Computer studies	11	100	95	18	23	4.7	4.6
Sports/PE studies	10	100	92	0	25	5.6	5.1
Art and design	6	100	96	0	46	4.0	6.5
Classical studies	4	100	96	0	49	4.5	6.5
Geography	23	100	92	48	38	6.3	5.7
History	16	100	89	63	36	7.1	5.5
Sociology	10	100	86	50	35	6.2	5.3
Other social studies	17	100	87	41	34	6.2	5.3
English language	8	100	90	63	29	7.8	5.2
English literature	6	100	95	33	37	6.0	5.9
English/language	24	96	92	50	31	6.3	5.3
Communication studies	23	100	94	30	31	6.1	5.6
French	8	100	90	50	38	7.0	5.6
German	3	100	92	33	40	5.3	5.8
Spanish	2	100	89	0	39	2.0	5.7

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

72. The focus subjects were mathematics, AS further mathematics, biology, chemistry and physics, but electronics systems was also sampled. Over the past three years the small number of students taking A-level electronics systems have all passed. The grade range from A to E has been achieved and results have been well above average. Achievement has been satisfactory considering the students' GCSE results. In the lesson observed the quality of teaching was very good. Students of a wide range of ability were helped effectively. Students learnt from their mistakes as a result of knowledgeable questioning by the teacher.

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- standards in A-level examinations are above the national average
- the subject knowledge and expertise of the teachers leads to effective teaching and learning
- students have positive attitudes to the subject
- procedures for assessing students' attainment and progress are good

Areas for improvement

- subject monitoring could be developed to ensure greater consistency of practice
- the use of information and communication technology to enhance students' learning in mathematics is underdeveloped
- targets for improvement could be more specific

73. Results in A-level mathematics have fluctuated in recent years. In 2001, they were above the national average, having been below the national average in the previous year. The proportion of students gaining A or B grades was similar to that nationally. The relative performance of male and female students varied from year to year. In 2001, two-thirds of the students who entered for AS-level mathematics at the end of Year 12 gained grades A-E.

74. Standards in the work seen during the inspection, both in lessons and in the student work sample, indicate that standards are above nationally expected levels. Students have a facility in algebra which supports their work in all modules. They confidently simplify fractions in algebra, factorise expressions and solve equations. They do well in their work on functions where they have a good understanding of composite and inverse functions and are able to represent them graphically. They also demonstrate good knowledge and understanding of sequences and series, and of exponential and logarithmic functions and their derivatives. They have a good understanding of many topics in statistics such as normal distribution. They do not always readily relate standard procedures from one area of mathematics to another. For example, they integrate and sketch integrating quadratic functions in pure mathematics but do not readily do so in the context of statistics. Students' skills are weaker in the area of trigonometry where they experience some difficulty in using standard trigonometric identities to simplify expressions or to solve equations. They use correct mathematical notation and symbols and this contributes to the standards they achieve in pure mathematics, statistics and mechanics. They have too few opportunities to develop their information and communication technology skills or to use them to enhance their learning in mathematics. Students make good progress in their courses overall and achieve well.

75. Students' attitudes and behaviour are very good overall. The quality of relationships is a particular strength. Their work is well presented and is an illustration of the pride which they take in their work.

76. The quality of teaching is good overall and, as a result, the quality of learning is also good. Teachers' subject knowledge is secure and this enables them to give clear explanations. In a Year 13 lesson, for example, students gained a good understanding of how to find the probabilities of particular events for a given probability density function because of the clear explanations of the teacher and the appropriate choice of illustrative examples. Clear explanations in a Year 12 lesson enabled students to learn about position, velocity and acceleration vectors. Lessons are effectively planned and build suitably on students' previous learning experiences. For example, in a Year 13 lesson on partial fractions, the work built on previous work on fractions in algebra and was also structured

into increasing more complex types of fraction, thus ensuring continuity of learning experiences. Teachers set and insist on high standards in the presentation of written work and check the organisation of students' folders at regular intervals. Students are well motivated and make intellectual effort. As a result of the pace set by teachers, students work at a good rate and they remain on task for the whole lesson. Where lessons contain a large element of teacher direction, students are willing but passive learners and have limited opportunities to collaborate or to discuss their work or to develop as individual learners.

77. Subject management is satisfactory. There are currently three people involved in the management of the subject, one at the college with a co-ordinating role, together with the heads of mathematics from the two schools. Monitoring of the subject, including monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning, is underdeveloped. Systems are thus not fully in place to ensure consistency of practice and to enable the sharing of existing good practice. Assessment procedures are good and are contributing to progress in students' learning. Students complete assignments at the end of each unit of work and these are regularly marked by teachers. Students know how well they are progressing towards their target grades. The targets for action which are set following assignments are not always sufficiently specific to enable students to know what they need to do to improve. The new scheme of work reflects the change of examining board but it does not yet identify many opportunities for the use of computers or graphic calculators. Improvement since the last inspection is good. Standards achieved by students are now higher than at the time of the previous inspection.

Further mathematics

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

Strengths

- current standards are well above average
- teachers have very good subject knowledge and understanding of examination requirements
- relationships in the sixth form are positive and supportive

Areas for improvement

- better monitoring across the department to identify strengths and areas for improvement
- less teacher direction and a greater emphasis on developing students' thinking skills
- increased use of information and communication technology, especially computers and graphical calculators

78. There are no national comparators for the further mathematics AS level examination in 2001 and the number of students is too small to make informed comparisons. The results have remained constant over the past two years and there is no marked difference between the performance of girls and boys. In relation to their prior performance at GCSE, progress in further mathematics is above expectations.

79. On the basis of the students' work and the lessons observed, standards at the end of Year 13 are well above national averages. The further mathematics work is developmental and hierarchical covering modules in pure mathematics and mechanics. The pure mathematics work covers partial fractions, complex numbers, differentiation, integration and hyperbolic functions. Mechanics work covers equations of motion, centres of mass, projectiles and conservation of momentum as well as vertical and horizontal collisions. Students are achieving very well in relation to their attainment at the start of the course.

80. The quality of teaching and learning in the sixth form is good. Teachers demonstrate very good subject knowledge and clear explanation so that students' learning is developed and consolidated. Teaching includes frequent references to external examination requirements and common errors are anticipated and addressed. Lesson planning is good although lesson objectives are not always shared with the students. In some lessons, teacher direction dominates the work and there is insufficient emphasis on the students' learning so that their thinking skills are not sufficiently encouraged and challenged.

81. Attitudes and behaviour in the sixth form are very good. Students show interest and enthusiasm for their work and they enjoy positive and productive relationships with their teachers. Relationships with one another are also positive and supportive. Students complete work to a very high standard and their organisation and presentation skills are very good.

82. The curriculum in the sixth form is flexible to allow different combinations of modules. The provision for literacy in the sixth form is satisfactory and technical vocabulary is used well although background reading is not

sufficiently encouraged and the stock of books in the library is insufficient. The provision for information and communications technology is satisfactory but the use of computers and graphical calculators is under-developed.

83. The leadership and management of the subject in the sixth form are satisfactory. New schemes of work have recently been introduced although links between modules are not always clear and the timetable lacks cohesion so that later modules are started before earlier modules are completed. At present, there is insufficient monitoring and co-ordination across the department to identify strengths and areas for improvement.

Biology

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

Strengths

- above average results at A-level in 2001
- the sound or better progress most students make
- good teaching that contributes to students' positive attitudes

Areas for improvement

- arrangements for keeping a check on the quality of learning and teaching
- matching work to the needs of students so that all progress equally well

84. In 2001, results achieved by the Year 13 students in A-level biology were above the national average. All students passed, and almost a third achieved a grade A or B. These results were much as expected in comparison with the GCSE successes of these students in Year 11. A very large number of students, some 63 of them, began studying for the new AS examination in 2001. However, 12 students dropped out of the course early on as they were finding it difficult to cope with its demands. The majority carried on and took the examination and just over a quarter gained one of the top two grades, though a small number failed to pass. The latter result was expected, even though the students were reported to have worked hard. This term, only two students have dropped out of the AS course, other than a few who changed courses within the first two weeks of term. Some students take biology as their only science subject. This makes parts of the course, especially those dealing with biochemistry, particularly challenging. As a result, these students tend not to perform as well as those studying both biology and chemistry.

85. Work seen during the inspection shows that students studying the AS course have made a secure start, are progressing satisfactorily and are reaching average standards overall. In work on the heart and lungs, for example, students have a sound knowledge and understanding of the structure and functions of the major parts of these organs and can speak confidently about them. Work in students' folders in other parts of the course, for example on the structure of proteins, similarly shows work that is meeting the expectations of the AS course. Year 13 students are on track to reach results that are similar to those achieved in 2001, that is above average. Progress is good, as students build on the foundations of their AS level work. In a revision lesson on ecology, for example, most students displayed a good grasp of the carbon and nitrogen cycles and of the factors affecting populations of animals. In both years, boys and girls are generally doing equally well, though girls are sometimes more painstaking than boys in building thorough notes for revision purposes. The dropout rate shows that students with more modest GCSE results tend not to cope well with advanced work in biology. Work in students' files also indicates that the more able students tend to achieve relatively better than those of average ability due to their more thorough personal work. However, in lessons seen, the more able students were not always given enough to do and, occasionally, did not progress as well as they could have. No students from minority ethnic groups were present in the classes visited. Overall students' achievements are good considering their abilities.

86. Teaching observed during the inspection was good. As a result, students generally learnt well and made good progress. All biology teaching is by subject specialists. Consequently, explanations of new work are clear so that students can understand them. Lessons are planned well for the new ground to be covered, building step by step on previous lessons. In this way, students can see how the course is unfolding. However, enough was not always done to match the work to the different stages of students' learning so that, occasionally, the most able students did not make enough progress and less able students were not sufficiently drawn into the discussions. Lessons are taught in a relaxed but purposeful way, where students listen carefully to their teachers and each other. All the time for the lesson is spent on learning, with no distractions. Plenty of questions are asked to check students' knowledge and understanding. But questions were not always challenging enough or didn't draw questions from students in turn. Students were rather passive, though very attentive and co-operative, in the lessons visited. Teachers select suitable methods and learning activities for their lessons so that students sustain a good effort during lessons and

make good use of the opportunities for learning. Marking of students' work is good, though not consistently so. This lack of consistency also shows in the checks that are kept of students' folders.

87. Some satisfactory use is made of information and communication technology to support learning in biology. Students word-process some of their scientific reports, including tables to organise presentation of measurements. They use information and communication technology to research topics and to help with statistical work. Due in part to the lack of availability of computers in the biology laboratory, students make no use of data logging to track changes, for example of temperature, during investigations. A TV-linked microscope is used well to help students' studies.

88. Students are building good files. These contain collections of their own notes, reports of practical investigations including those arising from fieldwork, worked examination papers and photocopied material. Together, these provide a good basis for revision and, in the case of some students, quite outstanding evidence of their very positive attitudes to biology. Teachers have a good system for checking files, with feedback given to students to help them to improve in the organisation and completeness of their work, but this is not used consistently in all cases.

89. The arrangements for leadership and management of biology in the sixth form college are rather complex though, as shown by the standards students are reaching, are generally working satisfactorily. The co-ordinator for biology, who is a full-time member of the college staff, is there to help colleagues as need arises, but has no responsibility for keeping a check on the quality of learning and teaching. Teachers have taken care to ensure that they are well prepared to teach the new AS examination and they attend other suitable training. The benefits of this show in the quality of teaching. The teaching scheme, though clear, is not written in sufficient detail to thoroughly support the teaching of staff new to the college or to help plan work for students of different abilities.

Chemistry

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

Strengths

- the staff are well qualified and have a good knowledge of the subject
- the attitude of the students is very good and there are good relationships between the staff and students
- the attainment of students is well above the national level
- the teaching is good and most students achieve at or above their identified potential
- students are aware of their achievements and progress due to effective assessment and monitoring

Areas for improvement

- a range of materials is needed to support the wide range of student attainment seen
- insufficient use is made of computers and information and communication technology

90. The A-level results in 2001 were well above the national average. Two-thirds of the students gained grades A or B. This high level of attainment has been maintained over the past few years. Most students' grades were at or above their predicted attainment levels and there was no significant difference in the achievement of boys and girls. Forty per cent of students gained A or B grades in the new AS-level in this year. There are no national comparators available yet. Almost all students attained at or above their predicted grade. Seventeen of the twenty-four students who took AS chemistry last year continued to A-level. There was no significant difference between the achievement of boys and girls at A-level

91. Year 12 students were finding the transition from GCSE relatively easy to cope with. The students were confident to enter into class discussions and were able to demonstrate their knowledge of the subject. For example, when students described the electron arrangement in covalent compounds and the effect of this on bond angles, they did so in a clear and concise manner. Students in Year 12 and those in Year 13 showed a level of attainment above national expectations. Year 13 students showed a good understanding of physical chemical principles while discussing the concept of lattice energy in ionic structures. They applied their numeracy skills well, together with their extensive chemical knowledge, in calculating energy changes during ion formation. Students in both years are achieving well in relation to their previous attainment.

92. The teaching in chemistry is good. Although the lessons observed were teacher led, the staff maintained the students' interest by demonstrating a clear enthusiasm for the subject, using their good subject knowledge. The

teachers involved students in constructive question and answer sessions, which enabled them to demonstrate their understanding. However, the large size of one group meant that some of the students were rather passive and not fully involved. The students' notes and teachers' lesson plans show that a good range of teaching styles are used, including the opportunity of performing many practical investigations.

93. The marking of homework and other assessment tasks is detailed with constructive comments and grades. Students appreciate the high quality of assessment and are aware of their potential and their targets. The regular use of review assessment sheets helps students and teachers to evaluate progress and achievement. This process allows the teachers to be aware of individual students' potential and is used to guide students in a very supportive manner. Teachers are willing to offer extra help and support to any student who requests assistance.

94. The attitude of students in chemistry is very good. This was evident in the complete and high standard lesson notes of all the students. In class, students were attentive, polite, and confident in contributing to class discussions. All teachers enjoyed a good relationship with the students and this gave rise to a general overall feeling of co-operation. Students appreciated the high quality of teaching within the subject and felt confident of success.

95. The management of the department is satisfactory despite the fact that there is no formal structure. The wide range of attainment seen in students in the large groups is a challenge to teachers. There is a need for the department to devise ways of ensuring that all the students have access to suitable material to allow them to progress. Little monitoring of teaching and learning takes place, which is limiting the potential for sharing good practice. Currently, no use is made of information and communication technology in teaching chemistry.

Physics

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

Strengths

- physics teaching is interesting and based on good subject knowledge
- subject planning is good
- students have good attitudes to learning and their behaviour is very good indeed
- students' notes are carefully managed and of good quality, with a good emphasis on problems

Areas for improvement

- lower attaining students underachieve; they struggle to understand concepts in AS physics and do not pass external examinations
- uncertainty over the management of teaching staff from two schools results in inconsistent evaluation of teaching and learning

96. A-level standards in 2000 were average overall when compared with national results. Attainment was below average in 2001. Over the past three years students have attained grades in the range A to E but, each year, one or more students have not passed. In relation to their GCSE grades, high and middle attaining students have done well but lower attainers, often with a C grade at GCSE or those who find mathematics difficult, have struggled with the complex concepts required and have not made satisfactory progress. Their achievements have been unsatisfactory. The number of girls taking the subject is low although there are a few in each year.

97. The standard of work of current Year 12 AS students is below average, with a likely grade range from A to N, including a few who may not pass overall. The range of capabilities is greater on the AS course than for the A2 programme followed in Year 13. Current standards of Year 13 students are above average. Achievement for high and middle ability students was similarly good in both year groups as a result of effective teaching by knowledgeable physicists. Good, clear explanations of the Doppler effect for Year 12 students, however, left a few struggling with how to calculate frequency and wavelength changes. The changes in sounds heard as a police car speeds towards or away from an observer were appreciated, but the explanations as to why this happened were beyond the understanding of a few. Students' work indicated that a similar situation occurs when other mathematical and abstract ideas are taught.

98. The quality of teaching observed was good, resulting in effective learning for all but the lowest attainers. Three lessons were seen, covering just two of the four classes and two of the four physicists. A key strength in teaching is staff subject knowledge, which results in confident, good explanations of physics, and interested if rather quiet students. Each class is taught by two staff ensuring that the expert knowledge of two physicists is available; the

students appreciate this. Planning is thorough, resulting in good coverage of syllabus requirements with a strong practical emphasis. Students are set a good number of problems, often using past examination paper questions. Staff are aware of the importance of a good grounding in mathematics if higher grades are to be achieved. The quality of teaching could be further improved through more rigorous questioning of named students, particularly lower attainers, and better marking of work, providing more detailed constructive criticism. Students listen attentively and co-operate. They are considerate to their peers and relationships generally are very good. Students' behaviour is very good indeed. During the lessons observed, some students tended to accept points when they would have benefited from asking for further clarification.

99. Students' notes indicate that most are conscientious and reasonably hard working. Work is presented well and organised carefully, enabling students to revise properly. Few examples of the use of information and communication technology were apparent in the students' files, although computer use is now built into the scheme of work. Students mentioned that they made infrequent use of it in physics lessons, but all spoken to were confident in using the Internet, word-processing and spreadsheets, for researching and presenting information. Many of the problems answered are self-marked by the students. Teachers' markbooks are too variable, and some have insufficient records of students' achievements. A more systematic and consistent approach to marking and recording across the department would be helpful to the students. Useful, regular topic tests are set and marked, enabling staff to know students' strengths and weaknesses at the end of each section of work.

100. Staff from both high schools teach physics in the sixth form college. They work together and share ideas, but overall management responsibilities are unclear; there are differences of view over 'who is responsible for what'. Resources are bought which are mainly based at the college and these are used well. Arrangements for ensuring that physics is well resourced are good. The laboratories are a good facility, looked after well and used effectively. Inconsistencies are apparent in monitoring the quality of teaching and learning, and in assessment and marking policies because these are based on two different school systems. Data is not yet used effectively, for example to ensure that those students starting the course have a realistic chance of completing it successfully. College managers are fully aware of these management problems, that result from the necessarily complex arrangements involving two schools. They are working to find a solution that will be of benefit to staff and help to improve standards in physics further.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

Design and technology

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

Strengths

- well-organised procedures to teach the new courses
- close co-operation between the two design and technology teaching teams from the separate schools
- students are achieving well as a result of good teaching and their very positive attitudes
- marking and assessment procedures that inform students and enable them to achieve to their potential

Areas for improvement

- more planned inclusion of the use of computer skills including computer aided design and manufacturing
- develop literacy and learning skills, for example the ability of students to develop and present information to different audiences

101. Students have taken A-level design and technology courses for a number of years. Currently, Year 13 students are in the second year of a new product design course having taken the AS-level examination in this course in 2001. Students join the course with a variety of design and making experience because of the different design and technology subjects taken at GCSE. At the time of the inspection there was little practical work available and judgements about modelling and manufacturing skills relied upon photographic evidence contained in students design folders.

102. A-level results in 2001 were well below national average although the numbers following the course are too small for meaningful national comparison. However, students achieved satisfactorily in relation to their attainment when they started the course. In the new AS-level examination, 5 of the 7 candidates gained grades A or B and students achieved well in comparison with their attainment at the beginning of the course.

103. Current standards are broadly average and achievement is good considering the students' prior learning. Students' completed course work to date is of a good standard. Where, in a few cases, the standard of current work does not reflect students' predicted grades, it is because it is not well enough organised. All students, however, are making good advances in knowledge, understanding and skills as they progress through the AS and A2 courses. For example, they are good at analysing existing products and, after research and evaluation, are able to develop their own ideas for adapting or improving products. Drawing, writing and presentation skills vary considerably with ability but a significant strength of most students' work is the annotation of sketches. Students develop good knowledge of materials and how products are constructed. They have good understanding of technical processes and this results in effective research into products such as screwdrivers and spanners before designing, making, testing and evaluating their own versions. The understanding of industrial and manufacturing practice is developing satisfactorily, for example through the group work taking place in Year 12 to design and make a document holder using batch production methods. However, although some use is made of computers to present work, the use of computer-aided design and manufacturing is at present under-developed.

104. Most students show a very positive attitude to their work and are making good progress at this stage of the course. Students are closely monitored and given regular detailed oral and written feedback about their individual performance. This is very effective in enabling students to develop and improve their work and for their personal development. Behaviour in lessons is good and there are positive working relationships. Casual, informal conversation by a small number of more dominant students does sometimes deflect others from engaging in tasks set.

105. Teaching is good. Shared teaching of the A-level courses is planned and carried out very effectively between the teams of teachers from the two contributory schools. Teachers have very good knowledge of the subject and this is used to plan and teach well-structured courses. Students and resources are managed well. Comprehensive marking to clear criteria, together with extensive written comments, enable students to develop and improve their work. A good range of teaching methods is used. Teaching resources are well prepared and time is used effectively. For example, overhead projection slides were used to reinforce technical words and discussions about form, function and aesthetics. Targeted written and oral questions were used to engage all students in an extremely well-resourced and organised evaluation of potato peelers. The majority of students work hard on their research and evaluation and, because they are given very good individual advice and support, they know how to use their knowledge and skills in an interesting and creative manner.

106. Leadership and management of the course are good. Staff work very hard, and co-operatively, to manage the complex arrangements for the teaching of designing and making activities. The team teaching which takes place is well organised to make use of teachers' expertise and the time and resources available. Courses are well documented with developing, detailed schemes of work that provide structured and well-organised experiences for all students.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

107. A-level computing was the focus of the inspection. AVCE Information technology was sampled. This course was begun in September 2000. Results at the end of the first year were disappointing. This was partly due to it being a new course and students coming to terms with different ways of being assessed. This resulted in an unsatisfactory balance in the time allowed for each module. This problem has been remedied and the standards of students currently in Year 12 are at the expected level, and those of students now in Year 13 have improved and are at nationally expected levels.

Computing

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

Strengths

- students achieve well in this subject
- teaching is good which leads to good learning
- resources are very good, including staffing, accommodation and learning resources

Areas for improvement

- increase the opportunities for students to develop as independent learners
- make greater use of available information to set clear subject targets and ensure that feedback from on-going assessment links to progress towards these targets

108. Results in 2001 were in line with the national average. The previous year they had been well above. The number of students studying the subject is small and the results at the end of the course are very dependent upon the prior attainment of each cohort of students. Analysis shows that, when compared to their attainment on entry to the course, these results represent good achievement for both groups of students. A larger number of students studied the new AS course and gained good results although there are no national comparisons available at the moment. From observation and scrutiny of students' files, the standards of work of both the current Year 12 and Year 13 students are above the expected level for the course and these students' achievements are also good.

109. Students, generally, have a facility with computers. They have used word-processing, database and spreadsheet packages well to record and respond to tasks set in a commercial context. For example, Year 12 students have learned how to reduce the repetition of stored information by using relational databases in a simple sweet shop scenario. Year 13 students develop this capability further in their work. Students show their understanding of computer systems through their analysis of, for example, input, output and storage devices. They show their understanding of the impact of computers on society through the scenarios which they model and their responses to questions on data protection shows them coming to terms with some ethical issues. The quality of their work shows through in their individual projects and these allow the higher attaining students to reach a good standard. This was illustrated when Year 13 students were learning how to write a web page using machine language, a topic specific to the new course. A student had developed, in the previous year, a high quality page which went far beyond the requirements of the syllabus.

110. Teaching is good. Clear explanations from knowledgeable teachers help students understand new ideas quickly. Additional information sheets help students build up a good set of notes for future reference and revision. Regular checking of folders encourages students to maintain them in good order and ensures that previous errors have been corrected. Lessons are well planned and offer students interesting and relevant scenarios and the use of an appropriate range of software packages. Much of the work is teacher driven as students learn to use these packages. Project work requires students to be more independent and they respond well. Strategies to develop students' independence are comparatively under-used. Tests and assessments are regularly set and thoroughly marked. Providing students with the mark scheme helps them to learn how they might, in future, maximise their marks. Guidance is given when work is marked and returned. Teachers record more on students' work in Year 13 than in Year 12. By the time students are in Year 13 they know the examination grade which their GCSE performance suggests and the level which their work currently demonstrates. Knowledge of these predictions earlier in the course would allow the setting of subject specific targets and assessment to be more closely linked to individual progress.

111. The subject is well managed, with both staff based at the college working closely together. An appropriate priority has been to develop and refine schemes of work to meet the requirements of the new syllabus. Formal monitoring and evaluation of classroom practice has relied upon the college's performance management procedures. Students like the subject and believe that they are taught well and are well supported. The subject is very well resourced, teachers are enthusiastic and up to date with their fast moving subject and teaching rooms are modern, of a good size and well equipped.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

Sports studies

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

Strengths

- attainment is above average; coursework is a particular strength
- use of a variety of teaching methods results in effective learning
- good use is made of information and communication technology
- target setting and marking are focused on achieving predicted grades

Areas for improvement

- ensure that lower-attaining students' understand what can and cannot be varied in comparing performance data

112. Results in 2001 were above the national average. The attainment of boys and girls changes from year to year, but the numbers taking the course are small. In the new AS-level examination in 2001, nearly one-third of students gained grades A or B. Students taking both AS and A2 courses achieved satisfactorily, considering their attainment on entry to the sixth form.

113. Students currently in Years 12 and 13 are producing work which is above national expectations. This is similar to the findings of the last inspection. Students currently in Year 12 take care to arrange their written work so that it is well organised for revision. This methodical approach is particularly helpful to lower attaining students' confidence in accessing essential elements to the course. For example, good links are made between fitness, body function, personality and achievement so students understand the psychological and physiological effects of altitude. Some lower attaining students, in a lesson relating circuit training to improving fitness, did not fully understand in their evaluation the need to keep all things the same if reliable measurements and target setting were to be achieved. Most students achieve well. Students in Year 13 convey their views effectively. For example, when analysing the influence of history on contemporary sport, they identify how international events can be inclusive and benefit international understanding. Conversely, students also understand how such events can be influenced by politics, racism and conflict and the attendant moral issues, for example the undermining of the Olympic ideal by the actions of individual nations. High attaining students produce mature written work; they use correct technical terms and work is accurately structured. They achieve well with good results in set work, even on complex issues such as the physics and principles of movement. Lower attaining students achieve well because they are given guidance in analysing exactly what is required for homework or an examination question.

114. Overall the teaching is good. Teachers have high expectations of students. The most effective lessons have good planning and organisation, which leads to good pace and results in effective learning. Most lessons include a variety of teaching methods that reinforce learning as well as adding interest. Teaching is often linked to familiar situations or sports personalities so that students readily relate this to their learning. For example, David Beckham's skills were used in understanding the various effects on the spinning ball. Good use is made of information and communication technology, which is accessed widely in teaching, research, coursework and recording. Marking and assessment is closely related to A-level grading and linked to target setting. This enables teachers to identify underachieving students and, where necessary, mentoring sessions are arranged to redirect and assist students. Learning is not as effective when students' understanding is not checked. For example, when students suggested that changing equipment on a circuit would add interest they were not helped to recognise that changing more than one variable made the comparison of data impossible.

115. Students have a very responsible attitude to their work. They have confidence in their teachers' knowledge. Good relationships enable teachers to tease out contributions to discussions from even the most reticent students; the minority of students, who are reluctant speakers, are therefore included. Students are prepared to assist one another, for example, in making improvements to computer work.

116. The department is well led and managed. There is a determination, and a commitment, to maintain high standards. This aim is supported by the teachers' careful analysis of examination results. For example, teachers are aware of the strengths and weaknesses of students' previous performance in the various components of the course and know where improvements might be made. The scheme of work contains the components of the course and ensures complete coverage of the syllabus, as well as suggestions on use of resources and teaching methods. Teachers update their knowledge by networking with other schools and reading evaluations on examination courses. Ongoing department initiatives provide a good basis for sustaining the present level of good attainment and achievement.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

117. The focus was on art and theatre studies. Media studies and photography were sampled. There was no opportunity to sample music. 2001 media studies results were well above national average, having been below the previous year. In the one lesson observed, good teaching helped students to analyse the conventions, house style and appeal of magazines. This resulted in a good understanding of how image and message were effectively conveyed. There are no separate comparators for attainment in photography.

Art

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

Strengths

- very positive relationships and personal development fostered
- the combined skills and expertise of staff based in the two schools and the sixth from college
- the quality of work reviews and verbal feedback given to students

Areas for improvement

- management of the subject – through more rigorous monitoring of the impact of teaching on the quality and standard of work produced to ensure students fulfil their potential

118. The trend in attainment shows standards to be below average in recent years except in 1999 where they were significantly higher. Male students did particularly well. The point score of students taking A-level art and design and photography examinations in 2000 was below the average and, in 2001, it was well below average. Results in recent years show achievement was unsatisfactory given students' starting points.

119. Results in the new AS-level examinations in 2001 show a significant proportion of students attained the higher A and B grades. Some students achieved very well having begun the courses with limited experience of art and design skills, knowledge and understanding. This was particularly the case for students studying photography.

120. Standards of work by students currently in Year 13 are higher than in previous years and broadly average. The work seen in lessons shows achievement as being satisfactory overall but with some variation in the achievements of individual students relative to their prior attainment in AS examinations. Not all are maintaining the same rate of progress and therefore on track to meet their targets in the second year of study. There are no significant differences in the achievements of female and male students. The standard of analytical and critical thinking, that comes through both written and practical work, is not high enough, particularly from students whose prior attainment suggests they should be attaining the higher grades in the A-level examination. Although some of the work by students shows good quality drawing and painting this is not always used as the standard for the next piece of work and progressively developed to an even higher level as students move through the course. The quality of painting is below the standard expected at this stage of the course. Art and design students who also have a qualification in photography combine the skills well in some units. A significant number of students from the partner schools have not been well prepared for advanced level work, in Key Stage 3 and GCSE courses, and teaching does not always take sufficient account of this. Their achievement is barely satisfactory.

121. Teaching and learning are sound overall. In half the lessons seen, teaching was good. The strengths of teaching are in the relationships that exist between teachers and students. Visits to galleries, and to national and international centres, foster the students' enthusiasm for learning. Imaginative and thoughtful use is made of the supporting materials, sketches and photographs. Students enjoy the work and many who enrolled for a one-year course decided to take a further year because they enjoyed the subject so much. Teachers give effective, one-to-one reviews of students' work, helping them see where improvements are needed. Teaching staff are experienced and have a good range of specialist skills and this leads to some very effective overlapping of disciplines, for example by using photography as a means of recording ideas and observations. However, the impact of teaching over time is less effective than it could be because teachers make too little use of their assessments of students' achievements to set an appropriate standard for the next stage of their learning. There are both strengths and weaknesses in lesson planning and teachers' expectations of a few students are not high enough. Students are generally taught by more than one teacher and the decisions about who will teach particular skills and knowledge, and what will be assessed, are not made sufficiently clear either in teachers' planning or to students.

122. The day-to-day management of the subject is satisfactory and enables the staff from two schools to pool their skills and experiences. Their presence also provides students with continuity as they move from one centre to another. However, roles and responsibilities for managing the subject are blurred and the longer-term strategic plans for improvement are weak. There are no clear plans for developing the use of information and communication technology, improving recruitment and tackling the trend of under-performance. The monitoring of students' achievements and of teaching needs to be more rigorous and regularly undertaken by the subject leader. The department does not have a technician and so technical tasks have to be carried out by teachers. This is not good use of their time and detracts from tackling the under-performance of some students.

Theatre studies

Overall, the quality of provision in theatre studies is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- tasks are clearly related to examination criteria so that students understand the nature of the task, and how they can demonstrate achievement
- students work well in groups to share, probe and develop ideas
- accommodation is good and well used

Areas for improvement

- examination results are very variable
- in discussion and written work, though scripts are analysed thoroughly, too many students give insufficient attention to how they might be interpreted or directed

123. During the period of the inspection, staff absence coupled with a pre-planned school activity resulted in it being possible to observe only one lesson. Broader judgements were also based on a scrutiny of the folders and files of a sample of Year 12 and Year 13 students.

124. A-level theatre studies attracts a small but viable group of students each year. Results in 2001, albeit from a small entry, were well below national average. This represented a decline from the previous year's results, which were above national average. The progress which students made from their GCSE results was less than might have been expected. The subject continued its traditions of a high retention rate and all students who were entered gained a pass grade.

125. The standards of work of the current Year 13 students are close to the national average, representing satisfactory achievement. They are good at quickly understanding scripts, including the more subtle issues in them. Confident group work is well used to examine ideas and issues, and students are particularly effective in using each other's strengths and knowledge. Surprisingly, they are much less animated and involved when working as a whole class, where they become too passive. Student files show a good understanding of the history of theatre, and the theory behind the work of various dramatists from Greek theatre to Ibsen, Brecht and Stanislavski. Higher attaining students show very good awareness of the historical and cultural background to theatre, and can relate themes in texts to literature and art. Average attaining students write in a lively, self-aware style and are able to use a reflective style. Too often, however, they revert to sweeping and unsubstantiated statements. Lower attaining students have a sound knowledge of theatre but find it difficult to see in texts, themes and links to other texts or art forms. Information and communication technology skills are well integrated into their written work by all students, downloaded research and website references being particularly effectively used. A common weakness is insufficient bridging between the text and performance, so that analysis remains too close to literary criticism, and the skills of interpreting and directing performance are not used and demonstrated enough.

126. Teaching was satisfactory in the one lesson seen. There was good knowledge both of the subject and the background to it so that the significance of the text's Irish setting was brought out for students. Good planning helped students to relate their work both to drama theory and to A-level success criteria. However this focus was not sufficiently broadened by the teacher in a question and answer session where issues such as characters' attitudes and emotions needed further exploration. Student files show that teaching is at least satisfactory over time. Appropriate work is regularly set and well marked. Clear advice is given as to how examination criteria can be more closely met.

127. Students have good attitudes to theatre studies as evidenced in the general diligence and smartness of their files, and the positive relationships they have with teachers and each other. The latter are well used in group work, but less so in whole class work where students tend to wait to be asked a specific question. Their concentration when working in groups and their support for each other are important factors in their learning.

128. Staffing changes have resulted in a number of very positive changes. The new scheme of work is clear and precise, with a good focus to examination requirements. Descriptors for achievement are being used by both teachers and students to ensure a shared language for, and understanding of, drama skills and the progress being made in them. Links have been forged with four local theatre groups resulting in a significant increase in theatre visits and potential work experience placements. Visits to workshops and visits by professionals, such as a

Zimbabwe dance group, have taken place. Teachers have identified what they need to do to improve and have undertaken extra training. Valuable, long-standing traditions, such as A-level students working with younger pupils, continue in workshops and productions. In this and other ways, the subject continues to make an important contribution to the social and cultural awareness of students, and pupils generally. Accommodation for teaching the subject remains good and is used effectively. After a period of swift transition the department is in a good position to improve.

HUMANITIES

129. Geography, history and sociology formed the focus of the inspection and lessons in classical civilisation, government and politics, law, psychology and the philosophy of religion were sampled. In a lesson in psychology, students demonstrated better than expected standards in their work as they drew on their good range of knowledge when evaluating the reasons why people remember and forget different things. In a government and politics lesson, standards were broadly in line with expectations. Students discussed the nature of prime ministerial power and those of higher attainment were able to identify and analyse a number of contentious policies. In classical civilisation, students demonstrate good research skills and synthesise information from a number of sources to increase their understanding of topics like everyday life in towns in Roman Britain. The standards that students demonstrate in philosophy are broadly as expected. Students demonstrate good research skills, using the Internet, for example, to prepare presentations on the value of telepathy in the understanding of philosophical issues. The lesson observed in law was well planned and most students achieved well, although a few were not sufficiently involved.

Geography

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

Strengths

- student attitudes are very good and they achieve very well
- quality of teaching in all lessons observed was very good
- teachers have very good subject knowledge that enriches the quality and range of students' learning
- the residential fieldwork provision in Year 12 is of good quality
- the assessment procedures and practices with their focus on improving standards of attainment are very effective

Areas for improvement

- planning for the use of information and communication technology in schemes of work
- the role of the heads of department in the 11-16 schools in the management of the department

130. Results in 2001 were above the national average and half the candidates gained A or B grades. The majority of students achieved or exceeded their predicted grades. Overall, over the previous three years, results have been better than the national average and the majority of students have achieved as well as or better than predicted on the basis of prior attainment. In the new AS-level examination this year most students achieved their predicted grades on the basis of their prior attainment.

131. The work of current students exceeds national standards. In Year 13, most students are achieving standards expected or better than would be expected in relation to predictions based on their GCSE results. In the lessons observed they were achieving this as a result of very effective teaching which made considerable demands on both their previous knowledge, their powers of reasoning and their ability to analyse data. In a physical geography lesson, the structure of the lesson and the range of activities clearly focused their learning and students applied previous knowledge and developed a good understanding of the reasons for the distribution of corries. Similarly in a lesson on human geography, students built on existing knowledge and developed a good understanding of the problems associated with population pressure. Students recall knowledge very well, interpret and analyse data very well and are able to discuss fairly sophisticated geographical concepts using appropriate subject-specific vocabulary. They apply this well both in full class discussions and through written work.

132. Students in Year 12 are achieving much as expected from their previous attainment. They show good knowledge and understanding of the reasons for the suburbanisation of a village and analyse a range of information

to identify critical stages in the development of a village. Students are successfully moving on from their GCSE work and developing their data processing and analysis skills.

133. Teaching is very good overall and students learn well as a result. Clear objectives, very good planning, a brisk pace, very good relationships with the students and an imaginative range of methods and approaches were a constant feature of all the lessons observed. All teachers show very good subject knowledge through their explanations and through their question and answer sessions with students. The physical geography lesson on the distribution of corries, for example, included an excellent introductory exposition from the class teacher and was followed by a rigorous and well-focused question and answer session involving all of the students. This led to very effective learning. There were also very good opportunities for students to work independently and to then explain their findings to the rest of the group. This was an outstanding feature of a very good, very well-structured and organised lesson in Year 12, where students worked extremely effectively because the class teacher constantly challenged them and provided them with very good stimulus material. Learning was once again very effective. Students learn well. They are co-operative, attentive, work productively and respond well to the supportive teaching and different learning styles they experience. They work well in small groups, support each other and listen well to each other's ideas. Most are confident in offering their ideas and respond well when they are given more responsibility for their own learning.

134. The courses are well planned and meet the requirements of the syllabus. Attention is paid to geographical vocabulary to ensure that students understand and use the correct terms. The use of information and communication technology is still developing and is not consistently incorporated into schemes of work or programmes of study.

135. In many respects the good teaching and learning in the subject is supported by effective leadership and management, although the role of the heads of department from the two 11-16 schools in the management of the subject is not clear. Day-to-day management and organisation are very good and there is a very clear commitment to improving standards and building on what has already been achieved. This is illustrated by good student review procedures, involving discussion between student and subject staff, followed by student self-evaluation and recording of targets. These targets are focused sharply on specific learning goals, based on analysis of students' performance and their prior attainment. Marking is rigorous and provides clearly identified specific targets for improvement. There are appropriate opportunities for students to produce work for in-depth assessment. Fieldwork in Year 12 is very well organised and provides good opportunities for students to extend their knowledge and understanding and to fulfil the requirements of the syllabus. Department development planning for this year does not identify, in sufficient detail, the priorities for the sixth form or the professional development requirements for members of the department. Regular department meetings focus on important issues and are helpful in ensuring effective communication within the department, although there is little focus in these meetings on teaching and learning in the sixth form or on the sharing of good practice.

136. Following the last inspection there has been very good progress in the setting of student targets following assessment.

History

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

Strengths

- standards well above the national average,
- good teaching which stimulates and challenges students and extends their historical knowledge and understanding to a high level
- students produce well-structured arguments: they analyse the causes and consequences of events, make good use of historical terminology, and reach balanced conclusions
- students' attitudes are very positive; they enjoy their study of history

Areas for improvement

- students' skills in analysing and evaluating sources are not as well developed as other aspects of their work

137. Students' performance in examinations was well above the national average in 2001 and 2000, and above average in 1999. There is an improving trend in the number of students awarded the higher grades. In 2001, all students who took the examination achieved A to E grades, and about two-thirds attained A or B grades, a success rate which is also above the national average and is the best achieved by the college to date. Over the past four

years there has been no significant difference in the attainment of male and female students. Most students starting the course completed it and, in relation to their previous attainment, achieved well.

138. In 2001, most of the students who took the new AS-level examination passed and nearly one-third gained grades A or B. Although most students who started the course completed it, achievement was significantly below expectations when compared with students' previous attainment. This reflects the students' less confident approach to the analysis of historical sources and the lack of staff training on the new specification.

139. Observation of lessons and a scrutiny of work show that the current standards in both years are above average and achievement is good. Students' written work is of high quality and demonstrates very good knowledge and understanding of the topics studied. Their essay writing is fluent and makes good use of relevant quotations and historical terminology. Notes are concise and well focused. Students analyse complex historical events and make good causal links when explaining events such as the fall of Lloyd George. Students are aware of various historical interpretations and explain why historians interpret the past differently, for example the events surrounding the Holocaust. When researching their personal studies, students work well independently. They are articulate and work co-operatively to produce group work and presentations, for example on international relations in the 1930s. However, students' skills in critically analysing and evaluating sources are not as well developed as other aspects of their work.

140. Students learn well and the work in their well-kept folders shows progress in the quality of their thinking and writing. This good learning is a result of the students' positive attitudes and a very good work ethic fostered by their teachers. The quality of teaching is good overall, with some very good features. A notable characteristic of the very good practice within the department is the high quality feedback students receive on their essays. Students are given a clear understanding of what they have done well and what they must do to improve. Students' folders show that they respond to the comments made, for example on the need to support arguments with quotations from texts and the importance of balanced conclusions. Students would similarly benefit from this level of guidance on their source work.

141. Other features of the very good teaching are high expectations and confident use of subject knowledge, which enable the teachers to ask challenging questions. In a lesson on the inter-war period, subject expertise was used to extend students' understanding and as a result they were able to acquire an overview of the complex international situation in the 1930s. As a result of the diversity of personal study topics chosen by students, teachers are occasionally unable to provide suitable support and challenge. The department need to investigate ways of utilising their considerable collective expertise to ensure that all students receive appropriate support.

142. The good teaching in the department is also reflected in the wide range of learning activities. These include presentations, group activities, analytical diagrams, timelines, source work, extended writing and independent research. Students make sound use of information and communication technology in the presentation of their work, but need more guidance on how to evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of the Internet as a tool for historical research.

143. The two heads of department from the partner schools provide satisfactory leadership and management of the subject. There have been recent improvements in the quality of some schemes of work, which place more emphasis on learning objectives than subject content. These improved schemes of work are a better model for giving guidance to the members of staff who are new to teaching the AS- and A-level courses. The subject development plan needs to focus more explicitly on what needs to be done to improve further the quality of teaching and student achievement. In particular it should look at ways of sharing the good practice within the department and extend the very good feedback to students' source-based work.

Sociology

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

Strengths

- clear and informed management of the department supports subject teaching staff and promotes students' learning
- good teaching leads to student success in examinations
- good relationships with students

Areas for improvement

- implement planned monitoring procedures to raise the standard of satisfactory teaching and thus the students' achievement

144. Results in 2001 were above the national average. Small groups lead to varying results year on year. In 2000, the department's results were very high compared to the national average. In the new AS-level examination in 2001, about two-thirds of candidates gained grades A or B. Students' achievement is generally good in relation to their attainment at the start of the course.

145. Standards of work of current students are above national expectations and they achieve well. Year 13 students are aiming to build on their success in last year's AS-level study. In a lesson in which they were preparing for their research study, they showed a confident knowledge of research methodology. For example, they easily classified questions from sample questionnaires into categories and identified key issues for researchers such as purpose, clarity, confidentiality and validity. Their neat, good written work indicated confident, independent learners putting theory into the practice of field research. They had a sound grasp of major theoretical perspectives and significant case studies.

146. Students in Year 12 showed that they were making a sound start. With reference to case studies already well known to them, they could discuss key issues in the methodology of social research such as confidentiality and respect for the participants. In their discussion of the ethical issues present in research (to be weighed in the balance of the need for valid results) the higher attaining students were able to demonstrate a sound knowledge of methodological issues and apply them to examples from significant research they had read and analysed.

147. Based on all the available evidence, including the samples of work provided, the quality of teaching is good overall. It was very good in a lesson observed when the teacher structured and focused the lesson around a clear objective. By posing new questions as students constructively critiqued research materials, the teacher drew them into new understanding of the dilemmas they might face in their individual research studies. Similarly, in a Year 12 lesson, the teacher drew effectively on recent past learning, posing searching suggestions as they debated. This encouraged these students, relatively new to their studies, to see the contradictions of competing needs in research and they described this dilemma well. They readily made reference to case studies they had worked with in their different modules. The impact of teaching can be seen in the well-informed and organised work in the students' files in Year 13. Teaching was only satisfactory when opportunities were missed to engage the students in their learning. For example, in a lesson where students provided the data for differences in expectations between their and their mothers' generation, the teacher summed up and analysed the results and substantially provided the explanations. The students at this stage were reduced to passive recipients.

148. The department is well led and managed with very good knowledge of the subject and examination demands in the department. As a result, the guidance for students is very clear and provides a basis for understanding the demands of the course. Guidance for teachers is equally supportive. The students' files in Year 13 show a consistent approach to planning for syllabus coverage, the value of which is seen in the success of the department in the past two years.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

149. The English language and literature course and French were a focus of the inspection. Lessons in English literature, German and Spanish were sampled. The English literature lesson seen was well planned with the teacher showing good subject knowledge; the students had very positive attitudes to their studies. In German and Spanish lessons, the students again had very positive attitudes. They worked well and attained good standards in response to good or very good teaching.

English - language and literature

Overall, the quality of provision in English - language and literature is **good**.

Strengths

- schemes of work are detailed and clearly planned

- relationships between staff and students are good, enabling students to work confidently
- standards of attainment are good overall and students make good progress
- the department is well resourced

Areas for improvement

- there is a need for a coherent system of monitoring to ensure consistency of good practice
- the use of performance data by subject teachers is not securely in place
- the use of information and communication technology needs developing as a tool for learning

150. Results in 2001 were well above the national average. All but a small minority of students achieved at least as well, and in many cases better, than their GCSE results predicted. Male and female students did equally well overall.

151. The standards of work of current students are at least at nationally expected levels and much is better than this. Students in Year 13 are achieving appropriately in relation to their attainment on entry to the course. The written work seen was a more positive indicator of their achievement than the work observed in lessons. Files seen were well organised and detailed, showing evidence of progress over time. The amount of assessed work varied from student to student but there was a good range of assignments developing different skills. Students in Year 12 are achieving satisfactorily. They show a thorough knowledge of basic language work and are beginning to approach texts with increased analytical and evaluative skills.

152. The assessment of written work seen for Year 12 and Year 13 students was variable. Comments on work were all encouraging and errors were corrected but in some cases there was little advice about how progress could be made. In the best practice seen, assessment was evaluative with clear guidance given about how to improve written work and raise the standard of attainment.

153. Teaching observed was satisfactory overall with some good features. Teachers have good subject knowledge and there is clear evidence of sound planning. Teaching is thorough but occasionally lacks some rigour. Lessons had a clear basic structure but the pace sometimes flagged and both small group and whole-class discussions varied from the focused and perceptive, to the more laboured. Relationships between students, and between them and staff, are good. Many students show their confidence in contributing their views and those who participate in class express themselves fluently and sometimes with considerable insight. In the lessons seen, not all participated, however, and while most were involved and attentive there was some digression in group activities. The quality of students' work over time, however, showed that teaching is effective and successful in enabling students to achieve well and attain high standards

154. Opportunities are given for different types of learning, in particular explanation by the teacher, class discussion based around clear questioning and small group work. In one lesson, students were examining closely a short scene from a David Hare play 'Murmuring Judges' Their group work led to a useful exchange of ideas in the subsequent plenary session.

155. The curriculum is well planned and resourced with schemes of work revised regularly. This course makes a very positive contribution to the development of Key Skills and to the social and cultural education of the students. Too little use is made of information and communication technology, however, as a learning tool within the department.

156. Leadership of the curriculum area is complex because of the roles of the two high school heads of department. The subject co-ordinator has produced clear and well-thought-out schemes of work and supports her colleagues well, but her role does not include monitoring, team building and development planning and these areas have been neglected as a consequence. Management although satisfactory, as measured by the outcomes for the students, is not as effective as it could be.

French

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

Strengths

- improved standards, which are now above the national average

- consistently good quality of teaching with very effective use of ICT
- very good curriculum planning and assessment
- students have very positive attitudes and a learning partnership with their teachers

Areas for improvement

- development planning should include a specific focus on raising standards
- the department needs to develop strategies to improve the recruitment of boys

157. The numbers of students taking A-level have fluctuated in recent years, but students' average points score in French has risen steadily to a level well above the national average in 2001. There has also been an improvement in the value added to students' attainment compared to their performance at GCSE. Half the students taking A-level French in 2000 and 2001 attained the higher grades A and B. All the students taking the examination in 2000 and 2001 were female. A large number of students, again predominantly female, sat the new AS-level examination in 2001: all but one were successful, though the majority attained grades C – E.

158. Standards of work seen during the inspection were above average. Students in Year 12 have successfully made the transition from GCSE to advanced study. In one lesson, they developed their understanding of the future tense through the lyrics of a contemporary song, which were both intellectually challenging and culturally stimulating. In another lesson, they prepared and conducted a debate on smoking which featured coherent and persuasive contributions from across the group. Their written work is of good quality, including substantial development of grammatical knowledge, response to a wide range of contemporary source material as well as more personal written response, including poetry. Year 13 students used a Maupassant short story to enhance their knowledge of narrative tense. Their written work is copious and very well organised, including extensive grammatical consolidation, and work on a wide range of social, moral and environmental topics. In one example, a presentation on the French theatre included material downloaded from the Comédie Française website. Other examples of good use of information and communication technology were seen.

159. The quality of teaching is consistently good. Teachers have high levels of personal skill and use a wide range of resources and strategies to engage and motivate students. Lessons are well planned and structured, with clear objectives. Teachers promote good learning by initiating good processes such as: interaction with, and analysis of, text; interpretation of data; discussion and debate. Students are encouraged to use French routinely. Assessment and marking of students' work, monitoring of their performance and review of their progress are particular strengths. Teachers have built a genuine learning partnership with their students based on knowledge of their strengths and needs.

160. Students have very positive attitudes to the subject. They apply themselves well, working constructively together and showing levels of interest and commitment which are appropriate to achieving success in advanced language study. It was evident in discussion with students that they enjoy the course.

161. The subject is well managed. Members of the teaching team are very clear as to their areas of responsibility for teaching the course. Standards are moderated through regular team meetings. The recent change of examination syllabus was based on an assessment of what would best correspond to students' interests and aptitudes. Curriculum planning in French is very good. The team has worked hard to create a topic resource base of very high quality and rich cultural content. This feeds into teaching and learning and has been a key agent in raising standards, promoting good learning and enhancing students' interest and motivation. Development planning is sound, but does not focus explicitly on raising standards. The very low uptake among boys – only one male student in the current Year 12 and 13 cohort – is a cause for concern. The department needs to devise strategies for improving recruitment of male linguists.

162. Since the last inspection, standards have improved and the quality of teaching has been maintained at a good level. The AS-level course has been successfully introduced. This is a strong department which has the capacity to maintain and develop its contribution to the college's success.