

INSPECTION REPORT

THE BECKET RC SCHOOL

Wilford, Nottingham

Nottinghamshire

Unique reference number: 122896

Headteacher: Mr A J Glover

Reporting inspector: Christine Ryan
12934

Dates of inspection: 26 – 29 November 2001

Inspection number: 243354

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

© Crown copyright 2002

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that all extracts quoted are reproduced verbatim without adaptation and on condition that the source and date thereof are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the School Inspections Act 1996, the school must provide a copy of this report and/or its summary free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Voluntary aided

Age range of pupils: 11 to 18

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Ruddington Lane
Wilford
Nottingham

Postcode: NG11 7DL

Telephone number: 0115 981 7742

Fax number: 0115 981 7717

Appropriate authority: The governing body

Name of chair of governors: Reverend G. Woodall

Date of previous inspection: March 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

| Team members | | | Subject responsibilities (sixth form) | Aspect responsibilities (sixth form) |
|--------------|----------------|----------------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| 12934 | Christine Ryan | Registered inspector | | Results and students' achievements Teaching and learning The effectiveness of leadership and management in the sixth form |
| 14214 | Gillian Smith | Lay inspector | | Students' attitudes, values and personal development |
| 30576 | Peter Bannon | Team inspector | Mathematics | |
| 11838 | Derek Cronin | Team inspector | French | The school's care for its students |
| 10561 | Angela Fraser | Team inspector | Biology Chemistry | |
| 12331 | Vera Grigg | Team inspector | Design and technology Geography | |
| 23080 | Robert Isaac | Team inspector | English | |
| 24127 | Jim Kidd | Team inspector | History | |
| 10010 | George Wallace | Team inspector | Economics | Curricular and other opportunities for students |

The inspection contractor was:
TWA INSPECTIONS LIMITED
5 Lakeside
Werrington
Peterborough
Cambridgeshire
PE4 6QZ

Any concerns or complaints about the inspection or the report should be raised with the inspection contractor. Complaints that are not satisfactorily resolved by the contractor should be raised with OFSTED by writing to:

The Complaints Manager
Inspection Quality Division
The Office for Standards in Education
Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

REPORT CONTENTS

| | Page |
|---|-----------|
| PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT | 6 |
| Information about the school | |
| How good the school is | |
| What the school does well | |
| What could be improved | |
| How the school has improved since its last inspection | |
| Standards | |
| Pupils' attitudes and values | |
| Teaching and learning | |
| Other aspects of the school | |
| How well the school is led and managed | |
| Parents' and carers' views of the school | |
| ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM | |
| PART B: COMMENTARY | |
| WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL | 13 |
| WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED | 19 |
| WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER? | 21 |
| PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS | 22 |
| PART D: THE SIXTH FORM | 27 |
| RESULTS AND STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS | 27 |
| STUDENTS' ATTITUDES, VALUES AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT | 27 |
| TEACHING AND LEARNING | 28 |
| CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS | 28 |
| THE SCHOOL'S CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS | 29 |
| THE EFFECTIVENESS OF LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT IN THE SIXTH FORM | 30 |
| PART E: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM | 32 |

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

The Becket School is an 11-18 mixed voluntary aided Roman Catholic comprehensive school serving a wide catchment area. It is very popular and heavily oversubscribed: for 2001 there were 270 applications for 166 places. The school draws pupils from a broad range of socio-economic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is around the national average at 11 per cent. The school is located on two sites (1.5 miles apart). Years 7-10 are based at Main School and Years 11-13 are based at Upper School, but pupils and students have to travel to the other site for certain subjects.

The school has 1029 pupils on roll (514 boys; 515 girls), of which 187 (94 males; 93 females) are in the sixth form. Pupil numbers are a little higher than the average nationally and are higher than at the time of the previous inspection (982). This places a considerable burden on the limited accommodation, and the average room occupancy is 82 per cent. The school also successfully recruits sixth form students from other schools.

The percentage of pupils identified as having special education needs is below the national average – though in Years 7-11 they represent 21.3 per cent of all pupils. The percentage of pupils with statements of special educational need, at 0.1 per cent, is well below the national average (2.5 per cent). The proportion of pupils that come from ethnic minority backgrounds is a little higher than average (7.4 per cent), as is the percentage of pupils speaking English as an additional language (3 per cent). The school has one refugee pupil from Rwanda.

The profile of pupils' attainment on entry to the school is a little higher than average. The standards of pupils joining the school in Year 7 were average for English, and above average in both mathematics and science. Very few pupils leave the school other than at the usual points of change. Over half of pupils from Year 11 stay on into the school's sixth form, and of these, over three-quarters continue into further and higher education after the age of 18.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

The Becket School is a very effective school with several excellent features. Leadership by the headteacher, the governors and management team is an outstanding strength, supporting the very good teaching in the school. Standards at GCSE are well above average and achievement throughout the school is high, relative to the attainment of pupils on entry in Year 7. Sixth form results are above average in most subjects. The school has improved upon the high standards found in the last inspection. It provides a very good quality of education in a cost-effective way, and gives good value for money in both the main school and the sixth form.

What the school does well

- Standards and pupils' achievements are high in lessons and examinations: national test and examination results are well above average.
- Pupils' learning is very good because teaching is very good. There are examples of very good teaching in almost all subjects.
- Pupils' behaviour and personal development are very good.
- The curriculum throughout the school is very well matched to learners' needs and strongly reflects the school's mission statement.
- Personal and academic support and guidance are very good.
- The leadership of the headteacher, key staff and governing body is excellent: it inspires both students and staff to do well.

What could be improved

- Accommodation, which limits opportunities, for example, in English, mathematics, design & technology, modern languages and history.
- Pupils' access to information and communication technology is not sufficient to meet their needs, especially in Years 7 to 9.
- There is no register of pupils with English as an additional language; as a result their specific needs are not readily identified.

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

The school's strengths far outweigh its few weaknesses.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made good improvement since the last inspection in March 1997. GCSE results have improved at a faster rate than nationally, as have national test results for pupils' aged fourteen. The good standard of teaching has improved to be very good overall. Teachers' expectations are consistently high resulting in more challenging opportunities for pupils' learning. A comprehensive programme of personal and social education has been established which provides a sound basis for the very good behaviour and personal development of pupils. The curriculum has been reviewed resulting in improved provision for information technology and frequent appraisal of sixth form courses to ensure their suitability for students' needs. Governors have worked hard to improve the accommodation with success in many areas, for example food technology, art, music and science. Despite their best efforts, and for reasons beyond their control, accommodation remains a problem because of high student numbers and the constraints of a split site. The length of the taught week has been increased, though it remains below the national recommendation; teaching time is used very effectively.

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 |
| | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2000 |
| GCSE examinations | A | A | A | A |
| A-levels/AS-levels | A | A | A | |

Key

well above average A

above average B

average C

below average D

well below average E

The table shows that pupils and students achieve consistently very good standards in GCSE, AS and A level examinations. Pupils make very good progress up to the end of Year 9, by which time they achieve standards in the core subjects (English, mathematics and science) that are well above the average, placing them about one year ahead of most pupils nationally. Results in English and mathematics are in the highest 5 per cent relative to similar schools, with science a little below this.

Pupils continue to make rapid progress in Years 10 and 11 and their results at GCSE are well above the average nationally. The proportion gaining five subjects at the highest grades A*-C is well above both the national average and that found in similar schools. Results are particularly high in English, mathematics, modern languages, geography, double award science, and design and technology. Boys' achievements in English are far ahead of those found in most schools. Girls, whilst also achieving above national averages in most subjects, have performed relatively less well in science and mathematics than boys. Pupils with special educational needs also make good progress and this is reflected in their attainment in national tests and examinations. Standards of literacy are notably good throughout the school and reflect the well-organised drive to improve literacy in all subjects. Standards of numeracy are also good.

Results for GCE A level and AS level have remained well above the national and local averages for the past three years. Results in 2000 were particularly high in art and design, geography, and mathematics. In comparison with their earlier GCSE results, students achieve well above what might be expected and by this measure place the school in the top 25 per cent of schools nationally. Most students make rapid progress in the sixth form.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

| Aspect | Comment |
|--|--|
| Attitudes to the school | Very good. Pupils are keen to succeed, interested in what they do and are proud of their achievements. |
| Behaviour, in and out of classrooms | Pupils behave very well during lessons and around the school. Rare incidents of bullying are effectively managed. |
| Personal development and relationships | Personal and social skills are very well developed. Sixth form students develop mature attitudes towards their work and others. Relationships are very good. |
| Attendance | Satisfactory. Lessons start promptly and no time is wasted. |

Pupils' very good attitudes and behaviour, together with their very good learning skills, help them to do well in lessons. They show high levels of motivation and concentrate well for extended periods. Relationships among all groups are very good; they respect each other's feelings and values.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

| Teaching of pupils: | Years 7 – 9 | Years 10 – 11 | Years 12 – 13 |
|---------------------|-------------|---------------|---------------|
| Quality of teaching | Very good | Very good | Very good |

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

Teaching and learning are very good overall; almost all lessons were satisfactory or better. In more than eight out of 10 lessons, teaching was judged to be good or better; in more than half it was very good or excellent. Only one unsatisfactory lesson, in Year 9, was seen during the inspection. The quality of learning is supported by the very good attitudes and behaviour of pupils and students. Examples of very good teaching occur in most subjects in Years 7 to 11, particularly in English, mathematics, science, history, and modern languages. In the sixth form very good teaching was seen in almost all subjects inspected in depth. Teaching across the curriculum emphasises the development of pupils' skills in spoken and written English, resulting in high standards overall. Numeracy is systematically developed in mathematics, and pupils are helped to solve mathematical problems in other subjects as they arise. Good use is made of information and communication technology (ICT) in some subjects, for example, in sixth form French where Internet sources provide up-to-date information for students. Most lessons are conducted at an appropriately brisk pace so that pupils and students make full use of the time available. Teachers use a wide variety of methods to interest and motivate their students; their enthusiasm, good subject knowledge, and evident care for pupils establish an atmosphere of high expectations in which pupils are eager to succeed. Teaching in ICT was very good in the small sample of lessons seen, but its impact is limited because pupils do not have enough chance to use their skills in other subjects. Homework is set regularly and is well chosen to extend pupils' knowledge and understanding.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

| Aspect | Comment |
|---|--|
| The quality and range of the curriculum | The school offers a well-planned curriculum that reflects its commitment to meet the needs of all its pupils. The sixth form offers a strong academic range of subjects that acknowledge the school's strengths and the needs of its students. |
| Provision for pupils with special educational needs | Good. The thorough approach meets pupils' needs effectively. |
| Provision for pupils with English as an additional language | Satisfactory overall. The school does not have a register of pupils with English as an additional language. Some pupils are identified through special educational needs procedures and the support they receive is generally good. |
| Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | Very good. High priority is given to pupils' personal development through lessons, extra-curricular activities and links with the wider community. They have a clear sense of right and wrong and respect other people's values and beliefs. |
| How well the school cares for its pupils | The school cares for its pupils very well. It has effective practices for monitoring pupils' achievement, attendance, and behaviour. In the sixth form, monitoring of students' academic progress is excellent. Pupils and students feel valued and supported; they are well represented by the student council. |

Religious education and the content of Collective Worship were inspected separately under Section 23 of the School Inspections Act.

There is a well-established emphasis on literacy throughout the main school, which has provided very effective support for pupils in all their subjects. A good range of GCSE subjects, along with vocational and other award courses, provide the flexibility necessary for pupils of all abilities. Extra-curricular provision is very good and reflects the school's values and aims: the Year 7 residential visit quickly helps new pupils to bond with the rest of the school community. Sixth form students have a good choice of AS and A level subjects with a range of enrichment activities, including community service and first aid. Pupils' and students' personal development is a focus across the curriculum and is partly responsible for the excellent relationships within the school. However, provision for specific

lessons in personal and social education and ICT is limited by the lower than average teaching time.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

| Aspect | Comment |
|--|--|
| Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff | The leadership of the headteacher, key staff and governing body is excellent. There is an ethos of openness in decision making and good opportunities for all staff to participate in establishing the priorities for development. |
| How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities | Governors provide excellent support and contribute very effectively to school improvement. They supply considerable expertise and share a commitment to high quality in all aspects of school life. |
| The school's evaluation of its performance | Monitoring and evaluation are very thorough and have led to obvious improvements in teaching and learning. There is a very clear link between evaluation and planning for future development. |
| The strategic use of resources | Excellent overall. For example, investment in a national teaching and learning project has raised standards throughout the school. |

Excellent leadership has supported the further raising of standards. There is a clear commitment to continuous improvement. All staff contribute to the happy and high achieving ethos of the school. Excellent use is made of available resources and identified priorities are carefully linked to the professional development needs of staff. The school seeks best value at all times. The accommodation presents specific difficulties, but costs are kept to a minimum.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

| What pleases parents most | What parents would like to see improved |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expectations are high • Progress is good • Teaching is good • Their children like the school | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The information they receive about progress • Homework which is sometimes too much • Extra-curricular opportunities • The way in which the school works with parents |

Almost all responses to the questionnaire and at the parents' meeting were positive. The inspection findings support parents' favourable views. Many parents commented on the difficulties presented by the nature of the school buildings, confirmed during the inspection, but also recognised that these are outside the school's control. Some parents, particularly those of Year 7 pupils, felt that the summer term meeting with teachers to discuss their children's progress was too late in the school year. The inspection supported parents' views. However, current Year 7 parents will have an earlier opportunity for discussion, as well as a progress report after the first term. Inspectors observed that the setting of homework followed the school's guidance and was useful. Sometimes though, in their enthusiasm to do well, pupils spend more time on homework than is required. The inspection found that a good range of extra-curricular activities is provided, including visits and special events.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form of this 11-18 comprehensive school has 187 students and is expanding. There are a very small number of minority ethnic students, who speak English well. The school recognises its strengths and those of other local providers in the courses that it offers. It provides a wide range of academic subjects leading to GCE Advanced Subsidiary (AS) and Advanced (A) level examinations. An Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) in information and communication technology is also available. More than half the students from Year 11 continue into the sixth form, and an increasing number of students join from other schools. The school's examination results are well above average and most students embark on two-year programmes leading to A level.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The sixth form is very successful and cost-effective. Students learn very well and achieve well ahead of expectations nationally in relation to their attainment at GCSE. Leadership by the sixth form management team is excellent and supports the very good teaching. The high standards found in the last inspection have been maintained and the sixth form provides a high quality of education for all its students.

Strengths

- Students achieve very good examination results overall: they are well above average in A level geography, art and design, and good in AS mathematics, biology, and chemistry.
- Teaching is very good: it is well planned and uses a wide range of methods to engage and motivate students. As a result, students' achievements are high.
- Students are mature and confident: they support each other and play an active part in the school community.
- Procedures for assessing students' attainment and progress are excellent. They receive very good support and guidance.
- Leadership and management of the sixth form are a strength of the school: there is a clear emphasis on improvement through meeting the needs of all students.

What could be improved

- The range of provision for those students who spend only one year in the sixth form.
- The range and quality of books in the upper school library, and the availability of librarian assistance.

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 |
|-------------------|--|
| English | Very good. Examination results are broadly in line with national averages and the proportion gaining the highest grades A and B is a little above average. Teaching is very good. |
| Mathematics | Very good. Results are good, with the proportion at higher grades well above the national average. Teaching is very good overall. |
| Biology | Very good. Standards are above average and examination results for AS level are well above average. Teaching and learning are very good. |
| Chemistry | Very good. Standards are above average and examination results for AS level are well above average. Teaching and learning are very good. |
| Geography | Excellent. Standards are very high and students achieve very well. Teaching is very good and motivates students to achieve high standards. |
| Design technology | Very good. Examination results are above average. Teaching is very good overall. |
| Economics | Good. Standards are above average. Teaching is consistently good. |
| French | Very good. GCE A level results are above the national average; almost half of students gained A or B grades in 2001. Teaching is very good, and based on high expectations. |
| History | Very good. Examination results are above national averages, with more than half of students gaining higher grades A or B in 2001. Very high quality teaching is characterised by impressive subject knowledge and high expectations. |

Work was also sampled in art, German and information technology (IT). Teaching was never less than good and lessons in which teaching was very good were seen in German and IT.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

| Aspect | Comment |
|--|---|
| How well students are guided and supported | Very good quality support and guidance is maintained through Years 12 and 13. The two-day induction programme provides good initial preparation and students are actively involved in action planning for their progress to A level and beyond. Guidance for university entrance is excellent. Careers guidance is good, but occurs rather late in the lower sixth programme for those who leave at the end of Year 12. Monitoring of academic progress is excellent and students are set clear and realistic targets that motivate them. |
| Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form | Leadership and management are excellent. Provision is frequently reviewed to ensure that it meets pupils' varied needs and there is a strong focus on improvements in teaching and learning. Performance is carefully evaluated and effective steps taken to overcome weaknesses. The governing body plays an active part in planning for improvement and in supporting the sixth form. |

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

| What students like about the sixth form | What they feel could be improved |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teachers are accessible for help• School helps students to settle in• Good teaching and challenge• Work is thoroughly assessed | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Schools' response to students' views• Treatment of students as young adults• Advice and information about future options• Information about progress, and support with personal problems |

Students think highly of the school and enjoy life in the sixth form. They are particularly appreciative of the guidance and support they receive and the high quality of teaching. The many strengths identified by the students were confirmed during the inspection. A minority of responses to the questionnaire expressed some concerns about the schools' response to students' growing maturity and independence, in that their work and behaviour were monitored too closely. Inspectors did not find evidence to support these concerns. Students are given many opportunities to demonstrate their increasing maturity, they have an effective school council and they are strongly encouraged to become independent learners. Relationships with staff are very good.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Standards and pupils' achievements are high in lessons and examinations: national test and examination results are well above average

- 1 Pupils and students achieve highly at the Becket School. Results in the last three years for the General Certificate of Education (GCSE) have been well above the national average and are high when compared with pupils in similar schools. Results have improved since the previous inspection, in line with the national trend. National test results for 14-year olds are also well above the average. They show that very good progress has been made when account is taken of pupils' attainment on entry to the school in Year 7 (slightly above average overall). The school's target for GCSE, of 62 per cent passes at grades A*-C, was much higher than the LEA average. It was significantly exceeded this year and the school has set an even more challenging target for 2002. Examination results for the sixth form, described in more detail in the annex to this report, are also well above national averages.

- 2 In the 2000 National Curriculum tests for the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, pupils' performances at age 14 were well above the nationally expected standards. Pupils' results in English and mathematics were in the top 5 per cent when compared with similar schools. GCSE results show a similar pattern, with results over the last three years that have been well above the national average. Boys' achievements in English are far ahead of those found in most schools and they are obtaining similar results in examinations to those of girls, contrary to the national trend. Girls' performance in science and mathematics was relatively lower than that of boys in national tests at 14, and in GCSE and A level examinations. However, in lessons during the inspection there was no difference in achievement between girls and boys. In almost all other subjects, pupils' GCSE results are above the national averages. In 2000, results were particularly good in English, mathematics, double award science, design and technology, French, German and geography. Results were below average in just two subjects: biology and religious studies. However, both improved substantially in 2001. Pupils with special educational needs also make good progress, which is reflected in their attainment in national tests and examinations. Gifted and talented students make rapid progress in the sixth form and do very well.

- 3 Standards of literacy and numeracy are also notably good throughout the school. The National Literacy Strategy was introduced in Year 7 three years ago, and since then pupils' literacy skills have improved significantly. High standards of reading and writing, as well as discussion, support productive learning in most subjects throughout the whole school. Pupils use personal notebooks to develop their own subject dictionaries as an aid to learning. On the evidence of lessons and work inspected, English is above average because of good teaching that places an emphasis on literacy. For example, pupils in Years 10 and 11 write confidently about Shakespeare and use apt quotations to support their ideas. Pupils read and write confidently, and express their ideas clearly in discussion. In a Year 12 English lesson, students engaged in vigorous discussion about characters from Jane Austen's novel Emma, clearly identifying Austen's underlying comments on social hierarchies of the day.

- 4 The development of pupils' numeracy skills is encouraged in most subjects, though it does not yet have the focus given to literacy. Pupils demonstrate agility in mental arithmetic and they handle statistical information well. Their use of these methods and a range of other numeracy skills underpin their learning across the curriculum. Pupils and students confidently use formulae to solve problems and communicate information in charts, tables and graphs. The high standards in mathematics arise from the teachers' high expectations and the variety of teaching methods they use. Pupils are encouraged to work together and to present their solutions to the rest of the class; this builds their confidence and reinforces their learning.
- 5 In science, pupils acquire a wide range of scientific knowledge and show a good grasp of basic ideas. By the sixth form they can discuss and explain complex scientific issues. The high standards in science spring from the very good teaching and pupils good literacy and numeracy skills. This enables them to record and interpret results from their investigations accurately and to discuss their findings confidently with the rest of the class. A sense of fun is incorporated into the purposeful working atmosphere found in most lessons.
- 6 The school now sets challenging targets for attainment and pupils of all ages and abilities achieve well. Pupils with special educational needs achieve at least as well as expected for their abilities and often beyond this. The great majority of pupils who do not speak English as their first language are sufficiently fluent to play a full part in lessons.

Pupils' learning is very good because teaching is very good. There are examples of very good teaching in almost all subjects

- 7 Teaching and learning are very good at Becket School. The school has clearly benefited from its involvement in the national project, 'Improvement in Quality of Education for All' (IQEA) and has seen standards rise as a result. In all but one lesson seen during the inspection teaching was satisfactory or better. In more than eight out of 10 lessons teaching was good or better and in more than half of these it was very good or excellent. Teaching has improved further since the high standard reported at the last inspection. The quality of learning follows a similar pattern and is supported by the very good attitudes and behaviour of pupils and students. Examples of very good teaching occur in most subjects in Years 7 to 11, particularly in English, mathematics, science, history, and modern languages. In the sixth form, very good teaching was seen in eight of the nine subjects inspected in depth. It was predominantly very good or excellent in design and technology, modern languages, geography, history, mathematics, biology and chemistry.
- 8 The most striking feature of the very good teaching is the consistency with which it is found across the school from Years 7 to 13 and in all subject areas. Teachers' use their very good subject knowledge to plan lessons carefully, so that all pupils have good opportunities to participate. A brisk pace is quickly established and the teachers' high expectations result in high achievement from pupils. This was clearly the case in a mathematics lesson in Year 7 when the class learned about equivalencies between fractions, decimals and percentages as a result of being constantly pushed forward by the eager and supportive teaching. Lively and enthusiastic approaches engage pupils and stimulate their interest, and very good relationships give pupils confidence in working with their peers and independently. For example, in Year 13 mathematics the skilful guidance of the teacher encouraged students to experiment with theories in calculus until they deduced the correct rule for themselves. In the single instance of unsatisfactory teaching, in Year 9, the

weakness lay in poor management of the lesson so that it lacked the pace and involvement necessary for a high achieving group. Class teachers know their pupils well and usually set work at the right level for all pupils. Pupils with special educational needs do well in relation to their prior attainment as a result of the good support they receive. Subject teachers are careful to provide suitable help for the small number of pupils at the early stages of learning to speak English. For example, in mathematics, an extra lesson is provided each week for a sixth form student who joined the school from the former Soviet Union.

- 9 Pupils and students are given clear information on how they are progressing in their work and about what they need to do to improve. In Year 10 history, for example, the teacher helped pupils to assess the quality of each others work on changes to medical practice. This focussed their thinking on how to improve. Procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and progress are very good overall, and are excellent in post-16 mathematics, geography, and French. Students benefit from the detailed feedback on their work given by teachers and from the setting of targets for improvement. Self-assessment is an integral part of monitoring progress in the sixth form.

Pupils' behaviour and personal development are very good

- 10 The school makes its commitment to pupils' and students' personal success very clear. The mission statement emphasises the value placed on recognising each person's individual contribution and developing the talents that each brings to the community. This vision is shared by all involved and is readily acknowledged by parents, pupils and students.
- 11 During the inspection a few lessons in personal social, and health education were observed. From these, and from discussions with pupils, it is clear that pupils are helped to understand issues that affect their well-being and helped in making informed decisions about their futures. At the time of the inspection a group of Year 11 pupils were discussing the complex difficulties experienced by children with Asperger's syndrome and autism. The teachers' skilful and sensitive explanations helped them to appreciate the need for care and compassion of those with disabilities. Pupils' confidence in expressing their views was evident in this and all other lessons. Careers education, work experience, direct contact with industry, and numerous educational visits all help pupils in understanding their place in society. Behaviour in and around the two sites is very good: pupils do not abuse the trust placed in them and are noticeably friendly and helpful to visitors.
- 12 The school's provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. The headteacher, staff and governors are successful in meeting the spirit of the school's mission statement. Each department has interpreted that mission statement in its handbook to establish how the school's central philosophy can be at the centre of daily work in each subject. Working together, teachers create an ethos of teamwork and mutual respect. The sense of shared respect between teachers and students comes out particularly strongly at times. In English, for example, teachers value students' opinions when they consider the issues surrounding religion and superstition in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.
- 13 Teachers help students to gain a greater awareness of the wonders of the world through science lessons where they study atomic structures and write as if they were atoms. Students have also gained substantially in their spiritual development through school visits to Berlin where they visited Nazi concentration camps and

talked with the relatives of victims. This deeper understanding of man's inhumanity to man has also occurred in visits to the battlefield sites of the Great War, when students stood at the Mennen Gate and read the names of the Fallen. In art studies, students have learned more about life and death in their project work on the philosophy of Ecclesiastes in the Old Testament. Their artistic responses to this are full of impact, and reach high standards not just in representational detail but also in the achievement of a haunting, mystical quality.

- 14 In studies of modern languages, students build a greater knowledge of the world through their use of informative and up-to-date websites. This enabled them, for example, to have a current view of French reactions to the September 11th terrorist outrage in New York and to engage in vigorous debate as a result. Students of German at GCE A-Level are similarly advantaged in the use of this resource and their work and knowledge of international affairs are significantly improved. Religious education and other subjects in the curriculum, such as classical studies and history, help students to reflect upon the lives, the feelings and beliefs of others. These can range from explorations of the symbolism of Jesus as the Light of the World to discussions in Year 11 English classes on the nature of love, in which students refer easily to the different kinds of love identified by the Ancient Greeks. Teachers help students tackle low self-esteem by taking a positive attitude to all their achievements, celebrating them in a variety of ways. Teachers and other adults show concern for pupils and students welfare in their everyday dealings with them. The school has recently appointed two teachers as pastoral coordinators for the sixth form, which has further strengthened student support. Most pupils and students feel valued members of the school community.
- 15 Acts of collective worship are often thoughtful times. Teachers use themes to help pupils and students reflect upon their experiences and they provide wholesome and assured role models. The virtue of being charitable is constantly emphasised through support for the work of organisations such as The Catholic Fund for Overseas Development and the National Blood Donor Service. Teachers also reinforce the value of taking responsibility for oneself and others in a very positive way. The value of prayer and reflection are given added significance by residential visits to Catholic retreats in the locality and in Berkshire. Up to 50 students attend fortnightly masses in the school's chapel and there is a sixth form prayer group.
- 16 Teachers promote moral education very well throughout the school. They highlight simple moral values, which permeate the school's life. They help students to make good decisions based squarely upon the principles, which distinguish right from wrong. School rules and systems are used to remind students what is expected of them and as such contribute effectively to their moral development. Students also gain a sense of right and wrong through home school agreements. Teachers discuss how to act considerately with pupils in assemblies and in the Student Council. The Student Council enables pupils to raise ideas and to have them discussed with staff. Evidence of its effectiveness was seen when pupils' request for girls to be allowed to wear trousers was debated and agreed by the school.
- 17 Teachers provide many opportunities for students' social development. The variety of school visits helps students to relate positively to one another, and their teachers. They learn how to adjust their behaviour to suit different occasions, and how self-discipline is important to academic achievement. During lessons there are many opportunities for students to work collaboratively, as well as in competition. The school helps students develop a sense of responsibility through the appointment of peer mentors in chemistry, and in the sixth form as helpers for Year 7 reading. The involvement of pupils and students in the appointment of head boy and head girl, as

well as representatives of the student council, also helps pupils and students to become more mature. It gives them a voice in decision-making, and a greater understanding of school issues. Pupils demonstrate their sense of responsibility through the assistance they give at school events, such as the senior citizens Christmas party. Students show much interest in human rights and debate issues arising from the work of Amnesty International. In an inclusive way, the school takes account of those from other faiths and those with no faith.

- 18 Teachers create very good opportunities to raise students' awareness of their own cultural heritage and that of others. The curriculum in subjects such as history, geography, and religious education enables students to become aware of the traditions of different world cultures and faiths. A particularly good example is found in history lessons when students are given carefully planned opportunities to truly understand the motivations of world leaders from the past. The parent teachers' association also contributes to improving students' awareness of other cultures. For example, last year they held a Caribbean evening of food, music, dance, and drama last year. The Becket Extravaganza held each March has included Irish dancing, and staff and pupils have joined in performance. Pupils and students have enjoyed learning more about special places of worship, such as progressive and reformed synagogues. They have the opportunity to experience the culture of contemporary Britain and the school promotes multicultural understanding and racial tolerance positively. Visitors further enrich provision, for instance, when Chinese, South or North American students join the sixth form or when South American lecturers from Nottingham University have shared their educational experiences with students. International visits to Calais, Berlin, and Cologne help to further develop pupils and students' cultural, social and linguistic understanding.

The curriculum throughout the school is very well matched to learners' needs and strongly reflects the schools mission statement

- 19 The values of the school form the starting point for the curriculum it offers. There is a strong commitment to the inclusion of all pupils, taking account of their varied life experiences and needs. In the drive to ensure that all pupils work to the full extent of their competence, teachers give up much of their free time to provide extra lessons and other forms of enrichment. There are good links with the partner primary schools, which makes the transition into senior school easier for pupils. In Years 7 to 9, pupils are offered a broad range of subjects including, for most pupils, two modern foreign languages. For others, a general classics course is available which enhances literacy, social and historical awareness, and study skills. ICT is taught through the subjects of the curriculum, but does not occur in timetabled lessons. This does not provide a sufficiently consistent experience for all pupils and the variations in the teaching of ICT have an adverse impact on their attainment.
- 20 In Years 10 and 11, the school works hard to fulfil the potential of all pupils by offering flexibility in the courses available. In addition to the subjects of the national curriculum, there are a number of other courses for those who need extra support or who wish to follow a less academic programme. There is a wide range of options in science, including 'Science at Work', a certificated course in place of GCSE. Some pupils with special educational needs follow a national youth award scheme and, in Year 11, there are part-time college placements for vocational courses. Care is taken to ensure that pupils with special educational needs are well taught and receive appropriate support. A full programme of personal and social education is in place. There are timetabled lessons for it in Year 7, but later in the school it is taught through form time and occasional suspension of the usual timetable. Whilst the

school continues to fall short of the recommended teaching time, this is not having an adverse impact except in the time available for separate lessons in ICT and PSHE. The school continues to explore ways of extending work in these areas.

- 21 Sixth form students follow a predominantly academic curriculum with lessons in general studies, which incorporate key skills. They also have the option of taking a vocational course in ICT. The basic curriculum is considerably enriched by a wide range of extra-curricular activities.
- 22 The school actively seeks ways to improve its provision and has been involved in a number of projects aimed at raising the achievement of specific groups of pupils. These projects include the 'First in Family' project, supporting students whose parents do not have a university background; and a joint project with Nottingham University for improving achievement of Black and Asian pupils. Extra-curricular provision in both the upper and lower schools is very good and is greatly appreciated by the many pupils who take part in activities. For example, the Year 7 residential visit is very popular and works very successfully in helping new pupils to integrate into the school.

Personal and academic support and guidance are very good

- 23 The level of care for pupils is very good because of the integrated way in which teachers, pupils, parents, and the wider community work with each other. A comprehensive network of support in the school ensures that pupils are well known to their teachers and are confident with them. Parents, pupils and students feel that teachers have their best interests at heart. The school has very good procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and progress and these procedures are effectively used to provide pupils with relevant targets. Celebration of achievement is central to the school's positive ethos and is publicly acknowledged through awards for attainment, effort, good attendance, and overall contributions to the school. The discipline policy and behaviour guidelines emphasise rewarding positive achievement. When sanctions have to be applied as a result of poor behaviour, a support programme is also put in place so that positive conduct can be quickly acknowledged and rewarded.
- 24 As well as the guidance provided by form tutors, year managers and heads of year, pupils also benefit from the support given by the parish priest, the school nurse, and learning support assistants. Appropriate outside agencies, such as the Careers Service, are also involved as required. The General Council, consisting of pastoral staff and led by senior management, is very effective in monitoring and evaluating the support that the school provides.

The leadership of the headteacher, key staff and governing body is excellent: it inspires both students and staff to do well

- 25 The governors responded quickly to comments about the short-term nature of plans for the school's development raised in the last report and made all necessary improvements. They work effectively through a well-managed committee structure, fulfil all their statutory duties, and have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The school development plan provides an overview to 2003, with detailed and specific priorities identified to 2002. Plans from the previous cycle are carefully evaluated for their effectiveness before new plans are produced.

Development planning is now a strength of the school's leadership. It demonstrates the very clear sense of direction that permeates all documentation.

- 26 The relationship between governors, the headteacher and other managers is characterised by the supportive, but challenging dialogue that takes place both formally and informally. Development plans focus on celebrating the Catholic ethos of the school, improving standards through better teaching and learning, responding to national priorities, and securing new school buildings. There is a strong sense of continuous improvement throughout the school, which, whilst recognising that the accommodation is not ideal, does not allow it to constrain expectations. Since joining the school less than two years ago the headteacher has been the driving force behind improvements in the monitoring of teaching and pupils achievement. This has been achieved through establishing a climate of frank and open dialogue between all staff and the senior management. A range of monitoring and strategy groups, such as the Academic Council, the IQEA team, and the General Council, form a clear network for sharing ideas, evaluating progress and supporting change. The carefully interlocking system of meetings has overlapping membership and senior management representation. In this way, all levels of staff contribute to the development of policy and practice. The management of the school is therefore a corporate enterprise in which all share a common purpose and commitment to excellence, and to pupils' well-being. Overall, there is a strong team effort evident in all aspects of school life, which is underpinned by excellent leadership.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Accommodation, which limits opportunities in English, mathematics, design & technology, modern languages and history

- 27 The school is popular and heavily over-subscribed. At the last inspection, the constraints imposed by the present two sites were highlighted. Since then pupil numbers have grown further and the attendant problems remain. The whole school community has been involved over a number of years in trying to secure a single site for a new school building but so far without success. There is currently a planning application under consideration by the local authority, but in the meantime the school is designated as being in temporary accommodation. This restricts the funds that can be accessed for any substantial improvements, which could not in turn be easily transferred to a new site.
- 28 Governors have acted to improve facilities where possible, for example, by upgrading the specialist science and food technology facilities, and by improving provision for physical education. The school is very imaginative in its use of available space and maintains a good standard of cleanliness and acceptable levels of decoration and repair. The improvements have been achieved within strict budgets, which take account of the 'temporary' nature of present buildings. Nevertheless, significant shortcomings remain which pose numerous day-to-day restrictions on the way in which the school is able to provide for its students and pupils. The new premises are urgently needed in order to allow the current high standards to be maintained and further improved.
- 29 During the inspection, conditions were unsuitable in several lessons. In English, the scattered nature of the teaching rooms means that teachers often have to transport the necessary resources and some Year 12 mathematics lessons are affected by noise from an adjoining canteen. Sixth form design and technology students are

restricted in their access to equipment because of its high usage by Years 7-11 and its location in the main school buildings away from the sixth form site. This makes it difficult for them to work on projects in their own time, which affects the quality of the finished products. Other subjects also report cramped and unsuitable conditions, for example modern languages, and history. Science has too few laboratories to accommodate all lessons. As a consequence, some lessons are conducted in classrooms where experimental work is rarely possible. During the previous summer a part of the sixth form common room was sectioned off to provide necessary office space for staff, leaving students with less free space for unsupervised work and socialising. Discussions with students during the inspection revealed that practical difficulties arising from the accommodation are a considerable influence when deciding upon which subjects to study in the sixth form. Around both the upper and lower school buildings there is a general lack of storage space and teaching staff often have to move resources from one room to another.

- 30 It is of considerable credit to both staff and pupils that movement around and between both sites is conducted in an orderly and responsible way, with the minimum of fuss. Standards of attainment overall have not been adversely affected by the poor accommodation. This is because of the dedication of the teachers and their willingness to adjust their lessons to the constraints they face. Nevertheless, there is an urgent need for new building so that provision for pupils can continue to improve and develop as planned.

Pupils' use of information and communications technology across the subjects of the curriculum is not sufficient to meet their needs, especially in Years 7 to 9

- 31 Changes in the management of ICT have brought about improvements since the last inspection and new hardware and software has been purchased. Each department now has an ICT representative who oversees the provision of ICT within their subject area and contributes to decision making within the school's ICT strategy group. There is one technician, who provides good support, but the head of department is only available to teach ICT part-time. The improvements so far have not been rapid enough to raise standards sufficiently for all pupils, and attainment for pupils in Years 7 to 9 remains below average. These pupils do not have separate lessons in ICT but instead rely upon the incorporation of ICT into other subjects of the curriculum. Whilst ICT is well taught in some departments, for example, in English, mathematics, modern languages and geography, the programme offered in other subjects is not so refined and the quality of teaching is less good. This leads to an inconsistency in provision which adversely affects pupils' achievements.
- 32 Provision in Years 10 and 11 is better than in the lower school as pupils may take a short course which enables them to meet the expected standard for their age, and about a third of Year 11 take this option. In the sixth form, IT is offered through the AVCE course, though it is not offered as an A level subject. These students, though, have greater opportunities than other pupils to use computers during independent study, as well as during lessons, and their ICT skills are satisfactory.
- 33 Teaching overall, particularly in specific ICT lessons, is good. Pupils show great enthusiasm for their work in ICT, but the computer room in the lower school is cramped and pupils access to computers elsewhere is limited. The numbers of available computers is below the national average. Overall, pupils do not get sufficient opportunities to develop their skills to an appropriate standard for their age.

There is no register of pupils with English as an additional language; as a result their specific needs are not readily identified.

- 34 There is no separate register for pupils learning English, though some are listed on the SEN register. Consequently, there is no specific indication of the numbers of pupils and students concerned, the support they are to be given, or what they might expect to be provided.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

The school should now:

- Improve the accommodation, which was a key issue of the last report, by:
seeking ways of enhancing the existing accommodation in order to minimise the difficulties experienced in English, mathematics, design and technology, modern languages and history.
(paragraphs 27, 29, 67,82, 100, 108 and 115)
- Increase the provision of ICT in Years 7 to 9 and improve the consistency of ICT provision for all year groups in all subjects.
(paragraphs 31, 33, 58, 82 and 108)
- Establish a register for pupils with English as an additional language so that their specific needs can be readily identified and supported.
(paragraph 34)

Sixth form

- Improve the breadth of provision for those students who spend only one year in the sixth form
(paragraphs 46, 48, 53 and 77)
- Extend the supervision and administrative support in the upper school library so that students have access to the full range of resources and specialised help throughout the school day. Continue to improve the quality and quantity of books in the upper school library.
(paragraphs 58 and 108)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

| | | |
|--|--------------|----|
| Number of lessons observed | Years 7 – 11 | 33 |
| | Sixth form | 39 |
| Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils | | 50 |

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

| | Excellent | Very good | Good | Satisfactory | Unsatisfactory | Poor | Very Poor |
|---------------------|-----------|-----------|------|--------------|----------------|------|-----------|
| Years 7 – 11 | | | | | | | |
| Number | 3 | 13 | 11 | 5 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Percentage | 9 | 39 | 33 | 15 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| Sixth form | | | | | | | |
| Number | 5 | 21 | 13 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Percentage | 13 | 54 | 33 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching. Care should be taken when interpreting the percentages for Years 7 – 11 as each lesson represents more than one three percentage points.

Information about the school's pupils

| Pupils on the school's roll | Y7 – Y11 | Sixth form |
|---|----------|------------|
| Number of pupils on the school's roll | 1029 | 187 |
| Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals | 113 | |

| Special educational needs | Y7 – Y11 | Sixth form |
|---|----------|------------|
| Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs | 2 | 0 |
| Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register | 180 | 0 |

| English as an additional language | No of pupils |
|---|--------------|
| Number of pupils with English as an additional language | 21 |

| Pupil mobility in the last school year | No of pupils |
|--|--------------|
| Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission | 8 |
| Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving | 9 |

Attendance

Authorised absence

| | % |
|---------------------------|-----|
| School data | 6.9 |
| National comparative data | 7.7 |

Unauthorised absence

| | % |
|---------------------------|-----|
| School data | 1.5 |
| National comparative data | 1.1 |

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

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

| Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year | Year | Boys | Girls | Total |
|--|------|------|-------|-------|
| | 2000 | 84 | 82 | 166 |

| National Curriculum Test/Task Results | | English | Mathematics | Science |
|---|----------|---------|-------------|---------|
| Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above | Boys | 69 | 67 | 61 |
| | Girls | 72 | 67 | 58 |
| | Total | 141 | 134 | 119 |
| Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above | School | 85 (62) | 81 (76) | 72 (70) |
| | National | 63 (63) | 65 (62) | 59 (55) |
| Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above | School | 47 (35) | 55 (52) | 41 (40) |
| | National | 28 (28) | 42 (38) | 30 (23) |

| Teachers' Assessments | | English | Mathematics | Science |
|---|----------|---------|-------------|---------|
| Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above | Boys | 53 | 57 | 59 |
| | Girls | 65 | 65 | 67 |
| | Total | 118 | 122 | 126 |
| Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above | School | 71 (84) | 73 (83) | 76 (70) |
| | National | 64 (64) | 66 (64) | 62 (60) |
| Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above | School | 45 (50) | 49 (53) | 46 (38) |
| | National | 31 (31) | 39 (37) | 29 (28) |

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 |
| | 2000 | 87 | 67 | 154 |

| 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 | 57 | 80 | 83 |
| | Girls | 47 | 63 | 66 |
| | Total | 104 | 143 | 149 |
| Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified | School | 68 (60) | 93 (97) | 97 (99) |
| | National | 47.4 (46.6) | 90.6 (90.9) | 95.6 (95.8) |

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

| GCSE results | | GCSE point score |
|-------------------------------|----------|------------------|
| Average point score per pupil | School | 46.0 |
| | National | 38.4 |

| 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 |
| | 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 | 43 | 41 | 84 |

| Average A/AS points score per candidate | For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent | | | For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-levels or equivalent | | |
|---|---|--------|------|--|--------|-----|
| | Male | Female | All | Male | Female | All |
| School | 23.9 | 19.0 | 21.5 | 0 | 0 | 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 |
| | National | n/a |

| International Baccalaureate | Number | % success rate |
|---|----------|----------------|
| Number entered for the International Baccalaureate Diploma and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all they studied | School | 0 |
| | National | n/a |

Ethnic background of pupils

| | No of pupils |
|---------------------------------|--------------|
| Black – Caribbean heritage | 16 |
| Black – African heritage | 6 |
| Black – other | 13 |
| Indian | 15 |
| Pakistani | 1 |
| Bangladeshi | 0 |
| Chinese | 1 |
| White | 918 |
| Any other minority ethnic group | 16 |

Exclusions in the last school year

| | Fixed period | Permanent |
|------------------------------|--------------|-----------|
| Black – Caribbean heritage | 1 | 0 |
| Black – African heritage | 0 | 0 |
| Black – other | 3 | 0 |
| Indian | 1 | 0 |
| Pakistani | 0 | 0 |
| Bangladeshi | 0 | 0 |
| Chinese | 0 | 0 |
| White | 47 | 4 |
| Other minority ethnic groups | 2 | 0 |

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

| | |
|--|----|
| Total number of qualified teachers (FTE) | 61 |
| Number of pupils per qualified teacher | 17 |

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

| | |
|---|-----|
| Total number of education support staff | 13 |
| Total aggregate hours worked per week | 309 |

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

| | |
|---|------|
| Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes | 79.1 |
|---|------|

Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y13

| | |
|-------------|------|
| Key Stage 2 | n/a |
| Key Stage 3 | 23.3 |
| Key Stage 4 | 22.1 |

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

| | |
|----------------|-----------------------|
| Financial year | Apr 2000- Mar 2001 |
|----------------|-----------------------|

| | £ |
|--|-----------|
| Total income | 2,618,375 |
| Total expenditure | 2,702,910 |
| Expenditure per pupil | 2,626.73 |
| Balance brought forward from previous year | 202,949 |
| Balance carried forward to next year | 118,44 |

Recruitment of teachers

| | |
|--|----|
| Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years | 15 |
| Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years | 15 |

| | |
|--|---|
| Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE) | 1 |
| Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE) | 1 |
| Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE) | 0 |

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

| | |
|-----------------------------------|------|
| Number of questionnaires sent out | 1029 |
| Number of questionnaires returned | 152 |

Percentage of responses in each category

| | Strongly agree | Tend to agree | Tend to disagree | Strongly disagree | Don't know |
|--|----------------|---------------|------------------|-------------------|------------|
| My child likes school. | 52 | 42 | 5 | 1 | 0 |
| My child is making good progress in school. | 59 | 36 | 3 | 1 | 1 |
| Behaviour in the school is good. | 36 | 54 | 7 | 0 | 3 |
| My child gets the right amount of work to do at home. | 39 | 44 | 14 | 2 | 1 |
| The teaching is good. | 49 | 45 | 3 | 0 | 3 |
| I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on. | 32 | 44 | 17 | 3 | 4 |
| I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem. | 49 | 40 | 7 | 3 | 1 |
| The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best. | 74 | 22 | 3 | 1 | 0 |
| The school works closely with parents. | 38 | 39 | 12 | 3 | 8 |
| The school is well led and managed. | 47 | 39 | 4 | 1 | 9 |
| The school is helping my child become mature and responsible. | 53 | 38 | 1 | 1 | 7 |
| The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons. | 31 | 41 | 16 | 1 | 11 |

Other issues raised by parents

Within this very favourable picture, there were some particular recurring concerns expressed in the parents' responses and at the parents' meeting:

- There are no reports or consultations with Year 7 parents until the last term of pupils' first year in school
- Boys and girls receive unequal treatment in respect of requirements for PE diaries
- Discipline is inconsistent

The inspection did not find evidence of inconsistency in discipline and the reporting process for Year 7 has been improved this year. Concerns about PE diaries were substantiated and the school is now reviewing its practice.

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

RESULTS AND STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

- 35 Students achieve very good results in both the one-year AS levels and the two-year A levels. In 2000, as in the previous two years, the average points score was well above both the national and local averages. All students were entered for at least two A or AS levels and there were no candidates for vocational courses. A few also took GCSE in English or mathematics, with all but one achieving a pass grade. In comparisons with all maintained schools and all post-16 providers, the proportion of males gaining two or more A or AS levels was well above average and for females was above average. The proportion of students gaining the highest grades A and B was above the national average in geography, mathematics and physics.
- 36 Results from the national examinations over the last three years show that male students at the school performed better overall than female students. In 2000, the results for male students were at or above national averages in all subjects and were particularly good in geography and mathematics. Female students did well in art and design, French, geography and sociology. However, their results were below the national average in chemistry, general studies and mathematics, and well below average in biology.
- 37 The high standards achieved in public examinations are reflected in the attainments reached in the lessons observed and in the students' work. In nine out of 10 lessons it is greater than national expectations. It is clear from the work observed and from students' files that most are on course to meet or exceed the national average at A level and that their rate of progress is similarly good. The highest attaining students are well catered for and make particularly rapid progress.

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES, VALUES AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

- 38 Sixth form students have very positive attitudes to their work and to school. Their views were established through their responses to the students' questionnaire and through numerous discussions during the week of the inspection. The great majority spoke very highly of the school and would recommend the sixth form to friends. They are particularly pleased with the help given in settling in at the start of Year 12 and the ready guidance and support from teachers.
- 39 Students have a mature and sensible approach to their studies. Although a few are shy when addressing the rest of their class, they are generally confident and articulate. The school keeps them well informed about the progress they are making, which helps them to prepare for the next stage in their education. Students are conscientious in their work and many use their initiative in extending study beyond what is asked. They are articulate and can be relied upon to get on with their work both at home and at school. Through coursework, they become increasingly accustomed to working independently and they cope exceptionally well with the increasing demands that are placed upon them. Relationships between students and with staff are very good. In many lessons this contributes to a co-operative working environment, which enhances the rate of students progress.
- 40 Students are keen to take on responsibilities around the school. For example, they raise money for charity, help Year 7 pupils with their reading and run the sixth form committee. Through the school council, students help to improve facilities within the

sixth form common room and offer a supporting role to younger pupils in their role as 'buddies'.

- 41 Attendance is satisfactory. The overall level is slightly lower in Year 13 than it is in Year 12, but this is in keeping with the increased independence afforded to these final year students. Students also certificate their own absence and this system is working well. Students arrive promptly for lessons and this helps them to make very good use of the available time. The school is currently piloting a scheme whereby students use swipe cards to register their attendance at the start of each lesson.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- 42 The high quality of the teaching is one of the main strengths of the sixth form. It contributes directly to the effectiveness of pupils' learning and the high standards achieved. In over two-thirds of lessons seen, both the teaching and learning are very good or outstanding. The teaching is unusually consistent in its high quality. No student loses out in any subject area because the teaching lacks expertise or commitment. A variety of teaching styles is evident and it is rare to see classes too directed by the teaching. The impact of the Key Stage 3 literacy strategy on all teachers, together with the outcomes from the IQEA programme, are successfully improving the quality of teaching and learning in the sixth form as well as elsewhere in the school.
- 43 A key feature of the high quality teaching is the very good relationships that are established between teachers and students. An atmosphere is created in the classroom that combines congenial friendliness with a sense of purposeful activity. The teachers have a very good command of their subjects and high expectations, a fact which they convey vividly, but without imposing undue pressure on the students. The varied range of activities teachers select for the lessons are well matched to the learning objectives students need to attain and to their ability levels, so that the most able as well as the least able are both supported and challenged in their work. Lessons are very thoroughly prepared and often incorporate the use of information technology and the Internet to stimulate students' interest and provide them with up-to-date information. Sensitive support is given at the points where students begin to flag or are in danger of not understanding. The brisk pace adopted in most lessons ensures that by the end of the session, teacher and students can take pleasure in the fact that every goal has been reached in the time available.
- 44 Feedback on how well students are progressing is given regularly by teachers, so that students are left in no doubt about their level of performance or what they must do to improve further. As a result, students take an active responsibility for their own progress and match the high quality teaching with high quality learning. They engage in an impressive level of research and investigative work and develop their skills of problem solving in a range of contexts. Students are confident in group work and many develop good expertise in presentation. They debate and argue with well-reasoned exposition and clearly demonstrate their gains in knowledge and understanding.

CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS

- 45 Curriculum provision for sixth form students is good: it is well matched to the needs of its students, the expertise of the staff, and the facilities of the school. The school provides a strong academic curriculum leading to GCE Advanced Subsidiary and Advanced level examinations, plus one advanced vocational certificate of education (AVCE). Attempts to broaden the curriculum through offering other vocational

courses have been tried in previous years, but there has not been enough interest from students to sustain them. Annually, over half the students from Year 11 and a significant number of students from other schools join the sixth form.

- 46 Subjects at GCE A and AS level include appropriate representation of sciences, humanities, languages, social sciences and arts subjects. The school offers 17 subjects, which in addition to mainstream courses also includes sports science, economics, sociology and general studies. Students may also opt to study for an AVCE in information and communication technology. The core programme of study includes a course in religious education for all students. The school has carefully and successfully planned key skills into the curriculum. All students opt into at least one key skill, but have the opportunity to complete others. Literacy and computer skills are emphasised throughout; as for example, in art, where sketches are annotated and analyses word-processed. The lower sixth curriculum fully supports those students who are intending to remain for a second year in the sixth form to complete A level courses. However, it is a little narrow for those intending to complete only a one-year programme.
- 47 Class sizes vary between subjects, with the average number of students in Year 12 classes at 14 and in Year 13 classes at ten. These group sizes ensure that there are sufficient numbers in lessons to provide students with opportunities for challenge and collaboration and to make them cost effective. There is strong flexibility built into the AS level programme so that the individual needs of students can be met. For example, whilst all students follow an AS programme in Year 12, it is recognised that for a few students it is more appropriate to spread the course over two years, or to take an AS course in Year 13 only.
- 48 Students have good opportunities to balance their academic studies with an enrichment programme of extra-curricular activities, such as sports, work experience, community service, trips abroad, sixth form committee, and activities that introduce students directly to the world of business. In addition to their academic studies, these experiences strongly contribute to students' personal development and provide them with opportunities to reflect on spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues relevant to them. Careers guidance is good, though it occurs rather late in the lower sixth programme for those either unsure about remaining at school or definitely leaving at the end of Year 12. Guidance for university entrance is excellent.
- 49 The workload for sixth form students, whilst high, is carefully monitored and they receive an appropriate amount of time for private study. Students have good access to information and communication technology for private study and other resources are generally good or very good in supporting students' learning.

THE SCHOOL'S CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS

- 50 Procedures for assessing and monitoring students' academic progress are excellent. Students benefit from detailed feedback on their work and the setting of targets for improvement. Rigorous analysis of results are used to improve curricular planning and to motivate students in most subjects. In particular, teachers in history, geography, science and modern languages are painstaking in their marking of students' work, providing them with detailed comments of strengths and areas for improvement. The school makes good use of national statistics to help in providing overall predictions about students' performance in A-level examinations. Students use this information as the key element in their action plans, to set targets and to monitor their own progress. The school does not yet extend its analysis to include the monitoring and evaluation of specific groups of pupils. For example, by using

national prior attainment data to set realistically challenging targets for those studying specific subjects.

- 51 The school is strongly committed to its system of pastoral care, which continues into the sixth form where the care and support for students are very good. Pastoral care is led by form tutors who have the support of heads of each year; they in turn report to the deputy head responsible for the sixth form who is assisted by a deputy coordinator. This structure ensures that students have appropriate support and guidance available to them during their time in the sixth form.
- 52 A two-day induction programme provides good initial preparation for new students and is particularly appreciated by those joining from other schools. Students having problems in their chosen courses can rely on good advice from staff and most complete their chosen courses. They respond well to the teachers' high expectations and show maturity in their ability to organise their work. Students benefit from early guidance on this aspect of sixth form life through a programme of personal and social education delivered by form tutors. Part of this involves students in drawing up their own action plan to plot their progress through to A-level examinations, a good demonstration of the way in which the school encourages them to take responsibility.
- 53 In various discussions during the inspection, students expressed satisfaction with the way they are treated by teachers. Subject teachers know their students well and respond effectively to individual needs. The school council gives students a say in the running of the sixth form and they make their feelings clear when they are not consulted over decisions which affect them. Guidance on careers and progression to higher education is provided through the personal and social education programme. Most of this advice is focused on Year 13 and provision for those likely to leave at the end of Year 12 is not as full. However, a careers coordinator is available to help students to access specialist advice if they require it.
- 54 Procedures for monitoring and improving attendance are very effective. Students sign a contract to sustain at least 90 per cent attendance. Their attendance is monitored closely and there are sanctions if they do not uphold the contract. Students' health and safety has appropriate consideration and all statutory requirements are met.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT IN THE SIXTH FORM

- 55 The sixth form is under the direct responsibility of a deputy head who works closely with the headteacher, with sixth form tutors, and others with sixth form responsibility. This team is enthusiastic and committed to the development of the sixth form. Leadership is strong, clear and highly effective. The governors are very knowledgeable and fulfil their obligation to challenge and support the school. The processes by which the school decides its educational priorities and how to ensure that finances are in place to achieve them are excellent. At the centre of planning is the drive for excellence and the desire to meet the varied needs of students. The whole school development plan, which comprehensively targets all aspects of school life, also incorporates a separate section on the sixth form. Targets are precisely identified, with time-scales, persons responsible, success criteria and financial implications. Recent priorities have included the development of the personal, social, and health education programme, improvements in academic monitoring, and improvements to ICT provision for students. The plan is evaluated annually before the next one is agreed. Subject departments are kept aware of planning developments and as teams they bid for funding in terms of its relevance to the

school's priorities. This continuing cycle of departments feeding into the whole school process and the evaluation prior to future funding ensures that allocation of funds is purposeful. It also promotes the involvement of all staff in the development of the school.

- 56 The school administrator ensures that the school seeks best value at all times and effective consultation takes place to decide priorities. Departments are challenged to justify spending and competition is sought where possible. The school is conscious of the twin difficulties of being on a split-site and hopes to move to new premises in three years time. Decisions are taken with these considerations in mind and duplication of resources between the sites is kept to a minimum. The chair of the governors finance committee is very energetic and up-to-date on all decisions affecting spending.
- 57 The match of the number of staff, their qualifications and experience to the demands of the sixth form curriculum are very good. The proportion of time teachers spend on timetabled teaching is in line with the national average and allows them to give freely of their own time to support students. There are sufficient technical and administrative support staff to allow departments to function very effectively. Both procedures for performance management and those for staff development are very good, though heads of one-person departments, such as economics, would benefit from more contact with other teachers. The school's decision to become involved with the improvement programme for teaching and learning has been very successful and its impact is evident in the high quality of teaching in the sixth form.
- 58 Resources are good across the majority of subjects. Their impact is considerably enhanced by the very good use teachers make of them and by the establishment of external links with other institutions. Physical education benefits greatly from a wide variety of resources other than its own gymnasium. Students have access to the ice rink, the river for rowing, a golf course and playing fields. Modern foreign languages has its own satellite dish and accesses up-to-date information from abroad that greatly increases the motivation of students. However, in information and communications technology, there are still not enough computers to allow full access to departments when they need it although there has been substantial recent investment and the situation is much improved since the previous report. In design and technology, there is no computerised sewing machine or facilities for computer-aided design. The library still contains many old books, but an audit of library stock is currently taking place so that appropriate new materials can be supplied. However, because the librarian is based mainly at the lower school she cannot directly monitor library use in the upper school. As a result, the borrowing of library resources is not adequately supervised and students do not have access to specialised help throughout the school day.

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

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

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2000.

GCE AS level courses

| Subject | Number entered | % gaining grades A-E | | % gaining grades A-B | | Average point score | |
|--------------------|----------------|----------------------|---------|----------------------|---------|---------------------|---------|
| | | School | England | School | England | School | England |
| Physics | 1 | 0 | 53 | 0 | 8 | 0 | 1.08 |
| English literature | 1 | 100 | 76 | 0 | 12 | 1.0 | 1.82 |

GCE A level courses

| Subject | Number entered | % gaining grades A-E | | % gaining grades A-B | | Average point score | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------|----------------------|---------|----------------------|---------|---------------------|---------|
| | | School | England | School | England | School | England |
| Mathematics | 29 | 90 | 89 | 55 | 45 | 6.48 | 5.99 |
| Chemistry | 20 | 85 | 89 | 40 | 42 | 5.40 | 5.87 |
| Biology | 20 | 85 | 88 | 15 | 34 | 4.30 | 5.28 |
| Physics | 17 | 82 | 88 | 53 | 41 | 6.00 | 5.72 |
| Economics | 32 | 91 | 88 | 28 | 36 | 5.06 | 5.41 |
| Physical education/sports studies | 5 | 100 | 91 | 0 | 25 | 4.80 | 4.99 |
| Art | 6 | 100 | 96 | 33 | 45 | 7.33 | 6.42 |
| Geography | 19 | 95 | 92 | 58 | 37 | 6.84 | 5.73 |
| History | 33 | 97 | 89 | 21 | 34 | 5.21 | 5.43 |
| Sociology | 19 | 100 | 88 | 32 | 37 | 6.11 | 5.46 |
| English literature | 29 | 93 | 96 | 34 | 36 | 5.86 | 5.9 |
| German | 6 | 100 | 92 | 33 | 41 | 5.67 | 5.88 |
| French | 9 | 100 | 91 | 22 | 39 | 5.56 | 5.74 |

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

Mathematics

The overall quality of the provision is very good and shows significant improvement since the previous inspection.

Strengths

- Results in A-level mathematics are consistently very good.
- Results in AS mathematics in 2001 were well above the national average.
- Students have a very good grasp of concepts and are confident when discussing and explaining ideas.
- Teaching is always good or better. It is usually very good and is sometimes excellent.
- Assessment is excellent. Students are knowledgeable about their progress towards their targets and are given very good guidance to achieve them.
- Leadership and management are very good.

Areas for Improvement

- The department does not share the excellent practice that exists, to all teachers in the department.
- The use of information and communication technology and other resources is not extended to all aspects of the course.
- Accommodation is unsatisfactory.

- 59 Results in the 2001 AS level examinations were well above the national average. In recent years, the GCE A-level results in mathematics have consistently been well above the national average and are all the more impressive because more students follow this course than could be expected for a school population of this size. In 2001, the A level results dipped below the national average for the first time in many years. However, this is largely because the department continues to attract a high proportion of students from the full range of ability to the mathematics and further mathematics courses. When compared to their prior attainment at GCSE, students' overall results are impressive. They mostly do very well and the proportion of higher grades is always well above the national average.
- 60 Whilst there are more boys than girls currently on the course, the proportion of girls is more than in recent years. The standards of work of all students seen in lessons continues to be very good and most students are making very good progress. In a lesson on elastic impacts, students in Year 13 worked meaningfully in small groups to discuss the implications of collisions between two particles. They then presented their model solution to the rest of the class. Solutions were critically appraised for their logic and completeness. The students demonstrated confidence and a very good understanding of the principles involved. Standards of numeracy are good.
- 61 Students of further mathematics in Year 12 already have an excellent understanding of forces and acceleration in the study of mechanics. They worked at a furious pace, through a variety of problems involving weights suspended by string from pulleys. They drew meaningful diagrams, formulated equations and solved them speedily and accurately. They all showed confidence in demonstrating their solutions at the board to other students to round off an excellent lesson.
- 62 Teaching is very good overall and as a result students make very good progress. Teachers set high expectations, give clear objectives, establish a brisk pace, and use

a variety of methods with students, often actively involving them in explaining solutions to others. Teachers have developed very good relationships with their students as groups and individuals. They go out of their way to include all students in learning effectively. One student with English as an additional language receives an extra lesson each week and is progressing very well. Teachers are also aware that some students joining the sixth form from other schools have not been as effectively taught to GCSE levels and in lessons check unobtrusively that they are included.

- 63 Teachers are willing to allow students to experiment with theories. Students in Year 13 learned the product rule well in a very good lesson on calculus in pure mathematics. The skilful guidance and enthusiasm of the teacher encouraged the students to arrive at the rule for themselves. They then applied it enthusiastically to different situations. Some teachers use information and communication technology effectively to allow students to consolidate ideas by visual representation and to experimentation. Students of further mathematics in Year 13 improved their understanding of conic sections by using computer software to appreciate fully the precise mathematical differences of the parabola, ellipse and hyperbola. Limited use is made of other resources in most aspects of the subject.
- 64 Assessment is excellent. Teachers set meaningful homework after every lesson. The work is marked promptly with clear mathematics-specific advice how to improve if necessary. Students are required to complete self-assessment sheets that focus on detailed areas of the syllabus and teachers respond suitably to these. One strong feature of lessons is a clear emphasis on examination technique, focusing in detail on where marks are gained or lost. In a lesson on decision mathematics with Year 12, the teacher made good use of experience as an examiner. The teacher used a question on oil flow to illustrate how best to tackle problems of different types and why some questions are more complicated than others.
- 65 Teachers have clearly instilled a strong work and study ethic into students. This is particularly important for further mathematics students who spend two lessons a week in independent study, working on tasks that are very well prepared by their teachers. Teachers readily make themselves available to help individual students and there are regular extra-curricular support clubs staffed on a rota basis.
- 66 Students work very hard. They are well motivated to learn and understand the subject well. They respect their teachers and are attentive to them. They respect each other's views and work well in teams or pairs, both formally and informally. They rise to every challenge, whether it is to present solutions to others or formulate a rule for themselves. Students take responsibility for their learning. They know their targets for final grades and with very good guidance from teachers know how to achieve them.
- 67 The department is very well led and managed. The head of department is an outstanding teacher who not only leads by example in the classroom, but who has also developed a good team spirit and very high levels of expectation. Staffing is very good, with well-qualified teachers suitably deployed. Resources are good, though not always fully used in helping students to visualise practical situations. Textbooks for every aspect of the course are given to all students and past papers are made available. Information and communication technology is being used increasingly to enhance learning. Accommodation is unsatisfactory. Whilst all of the sixth form lessons are taught on the same site, teachers have to move classrooms and one class in Year 12 have all of their lessons in a room next to the canteen, which is regularly affected by noise. Whilst the teacher and students work hard to

overcome this, the situation is not ideal. Teaching is usually very good, but occasionally it does not have the variety of methods needed to maintain the very good pace and student involvement seen in the most effective lessons. The split-site situation makes both the monitoring of teaching and the sharing of best practice, more difficult than when the department is in one building.

Biology

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

Strengths

- Standards are above average.
- Examination results for the new AS course are well above average.
- Student achievement is very good, some showing extremely high levels of motivation.
- Teaching and learning are very good, with high expectations for students' accomplishments.
- A very good team is ably led, showing commitment to raise student attainment further.

Areas for improvement

- Good quality data is not fully used for individual student guidance.

68 The performance of students in the 2001 GCE A level examination was average. However, evidence from the written work of current students and discussions with them indicate that standards in the current Year 13 are above average. This improvement in standards is the result of the considerable time and energy that have been invested to improve the range of teaching methods. Results over the last four years show fluctuations that are characteristic of small cohorts taking the examination. Each year a credible number attain the highest A/B grades, but a small number of individuals fail to reach a pass grade each year. Results for the first year of AS examinations are very encouraging. The number of students achieving a pass grade is well above the national average, with half reaching the higher A/B grades. Progress compared with GCSE results is good, taking into account the wide range of attainment of entry that results from the school's inclusive attitudes to students wanting to follow the course, including recruitment from other schools. The number continuing from Year 12 to Year 13 is very good and the new AS course has resulted in larger numbers taking biology in the sixth form.

69 Students reach good standards in lessons because teachers have high expectations and use their subject expertise with considerable skill in order to help students communicate what they have learned. For example, Year 13 students are expected to use their notes in order to give clear explanations of the role of the pancreas in controlling blood sugar levels and in doing so, successfully consolidate earlier learning. They use the Internet very well because the teacher has undertaken excellent research to find interesting and relevant websites. As a result, they deepen their understanding of why acid rain is a danger to freshwater ecosystems and to the Canadian economy. Year 12 students reached very good standards when investigating the catalytic breakdown of hydrogen peroxide because they received very good guidance for procedures.

70 The well-chosen course enables students to make very good progress in key skills and achieve highly. Able students make very good progress, sustaining high motivation from GCSE. Similarly, lower attaining students benefit from the challenge of the group, as seen in Year 12, when a boy from another school deepened his

understanding because the teacher allocated time to discuss the basic background needed. Girls and boys contribute equally well in lessons, particularly when they are encouraged to argue their case. Students from ethnic minority backgrounds are very well integrated. A student with special educational needs is making very good progress because the teacher understands her specific difficulties very well and is providing additional help and guidance. Students complete the course, even though a number of individuals find it difficult. However, the new AS course has given all students renewed motivation.

- 71 Teaching and learning are very good overall. Students learn to work quickly because lessons have a very good pace. They improve their use of vocabulary because teachers place a strong emphasis on language development. Very good questions challenge students to speak with clarity about their learning. Year 12 students have improved their communication skills in preparing presentations, for example, of the structure of protein molecules, such as haemoglobin. A useful accompanying booklet benefits the whole class. Students' folders are well organised and show that they have a good understanding of what is required. Practical work is reported very effectively, with good calculations and examples of well argued conclusions. Teachers use time efficiently and students respond very positively to rigorous time targets. A superb example was seen in a Year 12 lesson. Students had a succinct introduction to the theory of enzyme activity that was to underpin their investigation. As a result, they worked productively to gain results and completed most of the writing within the lesson. This was effective because it gave time for students to seek clarification and correct errors in their thinking, as they tried to explain their findings. It generated confidence and a great sense of achievement to end the lesson. Students appreciate the hard work of teachers in providing good guidance and the regular assessment of their work, which helps to ensure their understanding.
- 72 The subject is ably led and the team of teachers continues to aspire to greater achievements for students. In this, they fully reflect the aims of the school. Monitoring of students' progress is good, with appropriately challenging targets for improvement each year. Teachers do not use the available good quality data enough to support and guide individual students.

Chemistry

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

Strengths

- Standards are above average.
- Examination results for the new AS course are well above average.
- Students' achievement is very good, some showing extremely high levels of motivation.
- Teachers have high expectations of what students can achieve.
- A very good team is ably led, showing commitment to raise student attainment further.

Areas for improvement

- Good quality data are not fully used to guide individual students.

- 73 Students' results in the 2000 GCE A level examinations were above average, but fell significantly below average in 2001. The most recent results included a number of weaker students who did not achieve a pass grade. Results over the last four years show fluctuations that are characteristic of small cohorts taking the examination. Each year a credible number attain the highest A/B grades, but a small number of individuals are not entered because they find the final stages of the course too

difficult. Results for the first year of AS examinations are very encouraging. The number of students achieving a pass grade is well above the national average. Progress of most students, compared with their prior attainment at GCSE, is good. The school's inclusive attitude to students wanting to follow the course means that groups include a wide range of ability, comprising of individuals from other schools as well as those progressing from within the school. The number continuing from Year 12 to Year 13 is very good and the new AS course has resulted in increased numbers taking chemistry in the sixth form. Standards by the end of Year 13 are above average and better than the examination results indicate because the school has invested considerable time and energy to improve the range of teaching and learning styles. Evidence from current work and discussions with students indicates the quality of teaching and learning is influencing the standards they are able to reach.

- 74 Students reach good standards in lessons because teachers have high expectations and use their subject expertise with considerable skill in order to help students communicate what they have learned. For example, Year 13 students quickly increased their understanding of types of chemical reaction because the teacher clarified errors and uncertainties. During a practical session, they developed a very good understanding of a group of organic compounds, having predicted the behaviour from earlier examination of data. Year 12 students reached very good standards in constructing dot and cross diagrams to represent molecular structures after using 3D models to deepen their understanding. Very able pupils ask searching questions about how atoms are bonded together.
- 75 Achievement is very good. Students make very good progress in key skills because the course is well chosen. Higher attaining students have considerable talent and make very good progress, sustaining high motivation from GCSE. Several students do much better than might be expected from earlier achievements. Similarly, lower attaining students benefit from the challenge of the group and most make good progress. Girls and boys contribute equally well in lessons, particularly when they are encouraged to argue their case. Some are tentative because they find the mathematical demands very challenging, but through excellent encouragement they improve their skills. Students from ethnic minority backgrounds are very well integrated. Most students complete the course, even though a number of individuals with lower attainment on entry find the course difficult. However, the new AS course has given all students renewed motivation.
- 76 Teaching and learning are very good. Methods are varied and students say the high level of interest and involvement expected of them helps their understanding. Year 12 students work very well because the teacher changes the groups and in doing so helps all of them get to know each other better. Year 13 work at a very good pace because the teacher sets rigorous timescales for the completion of a series of practical tests. In theory lessons, they improve their understanding because they have to teach each other in pairs. Searching questions challenge them to speak with clarity about their learning. Teachers are developing CD-ROM resource materials to support students in their revision and are currently extending a website to support them if they have missed work through absence. Students appreciate this development of ICT and consider that it makes them increasingly independent. Practical notebooks are very well presented. All students tackle calculations confidently, gaining very good support from detailed marking when errors are made or misconceptions occur. Generally, conclusions are very well argued. Students appreciate the hard work of teachers in providing guidance and ensuring they have understood by the regular assessment of their work.

- 77 Leadership is good and teachers are committed to improving students' achievement. Students' progress is carefully monitored and they are given clear targets for improvement. Greater individual student guidance is needed for those who might benefit from following alternative courses after the first year of sixth form study.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

Design & technology

Overall, the quality of provision is very good.

Strengths

- Results are good.
- Students achieve well and individual projects show a very good understanding of design practice.
- The quality of teaching leads to a high level of motivation.
- Good leadership and management recognise the strengths of the department.
- Students display very high levels of interest and motivation.

Areas for improvement

- The use of ICT by students.
- The development of computer-aided design and manufacture.
- The separation of the design technology rooms from the Upper School, which affects students' learning.

- 78 The provision in design technology caters for seven students who follow the AS and A level courses in product design. Numbers of students taking design technology are too small to be statistically significant, but no student gained less than a D grade in the most recent examinations. Students achieve well in relation to their GCSE grades. The retention rate is very good, with all students continuing the course to completion.
- 79 Standards are high overall. Students make good progress in the quality of their graphical techniques, often from a low base. All students make good progress in their analytical skills, for example, when evaluating vacuum cleaners early in the course. They have a very clear understanding of designing for a purpose, for example, when improving signs in a building. Students' evaluations of existing signs in the school were perceptive and they effectively related their final product to the user. They are creative in their thinking and designing. The quality of their research is very good. These include the use of the Internet and in one instance, a visit to the design unit for the disabled at Great Ormond Street.
- 80 The quality of teaching is very good overall, and occasionally excellent. The pace of the lessons and the expectations that students will achieve, lead to a high level of motivation. Teachers ask purposeful questions to make students think, which is the essence of very good design technology. For example, they asked students why the study of ergonomics is so important. Teachers challenge students to complete tasks rapidly and they have to lead discussions and present their conclusions. Students rise to the challenge and work extremely hard. Teaching places an emphasis on students' independent learning, which contributes to the high standards achieved. Resources are good; for example, students examined a wide variety of vacuum cleaners. The teachers use the resources well to stimulate thought and to enable

students to evaluate. Teaching points constantly add to students' understanding, for example, when the teacher explained the BSI mark and referred to the equivalent international standard.

- 81 Students learn well. They are exceedingly highly motivated and determined to succeed. All students make very good progress, working under pressure, which results from the very good teaching. They use resources well and they grow in maturity in the understanding and application of clear specifications. They take pride in their work and are ready to explain their proposals. Students work very well together and explain their conclusions clearly and logically.
- 82 Leadership and management are very good. There is a clear recognition of the individual strengths within the department, which helps to raise standards further. With a bank of new computers, the development of ICT in the department is given a high priority and the close liaison with Loughborough University assists in raising standards in this area. The school does not have enough equipment to develop computer-aided design and manufacture. This was noted in the last report, as was the need for an improvement in the use of ICT. Visits to industrial firms, such as one making aluminium moulds, adds to students' understanding of manufacturing processes. As the design technology rooms are in the main school, post-16 students have to travel and consequently, find it difficult to use the facilities outside the taught time. Their lessons are also in blocks of two, which limits opportunities for extended work. These factors affect the standards of products made. To remedy this, the head of department is available during a half-term break in order to help students obtain the high standards of which they are capable. The separation of the department also affects the take-up of the subject, as students recognise the difficulties that they face in extending their studies into sixth form. The department makes a valuable contribution to students' communication skills by placing an emphasis on oral presentations.

BUSINESS

Economics

Overall, the quality of provision in economics is good.

Strengths

- Overall standards are broadly above average.
- Teaching is consistently good.
- Students are interested in economics and relationships are very good.
- Guidance for students on examination techniques is good.
- Management of the subject is good.

Areas for improvement

- Teaching does not always draw out students thinking strongly enough to help them in classroom discussion.
- Pass rates at grades A and B are too low.
- Teaching does not benefit enough from sharing ideas with other sixth form departments.

- 83 GCE A Level results over recent years have been slightly above average and this mirrors the levels of attainment of students' at the time of the last inspection. At the same time, the proportion of students gaining grades A or B remains slightly below the national average. The results for 2001, however, were slightly down on students' overall attainment of previous years, but the standards of those currently studying

economics seem to be back in line with the pattern of results of recent years prior to those of summer 2001. In all recent years, the results gained by students in economics are significantly better than those gained by the same students in their other subjects. Male students' results are marginally better than females.

- 84 Year 13 students show a good level of fluency in their written work. Their knowledge of economics is broadly above average and the way in which they express themselves in writing is also good. Examples of homework show that they present their findings in a sharply focused way. Writing is well balanced between a clear introduction, competent analysis of the issues and logical conclusions made. Well-planned tasks motivate the students so that they recognise and willingly discuss issues, such as differences in wages and what is likely to determine such differences. Very good brisk questioning by the teacher leads the students into areas where they quickly recognise, for example, that whilst the general trend of wages may be upwards, it is possible for certain groups of earners to nevertheless become poorer. Students showed good understanding about the impact of a major technological breakthrough, such as computer programming in the 1980s, on rates of pay. Students in both year groups are responsive and have sound attitudes to learning. Interesting source material, clear tasks and very good questioning by the teacher ensure that all students have to think quickly and enter into the conversations of the lesson. However, in several cases the teacher has to work hard to draw out ideas and answers from some students. Students work in small groups. Some are quite vocal and show very clearly that they have understood the issues, but others, although their notes indicate understanding, are rather less confident in airing their views, even though they know their learning will be supported.
- 85 Year 12 students have made a good start to their course. Standards are slightly above average. Students' comments in class and the quality of their writing show that they are interested in economics and use their emerging knowledge to improve their understanding. Whilst the quality of some pieces of writing is not strong, students demonstrate a sound understanding of the subject in their written answers. Good teaching is keeping the students focused. The tasks presented to them always encourage the students to think and to consider what would happen if one scenario was chosen over another. In one lesson, students showed a good understanding of price elasticity of demand by recognising that consumer choice over the products they buy is likely to vary depending on the choice they have and the nature of the product. They recognised that the choice made by consumers would depend on different things, for example, whether there are plenty of similar alternatives or things that are unique to the product.
- 86 Lessons start promptly with a short timed task. This is based on the link between the previous lesson and the area of economics planned for the new lesson. Students are quick to key into these tasks. The purpose and focus of the lessons are always given, but when drawing out information from students in class discussion their ideas are not always recorded for the whole class so that a clear picture of the route to the conclusion emerges. All students have received a very good quality handbook about economics in the sixth form. Whilst outlining the course there is a strong emphasis on assessment requirements for the examination and therefore, on how to study and how to answer questions. It is clear that students are making good progress through the ways in which the teacher provides feedback in class by talking with students. Study skills that enhance students' techniques and ideas on how best to answer an examination question frequently forms part of economics lessons. When working on tasks in lessons the teacher always makes time to talk and question individual students, to press them on their understanding and to confirm that learning is secure.

In addition, students' work is marked to highlight good quality aspects and to provide pointers for improvement.

- 87 Relationships throughout are very good. Students feel extremely well supported in their learning and willingly talk with their teacher about any issues causing concern. They also feel that the work is challenging. They are confident about using books and journal articles. Most also use information and communication technology to enhance their work, though they use only a few of the available web sites. The classroom displays do not complement the topics being covered and are currently rather old and largely irrelevant. The teacher is an enthusiast and totally secure with the subject and topics covered, and there is a commitment to success. There is now a need for some stronger departmental development planning and the sharing of ideas about teaching, planning and learning with other related departments so that economics does not become totally isolated because it is taught by one person only. Students are aware of the targets they have set for themselves. It is important that students continue to know the level at which they are working and the likely grade they will get if they continue to work at their current rate.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Overall, the quality of provision is excellent.

Strengths

- Standards are very high and students achieve very well.
- Students' fieldwork assignments are of a very high standard.
- Teaching is very good, which motivates students to achieve high standards.
- Teachers provide high quality support for students' studies, both for the taught syllabus and for their individual studies.
- Leadership and management give a clear direction to the subject.
- Students' very high level of interest and motivation.

Areas for improvement

- The further development of ICT in the curriculum.

- 88 The provision in geography caters for 62 students who follow the AS and A level courses. Standards overall are well above average. The most recent GCSE A level examination results were well above average. All students who took the examinations gained a pass grade. No student gained less than a D grade in the A level examination and almost 60 per cent of students gained an A or B grade, which is very good. Half the students who took the AS level examination gained an A or B grade, which is very good. The retention rate is very good, with no student leaving the course recently. Among Year 13, half the students improved on their predicted grades.

- 89 The overall standards are very high. Students show a secure knowledge of topics, both in human and physical geography. These are backed up by investigations into actual situations, such as a study of rural settlements in Lincolnshire, where they accurately analysed the locational factors. Students show a very good understanding of issues and clearly present the causes and implications that ensue. This was seen when deprivation factors with reference to Nottingham were examined. Fieldwork assignments are of a consistently very high standard and show a wide variety of topics studied. These included climatic patterns in Nottingham, the

spheres of influence of villages, and the environmental impact of the East Midlands airport. The variety reflects the importance attached to individual learning. Students gather relevant primary evidence and the data collected are well presented, with appropriate high level statistical techniques. They evaluate perceptively, questioning the reliability and accuracy of data collected. The majority of students start the course with above average levels of achievement and they achieve very well to attain the very high standards. Students use the Internet extensively.

- 90 The quality of teaching is very good. Teachers' have very good subject knowledge, which they use effectively to extend students' understanding. This was seen when the multiplier effect was explored in relation to industry. Resources such as maps, text and photographs are relevant and up to date. For example, the very recent chemical explosion in Toulouse was used to examine the effect of manufacturing on the environment and to stimulate discussion. Students are given clear judgements on the standards they achieve and how they can improve. The quality of guidance to students is outstanding. Each topic is broken down into subsections, with details of resources and exercises. These are accessed with ICT and also included are specimen questions, with model answers. Teachers encourage independent learning through group work and subsequent presentations, which motivates students to achieve. Questioning is probing and this stimulates discussion and makes students think around the topic. For example, the teacher's questioning helped students to establish the origins of coastal features, such as marsh and sand dunes. The pace of lessons and the involvement of students leads to their high level of motivation. Teaching styles have improved since the time of the last inspection.
- 91 Students are keen to learn. They are very interested in the subject. Their interest is seen in their comments and questions, for example about the effect and cost of clearing contaminated land. Students explain in detail and with great enthusiasm the practical work and fieldwork that they undertake. They work very well independently, which contributes to the very high standards achieved. They organise themselves into effective groups, and discuss issues with a high degree of maturity in both years. Their level of discussion shows an awareness and application of theory and models, both economic and geographical. A good proportion of students go on to take subjects allied to geography in higher education, which reflects their involvement and love of the subject.
- 92 The subject is very well led and managed. The new AS course was very carefully planned to ensure that all topics were well covered, to ensure that students were well prepared for the examination. The use of local case studies contributes to the high level of application by students. The quality of the reference material collated is excellent. It encourages independent learning, and contributes to the high standards and motivation amongst students. Target setting is an important element towards challenging students to achieve well and data collected over 10 years is used to support this. Resources are good and support students' learning, for example when undertaking fieldwork. The extended use of ICT contributes to raising standards. Geography makes a significant contribution to students' social development, through the study of environmental issues. It also contributes to students' communication skills through their oral presentations.

HISTORY

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

Strengths

- The very high quality of teaching is characterised by teachers' impressive subject knowledge and high levels of both challenge and expectation. Teachers recognise the different ways in which their students learn and use teaching styles that meet all their needs.
- The emphasis on the sharing of ideas during lessons leads to students learning much from each other, to keen intellectual debate and to attainment, which is above average.
- The assessment of students' work is excellent. Teachers mark essays in depth and offer their students comprehensive advice on how they may make further progress.
- Leadership and management of the subject are first class and teachers work hard to bring about continuous improvement in academic performance.

Areas for improvement

- The use of information communications technology to support teaching and learning is in need of further development.

93 Students' performance in A-level examinations over a four-year period since 1997 has been generally above national averages. A-level results in 2000 were at least in line with performance in other subjects, but were much better in 2001 when over 60 per cent of students attained A and B grades. The numbers opting to study history in the sixth form are increasing.

94 Standards of work seen during the inspection, mainly because of the very good teaching and its emphasis on paired and group work, confirm that students are making very good progress in acquiring higher-order historical skills and in the accurate use of quite complex terminology. Their achievement is at least good and they have the confidence and the background knowledge to ask quite searching questions of their teachers. Students in Year 12, for example, can lead discussion very effectively on the instability of Russia at the end of the First World War, and they can also talk with confidence about political problems which still remained in Britain after the 1832 Reform Act. They go further and can give good information on key figures such as Adam Smith and Jeremy Bentham. In Year 13, students can compare and contrast the views of Wilson, Clemenceau and Lloyd George in relation to the peace treaties of 1919. They make perceptive comments about why Germany was displeased at the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, linking the loss of colonies and of the Saar coalfields to Germany's ability to pay future reparations.

95 Students are very adept at the analysis and interpretation of source material, giving convincing arguments as to its validity and to its use to historians. They enjoy both informing and challenging each other; they thrive on historical debate and support their views with evidence and skill. They are most articulate and, for those operating at higher-grade potential, the active use of the language of history is quite natural and is always accurate. These students write convincing essays, which include an analysis of the views of a variety of historians. Moreover, in both oral exchanges and in written assignments, students demonstrate objectivity: they are able to understand why historical figures thought and acted the way they did.

96 The very high quality of teaching is the major strength of the department and leads directly to the involvement of all students, irrespective of their capabilities, in what the subject has to offer. Very good teaching was seen in both British and European

history, and from all four teachers involved in sixth form provision. Teachers are highly qualified and know just the right questions to ask in order to challenge their students to greater depth of thought. Furthermore, teachers recognise that paired work and group activities can provide opportunities for students of high capability to demonstrate their knowledge and to share it with their classmates. Students experiencing difficulties benefit from this approach too. For example, in a Year 12 lesson on Russia, less confident students were more willing to make comments in a small group situation than in front of the whole class. They thrived on the help of those who had a greater understanding of the concepts involved. Teachers recognise the different ways in which their students learn and they modify their methods accordingly. This means that students, also, are aware of how best they may make progress. They are not afraid to experiment with different ways of making notes and with a variety of revision techniques. A student in a Year 12 British history class, for example, was proud of her pictorial approach to a research assignment on the Great Reform Act and said that, after several attempts, she felt that this was the best way for her to remember information and to link similar concepts.

- 97 Teachers transmit to their students their high expectations of what they can do. Coupled with very good relations between teachers and students, the high expectations lead to high levels of industry and a most mature approach to the study of history. Furthermore, because teachers use subject terminology and promote high levels of intellectual debate, students demonstrate very good progress in their depth of thinking and in their willingness to become increasingly more critical of the sources available to them. The teaching not only ensures that all students have opportunities for personal success, it also encourages independent learning and the ability to judge the past on its own standards and values.
- 98 Students enjoy history and speak highly of their teachers and of how they help them to succeed. Positive relations abound and students enjoy the company of their classmates. There is much smiling during lessons and students are keen to praise the contributions of their peers and are happy to learn from them. Students treat each other, their teachers and visitors with dignity: they are pleasant and engaging.
- 99 Teachers know their students well and are aware of their strengths and of their weaknesses. They analyse examination performance in a most sophisticated fashion and there is in-depth tracking of students' progress. The quality of advice on how to improve further is of a high order and work is marked to an excellent standard. Concerned to ensure that students are prepared for the rigour of higher study, teachers emphasise efficient note taking and provide students with writing frames for when they approach essays. Students receive a comprehensive booklet on sixth form study and they are required to complete record cards, which allow them to assess how well they are progressing.
- 100 Continuous improvements in teaching and in students' attainment are the result of excellent departmental management. All teachers share ideas, expertise and resources and they have a common vision for how history should be taught. Departmental documentation is comprehensive and of the highest quality; the handbook is a working document, which brings about a common yet flexible approach to the delivery of the subject. Teaching rooms are adorned with quotations and with the language of history, but the accommodation in which they are contained is unsatisfactory: the rooms are small and insufficient for the large groups in both Years 12 and 13. Nonetheless, the department is an enviable example of effective corporate management and is well placed for future development.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English

Overall, the quality of provision is very good.

Strengths:

- Good progress has been made since the last inspection. Standards are improving.
- Teaching is often good and sometimes very good. Lessons are well-planned and teachers have a thorough knowledge of their subject. As a result, students understand quickly and share their research ideas freely.
- The subject is well led and managed by experienced and capable teachers.
- Assessment is very good. This helps students to have a good idea of how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve further.
- Students feel respected and confirm that teachers value their views.

Areas for improvement:

- Accommodation is poor. English classrooms are overcrowded, sometimes housed in other departments, and scattered around the school. This is not conducive to very good learning. It limits the opportunities for displays about literacy or drama, or for teachers and students to support each other and share effective practice or new learning.

101 GCE A-Level examination results have been broadly in line with national averages for some years. All students who took the examination gained a pass grade and the proportion gaining the highest grades A and B was a little above average. Many students choose to study English. Most complete the one-year AS Level course and are well prepared to go on from that to the A2 course in Year 13. Male students tend to do a little better than females. Those few students who come from ethnic minority backgrounds achieve their potential and are included fully in learning because of very good teaching.

102 Standards are improving. The standards of work of current students are well above average in Year 12 and above average in Year 13. Most students achieve very well in relation to their prior attainment at GCSE. This is due to a potent mix of good teaching coupled with good learning. Those students who are more able do well and are encouraged to achieve their full potential. The department fulfils the aims of the school in its mission statement, particularly in terms of spiritual development. Students are able to examine poems of faith and doubt and they compare the underlying concepts with their own beliefs in an insightful way.

103 Most students enter the sixth form with above average attainments in speaking and listening. When students speak, other students listen respectfully and carefully. In a very good Year 12 lesson on the portrayal of women in Shakespeare's *"Hamlet"*, students were increasingly confident in their analysis of Ophelia and Gertrude. They hold lively discussions in groups and present their findings cogently to the class. They are confident enough to cross-question their teachers in order to add depth to their understanding. In a Year 13 lesson, students were able to respond knowledgeably to questions about the concept of order in society, as represented in the *"Duchess of Malf"*.

104 Standards in reading are above average. Students read fluently with good emphasis.

They have a good understanding of the poetry, plays and novels they read and develop this further through vigorous discussion with others. Many read aloud with good emphasis and understanding, but in an understated way. Students' written work is good and covers a wide range of genres. They have undertaken useful background research on Jacobean Theatre in their studies of Revenge Tragedies. Students improve their writing through a structured process of drafting and redrafting. They demonstrate a good understanding of the underlying implications of literature. In the best writing, they handle and communicate ideas fluently and are able to support hypotheses with well-chosen quotations from the text. Most students use information and communication technology to a limited degree in their writing. Standards in punctuation, sentence construction and spelling are sound.

- 105 Attitudes to learning and behaviour are very good. Students show maturity in evaluating their attainments, as well as the work of their peers. They have good working relationships with their teachers and other students.
- 106 Teaching is good and in some cases very good. The main features of teaching are very good subject knowledge, good relationships, first-class discipline, confidence, a sharp focus on the task, and thorough planning. Students are eager to learn from their mistakes and enjoy discussions of high quality because the teachers know and make clear exactly what they want their classes to understand. Teachers develop students' knowledge through informed questioning and they have a thorough understanding of examination board requirements. Teachers also make lesson objectives explicit to focus students on the requirements of the course. Classes are managed well and most lessons are lively and well timed. Lessons usually end with a whole class session to draw conclusions and establish what new understandings have been gained. Occasionally, this opportunity is lost when lessons have too much content and there is not enough time left to draw conclusions. There is a good match of work set to the needs of individual students. Students learn particularly well when teachers use humour to good effect, making their lessons more enjoyable.
- 107 The English department is led and managed well. There is a clear sense of educational direction and this comes through clearly in its handbook and schemes of work. The Academic Council provides it with a useful forum to create and promote ideas on subject development, such as the further development of the literacy strategy. Given that four out of the seven teachers in the department are new this term, this significant degree of change is being handled well and the school's senior managers are providing very good support for new staff.
- 108 Accommodation is poor. Some English teaching takes place in classrooms belonging to other departments. In these lessons, teachers find it much harder to provide the resources necessary. The scattered nature of English accommodation makes it more difficult for the permanent staff to support newly recruited colleagues. The library is inadequate for the needs of sixth form study. It has too few books and some of those are long past their useful working life. Students have access to a few computers in the library and in another room, but not in English classrooms. They do not have sufficient access to use computers in support of their work, or to improve their key skills.
- 109 Good progress has been made since the last inspection. Standards are improving and the quality of English teaching remains good overall, with some aspects that are very good.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

The focus of the inspection was on French, but work in German was also sampled. Substantial numbers of students take German. Results in recent years have been in line with the national average. Standards in lessons and in work seen show that students are making very good progress in response to very good teaching.

French

The quality of provision is very good.

Strengths

- Results at GCE A-level improved in 2001 to be above the national average.
- Almost a half of students gained grades A or B: they build well on previous levels of attainment.
- Teaching is very good, based on high expectations.
- The quality of leadership and management is excellent.
- Assessment procedures and support for learning ensure that students are aware of progress and how to improve further.

Areas for improvement

- The accommodation, which is currently cramped, acoustically unsuitable and hinders activities requiring movement.

110 Over the last three years, increasing numbers of students have been entered for A-level French. There has been a steady trend of improvement. In 2000, results were in line with national expectations and students did better in French than in most other school subjects. In 2001, results improved further and almost a half of the 12 students entered gained the higher grades A or B, with 75 per cent gaining grades A to C. This represents very good achievement compared with their performance at GCSE. Performance was equally good in all aspects of the examination. Unconfirmed results at AS level for students now in Year 13 shows attainment to be slightly above average overall.

111 In lessons, standards are above average and students are making good progress. In Year 13, students from the full ability range are achieving their potential, including those from minority ethnic backgrounds. Both male and female students make strong contributions to oral classwork, though some female students are less confident than others. Students argue cases well and show good ability to explain difficult words and concepts entirely in French. In one lesson there was a good level of discussion about French impressionist painting. Pronunciation and intonation are very good because students are accustomed to hearing and using French throughout lessons. The quality of written work is generally good. Content is always good and reflects individual Internet research that builds on information given by teachers. Accuracy in writing, as in speaking, is more variable. The more capable write carefully and include many of the more complex structures learned in lessons. Others write fairly accurately, but are prone to basic errors, for instance in gender and number, which detract from the impact of the content. All students have well developed comprehension skills, as they are constantly challenged to understand spoken language and read demanding texts. Their cultural awareness is unusually strong.

112 Attainment in Year 12 is more varied and about average overall. Some male students are making very good progress in the bridging course, making good oral

contributions, and already including a range of sophisticated structures. Some female students also contribute well, for instance in a discussion on the French school system, though others are more diffident and restricted by weak knowledge of tenses and structures. There is a pronounced difference in terms of grammatical awareness between students educated at this school, who have good understanding, and those who have joined the school in the sixth form. Regular testing of vocabulary and practice in grammatical exercises are improving comprehension skills. The more capable are beginning to include more advanced language in creative written assignments. Others write coherently, but less ambitiously at this stage, and are prone to basic errors.

- 113 The quality of teaching is very good and promotes very good progress in learning. Teachers' knowledge of French and of French culture is very good and underpins the very high expectations that are at the heart of students' progress. Teachers use French consistently, even where the subject matter involves technical language and refuse to accept answers in English. As a result, students are constantly challenged to think and to adapt the language they know to new situations. In doing so, they improve their fluency and confidence. Relationships are excellent. Teachers clearly care for the progress and welfare of their students, not only in the way they treat them in lessons, but also through the painstaking efforts they make in marking their work. Lengthy comments indicate careful diagnosis of individual strengths and weaknesses. Students are in no doubt about their level of performance relative to course criteria, nor about what they must do to improve to the next level. Very good planning ensures that students use French in every lesson and benefit from a range of activities that improve productive and receptive skills. Teachers use authentic and up-to-date resources, for instance video clips of French news items broadcast via satellite, or articles downloaded from the Internet. These materials stimulate interest, so that students themselves make good use of the internet to inform their writing. The lessons are long at 70 minutes, but teachers sustain a good pace throughout, and students enjoy their work.
- 114 Students are mature, work hard and are appreciative of the efforts of teachers on their behalf. They are keen to participate in discussions and research topics conscientiously. For example, students in Year 13 spoke in French for several minutes on an impressionist painting of their choice. They argue cases well and are not afraid to take issue with each other, or even the teacher. Though there is no literary element in the course, there is evidence of students improving their cultural awareness by reading, for instance the novels of Zola. Even those in Year 12 who are experiencing some difficulty in making the leap from GCSE to AS level show a determination to succeed and to contribute on equal terms with classmates. All students feel that they have had a thorough preparation for study and speak highly about the structured feedback they receive on written assignments. Numbers opting for language study in the sixth form are increasing. Several students in Year 13 express the wish to continue language study at university.
- 115 Work in the subject benefits from excellent leadership and management. Since the previous inspection there has been good improvement overall, though accommodation remains inadequate. Policies and procedures are clearly set out in outstanding documentation. Schemes of work for the new AS and A2 courses are already in place and are adjusted in the light of thorough analysis of results. The allocation of a full term to the transition from GCSE is time clearly well spent and reflects the thoughtful approach of this dedicated department. Whilst there is no provision for work experience abroad, students have opportunities to take part in exchanges and visits throughout their time in school. There is a sixth form exchange with a school in France, which helps students to further develop their linguistic and

cultural knowledge. Overall, there has been good improvement since the previous inspection.