

INSPECTION REPORT

THE THOMAS HARDYE SCHOOL

Queen's Avenue, Dorchester

LEA area: Dorset

Unique reference number: 113895

Headteacher: Dr I E Melvin

Registered inspector: David Potter
1027

Dates of inspection: 28th – 31st January 2002

Inspection number: 243957

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Voluntary aided
Age range of students:	13 to 18
Gender of students:	Mixed
School address:	Queen's Avenue Dorchester Dorset
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr G Currie
Date of previous inspection:	21 st April 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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19096	Brian Bartlett	Team Inspector		Teaching
4738	David Berrisford	Team Inspector		Care: assessment Leadership & management: resources
3534	Ann Braithwaite	Team Inspector		Curricular & other opportunities
13748	Frances White	Team Inspector	French	
12226	Caroline Clarke	Team Inspector	English	
17318	Jan Greenhalgh	Team Inspector	Health & Social Care	
4727	Jeff Hale	Team Inspector	History, Sociology	
23031	Ian Knight	Team Inspector	Mathematics	
20588	Ian Hodgkinson	Team Inspector	Business Studies	
1968	Stuart Farmer	Team Inspector	Biology, Physics	
10288	John Richards	Team Inspector	Art, Design & Technology	
24026	Celia Holland	Team Inspector	Music	
31385	Neil Gillespie	Team Inspector	Information and communication technology (ICT)	
14596	Anthony Fiddian-Green	Team Inspector	Religious Education (RE)	
4741	Diana Valentine	Team Inspector	Physical Education (PE)	

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

The school was inspected by five inspectors, led by David Potter. This is a summary of the inspection report, which is available from the school.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Number of full-time students:	1762	much larger than average
Students with English as an additional language	0.0%	below the national average (7.8%)
Students entitled to free school meals	4.8%	below the national average (15.3%)
Students with special educational needs (SEN)	14.3%	below the national average (19.5%)

The school serves the town of Dorchester and surrounding villages - an area which is mostly socially advantaged with some areas of disadvantage. The school has been growing for some years and has a very large and expanding sixth form. Student mobility is low. The school is very popular and is over-subscribed. Students' attainment on entry is slightly above average; the school receives fewer students of very high and low ability than might be expected. The school is fully staffed with specialist teachers. The school is a leading member of a partnership of schools within the town and surrounding villages.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is an outstanding school that sets and achieves very high standards. It is characterised by a "can do" culture: all students are expected - and helped - to learn and succeed. The school has been exceptionally well led for many years; the headteacher's commitment to continuous improvement has resulted in teaching which is consistently very good and frequently outstanding. The school provides excellent value for money.

What the school does well

- Standards in tests and examinations for all age groups are consistently well above national averages, and continue to improve faster than the national average.
- Students of all abilities achieve very well and are valued equally: the provision for and achievement of both those with special needs and gifted and talented students are excellent.
- Students behave exceptionally well and have excellent attitudes to work and school; they work in partnership with teachers to achieve the school's shared vision of learning and achievement.
- Students support each other in their determination to learn: this is a school in which success and excellence are respected.
- Teaching is consistently very good; examples of exceptional teaching abound and are found in all curriculum areas.
- The school provides an excellent curriculum that is dynamic and responsive to the needs of students and the local economy.
- Students' work and achievement are extremely well monitored and supported through an exceptional academic monitoring system: students have clear and ambitious targets for improvement.
- The leadership provided by the headteacher, senior staff and governors is of the highest quality: it is far-sighted and sets extremely high standards.
- The school achieves continuous improvement while expanding rapidly because everyone shares a strong commitment to improvement.
- The local partnership of schools (DASP), by providing continuity and shared endeavour, plays a significant role in promoting students' achievements.

What could be improved

- There are no major areas for improvement; there are points of detail for consideration in the sixth form subject reports.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Improvement since the last inspection in April 1997 has been excellent. All the many strengths have been maintained; the teaching, described as very good in 1997, has improved sharply, and the standards achieved by students, also praised in the previous report, have risen faster than the national average at all levels. The key issues raised in the last inspection have all been met.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	Compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1999	2000	2001	2001
GCSE	B	A	A	A
AS/A-levels	A	A	A	

Key

Very high	A*
Well above average	A
Above average	B
Average	C
Below average	D
Well below average	E
Very low	E*

Since the last inspection, the school's results in national tests and examinations at the end of Years 9 and 11 and in the sixth form have consistently been well above both national averages and the average of similar schools, and have improved faster than the national average. The gap between boys' and girls' results is less than the national gap. Examination performance is consistently very good across the school.

Standards are high at GCSE; results have improved faster than the national rate, and both boys' and girls' results have been well above the national average for several years. Students achieve high grades, and very few leave Year 11 without qualifications.

Pass rates and the quality of grades achieved in sixth form courses have been well above national averages for several years, and outstanding results are achieved consistently in several subjects. Results in the first year of the new AS-level examination were very good. Very good pass rates are consistently achieved in vocational courses, with a very high proportion of higher-grade passes.

Students of all abilities achieve well; those with special educational needs (SEN) achieve considerable success at GCSE, and able students achieve outstanding results. Gifted and talented students achieve excellence in examinations, sporting honours, artistic performances and enterprise competitions.

Students' current work confirms these results; it is well above average throughout, and improves up the school. Standards of literacy and numeracy are very good, enabling students to make the most of their work. Students' skills in ICT are developed well in specialist ICT lessons but inconsistently in other subjects. The standard of coursework is frequently excellent, showing not only that students have been very well prepared, but also that they make considerable effort to produce work of the highest quality.

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Attitudes are excellent. There is an outstanding ethos of mutual respect, and students relish the range of learning experiences that the school provides. Students are very proud of their school.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Excellent. Behaviour in classes and around the school is a pleasure to witness and the incidence of exclusions is very low.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. The school provides a significant number of opportunities for individual initiative and responsibility and these are well used and appreciated by students. Year heads and tutors ensure that all students consistently receive individual attention and the school knows its students very well. Collaboration and co-operation are the norm throughout the school.
Attendance	Attendance is well above the national average with a very low rate of

	unauthorised absence (truancy). Punctuality to lessons is excellent.
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All of these areas are great strengths of the school, which has a powerful ethos that supports the excellent standards. Working hard is the norm, and mutual support and challenge are a way of life. Relationships are relaxed, mature and good-humoured. Respect for others, regardless of difference, is very strong.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of students:	Year 9	Years 10 and 11	Years 12 and 13
Lessons seen overall	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.

The quality of teaching is a major contributory factor to the very high standards achieved. Teaching was very good or excellent in three out of five lessons seen, with examples of excellent teaching in almost every subject. The proportion of very good and excellent teaching increases up the school - just over fifty per cent in Years 9 to 11, rising to a remarkable seventy per cent in Year 13. As a direct result of such high-quality teaching, students have developed excellent learning skills and attitudes to their work.

Teaching has several outstanding features: teachers are not only knowledgeable subject specialists, they also have great enthusiasm which they transmit to their students, inspiring those of all abilities to produce work of high quality. Teachers and students expect a lot of each other; just as teachers prepare carefully for lessons, so students do their homework and arrive at lessons well prepared to take part.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum.	The curriculum throughout the school provides rich and exciting opportunities for students of all abilities. It is carefully planned to meet the interests of all students and to promote their personal development. It meets all statutory requirements. Large numbers of students enjoy the excellent, extensive programme of extra-curricular activities.
Provision for students with special educational needs (SEN)	Provision is very good overall and excellent in many respects. Strategies provided by the SEN department in individual education plans (IEPs) enable subject teachers to provide students with SEN with full access to the whole curriculum. Students receive very high quality support from the teaching assistants.
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Excellent. The emphasis on individual growth and attainment for all students ensures that the provision for their personal development is vigorous throughout the school.
How well the school cares for its students	Excellent. The school provides an environment of security and support. Tracking of students' achievement is outstanding. Tutors know their students' capabilities and aspirations well, and set ambitious goals for improvement with them.

The school's curriculum makes a significant contribution to its ethos and standards. It is rich, varied and carefully planned, so that students of all abilities can achieve their full potential. Students are offered a curriculum that provides excellent opportunities for personal development as well as for achievement in many fields. The excellent extra-curricular activities programme allows students to develop their interests and talents still further, and clearly benefits their achievement. The school responds readily and effectively to initiatives: its response is always considered, ensuring that changes are well planned and thoroughly implemented with the support of staff. Tutors focus on students' achievement and welfare through the excellent academic mentoring programme, which is both challenging and supportive.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	From clarity of vision and purpose to very smooth daily running, senior staff run the school in an exemplary way. Particular strengths are the headteacher's clear focus on learning and improvement, the consistency with which these aims have been pursued through the years and across the school, and the way middle managers have been made accountable for the achievement of ambitious improvement targets in their areas of responsibility.
How well the appropriate authority fulfils its responsibilities	The governing body fulfils all of its statutory responsibilities and is very well organised. Governors provide excellent support for the school, understanding its strengths and areas for development very clearly, and share in the development of its strategic vision by contributing to the compilation and monitoring of the school improvement plan (SIP).
The school's evaluation of its performance	The collation and use of attainment data are excellent. Students' achievement is tracked from their middle schools to when they leave. This tracking, together with the excellent academic mentoring programme, enables the school to predict grades reliably and to set ambitious targets with the students.
The strategic use of resources	Excellent. Strategic and financial planning are major strengths of the school. The school benefits from a strong and committed governing body that is fully involved and active in all aspects of budgetary management. The SIP reflects the needs and aspirations of the school and is appropriately resourced.

The key to the school's success has been its consistency and clarity of purpose over many years - a commitment to high standards and success for all and to continuous improvement, led by the headteacher and shared and understood by governors, staff, other schools in the partnership, and by students and parents. All the school's systems are focused on achieving the key purpose. The twin principles of equal value and best value are at the centre of the school planning processes and ensure that the procurement and deployment of resources are targeted at enhancing the learning opportunities for all students. The support provided by the administrative, technical and site staff is of the highest quality. The school community derives considerable benefit from its membership of the Dorchester Area Schools Partnership (DASP). The high standards attained by the students and the very good teaching and learning, enriched by an extensive extra-curricular programme, mean that the school provides excellent value for money for its students and the wider community that it serves.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • their children, irrespective of ability, are attaining well and making good progress; • because of good links between schools, their children's progress is continuous as they move from school to school; • the school sets high standards of work, behaviour and attitudes to others; • there is a culture of achievement and success; • the teaching is good; • the school is approachable and listens to them; • behaviour is good they feel their children can learn uninterrupted by others; • the school is a place with decent values which helps their children develop into mature young adults; • it is a well-managed school which keeps them well informed; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • homework, although their reasons for criticising it are mixed, some believing there is too much, others that it is variable in quality; • the provision for ICT.

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|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• that it is a good and improving school. | |
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Inspectors are in full agreement with parents' very positive views and pride in their school. Provision for ICT, although it should be more consistent across subjects, has improved sharply recently. Inspectors could find no evidence to support parents' views on homework, finding it adequate and well set.

ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form was inspected by a team of fourteen inspectors, led by David Potter. The summary report focuses on subjects and aspects of the sixth form. The full report is available from the school.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form of this very large, popular comprehensive school has 574 students, and has grown rapidly for several years. There are equal numbers of male and female students. About eighty per cent of the students from Year 11 in Thomas Hardy School join the sixth form and make up three-quarters of its population; the remaining quarter (about eighty students per year) join from other schools. Since results at GCSE are well above average, most students embark on two-year, advanced-level courses.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

This is an excellent, highly cost-effective, sixth form. The substantial rise in numbers has been more than matched by the rise in examination achievement. Continued success has come about because of excellent leadership, consistently high-quality teaching and the excellent, professional relationships between staff and students.

Strengths

- Standards achieved in AS/A-level and vocational examinations are well above national averages, with outstanding performances in many subjects.
- Students are mature, professional partners in the learning process.
- Teaching quality is consistently very good, with a very high proportion which is excellent.
- The curriculum is very broad and includes an excellent range of extra-curricular activities which have a very positive effect on students' learning and achievement.
- Students' achievement is monitored thoroughly and they receive excellent tutorial support and feedback on what they do well and how to improve.
- All students joining the sixth form, including those from other schools, are inducted and welcomed very well.
- The leadership provided by the headteacher, governors, the director of sixth form and his deputies is of the highest quality.

What could be improved

- There are no major areas for improvement; there are points of detail for consideration in the sixth form subject reports.

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

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

Curriculum area	Overall judgements about provision, and comment
Mathematics	Very good. Students achieve well above national average results because of very good, focused, teaching.
Biology	Very good. Examination results are above average and teaching is consistently very good.
Physics	Very good. Attainment is good and teaching is very good.
Business Studies	Very good. There has been a strong improvement since the last inspection. Very good teaching brings the subject alive to students by relating business theory to practice in real organisations.
ICT	Very good. Examination results are consistently above the national average and teaching is good and often very good.
Physical Education (PE)	Excellent. Examination results are consistently well above average; teaching is very good and sometimes excellent.

Design & Technology	Excellent. Standards of work are very high and teaching is consistently at least very good and often it is excellent.
Health & Social Care	Good. Examination results are above average and the majority of teaching is good.
Art	Excellent. High standards are achieved in all courses, through teaching which is very good and often excellent.
Music	Very good with some outstanding features, such as the standard of performance and the range of musical experiences provided. Examination results and teaching are very good.
History	Excellent. Standards are high, students' attitudes to the subject are exemplary and teaching is frequently excellent.
Sociology	Satisfactory with many good features. Results at A-level are in line with the national average, and well above it at AS-level.
English	Excellent: results are excellent and teaching is consistently very good.
French	Very good with excellent features such as results at AS-level and improvement since the last inspection.
Religious Education (RE)	Very good. Examination results are outstanding, and teaching is very good.

Inspectors make comments in the range excellent, very good, good, satisfactory, unsatisfactory, poor, very poor

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Academic support and guidance for students are excellent. The mentoring programme, together with the comprehensive tracking system, enables students to understand their own strengths and weaknesses and to set targets for improvement. Information about future courses of study and induction arrangements for entry into the sixth form are very good.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	As a direct result of the excellent leadership, throughout the major expansion of recent years, the sixth form has maintained its ethos, and its already good results have improved considerably. The governing body provides excellent support and oversight of the work of the sixth form. All aspects of leadership, from the clear focus on success and learning for all to the smooth daily running of this very large and complex organisation, are carried out with distinction.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the success they achieve; the teaching they receive, which they find both challenging and supportive; the availability of teachers to offer extra support; the range of courses on offer; the way they are inducted into the sixth form, including the written information they receive in advance; the welcome to students joining the sixth form from other schools. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> how they are kept informed about their learning and achievement; the career advice they receive when joining and leaving the sixth form; the degree to which they feel they are treated as young adults, and whether their views are listened to sufficiently.

Inspectors are in full agreement with students' positive views. Relationships and opportunities in the sixth form are excellent, students are very well taught and supported, and the induction arrangements are very good. Sixth form students are genuinely proud of their school. The advice given to students applying to university is excellent, and the school is currently implementing improved systems of guidance for those following other pathways. Inspectors were unable to reach a judgement about the degree to which the school consults and listens to its students: staff and students should discuss the matter further. Inspectors do not agree with students' views on the feedback to them about their achievement, finding it excellent.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Standards in tests and examinations for all age groups are consistently well above national averages, and continue to improve faster than the national average.

1. Students' attainment when they arrive at Thomas Hardy from their middle schools is slightly above average. Their results in tests and examinations at 14, 16 and 18 have been consistently well above average since the time of the last inspection. Most of the work seen during the inspection was also well above average in standard. This very good learning and achievement is the result of very good teaching (paras.16-23), a very well-organised curriculum (paras.24-27) and students' excellent learning and attitudes to work (paras.8-15). Sustained, high-quality leadership (paras.32-38) underpins all.

Test and examination results at all levels show similar, impressive strengths:

- they are well above national averages;
- they are well above the averages of similar schools;
- the gap between boys' and girls' results is less than the national gap;
- they represent equally good achievement across the ability range: the results for the most- and least-able students exceed the national averages for those groups (see paras.5-7);
- they are improving at a rate faster than the national average, from which the school's results are accelerating away;
- they consistently meet or exceed the school's targets;
- the quality and the improvement are sustained over time;
- there are no weak subjects and many in which performance is consistently excellent.

2. At GCSE, not only do nearly three-quarters of students achieve five or more A* - C results, over forty per cent achieve nine such results, and most students with SEN achieve one or two. There were only six ungraded results out of the well over three thousand subject entries in 2001, and results were significantly above the national average in almost every subject. As a result of these very good results and their very positive attitudes to work, over ninety per cent of students remain in full-time education beyond sixteen, the great majority embarking on advanced-level courses.

3. Sixth form students at Thomas Hardy achieve well above national average standards: an average of twenty examination points each, against a national average of around seventeen. Results in most subjects, vocational as well as A/AS-level, far exceed the national average, and no subject achieves below-average standards. The quality of results is shown by the fact that, on leaving the sixth form, a high and rising proportion of students - over eighty per cent in each of the last three years - goes into higher education.

4. In responses to their questionnaire, ninety-nine per cent of parents stated that they felt that the school set high standards and encouraged their children to do well, and ninety-seven per cent that those children are making good progress. These are remarkably high proportions.

Students of all abilities achieve very well and are valued equally: the provision for and achievement of both those with special needs and gifted and talented students are excellent.

5. In the national tests at age 14 and at GCSE, students of all abilities achieve well. The test and examination certificates of the most able students are outstanding, with some students achieving results of the highest quality in the world-class tests and several gaining ten or more A* and A grades. The achievement of students with SEN is very good; most gain at least seven GCSEs with some in the A* - C category; very few students leave with no qualifications, and only five per cent of all grades achieved are below an E. The school is convinced that all students can succeed and make progress, and adopts a highly inclusive approach in its varied strategies to ensure that they do so. The proportion of students of well-above-average ability is small, and yet the proportion achieving the highest grades in all tests and examinations is large.

6. The school makes excellent provision for students with SEN. Students who may require additional support are identified early and are then given a programme of work aimed at increasing their reading and spelling ages. This is extremely successful and many students make exceptional progress. Most subjects are taught in mixed-ability classes and therefore students with SEN have access to the full range of the curriculum. All teachers are very aware of the individual needs of the students, and the SEN department advises them on teaching strategies that will be effective. Excellent use of special arrangements (such as additional time) means that the students are able to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding in examinations. Students receive very good support from the specialist SEN teachers and the teaching assistants. The school challenges all students to produce work of the highest quality; those with SEN respond very positively to this demand and as a result their achievements are high. The small number of students from minority ethnic groups attend and achieve as well as their colleagues. The one student for whom English is an additional language is predicted to achieve high grades at GCSE after only one year in the school.

7. The school identifies its gifted and talented students in a systematic way, acknowledging exceptional talent in academic and other fields: such students have many opportunities to fulfil their potential and achieve distinction in areas such as art, drama and music, in which Thomas Hardy students perform with distinction in festivals nationally and abroad, and sport, in which talented students achieve regional and national honours. Provision for the academically gifted is challenging and stimulating: students who have the potential to achieve at the highest level meet with the headteacher, and action plans are set with them and their parents. The school sends a high and rising proportion to Oxford, Cambridge and other prestigious universities, and provides impressive levels of after-care to help students do well at their universities.

Students behave exceptionally well and have excellent attitudes to work and school; they work in partnership with teachers to achieve the shared vision of learning and achievement.

8. At the time of the last inspection, behaviour was seen as good and students' attitudes as very good. Both have improved still further, and are now of very high quality. The rate of exclusion of students is low.

9. Students are proud to attend The Thomas Hardy School. Their excellent behaviour, and their positive attitudes to work and to the school, are the result of:

- the powerful ethos of learning and success;
- the mutual respect between teachers and students;
- very good pastoral and monitoring systems which provide challenge and support;

- very good teaching and a broad curriculum with a rich extra-curricular component, all of which encourage participation, collaboration and co-operation;
- the very clear and consistently-implemented guidelines for behaviour

10. Students show their skills and their positive attitudes to work in the good learning that characterises most lessons. Learning was always at least satisfactory, and in two-thirds of lessons seen it was excellent or very good. Students settle to work quickly, persist when they find tasks difficult and participate fully in lessons.

11. Described by inspectors as very good or excellent in over three-quarters of lessons, students' behaviour is a major support to their learning. In a very large school with narrow corridors, congestion at lesson changes is considerable in parts of the building: at all times students were calm, polite and courteous to each other and to adults. No poor behaviour was observed during the inspection. Students' attitudes to school show in their helpfulness and courtesy to visitors and in their willingness to talk about their school. While recognising and valuing its concentration on learning and improvement, and the quality of teaching and support they receive, they are not uncritical: they have been trained to expect very high standards of themselves and of their teachers. Students' positive attitudes raise their attainment and speed their progress. By the time they reach the sixth form, students are mature, professional partners in the learning process.

12. Parents, at their pre-inspection meeting and in their questionnaires and written comments, expressed great satisfaction with behaviour at the school, with the way the school helps their sons and daughters become mature and responsible, and with how well it helps them achieve.

Students support each other in their determination to learn: this is a school in which success and excellence are respected.

13. Although closely linked to the excellent attitudes and behaviour described in paras.8-12, this is a distinctive feature of the school and a factor contributory to its success.

14. This is a school in which to achieve is acceptable and indeed encouraged: students feel confident to say that they are working hard, attempting to achieve high grades and aiming for success. Students take pleasure in each other's success and help each other achieve. In an exceptional sixth form sociology lesson, the absence of the teacher through illness had prompted the students to carry out a spontaneous review of their work to help those who had been absent cover ground they had missed; the initiative shown, and the quality of the discussion and collaboration, were impressive and a great tribute to the students' commitment and motivation.

15. There is a strong emphasis on mutual support and challenge between students and staff and this plays a major part in driving the school ethos of attainment and success. The students have a real desire to show individual initiative and responsibility to the benefit of others and many examples of valuable collaboration between students were seen during the inspection, in subjects such as music, French and English, and in the very strong and successful Young Enterprise teams.

Teaching is consistently very good; examples of exceptional teaching abound and are found in all curriculum areas

16. Teaching is very good across the school. In lessons seen in Years 9 to 11, there was no unsatisfactory teaching and over fifty per cent was very good or excellent. In the sixth form, nine out of ten lessons were at least good, and two-thirds were very good or excellent. The amount of outstanding teaching is remarkably high; such teaching was observed in all curriculum areas and almost every subject.

17. The teaching has several impressive strengths. Most notable is the teachers' knowledge and understanding of their subject. Because of this they are able to plan and present lessons that capture the students' interest and imagination. In a sixth form science lesson, the teacher shared insights and techniques with the students so that they developed new skills to conduct practical experiments. In a Year 11 English lesson, the students were guided skilfully towards an understanding of the subtleties of Browning's 'My Last Duchess'.

18. Expectations are very high. This means that the students are challenged to achieve the highest possible standards, such as in a Year 10 music lesson where they demonstrated their confidence in composition. Most teachers pose questions that encourage students to reflect, analyse, predict or hypothesise, which in turn enhance their level of understanding.

19. Students of all abilities achieve very well because the teachers motivate and inspire them and they therefore enjoy their learning. The high quality of explanation and exposition ensures that the students know not only what to do, but also that they understand how to produce detailed and thoughtful work of high quality.

20. Students with SEN are provided for very well. Teachers are aware of their difficulties and employ appropriate, alternative methods to enable those students to make very good progress.

21. Relationships between teachers and the students are excellent. This means that an environment is created in which learning is a partnership. As a result, both teachers and students work hard for one another and thus the standards rise. Whilst there is a clear understanding that learning is a serious business, it can also be fun. In an excellent Year 11 German lesson, the teacher found a way to practise clause- and word-order with students which made them both laugh and learn.

22. On occasions, lessons are dominated or over-directed by the teacher to the extent that the students are required to make little or no contribution. When this occurs, there are no opportunities for the students to think for themselves or develop their organisational skills. In a few lessons in the 13 – 16 part of the school, there is insufficient pace or challenge and therefore the rate of learning falls.

23. Teaching is of such consistently high quality because senior managers have set clear standards and have used performance management very well to monitor and improve quality. There are some sixth form subjects in which this could be done even better, but the overall standard is very high.

The school provides an excellent curriculum that is dynamic and responsive to the needs of students and the local economy.

24. The quality of opportunities and experiences provided for students is excellent. The curriculum meets statutory requirements throughout the school, which is rightly proud of the broad curriculum it provides, with excellent access and opportunity for all. The high quality of planning for the continuity of learning throughout the school is a factor contributory to students' very good achievements. Equally impressive are the very strong curricular links with partner

middle schools so that, when students change school, there is very good, seamless continuity in their learning and achievement. From the National Curriculum subjects in Year 9, the students can select from GCSE and then sixth form courses which enable them to follow their interests and meet their aspirations for life after school. The sixth form provision is particularly extensive, with a sound range of vocational courses and a very wide range of A/AS-level courses. The sixth form curriculum is also sensitive to the needs of the local economy through the provision of leisure and tourism, leisure and recreation courses and a two-year Diploma in Child Care (Cache). The school curriculum reflects the inclusive ethos of the school through its high-quality provision and access for students of all abilities and interests. For such a large school, it is remarkably responsive to the needs of individual students: for example, a one-year course in Year 12 was set up for a few students with particular special needs, while gifted students have early entry to examination courses.

25. A defining feature of the curriculum is the extent and excellent quality of extra-curricular provision. Teachers are committed to providing stimulating visits and activities in and out of lesson time that greatly enhance and deepen students' learning. Examples of this enrichment are found across the curriculum. In business education, for example, extensive links with industry and case studies provide real-life examples that have a powerful effect on learning. In English, a series of Victorian seminars such as 'The Rise of Women in Victorian Literature' was used as the starting point for a study of texts. Fieldwork in geography improves motivation and understanding and helps students produce high-quality individual studies at A-level. In addition, there is a wealth of clubs and activities provided by all subjects. The students greatly enjoy the opportunities these offer and attendance is very good. This level of support is encouraged by the open nature of these clubs; students of all abilities are welcomed and appropriate provision made. The range of homework and revision clubs is very impressive - almost all major subjects provide such opportunities. In outdoor activities for example, there is use of the climbing wall in the sports hall, use of the local area and, for students with the necessary skills, a visit to the French Alps. Parents also feel extra-curricular provision is a strength of the school.

26. The quality of the arrangements for students' personal development is equally strong. Students report that the excellent personal and social education course deals with issues of importance to them. The preparation for the world of work is imaginatively planned around visits and industry days as a way of offsetting the difficulty of finding work experience placements in the local area; this is an improvement from the time of the last inspection. Careers guidance is very good. These elements of personal development are bound together for individual students through the well-developed tutoring programme.

27. The key issue about the curriculum raised in the 1997 inspection has been dealt with very effectively. The use of tutor time has been reviewed twice since then, resulting in the current excellent academic tutoring programme which plays such a significant role in raising achievement. A further improvement has been the increase in time for the second modern foreign language, causing an increase in the numbers taking two languages at GCSE; numbers of students studying two languages in the sixth form are, however, still low.

Students' work and achievement are extremely well monitored and supported through an exceptional academic monitoring system: students have clear and ambitious targets for improvement.

28. Academic support and guidance for students are excellent. The academic mentoring programme, which runs throughout the school, enables students to understand their own strengths and weaknesses, and to set targets for improvement. Through the academic mentoring programme, the school has managed to link the pastoral care of the students with their academic achievement, ensuring that all students are equally valued. The heads of year provide the crucial link between form tutors and subject teachers, and ensure that the students

experience a rigorous but supportive programme which encourages them to reflect on their achievement and which provides them with practical ways to improve their work.

29. Across all subjects, tracking of achievement is very good. Attainment data are collected, analysed and used effectively by year heads, tutors and subject teachers. Achievement is tracked continuously from the middle schools and further data are added as students progress through Thomas Hardy School. This very comprehensive database allows grades to be predicted with a high degree of reliability.

30. Students feel that they are supported well by their tutors and are confident that any potential under-performance, or difficulties that they might experience, will be quickly picked up by their tutors, and that appropriate guidance will be given. Assessment is accurate and realistic; students' work is regularly marked to a very high standard, with constructive criticism that enables students to improve their work.

31. Review statements and reports to parents and students are excellent; they are both diagnostic and supportive. Reviews are informed by the very effective student tracking system and by the termly academic mentoring sessions.

The leadership provided by the headteacher, senior staff and governors is of the highest quality: it is far-sighted and sets extremely high standards.

32. Leadership and management, good at the time of the 1997 inspection, have improved markedly such that all aspects - from the establishment of a clear long-term vision through to orderly day-to-day running - are of very high quality and directly benefit the standards reached by students. The vision is shared and promoted strongly by senior staff and governors, and flows from the determination and conviction of the headteacher, who has given distinguished leadership over a long period, and from his unswerving commitment to high standards. The result is a learning community characterised by very high standards of work and behaviour, excellent attitudes and a shared commitment to success. Although the community is large and complex, day-to-day running is smooth and no time is wasted. The inclusive nature of the vision is shown by the high achievement by students of all abilities (see paras.5-7) and by the breadth and richness of the curriculum and how it meets the needs of students of all ages and abilities (paras.24-27).

33. Strategic vision and management are excellent. Senior staff and governors look ahead to the implications of rising numbers, not only on curriculum, staffing and buildings, but also on the maintenance of standards. Senior staff and governors analyse the school's performance thoroughly and well, involving the talented team of middle managers; they then plan for improvement on this secure basis, matching plans with the professional development of staff so that initiatives do not misfire but hit the ground running. This was true of the development of the new sixth form courses and of work on literacy. The improvement plan is a live document, used to guide actions and spending decisions; its central focus on teaching and learning ensures that all the school's actions are geared to its core business. The governing body is closely involved in agreeing the priorities of the development plan, and ensures that its intended outcomes are clear and measurable. Governors then monitor these outcomes very effectively and ensure that the next plan is adjusted accordingly. The budget and its management are seen as ways of achieving the school's ambitions, rather than as a brake on spending. Performance management has been used very well to monitor and improve the quality provided.

34. Over ninety per cent of parents who responded to the questionnaire believe the school to be well led and managed - a remarkable and unusually high proportion.

35. Since it manages resources very well, provides very good teaching and an excellent curriculum, and achieves very high standards, the school, including its sixth form, provides excellent value for money for its students and for the wider community it serves.

The school achieves continuous improvement while expanding rapidly, because everyone shares a strong commitment to improvement.

36. Since the last inspection in 1997, numbers in the 13 – 16 part of the school have expanded by nearly twenty per cent and in the sixth form by nearly forty per cent. Numbers in main school year groups continue to rise, as does the attraction of the sixth form to students from both Thomas Hardy and other local schools. Further significant expansion is therefore certain.

37. It is a distinctive achievement of the school that it has managed such large and rapid expansion without compromising its ethos of respect for the individual and commitment to success and improvement for all, and that achievement in all fields, especially examination results, has risen continuously throughout the expansion. Since the last inspection, examination results have remained well above the national average and have risen at a rate faster than the national average: in other words, at a time when it is taking in a higher proportion of its own students and of those from other schools, the Thomas Hardy results have accelerated away from the national average.

38. This has been achieved by:

- unswerving attention to the development of a culture of learning, success and improvement led by the headteacher, senior staff and governors;
- sustaining the same values and aims over a long time, with the focus kept sharp: all proposed developments are tested to ensure that they support the culture and the aims;
- the acceptance of the culture by staff and students so that it characterises the school and everything in it. The agreed ways of teaching and of working with students and managing their behaviour are consistently implemented by staff;
- high-quality analysis of performance and improvement planning;
- the designation of a senior member of staff to manage the improvement programme, and the skill with which he has harnessed all staff to that programme. The booklet explaining the part to be played in the programme by each teacher, and the resources given to them to carry this out, is an example of excellent practice.

The local partnership of schools (DASP), by providing continuity and shared endeavour, plays a significant role in promoting students' achievements.

39. For several years, the first, middle and special schools in the Dorchester area have worked with the Thomas Hardy School in a partnership, recognising that they will maximise students' achievements, and achieve best value for money, by collaborating and sharing resources. The Partnership has achieved:

- extensive discussion about curriculum continuity, ensuring that work in each phase proceeds smoothly from that in the previous phase;
- shared information about students' achievements, analysed by cohort and subject to evaluate strengths and weaknesses, and by student to ensure that individuals are achieving their potential;
- joint staff development days to ensure a common approach to key aspects such as literacy and behaviour management;
- sharing of resources to achieve a high-quality, cost-effective and customised service in areas such as music tuition, behaviour management and welfare support.

40. Through a sense of shared endeavour and the promotion of seamlessness, DASP has played a significant role in the high achievement of students at GCSE and advanced level.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

41. Inspectors judged that there are no areas of significant weakness in the school, and that many of the minor areas for improvement raised with the school already feature in its improvement plan.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

42. There are matters of detail for the school to consider within the sections of the report, particularly the subject sections of the sixth form report. None of these is sufficiently significant to bring forward as a key issue.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 9 – 11	42
	Sixth form	86
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students		50

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
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Years 9 – 11

Number	9	12	7	12	0	0	0
Percentage	23	30	17	30	0	0	0

Sixth form

Number	19	36	20	8	1	0	0
Percentage	23	43	24	9	1	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 all percentages, as each lesson represents more than one percentage point.

Information about the school's students

Students on the school's roll

	Y9 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of students on the school's roll	1188	574
Number of full-time students known to be eligible for free school meals	57	16

Special educational needs

	Y9 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of students with statements of special educational needs	24	5
Number of students on the school's special educational needs register	175	5

English as an additional language

	No of students
Number of students with English as an additional language	1

Student mobility in the last school year

	No of students
Students who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	19
Students who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	46

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	91.8
National comparative data	90.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.3
National comparative data	1.1

Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year, 2000/01.

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2001	208	194	402

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	172	169	174
	Girls	168	149	146
	Total	340	318	320
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	85 (86)	80 (78)	80 (80)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	42 (46)	56 (59)	52 (47)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)
Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	166	178	176
	Girls	168	154	155
	Total	334	332	331
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	83 (62)	83 (78)	82 (82)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	43 (29)	53 (54)	47 (40)
	National	31 (31)	42 (39)	33 (29)

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	2001	193	177	370

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of students achieving the standard specified	Boys	132	191	192
	Girls	130	169	170
	Total	262	360	362
Percentage of students achieving the standard specified	School	71 (65)	97 (97)	98 (97)
	National	48 (47)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results	GCSE point score
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Average point score per student	School	50.6
	National	39.0

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

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

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

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Male	Female	Total
	2001	92	101	193

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For all candidates entered					
	Male	Female	All			
School	18.1	20.6	19.4			
National	16.9	17.8	17.4			

Previous year figures not entered because the basis for calculation and comparison nationally has changed

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number in their final year of studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those students who achieved all those they studied	School	39	92
	National		75

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

Ethnic background of students

	No of students
Black – Caribbean heritage	4
Black – African heritage	2
Black – other	0
Indian	3
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	1752
Any other minority ethnic group	1

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	7	1
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y9 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	115.1
Number of students per qualified teacher	15.3

Education support staff:

Total number of education support staff	28
Total aggregate hours worked per week	550

Deployment of teachers: Y9 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	75.6
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Average teaching group size:

Key Stage 4	21.8
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FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000/01
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	£
Total income	4070357
Total expenditure	4031691
Expenditure per student	2448
Balance brought forward from previous year	135000
Balance carried forward to next year	173666

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	15.1
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	31.0

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

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1762
Number of questionnaires returned	411

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	35	53	7	3	0
My child is making good progress in school.	46	51	2	0	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	32	59	3	0	6
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	20	58	13	5	4
The teaching is good.	36	58	1	0	5
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	41	50	8	1	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	48	45	5	1	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	65	34	1	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	30	53	12	1	4
The school is well led and managed.	47	44	2	1	5
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	37	53	5	1	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	56	36	3	0	4

Summary of parents' and carers' responses

The views of the forty-five parents who attended the meeting, the four hundred and eleven who responded to the questionnaire, and the thirty-nine who sent letters to the registered inspector, are overwhelmingly positive about the quality of education given to their sons and daughters and the standards they are achieving. A remarkably high proportion believes Thomas Hardye to be a good school which sets very high standards, and that their sons and daughters are making good progress.

Although some parents voiced individual criticisms, no aspect of the school came in for frequent criticism. Some parents did, however, comment on aspects of homework and on provision for ICT.

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

43. At the time of the last inspection, the school's A-level results were described as in line with the national average, and results in vocational courses as above it. Since then, despite an increase over nearly fifty per cent in the number of candidates and entries, the quality of grades achieved and the rate of improvement in all types of sixth form course have been well above national averages. Results in the first year of the new AS-level examination were very good. Male and female students both achieve well-above-average results. Retention and completion rates are very high: for the last three years, over ninety per cent of students have completed their course.

44. In 2001, students at Thomas Hardy School achieved an average of over twenty examination points, well above the national average of seventeen, and results in most subjects, vocational as well as A/AS-level, far exceeded the national average; no subject achieved below-national-average standards. The quality of results is shown by the fact that, on leaving the sixth form, a high and rising proportion of students - over eighty per cent in each of the last three years - goes into higher education. Results have matched or exceeded the targets the school has set in all recent years.

45. Results in biology, business studies, chemistry, economics, French, design and technology, electronics, geography, history, mathematics, music, RE and PE have been consistently above to well above average in recent years, with exceptional performances in several of these in each year. Results in art, English, German, physics are generally above average and are improving, in some cases to very high standards. Results have been very good in other subjects such as Spanish, classical studies, computer studies, law and psychology, but the numbers taking these subjects does not always allow valid national comparison.

46. The school has run intermediate and advanced vocational courses in leisure and tourism, health and social care and business studies for several years. Completion rates have been good throughout the period and results have been well above average - all candidates have passed, and the proportion of merits and distinctions has been above average.

47. Students of all abilities achieve well in the sixth form, showing the school's commitment to inclusion. Several students with special needs, including some with statements, join the sixth form each year; they are extremely well taught and supported and achieve very good results. Many students achieve outstanding A-level results each year. Gifted and talented students achieve excellence in academic results, in regional and national sporting honours, artistic performances and in competitions in fields such as public speaking and business enterprise. Theatrical and musical performances by students from Thomas Hardy School have taken place in many venues across Britain and beyond.

48. Students' standards in key skills are very high. They write well, assembling well-reasoned arguments in good English. They speak very well: they discuss readily in lessons, and in many subjects they deliver presentations to other members of their class and take part in role-play: the role-plays seen in history and law were of outstanding quality. Not only do these exercises benefit their subject knowledge, their oral fluency and their confidence, they also help their skills of collaboration. Sixth form students have good ICT skills. The use made of computers in vocational courses is very good, but it is inconsistent in AS/A-level. There is good

quality work in several subjects including French, design and technology, RE, and PE. ICT work in geography is very good and a regular part of the learning repertoire; students automatically turn to the Internet as a source of up-to-date information, and use ICT regularly to present and enhance work in the most effective way. ICT is not used sufficiently to improve students' skills, or to enhance their understanding, in mathematics and sciences. Students' numeracy skills are good and are developed in many subjects, especially sciences, geography and technology. Students collaborate very well, and respond enthusiastically to assignments which require them to solve a problem; they collaborate well to organise their resources, research widely including using the Internet, and present their findings in well-argued, well-presented ways. Key skills constitute an area of strength and improvement over recent years, although provision is still uneven, especially in ICT.

49. Students' work seen during the inspection was generally in line with the examination results achieved, and in several subjects it is notably better. Current work in all subjects seen is at least above average and in most it is well above. Some work of exceptional quality was seen: individual studies presented by some A-level geography students are of undergraduate standard and publishable quality.

50. The improvement in achievement - the added value - from GCSE by students on both vocational and academic courses is very good. The school has developed solid analyses of the value it adds from GCSE to AS/A-level.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

51. This whole area is a considerable strength of the sixth form. Students' attitudes are particularly commendable: working hard to achieve the very best standards is routine for students of all abilities, and they display a mature and conscientious approach to learning, both independently and in groups. When provided with the challenge and the opportunity, such as in design and technology, history and ICT, they research avidly. There is a strong emphasis on mutual support and challenge between students and staff and this, underpinned by excellent relationships, plays a major part in driving the school ethos of attainment and success. The students have a real desire to show individual initiative and responsibility to the benefit of others and many examples of valuable collaboration between students were seen during the inspection, such as in biology, music, French and English. The academic monitoring system provides very detailed information about individual needs, and students respond very well to the standards expected.

52. During the inspection, sixth form students were a delight to talk with. The school aim to create role models for younger students and ambassadors for the school has been well achieved and they are a credit to the school community.

53. Attendance and punctuality in the sixth form are very good and students do not abuse the privilege of managing their time independently.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

54. The teaching in the sixth form is of extremely high quality and is a major contributory factor to the very high standards achieved in examinations. In ninety per cent of the lessons seen it was at least good; in two-thirds it was very good or excellent. These are most impressive figures. In almost every subject inspected, teaching was judged to be very good, and examples of excellent teaching were observed in every curriculum area. Thomas Hardy is a school in which the highest quality of teaching is not just an aspiration or an expectation, but a reality. Each teacher is committed to providing excellent lessons. The students respect this, realising that their teachers are making exceptional efforts to ensure that the achievements are as high as possible. Their response in terms of effort and productivity is consequently excellent:

this is a school in which the process of learning is a genuine partnership - the students' needs are addressed expertly by the teachers and the students reciprocate with outstanding endeavour.

55. A particular strength is the excellent subject knowledge of the teachers. They use their expertise not only to ensure that they impart information of the highest quality, but also to match their style of teaching to the needs of the students. As a result, in English, students are enabled to demonstrate mature expression and understanding across a wide range of literature, including Shakespeare, Chaucer, Bronte and Heaney. In PE, the students were both inspired and enabled to recognise the components of physical fitness required for different sports, while in physics, students make excellent gains in their skills of planning and conducting investigations.

56. Teachers' planning is extremely thorough and effective. In mathematics, art, and design and technology, for example, this ensures a systematic approach to learning. In a Year 12 biology lesson, the quality of the presentation fully engaged and interested the students in an activity related to energy, protein and nutrition.

57. Expectations of students are very high and they respond extremely well to those demands. In an RE lesson, the students engaged in a particularly high level discussion of the arguments concerning the existence of God, involving them in exploring transcendental and pantheistic attitudes to belief and truth.

58. Management of and relationships with students are of the highest quality. The Thomas Hardye is a school in which these two elements are inextricably linked. Behaviour is not managed through a simplistic rewards-and-sanctions approach but in a much more sophisticated way. Teachers acknowledge their responsibility to plan, prepare and present lessons that are dynamic, inspirational, challenging, stimulating and motivating, and achieve this time and time again. The students do not merely respect their teachers for this but, through their effort, productivity and pace of working, they demonstrate how they, too, strive for excellence.

59. Teaching methods are very effective because the teachers consider carefully how best to present the information and to require students to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding. Many examples were observed, including a music lesson in which a variety of strategies and tasks carefully developed the students' ability to apply their musical knowledge analytically, distinguishing between lower auxiliary and passing notes. In history, excellent questioning led students towards a detailed understanding of the Reformation.

60. Students with SEN in the sixth form are very well taught and they respond with excellent learning. Those with literacy and/or organisational difficulties are provided with extremely high quality support, enabling them to improve their understanding and demonstrate what they know and can do.

61. Very good use is made of assessment, both during lessons in response to students' comments and in the marking of their work. This links back to the teachers' knowledge of their subjects and ensures that the feedback to students enables them to overcome difficulties and identify what they must do to improve the quality of their work. Homework is generally used very well to extend the students' learning and is built into the planning - before the lesson starts, the teachers know how they are going to use homework to promote learning, rather than just using it to complete unfinished work.

62. On a few occasions the lessons are too teacher-directed or dominated by teacher talk and the students are told what to do rather than encouraged to use their prior knowledge to determine what would be appropriate. When this occurs, students usually just follow the

instructions and produce work of satisfactory quality; only on rare occasions do they become inattentive. The scope for greater independence in learning is mentioned in the reports for mathematics, French and RE; in some other subjects, such as those mentioned in para.51, students are actively encouraged to become independent learners.

63. The students are used to challenging teaching which encourages them to think and be creative; on the rare occasions when this does not happen, whilst remaining compliant, they lack enthusiasm. Learning was judged to be very good in eleven of the fifteen subjects inspected in detail, and as excellent in a further two. Students respond to the high-quality teaching by acting as professional learners: they prepare for lessons very well, such as in history, physics and biology, and take a very full part in them. Hard work is the norm. Because of the very good teaching and excellent academic monitoring systems, they understand their own learning and strengths very fully, and have a very clear understanding of how to improve.

64. The development of key and study skills is slightly more variable than that of subject-specific skills and knowledge. Whilst none is less than good, some subjects promote these aspects more actively than others. There could be greater consistency in the development of independent learning and in the use of ICT (see para.48).

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

65. Excellent provision is made for the academic and personal development of the students. The curriculum is very well planned to build on and extend the students' earlier experience in Years 10 and 11. Students receive good and impartial advice about sixth form provision. Care is taken to ensure that programmes match the requirements and aspirations of the students. The governing body is actively involved in evaluating the effectiveness of the curriculum and is well placed to evaluate any changes.

66. Thirty-four AS and A2 level courses are provided in the sixth form; from this extensive range, students can continue studies started in Years 10 and 11 or start new courses such as photography or psychology. Students wishing to pursue a vocational route can select from Advanced Vocational Qualification Certificate of Education (AVCE) in five subjects, from the General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) in a further five subjects, and from a small range of GCSE courses. A two-year diploma course in childcare is also available (CACHE). This last course, together with the courses in leisure and tourism and leisure and recreation, illustrates the positive way in which the sixth form responds to local employment needs.

67. This exceptional range of subjects is supported by a course of complementary studies that makes an excellent contribution to students' personal development. These studies include RE and a wide range of issues of importance to students at this stage in their education. Careers education is very thorough, particularly for students wishing to enter higher education. The school is developing a more extensive programme to support those students looking to employment or other training opportunities. An excellent range of extended curricular opportunities is provided through the subjects, and students have access to an excellent range of enrichment activities outside lessons. Many students take part in clubs, sporting activities and visits locally and much further afield. These add considerably to their breadth of experience and learning. Both parents and students feel this extra-curricular provision is a strength.

68. The sixth form is currently reviewing its provision for developing students' key skills, for which the school does not provide accreditation at present. However, provision for key skills is very good in most subjects, because of the wide range of teaching methods employed. This ensures that students develop good skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT and can apply these within the context of the subjects they study. Provision for ICT is uneven across the subjects (see para.48).

69. The sixth form has strongly stated aims of equal opportunity for all and its curriculum upholds these values, ensuring equality of access and opportunity. The curriculum is organised flexibly so that students can choose a range of courses to meet their particular needs. When necessary the sixth form will provide a course tailored to the needs of a particular group of students; in this way, maximum use is made of the flexibility conferred by such a large sixth form.

70. Every opportunity is taken to provide for students' personal development. There is excellent provision for spiritual, social, moral and cultural development through the rich curriculum, especially in arts subjects such as art, theatre studies, music and English. In all courses, opportunities are taken to supplement the core content of lessons with aspects of personal development, such as Young Enterprise activities in business studies and economics, foreign visits across the curriculum - such as history and science visits to the USA and an annual exchange to a high school in Missouri - and fieldwork in geography. Personal development is enhanced by community service, charity work (there is a Charity Week as well as regular support for chosen charities) and the leadership roles adopted by students.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

71. Guidance into the sixth form is very good. Although the school is keen to retain students, full information is provided about the courses and opportunities available at other schools, colleges and providers of post-16 education and training. Induction arrangements for entry into the sixth form are very good and were praised by students and their parents, including those who have joined from other schools.

72. Academic support and guidance are outstanding. The academic mentoring programme provides each student with three one-to-one academic tutorials per year, enabling students to understand their own strengths and weaknesses better, and to set targets for improvement. The resulting guidance on the targets to be set is excellent. Advice and guidance for students moving on to higher education through the UCAS procedure is excellent and support for those students who are making an alternative choice is improving.

73. Across subjects, tracking of students' achievement is very good. Teachers have a very good knowledge of the standard of students' work and their potential. Assessment is accurate and realistic; teachers have an excellent understanding of the examination assessment criteria for their subject. In English, for example, external examination moderators comment enthusiastically on the quality of assessment of students' work. In all subjects, students' work is marked thoroughly and the marking makes clear to the student what s/he should do to improve. In some subjects, for example PE, regular 'clinics' are held to help students overcome difficulties. Students have confidence in their tutors and are kept aware of their own current and expected future attainment through regular meetings with their tutors. Review statements to parents and students are excellent: they are both diagnostic and supportive.

74. Teachers also use the results of assessment to improve their courses. In mathematics for example, careful evaluation of the outcomes of student assessment activities is used to improve lesson planning and subsequent teaching.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS AND STUDENTS?

75. Parents and carers are very pleased with the quality of education and care given to their children, and many are deeply impressed with their achievement, and the guidance and support they receive, across the ability range. Parents and carers appreciate the ambitious targets set

for all students and the efforts made by the school to ensure that the best results possible are achieved by all. The small number of concerns that do exist centre mainly around homework - its consistency and quality.

76. Students in the sixth form are very proud of their school and how it drives them towards high standards of achievement. They value particularly the challenging yet supportive nature of the teaching they receive, and the adult, professional relationship with teachers who are willing to give up their time to provide extra support. They are impressed by the choice of courses and the wide range of extra-curricular activity on offer, and by the careful way they are inducted into more advanced work. They experience some frustration with the quality of careers service advice they receive, including the guidance for those students who choose not to move on to higher education; the school has acknowledged this and improvements are under way. In their questionnaire responses, students expressed some dissatisfaction with the way they are kept informed about their achievement; inspectors cannot agree with this view, finding the quality of feedback and dialogue about improvement with students to be excellent. Some students also doubt that their views are listened to by the school: inspectors could not come to a clear judgement about this, and invite the staff to discuss the matter further with the students.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

Leadership and management

77. In the last five years, the sixth form has expanded by nearly forty per cent and the number of students joining it from other schools has grown from a handful to nearly eighty, one quarter of the total intake. Over the same period, the sixth form has maintained its strong ethos of learning and success, and its already good academic results have improved markedly: this shows the positive effect of leadership. Students joining the sixth form from other schools speak very highly of the clear focus on learning and success. In all of the thirteen subjects reported in detail in this inspection which were reported on in the last inspection, improvement has been at least good, and in over half of them it has been very good or excellent.

78. Leadership and management of the sixth form by the headteacher and governors, and by the director of sixth form and his deputies who lead it on a day-to-day basis, are excellent. All aspects of leadership, from the clear focus on success and learning for all to the smooth daily running of this very large and complex organisation, are carried out with distinction. The heads of sixth form have been particularly successful in establishing a professional approach to learning and achievement in the sixth form. Staff and students alike prepare well for lessons and expect high standards of each other.

79. Governors maintain careful oversight of the life and work of the sixth form through their committees and through a sixth form link governor who liaises regularly with the director of sixth form, acting as a conduit between him and the governing body to ensure that the sixth form's successes, areas for development and plans for improvement are well known to governors and gain their approval. Governors are well informed, through their education committee, about the major curriculum changes of recent years and how they have affected the sixth form; equally, the policy and resources committee ensures that the sixth form lives within its budget, and maintains a careful discourse about the strategic implications - the threats and opportunities - of the large size of the sixth form and its rapid expansion. This strategy is effective in discharging the governing body's roles to support the sixth form, acting as its critical friend and ensuring its accountability.

80. All aspects of sixth form work are carefully evaluated. Students' achievements are very carefully monitored and the discourse between students and their teachers about how they should improve their work is exceptional. Students' views are carefully and systematically sought, and the results of questionnaires to them are analysed to assess strengths,

weaknesses and trends. All of these evaluations form a secure basis for the sixth form's plans for improvement. For example, evaluation systems have told the school that it needs to do more to support students who do not intend to proceed to higher education, and a programme has been put into effect this year.

Resources

81. Excellent financial management and planning, embracing the principles of equal value and best value, enable the sixth form to operate within its budget on an excellent, cost-effective basis. The quality and quantity of learning resources are very good. Students have access to extensive ICT facilities and to a very well-resourced library and resource centre.

82. Accommodation in the sixth form centre is very good: it provides a very pleasant environment for the students to live and work in. In some subject areas, for example in music and business education, the accommodation is very tight when large teaching groups are present. Group sizes are very variable, with small classes in some subjects such as modern languages and large classes in humanities subjects. The sixth form is staffed with sufficient, well-qualified teachers.

83. Students benefit from a wide choice of courses and from the excellent range of opportunities provided by the school. These features, together with the excellent quality of teaching, the very high standards attained in external examinations, mean that the sixth form provides excellent value for money for its students and for the wider community that it serves.

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

In the inspection, fifteen subjects and courses were inspected and are reported on in detail. Work in other subjects and courses was sampled and contributed to the overall picture of teaching and learning in the school. The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2001.

GCE AS-level courses (Year 13)

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art & Design	8	88	83	13	23	1.75	2.27
Business Studies	2	100	76	50	12	3.00	1.69
Chemistry	1	100	43	0	5	2.00	0.77
Dance	3	100	*	67	*	3.33	*
Economics	1	100	73	0	22	2.00	1.94
General Studies	10	10	77	0	19	0.10	1.92
Mathematics	6	83	62	33	15	2.17	1.51
Social Studies	3	100	74	0	11	3.00	1.47
Sociology	2	100	63	0	7	2.00	1.17

* figures not available

GCE AS-level courses (Year 12)

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	60	93	71	60	32	*	*
Chemistry	22	82	87	36	42	*	*
Biology	58	93	84	26	35	*	*
Physics	37	97	86	54	41	*	*
Electronics	15	100	*	73	*	*	*
D&T: Design	12	92	*	25	*	*	*
D&T: Graphics	13	100	*	62	*	*	*
Home Economics: Food	7	86	*	14	*	*	*
Textiles	13	77	*	31	*	*	*
ICT	11	100	81	27	21	*	*

Business Studies	31	90	87	19	28	*	*
Economics	7	100	88	57	42	*	*
Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Accounting	10	80	*	10	*	*	*
Physical Education	36	100	88	47	24	*	*
Art & Design	55	91	88	65	44	*	*
Art - Photography	29	100	*	69	*	*	*
Dance	3	100	*	67	*	*	*
Theatre Studies	14	86	*	14	*	*	*
Music	10	100	95	50	44	*	*
Music technology	3	100	*	67	*	*	*
General Studies	208	97	82	42	26	*	*
Law	15	93	80	53	29	*	*
Geography	24	100	91	46	39	*	*
Government & Politics	5	100	90	60	42	*	*
History	37	100	94	59	43	*	*
Religious Education	12	100	92	42	42	*	*
Psychology	48	94	83	40	28	*	*
Sociology	25	100	87	52	33	*	*
English literature	100	99	95	46	37	*	*
French	25	100	91	72	47	*	*
German	8	100	92	40	45	*	*
Spanish	4	75	91	25	50	*	*
Classical Civilisation	3	100	96	33	56	*	*

- figures not available

National results for 2001 are provisional at the time of writing

GCE A-level and AVCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	53	98	87	57	43	7.1	5.8
Biology	36	100	88	28	34	5.9	5.2
Physics	19	95	88	37	40	5.9	5.7
Business (VCE)	11	100	*	0	*	10.4	10.4

Business Studies (A level)	15	100	92	33	32	6.4	5.5
Physical Education	16	100	92	50	25	6.6	5.1
Health and Social Care	6	100	*	50	*	12.0	10.8
Leisure & Tourism	14	100	*	61	*	15.0	10.1
Art & Design (VCE)	3	100	*	0	*	12.0	12.2
Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art & Design (A level)	35	100	96	51	46	6.5	6.6
Music	8	100	93	75	35	7.8	5.7
English literature	53	100	95	40	37	6.8	5.9
French	16	94	89	56	38	7.5	5.6
Chemistry	19	100	90	58	43	7.1	5.9
Classical Studies	1	100	95	100	49	8.0	6.5
Computer Studies	7	100	86	43	23	6.6	4.6
Economics	6	100	89	67	36	7.7	5.5
Design & Technology	14	93	91	21	30	5.6	5.4
General Studies	151	81	85	23	30	4.5	4.9
Geography	25	96	92	40	38	6.0	5.7
German	10	100	91	40	40	7.0	5.8
History	21	100	88	52	35	7.2	5.5
Home Economics	7	86	83	14	28	4.9	4.7
Other sciences (electronics)	7	100	90	71	30	8.3	5.2
Other social sciences (law, psychology)	37	86	87	22	34	4.9	5.3
Religious studies	9	100	92	78	38	8.7	5.8
Sociology	20	95	86	15	35	5.2	5.3
Spanish	3	100	89	67	39	8.0	5.7

* figures not available

Intermediate vocational qualifications

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		%gaining distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Information and Communication Technology	6	100	*	67	*	0	*
Leisure and Tourism	4	100	*	75	*	0	*

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

GCSE COURSES

84. The school provides re-sit courses in English language, mathematics, science, French, and Spanish, and “new” GCSE courses in geology and human physiology and health. These courses were not inspected in detail because they are taken by relatively few students, many of whom take the examination in the winter and then drop the courses.

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

85. In this curriculum area, the school provides courses to AS/A-level in mathematics, further mathematics, biology/human biology, chemistry, electronics and physics. The AS/A-level courses in mathematics, biology, and physics were inspected in detail.

86. Standards in both chemistry and electronics are very high. In both subjects, pass rates are regularly one hundred per cent, and a very high percentage attains the highest grades. Results in A-level electronics in 2001 were among the best in the country, with twelve of the fifteen students gaining A or B grades. Two lessons of chemistry were observed; teaching was very good in one and excellent in the other. In one the teacher generated a calm and purposeful atmosphere which enabled the large group to operate efficiently during practical activity and contribute fully in the theory session that preceded it. The success of this very good lesson was built on excellent relationships and the challenge and inspiration provided for students. In another lesson, an adult learning environment promoted excellent achievement: the partnership between students and teacher improved the outcomes very considerably. Students in chemistry are confident, and are developing secure understanding and are acquiring the practical skills necessary to attain the good grades to which they aspire.

Mathematics

The provision for mathematics is **very good**. Students attain well above national average results because of very good, focused, teaching.

Strengths:

- Standards in examinations are consistently well above the national average.
- Teaching is of high quality, based on:
 - strong professional knowledge
 - very good planning, meeting the needs of classes
 - excellent relationships with students.
- Students are very good learners.
- There is a strong ethos of hard work and determination in lessons.
- Leadership is clearly focused on the achievement of high standards.

Areas for further development:

- Students have too few opportunities to be independent in their learning.
- ICT is not used enough to support learning.

Standards and achievement

87. Standards in advanced level mathematics have been consistently well above national averages since the last inspection. Male and female students achieve equally well. A very high proportion of the large numbers of students who study mathematics gain the higher pass grades of A, B and C - seventy-six per cent compared with the national average of around sixty per cent - and almost all pass their examinations. The school's mathematics results place it in the top quarter of all schools nationally, and students achieve well in the light of their GCSE results. Standards in the recent AS-level examinations were well above average and at least in line with the school's expectations, based on its excellent tracking system. The AS-level pass rate of ninety-four per cent, compared with the national average of around seventy, is excellent.

88. The analysis of work for students in both their first and second year of A-level study confirms the picture from examination results: the standard of students' work is well above average. In almost all lessons observed, standards were higher than would be expected at this stage of the course. For example, students in one Year 12 lesson about increasing and decreasing functions were completely conversant with the notation and able to take a method to analyse a quadratic equation and apply it to a cubic. Their understanding of the nature of quadratic equations enabled them to use a variety of methods to assist them in sketching graphs accurately and with confidence. Students in a Year 13 statistics lesson about testing hypotheses showed a solid understanding of the terminology and its meaning. They quickly grasped how to decide if a test should be 'one-tailed' or 'two-tailed' and, in discussion with the teacher, asked some incisive questions about the nature of the topic.

Quality of education

89. The principal reason for the high standards is the very good teaching, over half of which is very good; one unsatisfactory lesson was observed. The analysis of completed work confirms the picture of very good teaching overall, showing supportive marking, especially of those students experiencing difficulty with a topic, and rigorous attention to detail.

90. In the majority of lessons, teachers know the students well and ensure that tasks match their individual needs. In a Year 12 lesson, the class had just begun the mechanics module, having studied statistics last term. The teacher was well aware of the variations in the background knowledge of students and their levels of confidence, so several tasks were at hand to support all at the appropriate level: as a result, all were challenged and learned well in the lesson. The teacher also used well-focused questions to nominated students during the introductory part of the lesson. This kept all of the class alert and engendered a workmanlike atmosphere. In this lesson, as in almost all of those seen, relationships between students and between the teacher and the class were excellent, as all worked towards the common goal. Methods are similarly well chosen in the main, with competent use of, for example, overhead projectors and prepared transparencies. However, the department accepts that the potential of ICT as a teaching tool is currently underdeveloped; plans are in hand to remedy this.

91. In lessons and in discussion, students were extremely positive about the subject and behaved impeccably. However, lessons tend to be teacher-led so that, other than answering directed questions, students learn passively and there is little evidence of independent learning. Schemes of work are sketchy. They consist of the examination syllabus with a page of notes and tips on their teaching. In one aspect, this is a strength: it allows significant flexibility and the ability to react quickly to unforeseen demands. The more experienced members of the department use this flexibility well and deliver exciting and effective lessons that keep students on the edge of their seats. This happened in a further mathematics lesson focusing on the use of reduction formulae. The teacher had very good understanding of the techniques required, allowing her to set challenging work for all and to offer very effective individual support as necessary. This meant that all enjoyed the intellectual challenges and elegance of the methods presented. However, the scheme of work does not give sufficient guidance to less experienced teachers. Despite the discussion and sharing of good practice in the department, the main

source of guidance for newer members of the profession is the textbook series accompanying the syllabus. An over-reliance on the textbook meant that one lesson, whilst entirely satisfactory, lacked the sparkle which characterised other lessons observed.

92. In the one unsatisfactory lesson, the teacher talked over students and did not involve them in explanations, so that many became inattentive and were unable to complete the practice questions set without significant further help. One question was ill chosen; students lost confidence and the lesson ground to a halt. The teacher recognised this and gave a model answer on the board, but did not check that all were listening, so much of its impact was lost.

Leadership and management

93. All staff teaching in the sixth form share a vision of excellence for their students and strive to achieve it. In this, they are singularly successful. This clarity of vision comes from the head of mathematics, who has a passion for the subject which he communicates to both teachers and students. Students' learning and achievement are tracked very well, and the grades they should attain, based on their GCSE scores and the school's past experience, are predicted accurately. Good monitoring and evaluation of the department's work is at the heart of the shared commitment to improvement and the exchange of good practice. Similarly, the areas highlighted for further action in the department are entirely appropriate and good progress is being made towards achieving those targets. Overall, the department has made very good progress in its provision for sixth form mathematics since the last inspection.

SCIENCE

94. A distinctive feature of the post-16 science throughout the department is that it teaches 'school science' with a 'real science' feel. Students express the view that their teachers are scientists, and so are they.

Biology

Overall the quality of provision in biology is **very good**: examination results are above average and teaching is very good.

Strengths

- Students' attain above average results, often exceeding the grades predicted for them on the basis of their GCSE results.
- Staff are well qualified, experienced and able.
- The quality of teaching is very good and provides a secure framework for the students' learning.
- The quality of learning is very good: students are very willing to participate and have well-developed independent learning skills.
- Students' behaviour and attitudes are very good, often exceptionally so.
- Relationships and teamwork between staff and students, and among the students themselves, have a significant effect on standards.
- Student's achievement is tracked well; marking is very good and helps students understand how to improve their work.

Areas for improvement

- Managers do not drive further improvement in sixth form biology by ensuring that:
 - the best teaching practice is shared in the department
 - structured development planning is based on self-review and evaluation.

Standards and achievement

95. Biology examination results at A-level are consistently above the national average and in some years well above it; students generally achieve well in relation to their GCSE performance. In 2001, the pass rate at A-level was 100 per cent, above the national average; the percentage of students attaining A and B grades was just below the national average.

96. The standard of current work in Years 12 and 13 is generally above average. However, students' written records frequently do not reflect the high levels of knowledge, understanding and skill that are so clearly apparent in lessons.

97. In Year 12, students have a wide range of prior attainment. The work in their files, their contributions to lessons and discussion with them all indicate that most are achieving much as expected. Most are aware of the grades teachers expect them to achieve and they welcome the challenge. Students arrive early to their biology lessons and express positive views about them. The effective teaching encourages them to make links back to prior learning and builds their confidence. Homework and preparation are seen by them to be an integral part of the subject, and this has a positive effect on the standards that they attain.

98. The standards of Year 13 students' current work are above average, often well above. They enjoy the challenge of probing questions from their teachers. In one lesson, the students and the teacher worked hard as they steadily unpacked the biochemistry of respiration, with high-quality discussion developing around the tricky questions that were being carefully targeted at particular students. Often the students' curiosity and interest led to deeper explanation by the teacher and by their peers. A discussion about the significance of the Rosetta Stone had students enthralled. Year 13 biology students have impressively-developed independent-learning skills, and can summarise elegantly and can locate the detail to support their arguments. They make effective connections between areas of study, for instance linking organs with processes, or systems that work together such as the endocrine and nervous systems.

Quality of education

99. Teaching is very good with many strengths, and is a major contributory factor to the standards attained. Three features stand out as exceptional:

- teachers' knowledge and understanding;
- their very high expectations of their students;
- the way in which they manage their teaching groups to promote active learning.

Teachers' good understanding of examination requirements, and their use of past examination questions, help improve students' examination performance. In one excellent lesson, the teaching was very thoroughly prepared, and its delivery was dynamic and inspirational; this ambitious lesson began with the effective use of a PowerPoint presentation created by the teacher combining text, data and photographs. It moved on into student activities which prepared the way for a trachea/lungs dissection to introduce gaseous exchange. In another very good lesson that interested and engaged them throughout, students enjoyed applying their knowledge and understanding in the very challenging context of the Human Genome Project. In this lesson, students were able to support others, consolidate and enhance their own understanding, and help extend the capability of the group as a whole. It was the teaching strategy that made this lesson so successful and the effect of the teaching on the quality of the learning was very considerable.

100. There are very few aspects of teaching that require improvement. However, Year 12 groups can be quite large, with a wide range of prior attainment; meeting the needs of all students can therefore be difficult. In some lessons, too little attention is given to individuals' prior knowledge, understanding and skills, with all students receiving very similar levels of support and challenge. Teachers should give greater attention to students' individual learning styles; employing greater variety in teaching styles and methods could significantly raise rates of learning. In some situations, teachers' effective use of questioning and dialogue with students is not enough to ensure that they all learn well and achieve. Differentiation in such lessons focuses on outcomes rather than on the different routes learners might need to take to achieve them.

101. The quality of learning is very good and the students learn very well. They are very confident to offer suggestions, explanations and apply their prior knowledge and understanding in new situations. The learning partnerships that have developed between the students, and between them and their teachers, are impressive and have a very positive effect on learning. They use lesson time efficiently and take homework seriously enough for the quality of their preparation to influence the learning gains in lessons very noticeably. Students in biology feel comfortable with the idea that hard work is something to be praised and admired by their peers as well as by teachers. Students' attitudes and behaviour are very good, and frequently excellent. The thoughtful and precise teaching encourages students to be effective in their learning and reflective about the relationships between theory and complex reality. In one lesson, students' good microscopy skills and their care in recording and labelling what they saw were further enhanced by the teacher's timely interventions, so enabling them to tease out key relationships between stomach structure and function. The very positive learning environments created by teachers enable the students to be active learners - this is the norm for the vast majority. Levels of motivation and self-esteem are high and these too enhance their learning.

Leadership and management

102. The subject is well led: departmental and subject management are effective in delivering good outcomes for the students, and levels of improvement since the last inspection have been good. However, improvement planning, structured self-review, monitoring and evaluation processes are under-developed as tools to identify best practice in biology, and to improve teaching and raise standards further. Responsibilities and accountabilities for sixth form biology are unclear.

103. The management of teaching and learning at classroom and laboratory level is very skilled. Technical support is very effective. Useful schemes of work are either in place or being developed, and staff work together effectively to create and refine them. Students' achievement is tracked carefully. Assessment is very good and helpful marking enables students to understand how to improve their work. The department has not yet fully exploited the potential of ICT.

Physics

The provision in physics is **very good**. Attainment is good and teaching is very good.

Strengths

- Students' attain above-average results, building well on their success at GCSE level.
- There is a very healthy emphasis on research, new ideas and how fundamental principles can be applied in new situations.
- The highly-committed staff are well qualified, experienced and effective.
- The quality of teaching is very good and focuses on helping students develop understanding alongside good knowledge and skills.
- The quality of learning is very good; students enjoy physics and commit themselves to working for success.
- Students' behaviour and attitudes are excellent and make a very positive contribution to their success as learners.
- Relationships are a strength and teachers intervene in learning at the right time in the right way to build students' confidence and self-esteem.
- Technical support is very effective in enabling the efficient use of limited resources.
- Students' learning and achievement are tracked effectively, and marking and assessment are good.

Areas for improvement

- Managers do not drive further improvement in sixth form biology by ensuring that:
 - the best teaching practice is shared in the department
 - structured development planning is based on self-review and evaluation.

Standards and achievement

104. A-level examination results in physics have ranged from just above to well above the national average in the last four years. In 2001 the percentage of students receiving A and B grades was close to the national average and the overall pass rate significantly above it. Results in the new AS-level examination were well above average, with a high proportion of top grades. Large numbers of students choose physics in Year 12; some very successful Year 12 students choose not to continue with physics in Year 13, and the number of female students taking the subject is very small, despite excellent role models amongst the teaching staff

105. Though physics students bring a wide range of prior attainment to the sixth form, the standard of their work in Years 12 and 13 is generally above average. Students' written records often fail to reflect the very high levels of knowledge, understanding and skill that are so clearly apparent in lessons. Some Year 13 physicists are clearly enthusiasts who are very willing to engage in study beyond the syllabus and at the cutting edge of this branch of science.

106. In Year 12 the students achieve well. They are encouraged to plan and carry out investigations to help them understand theory. Teachers encourage students to base their thinking on fundamental concepts and to apply logic; as a result they make sense of the science and are able to discuss what they are doing with confidence. They carry out practical tasks swiftly and safely, often helping each other as they work. Activity is invariably carried out in a calm and purposeful atmosphere, very conducive to learning. Their attitudes to learning and their behaviour are excellent. Both students and teachers are able to enjoy the lessons: good relationships played an important part in ensuring good learning.

107. In Year 13 a seminar approach was particularly effective with a small able group of enthusiastic physicists. Together with the teacher they built a mind-map of ideas and

understanding as the topic of particle accelerators was introduced, and the students made their own record of their intense discussions with each other and the teacher. Students were exceptionally well prepared for the lesson and drew on a very wide range of knowledge in order to explore their ideas about how particle accelerators might work. Attitudes and behaviour were excellent, and both students and teacher enjoyed making the scientific links necessary. It was with great enthusiasm that they recalled Fleming's Right-Hand Rule and began to explore the science that fitted their theories.

Quality of education

108. Teaching of physics is very good with some outstanding features, namely:

- teachers' knowledge and understanding;
- their use of time, support staff and resources;
- the quality of marking and assessment.

In the majority of the lessons observed, teaching was dynamic and inspirational. Teaching was also impressively inclusive: in Year 12 lessons, teachers took great care to address the needs of all their students, helping particularly with numeracy issues that were interfering with the developing understanding of important concepts. Literacy and the language of advanced level physics were also dealt with efficiently, and with the necessary precision. It is to the teachers' credit that they are able to intervene sensitively, building students' confidence and self-esteem; they are able to do this because of the excellent relationships they have built with their students. Lessons are characterised by variety and pace. Teachers' questioning skills are excellent: they probe students' understanding brilliantly, and teachers use the information they glean about students' understanding from this questioning to ensure that very high levels of further challenge are set, and equally that well-targeted support is provided. The marking of students' work is of a very high standard - challenging, helpful, encouraging and thorough. A further noteworthy feature of the lessons is that, for teachers and most students, physics is fun and, for a few, clearly a passion.

109. Teaching is a strength in physics and there are therefore very few areas that require improvement. However, the current systems to monitor, evaluate and develop teaching and learning are under-developed. The team has much to share and a great deal of good practice on which to build further success. The use of ICT and current technologies to enhance teaching and learning is limited, though the use of the Internet is encouraged and web site addresses are identified for the students.

110. Learning in physics is very good. Students' intellectual, creative and physical efforts are often outstanding. The quality and range of learning opportunities are excellent, and enhance learning significantly. The focus on astronomy, visits to La Palma and scientific contacts around the world create a unique ethos in the subject at sixth form level. By Year 13, students are part of a scientific community that stimulates and encourages active involvement in real science. It is to the credit of staff and Year 12 students that a foreign exchange student can fit into an AS-level course for six months, enjoy the subject and the support of his peers in achieving at a high standard, in a language other than his own. Students of physics are well supported by teachers, who are very effective at finding ways of challenging and supporting them appropriately; as a result the students are able to achieve well.

Leadership and management

111. The subject is well led, has improved well since the last inspection, and very successful in terms of students' achievements, but management for further improvement lacks clarity. The processes of evaluation, and how these are used to plan for still further improvement are not yet fully developed. Accommodation and resources are mixed in quality: there are some high-

quality new laboratories, but limited and ageing resources inhibit teaching and learning in some lessons. Careful management by technicians and teachers reduces inconvenience to a minimum.

112. The management of teaching and learning in laboratories is good, and teachers are very well supported by effective and capable technicians. Schemes of work are appropriate and are the product of effective teamwork by staff. Very good systems are in place to ensure that students can be set performance targets based on prior attainment and test results.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

113. In this curriculum area, the school provides courses to AS/A-level in design and technology (product design and product design in 3D) and food and textiles technology, and the intermediate GNVQ course in engineering. Work in design and technology (product design in 3D) was inspected in detail.

114. Examination results in all design and technology courses have been above to well above the national average in recent years. Results in home economics have been around the national average in recent years, both in pass rate and quality of grades achieved; there were no candidates in 2001.

Design and Technology

The quality of provision in design and technology is **excellent**. Standards of work are very high and teaching is consistently at least very good and often it is excellent.

Strengths

- Standards of work are very high: students have a very good understanding of the design process and the quality of design presentation is excellent.
- Teaching and learning are consistently at least very good, and often excellent.
- A wide range of courses and experiences is offered, appropriate for the school's students.
- The department places strong emphasis on equal opportunities and inclusion.
- Leadership and management of the courses are excellent, and are supported by outstanding teamwork and high quality resourcing.

Areas for improvement

- The teaching of drawing skills and graphics, to ensure that the same high standard of presentation is consistently evident in all areas of the department's work.

Standards and achievement

115. Students attain very high standards in design and technology. The department offers an excellent range of A- and AS-level courses in various aspects of product design, and a very successful course in electronics (see para.86). Results for all aspects of design and technology at A-level in 2001 were above the national average, with a good number of A and B grades. Two-thirds of the students on the new AS-level 3-D product design course gained A or B grade passes. Many students, across the range of courses at AS level in 2001, did better in design and technology than they did in their other subjects, and department records show considerable added value for their students since Year 9.

116. Courses involve a wide range of contexts, materials and processes, and involve the analysis of test results, considering efficiency, function and fitness for purpose. Current work in

Years 12 and 13 involves the study of design and realisation of model prototype solutions to meet specific design briefs. Ideas for useful products identified by students cover a wide range, from fashion items to model robots.

117. Attainment in lessons is above average, and often well above. Students are very productive; working at a good pace, they often make outstanding advances in understanding and skills in a short time. Year 12 students' design sheets, for example, show how they relate their work to similar commercial applications, and their 3-D models for mobile phones and children's drinking flasks are presented with style and flair, showing a clear understanding of design requirements and the properties of materials. Year 13 students have an excellent understanding of the commercial design process, and a very good knowledge of how the properties of a range of materials influence design outcomes and aesthetic appearance. They work with confidence in modern materials such as jelutong and styrofoam, showing appreciation of component assembly and the advantages and disadvantages of different types of construction. Many students have very good drawing skills, and the best design sheets are extremely well presented, with well-chosen colour combinations, strong corporate image, and individual style. However, there is some inconsistency of approach across the department; less secure design sheets are characterised by arbitrary use of colour, a lack of freshness in drawing, and weaker design awareness.

Quality of education

118. The quality of teaching and learning is very good, and there is some excellent teaching. Teachers have very good command of design and technology as a whole, and excellent expertise in their areas of specialism. They communicate procedures, ideas and concepts well through clear lesson introductions, evaluative lesson summaries and well-presented demonstrations. Courses are professionally structured with realistic targets and deadlines, and extra workshop time is made available for students with special needs, including gifted and talented students. All lessons are planned well, with a clear focus on examination requirements and assessment criteria. Literacy, numeracy and ICT are well integrated into schemes of work. Students explore and analyse the properties and potential of a wide range of materials, making effective links with designers, design movements, and manufacturers. They use the Internet for research, and computer-aided design software to present their findings and ideas, taking increasing responsibility for their own learning. Students' work is well assessed and their learning is well tracked; students have one-to-one feedback and evaluation of their work in progress. Students have extremely positive attitudes; many are dedicated to the subject and spend long hours on independent research and practical designing and making activities.

Leadership and management

119. Leadership of the sixth form courses is very good. The structure and co-ordination of courses taught by different teachers is extremely well managed. Leadership is by example and by the careful monitoring of students' and teachers' work. Excellent teamwork ensures smooth day-to-day running, and a purposeful working ethos has been established in which teachers and students work together to raise standards. The high quality of the accommodation and well-organised workshops and resources make a major contribution to the department's success, and set high expectations for teachers and students alike. The accommodation is about to be extended, which will open up opportunities to develop further the use of computer-aided manufacture and other design activities. Very good improvements have been made since the last inspection in many areas and, specifically, in the successful launch and development of the new AS- and A-level courses. The department has improved very well since the last inspection, and has considerable capability and potential to improve even further.

BUSINESS

120. Within this curriculum area, the school currently runs AS/A-level courses in accountancy, economics and business studies, and an advanced vocational course in business studies. The business studies courses were inspected in detail, and work in economics was sampled.

121. Results at A-level in economics have been well above the national average in recent years, with a very high proportion of students achieving the highest grades. The lesson seen was very good. The teacher clarified the difficult concepts of consumer surplus and price discrimination in markets with a simple example which students readily understood. Students' files indicate that they are very confident in applying economic theory to the analysis of the behaviour of individuals, firms and governments in the real world. The small number of students who have taken the accountancy examination in the last two years have achieved good results.

Business Studies

Overall, the quality of provision in business studies is **very good**. There has been a strong improvement since the last inspection. Very good teaching brings the subject alive to students by relating business theory to practice in real organisations.

Strengths

- A-level standards and examination results have improved significantly since the last inspection and are well above the national average.
- Students achieve well in the light of their prior attainment.
- Teaching is very good, and is undertaken by experienced and well-qualified teachers.
- Students' higher-level skills of analysis and evaluation are well developed.
- Many opportunities are provided for students to apply business theory and principles to real examples, through case studies, Internet research and work with businesses.
- Very good management of the subject has ensured that the quality of courses on offer has been improved during a period of rapid change.

Areas for improvement

- Some weaknesses in the key skills of students on the AVCE course reduce the quality of work they produce.
- Subject schemes of work lack some detail.

Standards and achievement

122. At A-level, results have improved strongly since the last inspection, rising from below average in 1998 to well above average in 2000 and 2001. The performance of male students relative to that of female has also improved strongly over that time, so that in 2001, contrary to the national picture, males out-performed females. Students have on average performed better in business studies at A-level than in their other subjects: their results represent good achievement for the students concerned - nearly all who took A-level in 2001 did as well as or better than expected, given their GCSE results.

123. Good results were attained by the thirty-one students who took AS-level in 2001, with ninety per cent passing and nearly sixty per cent getting grades A-C. Twenty-one of those students are now taking the subject to the full A-level, a satisfactory retention of students indicating positive attitudes towards the subject.

124. Vocational results on the old GNVQ course were much more variable over time, with a low entry in 1999 and below-average pass rate in 2000, but results in 2001 marked an

improvement, with all students passing and a well-above-average proportion attaining merit grades, although there were no distinctions.

125. Currently, standards on the new single-award AVCE course, offered for the first time this year to Year 12 students, are above those expected in schools nationally. A high proportion of students have already attained A grades for their first assessed unit of work, representing good achievement for the students, given their GCSE results. Standards on the A-level course are well above average, and students achieve well. Across A-level and vocational courses, students' work typically displays very secure understanding of business principles, applied directly to real business operations or case studies. Most students' higher-level skills of analysis and evaluation are strong across all courses, and result from close attention to the development of these skills by teachers, along with rigorous application of awarding body assessment criteria in their marking. Some weaknesses in key skills are evident in the work of AVCE students. Their oral presentations lack awareness of the presentation techniques which would give impact to their messages and which would help get key points across. Similarly, students' word- and data-processing skills, while sound, lack refinement in processing and presenting information in business reports.

Quality of education

126. Teaching and learning are very good. Most of the lessons seen were good or very good, and all were at least satisfactory. They were very good where lessons were skilfully structured to lead students quickly through important basic knowledge of business principles and on to applied analytical tasks. For example, an A-level business lesson was very well structured to introduce a new unit of work dealing with business strategies and objectives, and led students through tasks which enabled them to look at a real company's objectives through on-line Internet links. An AVCE lesson enabled students to reflect quickly at the start of the lesson on the market research theory they had covered, through the critical evaluation of a questionnaire. Learning was not as effective where a lesson was over-directed by the teacher: these students respond better when given challenging opportunities to solve problems for themselves. A-level teaching was criticised in the last report for not allowing students to be active enough in their learning; for the most part there has been a significant improvement in this regard and teachers plan a range of very purposeful activities in lessons very effectively.

127. The key strengths of teaching lie in the teachers' confidence and subject expertise. They have considerable experience as examiners and vocational assessors, and leave students in no doubt about how they must improve their work to get higher grades. They use resources very well, planning opportunities for students to work directly with local businesses or to acquire first-hand material from businesses via the Internet, and providing an extensive range of case study materials and other applied exercises on which students can work. Teachers have high expectations of their students' performance, as a result of which the students work hard. The standard of response to teachers' questions in the classroom, and the quality of discussion, are very high. However, some AVCE students are not as diligent as they should be in their note-making in class or in completing notes and exercises.

128. Students clearly enjoy their learning, and are stimulated by the subject material. Students' views about the subject are very positive. They appreciate the support and guidance given throughout their courses. AVCE students choose the vocational option because of the strong emphasis on vocational coursework it gives. A-level students appreciate the range of varied activities their course offers.

Leadership and management

129. The subject is very well led and managed, and has brought about very good improvements to standards and teaching quality since the previous inspection, as well as presiding over a growing range of subjects on offer in the faculty's area. The subject has effective procedures to assure quality in the courses it offers, and the time made available to teachers to moderate their assessments of work together has ensured consistent standards across the subject. Much effort has been devoted to developing the rich vein of industrial links running through the business curriculum that is so effective in helping students to recognise how business theory operates in practice. Schemes of work for teaching the subject are not very detailed; as new courses become more settled, teachers need to build into their schemes:

- opportunities to strengthen the key skills of their students
- the methods used to teach each topic.

Accommodation is very good: it is cramped in some rooms for the growing size of classes, but the suite of rooms is very pleasant, well managed, and offers open access to computers, books, and magazines as needed.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

130. Within this curriculum area, the school runs the A-level and intermediate GNVQ ICT courses. The latter was inspected in detail. Until 2001, very few students studied the A-level course; the larger number who took the examination in 2001 did very well, achieving both pass rates and grades which were well above average.

Information and Communication Technology (GNVQ Intermediate ICT)

131. Overall, provision for GNVQ intermediate ICT is **very good**: Examination results are consistently above the national average and teaching is good and often very good.

Strengths

- Results have been consistently well above the national average since the course was introduced.
- Students attain good standards in coursework and are good at evaluating their work.
- Teaching is invariably at least good and is often very good. Lessons are well prepared, offering a good range of activities at a brisk pace.
- Clear advice and directions are given to students to enable them to gain high grades.
- Excellent use is made of ICT resources.
- Homework is well planned and students are expected to use their initiative to complete work on time.
- Leadership is very good and there is an excellent sense of common purpose within the department.
- Technical support is very good.
- Relationships between teachers and students are friendly and promote the achievement of high standards.
- Teachers are aware of students' targets and make arrangements to support those with particular needs.

Areas for improvement

There are no areas for improvement specific to the GNVQ course: the two areas noted below apply to the sixth form as a whole:

- Key skill certification of ICT across the sixth form.
- Access to CD-ROM titles across the network, to enhance the resources available to students.

Standards and achievement

132. Results in GNVQ intermediate level ICT have been consistently above the national average since the course was introduced. All students achieved at least a pass grade and one-third achieved merit grades in 2001. Most students on the GNVQ course are male.

133. Evidence from work seen in lessons and in students' coursework shows that standards are well above the national average. The highest-attaining students are able to make excellent use of the software packages available, integrating scanned and Internet images and presenting documents in a highly organised way. Students are able to evaluate their own work by looking in depth at the techniques they have used and improvements they have made.

134. Students are highly motivated and have the confidence to tackle new techniques such as adding midi music samples and wav files into PowerPoint presentations. This compares very well with the exceptional talents by some members of the A-level ICT students who have designed graphic artwork of outstanding quality.

135. Although sixth form students show high levels of skill in ICT, most do not have the opportunity to gain certification to show their competence. The introduction of such accreditation would also prompt the extension of ICT in those subjects in which it is under-developed as a tool for learning and research.

Quality of education

136. Teaching is invariably at least good and is often very good. The work they are set builds the confidence of less-able students while providing extended opportunities for those of higher ability. The teachers' knowledge of ICT enables them to use technical terms with confidence and use anecdotes to build a more realistic environment for learning.

137. Lessons are very well planned with a good range of activities and are conducted at a brisk pace. Opportunities for learning are enhanced by the excellent range of software and hardware available. Students may use the sixth form ICT area within the resource centre to continue their coursework or increase their ICT skills. Homework is well used, enabling students to use their own initiative to complete their work. There are regular visits to local businesses and to the traffic control centre.

138. Teachers are aware, and make effective use, of the value-added targets set for each student and make arrangements for catering for those students with special needs. There is a clear log of efforts made by teachers to chase up student absences.

139. Teachers have established very good relationships with students, and these have enabled them to interact positively within lessons and maintain high levels of motivation in the students, who are keen and enthusiastic to be involved in practical work.

Leadership and management

140. An able manager who has vision and purpose leads the ICT department. She has an excellent relationship with her colleagues, including the ICT technician. As a result the school has excellent, reliable and well-maintained ICT facilities. Plans are in place to build two more networked ICT classrooms to cater for increased numbers of students and a greater share of curriculum time for ICT in Years 10 and 11. The head of department has organised a system whereby teachers can acquire laptop computers, which will increase the exposure of ICT to students throughout the school.

141. Since the last inspection, improvement has been good: the head of department has ensured that the high standards have been maintained and that teaching, courses and resources have improved well. There is clearly an accreditation gap that was once filled by the RSA Computer Literacy and Information Technology (CLAIT) certification.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

142. Within this curriculum area, the school currently runs the AS/A-level course in PE (which was inspected in detail), both the intermediate- and advanced-level vocational courses in leisure, travel and tourism, the intermediate vocational course in hospitality and catering and the community sports leaders' award. Results in the leisure, travel and tourism courses have been very good: both the pass rate and the proportion of higher-level pass certificates have been well above the national average.

143. A joint lesson for AVCE students of leisure and recreation and travel and tourism was sampled. The students were spending a morning working through the English Tourist Board's (ETB) Welcome Host customer care training programme. The lesson was very good: the teacher had been trained by the ETB to deliver the programme and was supported by good written and visual resources, which prompted students to recognise many important features of good customer care. Attainment on the leisure and tourism GNVQ course, which was a forerunner to these courses, was well above average in 2001.

Physical Education (PE)

Overall, provision in PE is **excellent**. Examination results are consistently well above average; most teaching is very good and some is excellent.

Strengths

- Standards in PE in AS/A-level examinations and in current work are very high.
- Students make good in their understanding and use of technical vocabulary and develop good observation and analytical skills which they use effectively to improve performance.
- Students make an excellent commitment to the Community Sports Leaders' Award (CLSA) course and many achieve distinctions.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is very good: they are excellent role models and have high expectations of all students.
- Relationships between teachers and students are excellent and very good guidance is given to each individual.
- The provision of accredited courses is excellent, including sports leadership, recreational activities and a wide extra-curricular programme.
- Leadership is outstanding. Teachers work very well together, sharing their ideas and expertise, and this has a very positive effect on students' achievements and enthusiasm for the subject.

Areas for improvement

- The links between the practical and theory elements of AS/A-level courses.

Standards and achievement

144. A-level results over the last four years have been consistently well above the national average with one hundred per cent pass rates and a high proportion of A and B grades. This represents high achievement in relation to students' GCSE results. The take-up of the subject has been lower by females than males; the gender balance has become more equal over the last two years. Results at AS-level are outstanding.

145. The standard of work observed in lessons and in students' files during the inspection confirms these excellent AS-level standards. A particular strength is the quality of students' course work for their personal performance profiles; there are very good opportunities to use ICT to record and interrogate information. In this work, students across the ability range demonstrate very good understanding of the principles of fitness and the factors that affect performance in different sports. They gain good understanding of social, cultural and economic issues related to sport in emerging countries.

146. The pass rate for students taking the CLSA course is one hundred per cent. They make an excellent commitment to the course and make very good progress in their communication and organisational skills, as well as increasing their knowledge and skills in specific activities. Many students assist with clubs and festivals for younger students at the school and for other schools within the pyramid.

Quality of education

147. Teaching is very good, with some outstanding features. Teachers' keen knowledge of individuals and the comprehensive and constructive guidance given to each student accelerate their learning and enable them to see how they can improve. All teachers are excellent role models and have very good subject knowledge; they have excellent relationships with the students who, as a result, are highly motivated and work hard to realise their teachers' high expectations of them. Lessons are structured well with a variety of activities. The good range of visual resources used effectively in most lessons enables students to sustain concentration. Most students answer questions and contribute to discussion confidently. Overall, homework is used very effectively and this has a significant effect on standards; on occasions, however, some tasks do not always extend the most-able students.

148. Students respond well to opportunities to gain leadership awards in specific sports and most participate in the wide range of extra-curricular activities provided.

Leadership and management

149. The PE department is very well led and managed. Teachers are enthusiastic and committed to their work and students appreciate this. The inclusive and consultative style of leadership, and the high expectations, ensure consistency and shared values across the department. Teachers work very effectively together to share their expertise. Monitoring and evaluation is effective in raising standards because they are continuous processes, carried out through discussion with students and teachers. The department makes very good use of target setting and review with the students. The department has sought students' views on how the courses are taught which raised some minor issues and these are being addressed.

150. Since the last inspection, improvement has been very good. The school has managed changes in examination syllabi very effectively and the proportion of top grades has increased. The tracking of students' learning and achievement has improved and more opportunities for guidance are provided. Links between the practical and theory elements have been strengthened. PE has a high profile in the school and makes a significant contribution to the ethos of the school and to students' personal development.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

151. The school provides the advanced vocational course in health and social care, which was inspected in detail, and the diploma course in child care and education (NNEB/CACHE course), which was sampled. The CACHE course provides very well for potential intermediate-

level candidates; the course has a one hundred per cent success rate and the results represent enormous added value for some of the students who study it.

Health and Social Care

Overall, the quality of provision in health and social care is **good**: examination results are above average and the majority of teaching is good.

Strengths

- Results and achievement in the old GNVQ course were good.
- Relationships between students and teachers are very good.
- The department has excellent links with local health and social care organisations.
- The support provided for individual students is good.
- The teachers constitute a strong delivery team with a wide variety of expertise.

Areas for improvement

- The induction of staff new to teaching vocational courses.
- The consistency of marking across the area.
- The evaluation of the course through team meetings.

Standards and achievement

152. Overall, standards are above average. Over the last three years, grades in the health and social care advanced GNVQ course have been consistently above the national average. The majority of students have gained merits and distinctions, and retention rates have been good. In work seen in lessons and in students' files, the standards being attained by the current students are average overall, with some which is above average. Year 12 students on the AVCE course have made a good start; a comparison of their coursework with their GCSE grades shows they are achieving well. Their portfolios are thorough and well presented. Year 13 portfolios need further development to include critical evaluation and analysis. All students are able to research using a variety of sources, and make good use of ICT: there is good evidence of use of the Internet as a resource. Students communicate well in class and give constructive feedback following group work. They show good understanding of the effects of discriminatory practices and apply their knowledge in a practical care setting.

153. Students have positive views about the subject, and particularly appreciate the individual support they receive from staff. Many students interviewed wish to pursue health and care-related careers or courses when they finish school.

Quality of education

154. Teaching and learning are good. There is a strong teaching team with a very detailed knowledge of their subject, though more needs to be done to improve new teachers' knowledge of course specifications and structures. Teaching is well planned and well structured: each unit of the course clearly specifies the expected learning. Students receive accurate assessments and feedback about the quality of their work so that they clearly recognise what they need to do to improve. Lessons include a varied range of activities through which students can apply theory to practical activities. Teachers have developed excellent links with health and social care professionals, and the course is enhanced by visiting experts and off-site activities. Students are well managed. Relationships between students themselves and between them and their teachers are very good. Teachers are enthusiastic, know their students well and are supportive of their personal needs.

155. Assessment by individual teachers is continuous and accurate, but more needs to be done to ensure consistency of marking and feedback across the whole course. Work has begun on tracking students across the course but this needs to be developed further.

Leadership and management

156. The course is well led. It was not reported on in the last inspection, and so improvement since then cannot be determined; current improvement is good. There is a new course leader for AVCE who has made good progress in building on the existing strengths of the programme. She is aware of the areas for improvement and has begun to tackle them. Programmes offered meet the needs of students. They can access a mixture of AVCE and A2 courses, just the kind of flexible provision envisaged in the national reforms to the post-16 curriculum in 2000.

157. There are good progression routes from courses to higher education and employment. Students have access to adequate resources and teachers work hard to provide up-to-date relevant materials by drawing on their strong outside links. The specialist room contains good visual materials celebrating the work of the students.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

158. The school provides a wide range of courses in this curriculum area: AS/A-level courses in art, photography, dance, music, music technology, theatre studies and textiles, and an advanced-level vocational course in art and design. AS/A-level art and art/photography and both music courses were inspected in detail, and work in the other courses was sampled.

159. Standards in theatre studies are high; results in the A-level course have been above the national average for several years. There were no candidates for A-level in 2001, but results in the AS-level course were good. Dance is a new course without a history of examination results. Small numbers of students have taken the advanced vocational art and design course; almost all have passed in the last four years, and the great majority have achieved merit or distinction awards. The textiles course has produced mixed results, around the national average over the last five years.

Art

Overall, the quality of provision in art is **excellent**. High standards are attained in all courses, through teaching which is very good and often excellent.

Strengths

- High standards are attained. Results in 2001 were above average, and represent exceptionally good added value for these students.
- Teaching and learning are generally very good and often excellent.
- Challenging targets are set, using a wide range of exciting visual media, both two and three-dimensional.
- Very good courses are provided in art and design and photography - extremely well planned and structured, fully inclusive, and appropriate for the school's students.
- The quality of individual guidance, assessment, and monitoring is excellent.
- The department is very well led and managed, with excellent team work and team teaching.

Areas for improvement

- The opportunities for students to participate in class and group presentations.
- The links with local artists, designers and other outside agencies.

Standards and achievement

160. Achievement in the AS/A-level courses is very good, and often excellent. All thirty-five students who took the A-level examination in 2001 gained a pass, and the proportion of A or B grade passes was above the national average. Overall, standards and student numbers are increasing at both AS and A-level, in both the art and the photography courses. Results in 2001 show good improvement on the 2000 results, with a rising trend of improvement over the last four years. The department has an inclusive approach. Students are taken on who perhaps have not reached average standards for GCSE, but are interested in the subject and keen to learn. Very good to excellent results are achieved in the popular photography course, often by students who have not studied the subject before. Almost all students achieve very well through the courses and retention rates are high.

161. The quality of work on display, in progress, and in students' portfolios is very high. Most work is based on direct observational studies and linked to contextual work involving the study of the works of well-known artists, and art and design movements. A wide range of media and scale is used to explore themes and develop high-quality, well-presented drawings, paintings, sculpture and photography. As at the time of the last inspection, there is a high level of individual talent and flair evident in much of the work. For example, Year 12 students make a self-portrait, building layers of paper and card to suggest the contours of the face. Using thick acrylic paint in the impasto style, and a restricted colour palette, they create striking images that show a very good understanding of expressionistic use of colour, and how tone and colour work together to convey form. Work in photography demonstrates thorough investigation and lively creativity. Following visits to Bath and Bristol, where students took a large number of photographs from one standpoint, large photomontages were developed. These 'joiners' not only show a clear understanding of the work of Hockney, and his quest to show time and movement in his work, but combine advanced knowledge of the technical side of photography with the aesthetic, to form powerful compositions of striking originality.

162. Practical work on both courses is integrated with studies of the techniques used by various artists and characteristics of art movements past and present, and students are developing a very good working knowledge of these. This in turn influences the style and direction of their own work. Students keep records of their studies in logbooks, often making good use of the Internet and computer-aided design software for research and to enhance presentation. Sketchbooks are thoughtfully annotated and demonstrate good analysis of the assignments, and initiative in the development of ideas - rich and colourful records of the exploration of media and concepts. Almost all students have a mature, self-critical approach; they talk with knowledge and enthusiasm about their work and the work of other artists and photographers.

Quality of education

163. The quality of teaching and learning are very good and often excellent. Teachers have a very good general knowledge of art and design and considerable expertise in their area of specialism. Well thought-out, challenging tasks are set, appropriate to and inclusive of the school's range of students.

164. Teachers communicate their understanding of the subject well, through introductions and demonstrations that inspire students to strive for the highest standards. Students respond to the high standard of support and guidance they receive, and very positive working relationships are formed. Independent learning is appropriately developed, and students are very productive. Many students, especially in Year 13, have developed greater self-confidence than is normally the case, and teachers could find it advantageous to plan further student

participation in whole-class presentations. Teachers provide students with very good guidance on careers and higher education, and many students go on to art foundation courses.

165. The assessment and tracking of students' learning and achievement are extremely good and show considerable added value for most students. Students have the benefit of individual feedback during lessons and regular reviews. Targets and deadlines, with assessment criteria, are clearly presented on informative worksheets.

Leadership and management

166. Leadership and management of the subject area are excellent. Course structure and delivery are extremely well managed. Teamwork and team teaching are strengths. A stimulating yet calm learning ethos and environment has been created, in which students at all levels of attainment are helped and respected. Teachers are enthusiastic, work hard, and are committed to raising standards. They meet regularly to discuss strategies for raising attainment, to moderate work, to monitor progress towards set targets and to plan and review the curriculum. Development plans are exciting and innovative: they include the greater use of outside agencies, such as visiting speakers or artists in residence; this will help to improve students' awareness of visual art in the wider world - which is already good - still further. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good, and there is considerable capacity to improve even further now that there are plans to extend the accommodation. This will open up even more exciting opportunities for students.

Music

Overall, provision in music is **very good with some outstanding features**, such as the standard of performance and the range of musical experiences provided. Examination results and teaching are very good.

Strengths

- Results in AS and A level courses have risen in recent years to well above national averages. This has been achieved alongside rising numbers in a short period of time.
- Students' achievement is very good; they reach outstandingly high standards in their performances and have a very good knowledge and understanding of a good range of music.
- Teaching is very good: teachers' subject knowledge is very good and they have a very good understanding of their students' needs. Relationships are excellent.
- The department offers a very wide range of musical opportunities: there is a range of courses, an outstanding range of extra-curricular music and instrumental tuition.
- Students are very well motivated: they demonstrate commitment and enthusiasm both for the courses and all the opportunities offered.
- The department is very well led.

Areas for improvement

- Consistency of teaching, so that all is as good as the best.

Standards and achievement

167. Standards in the examination courses have risen from above to well above national standards in a relatively short period of time, during which the numbers of students following the courses has also increased.

168. Performance standards are outstandingly good. Students perform in a wide variety of styles including western classical, popular song and jazz. Technique is secure and musical understanding and interpretive skills are particularly good, with belief and commitment clearly evident in performances. Ensemble skills are very good and the sixth form choir performances heard were outstanding. In sequencing (performing through technology), students have a good stylistic understanding of the Baroque period, but more detailed attention is needed to some of the editing functions to achieve their intended effects fully. All students have a good understanding of the elements of composing and can sustain their chosen styles. Excellent work with extended chords, complex structures and textures was observed. Students' understanding of Bach chorale techniques is in line with expectations for their stage of the course although they need to make more use of stylistic features in their work. Minimalist techniques are better developed. In their arrangements, students maintain style well with varied textures and instrumentation. A more innovative approach to harmony, melody and structure is needed in some arrangements. Skills in musical analysis, musical understanding and knowledge are excellent. Written answers are detailed and students offer opinions backed by justifications and musical examples. Aural skills need further development and practice but they are still at least in line with national standards. Standards in extra-curricular work are excellent.

Quality of education

169. Teaching is very good overall. All lessons were at least good and very good and excellent teaching was also seen. Teachers' subject knowledge is very good and detailed knowledge of performance conventions and styles in a variety of genres enables students to develop very good interpretive skills and understanding of the meaning of music. The teacher's own love of music is apparent and there is a strong spiritual dimension to the lessons. Questioning is very well used to encourage students to think about their performances and the effects they intend to achieve. Extended questioning leads them to realise how to achieve the effect technically. In a few lessons across the courses, more questioning is needed to ensure understanding is fully in place.

170. Students learn very well in their lessons. Students of all levels of ability are very well motivated and respond to the quality of teaching with enthusiasm and concentration. They take responsibility for their own learning in some areas of the subject and develop confidence alongside skills and understanding. This very good learning results from very-well-planned lessons with a variety of tasks, including homework tasks, closely related to the topic. New work is placed in context, allowing students to develop skills and understanding from a secure knowledge base. In the best lessons, work sheets and tasks stretch the students and expectations are high. Students respond very well to this, working hard with very good levels of concentration. High standards of answers are encouraged and, in marking work, teachers' comments are constructive with many suggestions for improvement. Students with special educational needs are very well supported and make progress equal to that of their colleagues.

171. Teachers are very encouraging and take care to build their students' confidence. Relationships are excellent and there is a very good learning environment. Teachers work very hard, giving freely of their time to support and develop students' interests and skills across a variety of options. The school should ensure that all teaching reflects the very best practice in the department and that teachers' skills are matched to the areas of study of the courses.

Leadership and management

172. The department is very well led and managed. As well as the curriculum courses, the department also offers instrumental tuition in a wide range of instruments and extra curricular clubs in a very wide variety of styles meet regularly. There is a sixth form choir, barbershop choir, chapel choir, stage band, orchestra, flute choir, brass ensemble, 'cello ensemble, wind band, saxophonics, steel band, various rock bands and a music technology club. Dorset Music

Service runs some of these, and sixth form students also take up opportunities to run groups. Workshops and masterclasses are held regularly and, again, sixth form students lead groups of younger students on these occasions. Many concerts are arranged, some especially to present sixth form work and, during this inspection, two students were preparing to play concertos with the Imperial College Orchestra. Students regularly perform in local venues and the chapel choir has sung in Notre Dame, St Paul's and Wells cathedrals, Bath and Sherborne abbeys, as well as in local churches. Musical residencies and trips abroad are also arranged, with plans in place for a trip to Italy this year. Students are very appreciative of both their teachers and the opportunities offered to them.

173. The department makes very good use of data to inform their assessment of their students but stresses that the many opportunities to meet with the students in these informal situations is equally at the heart of their very good knowledge of the individual students' needs.

174. The head of department has a very clear vision for the department and schemes of work for the new courses continue to be developed in the light of examination experiences. All teachers contribute to this. The department has recently acquired some new computers but, as numbers increase on the various courses, more workstations will be needed as well as some specific equipment to support film music and multi-track recording courses. The department has very good accommodation in the performing arts area but at certain periods of the day this does not always have enough small areas to support the required individual work of all the various courses. Since the last inspection the department has made very good improvements and is well poised to improve still further.

HUMANITIES

175. In this curriculum area, the school provides courses to AS/A-level in history, sociology and religious studies, which were inspected in detail, and in geography, law, psychology and government and politics. Work in law and psychology was sampled. One excellent law lesson was seen, and it confirmed why results in this subject have been very strong in recent years. Students, taking the roles of judges, claimant and defendants in a case of negligence, demonstrated a remarkably good knowledge of relevant cases offering legal precedents. They have developed this knowledge in lessons and through access to specialist websites. The quality of exchanges and debate between students and the teacher was outstanding.

176. Provision in geography is excellent: it is a popular and successful subject that achieves results well above the national average in quality, for the proportion of top grades as well as for the overall pass rate. In the lessons seen, teaching was of very high quality: lessons are excellently planned and resourced with relevant maps, text, photographs, video and websites, and students are expected to work independently, using these resources, to solve challenging problems and to present their results, orally and/or in writing, in the most effective way possible. Some of the work seen, especially students' individual studies, was of stunning quality, comfortably of undergraduate standard, with some which is publishable. Results at A-level in the other humanities subjects have also been consistently above the national average: psychology has become a very popular subject with students, who achieve very good results, while those in the government and politics course are excellent.

History

Provision in history is **excellent**. Standards are very high, students' attitudes to the subject are exemplary and teaching is frequently excellent.

Strengths

- Standards in history are very high. At A- and AS-level the school consistently achieves results well above national averages.
- Students' attitudes to learning and to the subject are exemplary.
- Students' factual knowledge is extensive and their grasp of the complexities of the period they are studying, and their ability to discuss and debate, are very good.
- Teaching is frequently excellent and is never less than good.
- The department provides excellent opportunities for students to extend their learning through educational visits.
- Leadership and management are very good.

Areas for improvement

- The quality of students' oral discussions is sometimes higher than that of their written work.
- Individual lessons sometimes have too much pace and challenge.

Standards and achievement

177. Standards in history are very high. The school has consistently achieved results over the past four years that have been substantially above national averages both in terms of average points scores and the percentages gaining the highest grades. At A-level in 2001, more than half of students entered gained grades A or B, while at AS-level, sixty per cent did so. All students achieved pass grades at both levels. These are excellent results under any circumstances; given the inevitable difficulties arising from the introduction of the new AS-level examination last year, they are outstanding. Statistical analyses undertaken by the school indicate that, in history, students achieve higher grades than those predicted from their GCSE results.

178. In the lessons observed, and in students' folders seen in the course of the inspection, there is additional evidence that the very high standards the department has set itself are being maintained. Students' attitudes to learning and to the subject are exemplary. They come to lessons very well prepared and are consequently able to take full advantage of the high-quality teaching they receive. The notes they take in lessons are well organised and folders are well maintained, making them excellent study and revision aids. These notes are, however, sometimes detailed to the point that students' knowledge is greater than their ability to make full use of it. Essay introductions, for example, are sometimes undeveloped and some essays lack necessary length or the depth of understanding and coherent structure that, when led by the teacher, students readily demonstrate in lessons. The quality of students' oral discussion is sometimes higher than that of their written work.

179. Standards in lessons, however, are uniformly very high. Students' factual knowledge is extensive and their grasp of the complexities of the period they are studying, and their ability to discuss and debate them, are often astonishing. Several handle complex historical events, such as the absolutism of Philip II of Spain or the Evangelical Reformation with real flair, showing a maturity of judgement and an ability to draw on key information that are very impressive. There is a culture of excellence pervading every aspect of the work of the history department, and the contribution that students make to this is often outstanding. The department supports all its students, including the most able, exceptionally well; they in their turn respond with enthusiasm, intelligence, perceptiveness and a genuine concern for quality. They

want to succeed and work diligently and collaboratively in ways that bring immense credit to their school, to their teaching staff and to themselves.

Quality of education

180. Teaching is frequently excellent and is never less than good. Lesson observations provide the strongest possible evidence that it is teaching of the highest quality that has allowed so many students to perform so well. University-level interchanges between students and teachers were observed on several occasions. Sometimes teaching takes the form of dynamic role-play exercises in which students, having first researched material for themselves, then act out the roles of key historical figures, with the teacher drawing the lesson together to ensure that no insights are lost. Equally, there are lessons that excel just because the teacher has the ability to pitch the lesson at precisely the right level and to organise students' contributions and subsequent work to such good effect that students' understanding of the issue and their ability to articulate what they need to say moves to a higher plane. The department not only inspires, therefore, it does the basics very well. Marking, for example, is detailed, displays the assessment criteria and is invariably designed to offer students clear guidance on how to improve. Individual lessons sometimes have too much pace and challenge and can rely too much on telling rather than showing students how to improve, but the majority exhibit a clear sense of purpose and sharpness and are well-matched to students' needs. Teaching styles across the department are very varied but together they allow students of very different abilities every opportunity to improve. Staff work immensely hard for their students who readily acknowledge this, remarking in one interview that "What teachers do, they do for us, not for themselves".

Leadership and management

181. Leadership and management are very good. This is a highly effective department which has improved very well from its already high standards at the time of the last inspection. The department has a clear sense of direction, and history staff are all equally committed to ensuring excellence. Departmental documentation is detailed and comprehensive. There is a good quality scheme of work which specifies objectives, teaching and learning strategies, provision for key skills, study skills and the development of students' literacy and independent learning. Policies relating to these areas, as well as those for assessment and marking, written specifically for the sixth form, are consistently followed by teaching staff and contribute to students' very good results and excellent achievement. Arrangements for monitoring teaching and for evaluating the quality of the department's work are very good. There is a well-developed professional ethos governing all that the department is striving to achieve. There are well-established arrangements for improvement planning, and the department has recently revised its scheme of work to match the changes to the new A-level syllabus. Students' written introductions to essays has also been identified as an area needing improvement, but the writing frames that could be helpful in this respect have not yet been developed; nor has the monitoring of teaching yet been focused on determining whether, or how far, this area of relative weakness might require a different approach to teaching.

182. The curriculum is supported by some imaginative educational visits to New York, Washington and to Berlin as well as to the local records office and the annual regional history conference. Resource levels are satisfactory to good but the department has encountered difficulty in purchasing texts for the new AS-level examination, and will need to resolve this issue as soon as appropriate published material becomes available.

Religious Education (RE)

Overall, the quality of provision in RE is **very good**: examination results are outstanding, and teaching is very good.

Strengths

- Examination results are outstanding and show a consistent upward trend.
- The curriculum is very well planned, giving the amount of time allocated for each topic, ensuring that the course is completed in good time for revision.
- The numbers of students wishing to take this subject have steadily increased over four years. This reflects the high profile of the subject, and its success.
- Teaching is very good, and teachers' knowledge and understanding of the subject are excellent.
- Marking and the advice given to students are excellent, and promotes students' very good attainment and learning.

Area for development

- Further provision for independent study by students.

Standards and achievement

183. Students' attainment is well above average. In the 2001 A-level examinations, all those entered gained grades between A and C. These results are outstanding and represent the latest in a consistently-improving sequence since the last inspection. At the end of Year 12, students enter the AS-level examination: the excellent results for 2001 show that the very great majority gained grades between A and C, and that all passed.

184. Evidence from the work seen in lessons and in students' files, especially in Year 13, is in keeping with these results. Teachers provide a wide range of experiences for students, such as note-taking, work that helps to explain and retain key vocabulary, and essays. These essays arise out of the very well-planned flow of topics, and are always set and marked with examinations in mind. Students are therefore very well informed about the topics that they have studied, using extracts from definitive works well. For example, in Year 12 they study the ideas of a range of authors such as Kant, Russell and Newman, while in ethics they have considered G.E.Moore, Mackie and A.J. Ayer, and all students have four textbooks for constant reference. In their work on medical ethics, students research topics such as abortion, euthanasia and genetics. They show clear growth in their understanding as they add notes and essays to their files, providing a very solid base for learning and for future reference.

185. In Year 13, students not only continue to take notes and write essays, but also add case studies that broaden their learning very well. For example, in their studies of ethics, they examine the move from Judaism to Christianity, understanding the breaking of the Torah and the embracing of 'Agape'. In a very good lesson about environmental ethics, students explored sophisticated arguments about human-centred, animal-centred, and life-centred ethical dilemmas.

Quality of education

186. First among the factors contributing to the high standards and achievement is the very high quality of teaching, especially the marking, the planning of the curriculum, and teachers' excellent knowledge and understanding of the subject.

187. The quality of teaching and learning in both years is very good, with some that is excellent. Teachers' very high expectations were exemplified in an excellent Year 12 lesson in which students were engaged in a lively discussion leading to a greater understanding of the ontological argument for the existence of God. They spent time discussing aspects such as relativism in small groups, reported back to the whole class, and watched extracts from a video made by the author of one of their textbooks. The teacher made sure that each group was working along the right lines. Through skilful questioning and suggestions, he stretched their memories and the application of some of the things they had learnt in previous lessons. Teachers check students' notes and comment on the content very well, providing them with very good references for later use. Relationships are very good between staff and students and there is a mature attitude to work in all lessons. Students give of their best in response to teachers' prompting and excellent knowledge, and there is a relaxed, often humorous but always very well-focused, atmosphere.

188. An excellent feature of teaching is the marking, which gives very helpful pointers for improvement, books to use, and arguments to pursue. This undoubtedly adds much to the learning and is one of the strong factors leading to such excellent examination results.

189. Students' files are well organised and follow the order of the planning of the curriculum. When the time comes for revision, students are very well equipped, and teachers also provide a revision programme.

190. Although teaching methods are very good, engaging students fully in discussion and argument, an area for further development is the provision for students' independent study. The department has already begun to address this, and Year 12 students were seen preparing their own material for a debate. On some occasions, students give a presentation to the class, but overall there is scope for students to lead discussions and seminars more frequently.

Leadership and management

191. Leadership and management of the department are very good. The head of department provides very strong, clear direction, and is very capable. This has led to an increasingly high profile for the subject throughout the school, to some excellent results and to good levels of improvement since the last inspection.

192. Students have good access to computers for presenting their work, and they research using the Internet. There is a good departmental library.

Sociology

Provision in sociology is **satisfactory, with many good features**. Results at A-level are in line with the national average, and well above it at AS-level.

The head of the sociology department and main teacher of the subject was unable to attend school during the inspection, because of illness. Consequently, judgements about the quality of provision in sociology are based on observation of a small amount of teaching, examination results, analysis of students' folders, interviews with students and with senior staff.

Strengths

- Results in sociology are in line with the national average at A-level and well above average at AS-level.
- Students achieve well in sociology in the light of their performance at GCSE.
- Students' attitudes to learning are very good.
- Marking is good and students are given realistic and timely guidance on how they are progressing and on what they must do to improve.
- Leadership and management are effective and offer the department a clear sense of direction and purpose.

Areas for development

- Students are not sufficiently confident of their ability to build their ideas around sociological theory nor to balance conflicting points of view. They make insufficient use of statistics to support and reinforce their arguments.
- The department's development priorities do not sufficiently address these gaps in students' understanding and skill and do not therefore provide a sufficiently co-ordinated approach to improving their levels of attainment.
- The scheme of work lacks the detail that would enable it to help co-ordinate and focus the work of the department on the priorities outlined above.

Standards and achievement

193. Results in sociology are in line with the national average at A-level. Pass rates are good but comparatively few students - below the national average - achieve the top grades. There are no discernible differences in the results for male and female students; males outperformed females in 2000 but this pattern was reversed in 2001. In the new AS-level, taken for the first time in 2001, all students passed and the school obtained results that were substantially above national averages, with more than half the students entered achieving top grades - a proportion seven times that achieved nationally. Analysis undertaken by the school suggests that, in 2001, students taking sociology performed above their predicted levels of attainment by more than a full grade.

194. Evidence from lessons and from folders reveals that AS/A-level students' standards are generally above average but that there are areas where they lack confidence and skill. They explore debates arising from the study of crime and deviance, the family, education and religion with some confidence and analyse source material and statistical data well. They have a satisfactory grasp of most of the main theoretical perspectives, such as interaction theory, functionalism and conflict theory and can identify their main strengths and weaknesses without difficulty. However, their ability to link these theories or to apply theoretical perspectives in their own essay work is less secure. Neither A- nor AS-level students are confident of their ability to develop ideas around sociological theory, nor balance conflicting points of view, and they make

insufficient use of statistics to support or reinforce their arguments. However, their knowledge of the main sociological study units, and in particular their understanding of research techniques and methodologies, have progressed well.

195. The achievement of some AS-level students is very good. In one lesson, a Year 12 student, in the absence of the teacher, led an excellent review of the advantages and disadvantages of the full range of methodologies, in order to help another student cover ground she had missed. Her grasp of this topic, and that of the other students in the class who contributed readily to the discussion, was impressive and was an excellent tribute to the high level of motivation students bring to sociology and to the commitment of the teacher who had inspired them. Students' attitudes to learning in sociology are very good. They concentrate, contribute well to discussion and organise themselves and their work very effectively. Personal files, for example, are well organised, neat and up-to-date. That students are in a position to use them to such good effect when preparing for examinations is one reason for their success. Students clearly take this subject seriously; they expect to enjoy it but are equally ready to work hard to earn their success, a quality that was clearly apparent in the students who were interviewed in the course of the inspection.

Quality of education

196. The absence through illness of the head of department and the main teacher of sociology makes it impossible to arrive at a firm judgement of teaching quality in this subject. The study of students' files and the small number of first hand lesson observations that were completed in the course of the inspection, together with the department's results, suggest that teaching is at least satisfactory and much is good. The numbers of students opting for sociology are high and class sizes are large; it is clearly a very popular option. Students interviewed speak highly of the commitment of teaching staff, and are appreciative of the time and energy that all teachers consistently devote to helping them learn and succeed. Marking is clear and compatible with school policy. Students are given realistic and timely guidance on how they are progressing and on what they must do to improve. Lessons observed in Year 12 were well-prepared, purposeful, and sensibly pitched to help students new to sociology to come to grips with its more demanding terminology and concepts. Students also confirm that they are given every opportunity to debate and discuss the critical ideas they encounter. However, an examination of files and interviews with students both suggest that the department places a heavy reliance on photocopied material as a means of summarising key sociological perspectives and the outcomes of academic research. Whilst it is clear that this material is always used as a working tool and that students do not merely read and file it, the strong emphasis given to this technique appears to limit the range of other teaching and learning strategies employed by the department. It should therefore be reviewed in the light of this report's earlier comments on the need to give greater support to developing students' standards of composition and their ability to link facts and theoretical perspectives when defending or developing their arguments.

Leadership and management

197. There is clear evidence that leadership and management are purposeful and effective and provide the department with a clear sense of direction. Staff and students speak highly of the energy the head of department has brought to the development of sociology. Resource levels and book stocks are good and well maintained and there is evidence that day-to-day management is also good. The arrangements for monitoring the quality of teaching are systematically completed in sociology. Work samples are monitored for compatibility with the marking and assessment policy, and all teaching staff are observed teaching by the head of department and by the curriculum co-ordinator. Conclusions drawn from these observations are appropriately evaluative and perceptive and copies are kept on file to inform the next stage of the departmental development plan. Whole-school data management and target-setting

systems, both for individual students and for departments, are used very well in sociology. However, whilst the department has undertaken some analysis of students' skills and given greater emphasis to developing their higher order skills, there is generally insufficient evaluation of the effect of teaching on students' standards. Consequently, the department's development priorities do not sufficiently stem from a detailed picture of students' needs or identifiable gaps in their understanding. Similarly, the sociology scheme of work is insufficiently detailed and consequently is unable to provide a co-ordinated approach to improving standards.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

198. In this curriculum area, the school provides courses to AS/A-level in English literature, French, both of which were inspected in detail, and in German, Spanish and classical civilisation/Latin. German and a small amount of work in classical civilisation were sampled.

199. While fewer students take German than French, numbers have risen during the last three years and there has been a steady increase in the average points scored by students in A-level examinations. Results have been above the national average for two years. One lesson each of A-level and AS-level German was observed, in which the teaching was good and very good respectively. Spanish results have been very good, with a very high proportion of top grades. The small number of students studying classical civilisation/Latin have achieved very good results, almost all in the grade A – C range.

English

Overall the quality of the provision is **excellent**; results are excellent and teaching is very good.

Strengths

- Results in both AS- and A-level courses are excellent: all 152 students passed in 2001.
- Students' attainment is excellent: most reach very good or excellent standards and handle the terminology of literary criticism to very good effect in their writing.
- Students' ability to contribute to and sustain oral discussion is excellent.
- Teaching is very well planned: teachers know their subject very well, their delivery is very enthusiastic and in most lessons the pace is very good.
- Students learn very well; they are very good at working together.
- The subject has excellent leadership and management.
- The facilities and resources are of very high quality and provide an excellent and effective learning environment.

Areas for improvement

- The pace of lessons, ensuring that all achieve the same high standard as that of the majority.
- Students' ability to use literary terminology in class and group discussion.

Standards and achievement

200. Results for both male and female students in English literature have improved over the last four years and are now excellent. Large numbers of students study English to AS- and A-level - 152 in 2001 - and the pass rate has been one hundred per cent in three of the last four years. This includes a one hundred per cent pass rate in AS-level English in its first year. Predicted grades are entirely in line with results, indicating an excellent appreciation and understanding of both national standards and the potential of the students.

201. The observation of written work during the inspection confirms the excellent standards. In written work, students across all groups are able to use the vocabulary, structures and grammar of Standard English accurately and with a degree of maturity in formal and informal situations. Students reach excellent standards in their extended critical writing and, in that writing, make effective use of the language of literary criticism. They are encouraged to develop and express a personal response to literature and, by the second year, they have established an independent critical and personal voice in their writing. They have produced independent research work related to a wide range of writers and texts. Some students, for instance, have produced both written and visual portraits of characters from 'The Prologue', of the Pardoner, the Monk and the Friar, and there are displays of excellent creative writing linked with texts and with extra-curricular visits, such as to the Tate Gallery.

202. Students have excellent oral skills in debate, explanation and presentation. Almost all students are able to sustain their comments and to express their thoughts cogently, persuasively and with some poise. It is rare for any student not to contribute to discussion although, despite the wall displays of literary terminology, only a few students used such terminology orally. The very good standard of reading of an extract from 'The Merchant of Venice' by students in Year 12 added significantly to the group's understanding and appreciation. In one class there was also excellent use of PowerPoint presentations by Year 13 students who had done independent research on 'King Lear', as part of their revision for the imminent mock examinations. This was an imaginative project, combining independent research, revision and key skills. It included some excellent open questioning of students where, as a result of the probing and searching nature of the questions, students were encouraged to develop their thoughts fully. A link was also made between the text and a recent production at the Globe.

203. Students consistently display positive attitudes to English Literature. They have excellent relationships with their teachers and with each other, in most classes working in groups with generosity and courtesy. On rare occasions one or two students drift from the task set.

Quality of education

204. The teaching of English is very good or excellent overall, with a little which is good or satisfactory. In all cases the teaching is distinguished by excellent subject knowledge and very good planning. Teaching is almost always conducted at an excellent pace and activities are varied; almost all teachers cater for the variety of learning needs within the group with differentiated learning activities and control of group membership. Teachers introduce students to a very wide range of literature including the work of Carol-Ann Duffy, Auden, Bronte, Tennyson, Emily Dickinson, Heaney, Fowles, Pope, Hogarth, Shakespeare, Chaucer and, perhaps not surprisingly, Hardy.

205. Coursework folders from both Year 12 and Year 13 students show that students are given excellent detailed and constructive feedback and evaluation of their work at every stage of the drafting and re-drafting process. This is confirmed by the external moderator's report, which concludes that the department is 'a very good centre'. Team meeting minutes show that marking and standardisation are regularly discussed, and there is a bank of marked work for reference. Students are taught how to annotate texts effectively, for instance an annotated edition of Tennyson's poetry.

206. There is very good support for learning outside class with students going on numerous theatre visits locally and in London, for instance to productions at the Globe. There is a programme of Victorian seminars in preparation for the synoptic assessment. All staff contribute to these out-of-class seminars on topics such as 'Town and Country', 'Money and Class' and 'The Rise of Women in Victorian Literature'. Students are also encouraged to write for external publication and one of the current Year 12 students has had a lengthy piece

published in 'The Thomas Hardy Journal'. In addition there is an annual Creative Writing competition. All these aspects significantly enhance learning.

Leadership and management

207. The leadership and management of the department are excellent and cannot be praised too highly. They are a crucial element in the success of the department since there are so many members of the team, including a number with key roles in other areas of the school. Standardisation of marking and a common approach to marking and the selection of texts are emphasised. There is a core selection of texts but then individual teachers are given a limited selection so that imaginative response is not stifled.

208. The English department is housed in an excellent, purpose-built block. This significantly helps promote English as a subject and provides an atmosphere conducive to learning. There are excellent displays of literary terminology with key words such as 'assonance', 'onomatopoeia' and 'alliteration', together with students' work and posters linked with other aspects of the arts. The library has a good stock of books for English including fiction, biography, autobiography and literary history and criticism and there are also de-centralised resources, including dictionaries in every classroom. The ICT English base room, new since the last inspection, is very well equipped and an excellent addition to the department. It is understood that the department will continue to add to the ICT resources annually.

209. The department has achieved excellent levels of improvement since the last inspection and the overall quality of provision is excellent.

French

The quality of provision in French is **very good** with excellent features such as results at AS-level and improvement since the last inspection.

Strengths

- Achievement is well above average in both Year 12 and Year 13.
- Results in the first of the new AS-level examinations were outstanding.
- The written work of the most-able students shows a high level of fluency and very good knowledge and understanding of French civilisation.
- Teachers are excellent role models of language, and they support students to use French as the natural means of communication in class.
- Teachers' knowledge of A/AS-level specifications is very good. Their marking of students' work is rigorous and their feedback to students is excellent.
- Lessons are very well planned and conducted at a good pace, with good use of authentic resources.
- Students show a high level of commitment to their study of French. Year 12 students are especially enthusiastic learners.
- Students take advantage of many opportunities to use ICT for research and for presentation of their work.

Areas for improvement

- In some lessons, students have too few opportunities for sustained speech or to take the lead, working independently of their teacher.

Standards and achievement

210. Student numbers in French have increased considerably and examination results have risen to well above the national average. In 2001, results in the new AS-level examination were outstanding: of 25 students entered, 23 gained a Grade C or above, including 13 who achieved Grade A. In this year, students generally did better in French than in their other A/AS-level subjects.

211. The written work scrutinised in the files of Year 13 students during the inspection reflected these very high standards. The most-able students write well-structured essays, using complex language to express their views on current issues such as the recent war in Afghanistan. Some students still make basic errors and are not so skilled at turning to their own use the language of the newspaper and journal articles they have read. Most students' work demonstrates careful research into topics of French culture and civilisation, with sound analysis of facts and figures to support their arguments, for example about the relative effects of drugs and alcohol. Skills of listening and reading comprehension are very well developed. Some Year 13 students speak accurate French with flair, but others do not make sustained oral contributions in class, and their oral presentations lack confidence.

212. Year 12 students are making very good progress in the transition to advanced work. Their spoken French is well developed through the opportunity to make prepared contributions to class debates or discussion, and they are expected to respond to new ideas introduced by their peers or their teacher. Their listening comprehension is very good and they are developing sophisticated skills in inferring meaning from complex written texts. They are beginning to acquire good research skills and their written work is above average for this stage of their course, for example when they prepare guidance leaflets about eating disorders or put the case for and against divorce.

Quality of education

213. Teaching is very good; in lessons it is never less than good and is often very good. Teachers' expectations of students' commitment and performance in classwork and homework are very high and their marking of students' written work is rigorous, with outstanding feedback on how the work might be further improved. Teachers' own fluency provides an excellent model for students. Their knowledge of French society and culture as well as of the subject specifications is extremely good, and they use both to ensure that students develop most skills progressively in preparation for their examinations. They need now to plan to make such progressive demands on students' speaking and presentation skills, and on their capacity to collaborate in groups, consistently. Teachers encourage students to work independently on their written tasks and to undertake independent research into the various topics they study, often using ICT. They provide fewer opportunities for students to take the lead and to exercise initiative in class. Lessons are very well prepared, making good use of authentic texts, audio and video tapes to stimulate students' learning. Relationships are excellent, with teachers' concern to support students' achievements almost tangible.

214. Students respond very well to the challenges provided by teachers. They demonstrate a high level of commitment to their study of French, preparing well for lessons and undertaking extensive research into essay topics. They use ICT well, both for research and also to present posters, leaflets and charts. In class, they do not often work independently of their teachers, and they are not always sure how to work in groups. One class of Year 12 students responded with interest and enthusiasm to the opportunity for a class debate on violence in the media, and took pleasure in their improving understanding of complex written texts: more opportunities of this sort should be taken.

Leadership and management

215. Leadership and management of modern foreign languages are very good. Improvement since the last inspection has been excellent, leading to a significant rise in the standards of students' work. Teachers have a strong team ethos, focussed on self-evaluation and sharing ideas for continuous improvement. They make good use of prior attainment data to set targets for students and to monitor their achievement, but not yet to individualise their work. They have adapted rapidly to the demands of the new examinations, emphasising these in their teaching. They should now revise their long term plans in order to ensure progressive development of all four language skills; as the scheme of work is revised, it should articulate how language and learning skills, especially those of speaking and presentation, will be progressively developed. A further excellent feature of the department's work is the opportunity for sixth form students to take part in visits to France and Germany, which include work experience.