

INSPECTION REPORT

TONBRIDGE GRAMMAR SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

Tonbridge

LEA area: Kent

Unique reference number: 118915

Headteacher: Mrs Wendy Carey

Reporting inspector: Mr Roger Holmes
2632

Dates of inspection: 22nd – 25th April 2002

Inspection number: 244857

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Selective
School category:	Foundation
Age range of pupils:	11 to 18
Gender of pupils:	Female
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr David Makepeace
Date of previous inspection:	March 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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2632	Roger Holmes	Registered inspector		Information about the school The school's results and pupils' achievements How well are pupils taught? How well is the school led and managed? What should the school do to improve further?
13448	Dawn Lloyd	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
3758	Tony Barringer	Team inspector	English	
15706	Roger Crocker	Team inspector	Information and communication technology	
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23188	Jenny Maunder	Team inspector	Biology Chemistry	
31688	Brian McGonagle	Team inspector	Art and design	
17868	Eileen Metcalf	Team inspector		How well does the school care for its pupils?
19528	Roland Portsmouth	Team inspector	Mathematics	
21803	Laura Ramsay	Team inspector	Design and technology	
17404	Judith Tolley	Team inspector	Spanish French	
2626	Marion Thompson	Team inspector		How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
10666	Patricia Wheeler	Team inspector	History Economics	

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IN THE SIXTH FORM

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Tonbridge Grammar School for Girls is an average-sized grammar school, taking girls between the ages of 11 and 18. It has grown steadily since its last inspection in 1996 and now has 1036 pupils on roll. The sixth form has grown proportionately even more than the rest of the school and now has 278 students on roll, including one boy. There are well-developed plans to take around 20 boys into the sixth form next year.

The school is very popular, drawing its pupils from a wide area of Kent and neighbouring counties. It selects most of its pupils from girls who have achieved particularly well in the entrance examination but also retains some 10 per cent of places for girls who may have passed more modestly and live in the Tonbridge area. There are also places for girls who have sisters in the school. Overall, the girls' attainment on entry is very high compared to most secondary schools and many of them come from families which support them well and where socio economic indicators are well above the national average. This is reflected in the unusually low proportion of pupils (0.3 per cent) entitled to free school meals. Almost all the girls are white. All but 15 have English as their first language and no one is at an early stage of learning the language. Forty girls are on the schools register for special educational needs and one pupil has a statement for her particular needs; these are much lower proportions than in most schools. The school has recently been nominated as a Beacon School.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Tonbridge Grammar School for Girls is an excellent school, which refuses to be complacent and continually strives to become even better. The school is particularly successful in helping girls develop competence and self-confidence based on a firm understanding of themselves and the world around them. Results in examinations are very high, even considering the girls' starting points when they join the school. These reflect the high quality of teaching in the school and the excellent atmosphere for learning that has been established. Leadership is excellent and the school provides very good value for money.

What the school does well

- Standards of attainment are very high and examination results are in the top five per cent of schools in the country.
- There is excellent provision for the girls' personal development.
- Teaching is very good and the girls have excellent attitudes to their work.
- Curriculum arrangements are excellent and there is a very good range of extra activities.
- The headteacher's excellent leadership has led to a strong and distinctive ethos in the school, which encourages everyone to excel.

What could be improved

- A small minority of teaching, whilst satisfactory, is not up to the high standards set elsewhere in the school.
- Arrangements for information and communication technology (ICT) in Years 10 and 11 do not give all pupils enough access to the subject.
- Some of the school's accommodation is old and unsuitable.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made excellent progress since its last inspection in 1996. All six of the key issues identified in the report have been tackled successfully. Assessment and staff

development, which needed attention last time, are now very successful and strengths of the school.

Examination results, which were already high in 1996 have improved at a faster rate than the national picture for GCSE and Year 9 assessments. Results at A level have risen in line with national improvements and have remained far above average. Improvements to the curriculum leading up to GCSE and to the quality of teaching have been important in bringing about these improved standards.

STANDARDS

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

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

Key

well above average A

above average B

average C

below average D

well below average E

Results are in the top five per cent of schools for tests at the end of Year 9 as well as for GCSE and A level examinations. They represent good achievement for the girls despite their starting points being much higher than in most schools, particularly in the years up to GCSE, where the school's innovative curriculum enables the girls to spread their examination work over two years.

Results at GCSE and in Year 9 test are continuing to improve and are rising faster than the national picture. At A level, they are maintaining the same distance above the national average. The school sets itself realistically challenging targets for examination results, which it achieves. The standard of work seen in the school matches these exceptionally high results. Up to GCSE almost all of the work seen was of a very high standard. In the subjects which were inspected in the sixth form standards were very high in English, mathematics, history and French, well above average in biology, chemistry, design and technology, art and design, and psychology. They were above average in economics and Spanish and average for ICT. Standards in literacy and numeracy are very high throughout the school.

Pupils and students from different ethnic backgrounds and those with special needs make equally good progress as others in the school.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Excellent. The pupils and students are fully justified in the pride they feel in the school. Their wholehearted involvement in lessons is a major factor in the success they achieve.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Excellent. Pupils and students are polite and self-assured. Behaviour is outstanding in lessons and around the school.
Personal development and relationships	Outstandingly good. Pupils and students respond particularly well to the wide range of responsibilities they are offered. They develop as capable, self-confident and caring young adults with well balanced outlooks on life.
Attendance	Very good. Attendance is very high, pupils are rarely late and there is no unauthorised absence.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

The great majority of lessons are very successful. Teachers both capitalise on and contribute to the girls' excellent attitudes to learning by involving them in the lesson through question and discussion. A small minority of teaching, whilst still satisfactory, is less successful because the teacher relies on the girls' willingness to work to make up for un-stimulating presentation or other shortcomings. Teachers know their subjects very well and work is generally very well matched to the needs of the pupils and students. Very good use is made of the girls' targets for learning to ensure that everyone makes rapid progress.

There is a strong emphasis on literacy and numeracy throughout the school and these skills are taught very well.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Excellent. The wide range of subjects available throughout the school is very well matched to the girls' needs. The flexible arrangements in Years 7 to 11 are particularly successful, enabling the girls to cover an unusually wide range of subjects without undue pressure. There is a particularly good range of high quality extra-curricular activities including music, sports, drama and subject extension work.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Very good. Support is very well matched to pupils' needs and all staff play a part in its delivery.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Very good. Almost all these pupils are fluent speakers of English. Support for those still developing their fluency is very effective.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Excellent. The high quality of provision in these areas makes an important contribution to the girls' personal development, balancing their high academic achievement with understanding and concern for issues in the world around them.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Excellent. The school takes great care to get to know the girls individually and to ensure that they benefit as much as possible from its work.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Excellent. The headteacher's outstanding leadership has led to the establishment of the school's distinctive ethos and its drive for excellence. She is very well supported by other senior staff and the school is succeeding particularly well as a result.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Very good. Governors are very well informed and play an important part in taking the school forward.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Very good. There is a well-established and successful system for reviewing the school's performance which informs its planning for overall development and the professional development programmes for staff. Students' views are increasingly included in this analysis.
The strategic use of resources	Very good. Spending is closely linked to the school's priorities for development and there are very good systems to ensure that funds are used effectively. Major spending decisions are considered very carefully to ensure that the school achieves best value for money. The school has sufficient, very well qualified teachers and deploys them well. Resources for learning are good as a result of careful spending. Accommodation is barely adequate with many rooms old and unsuitable, which the school has well developed plans to address

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Parents are very pleased with almost all aspects of the school, particularly the standards achieved and the high quality of leadership and teaching. Everyone who responded to the questionnaire agreed that expectations are high.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Information about pupils' progress.The chance to work more closely with the school.

The inspection team agrees strongly with the parents' overwhelmingly positive views of the school. Parents are informed regularly about pupil' progress and the high quality of information is better than most schools provide. The school provides a good range of opportunities for parents to take part in its work and welcomes their involvement. Consequently the team disagrees with the parents who had concerns in these areas.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

Although the main school is an average size the sixth form is larger than most others and has grown over the last few years. There are currently 278 female students and one male in the sixth form, all of whom are studying at AS or A level. The great majority of girls move from Y11 into the sixth form. Many of those who leave move into other post-16 education which demands even higher entry qualifications than this sixth form. They are replaced by a similar number joining the sixth form whose attainment on entry is not quite as high as those who have left. Consequently the sixth form has much the same ethnic and social composition as the rest of the school with attainment on entry which is well above average, but which is nevertheless a little lower than the main school.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

Students receive an excellent education in the sixth form. Standards are very high as a result of very effective teaching and the students' excellent attitudes to their studies. They were well above average at the time of the last inspection and have improved since. Students' wider needs and aspirations are met through an excellent range of enrichment activities and through the opportunities they have to take responsibilities across the school. The sixth form is very well led and successful management ensures it is very cost effective.

Strengths

- Students have excellent attitudes to their work.
- Standards are very high and examination results are in the top five per cent of all schools.
- Students benefit from the excellent range of enrichment activities.
- Students are supported very effectively so that they make very good progress and their achievement in relation to their standards at the start of Year 12 is very good.
- Teachers know their subjects well, teaching and learning are very effective.

What could be improved

- Standards in ICT are not as high as other key skills
- Accommodation for some subjects is unsatisfactory.

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

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

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

Subject area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	Excellent. Results are very high as a result of very good teaching based upon good knowledge of the subject. This encourages the already high levels of motivation of students. A wide range of suitable modules is offered.
Chemistry	Excellent. Results were well above average in 2001 and are set to improve further. Students achieve very well in relation to their GCSE results. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and the quality of teaching is very good with some excellent features. Students work very

	well and learn from each other effectively.
Subject area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Biology	Very Good. Examination results were well above average in 2001. Students achieve well in relation to their GCSE results. Staff have strong subject knowledge and the quality of teaching is good overall with some very good features.
Design and technology	Very good. In design and technology two AS/A level courses are offered and taken by relatively small numbers of students. Examination results in 2001 were above average. Teachers have very good subject knowledge which is used well to help students build up their knowledge, understanding and skills to design and make good products. Students are mature, highly motivated and make substantial gains in their learning.
Economics	Satisfactory Results are above average and have been improving over the past four years. Students use the Internet extensively to research up-to-date information on topical issues. The department provides a good enrichment programme.
Information and communication technology	Satisfactory. Students complete one or two modules in vocational ICT each year. Standards are satisfactory, but some students lack an appropriate level of skill and confidence. Some subjects make very good use of ICT. Teaching is good overall. A more effective procedure for the development of ICT as a key skill in the sixth form is needed.
Art and design	Very good. Results are well above average and are continuing to improve. Teaching is good. Teachers have good subject knowledge and they set challenging tasks for students. As a consequence, students are highly motivated and learning is very good.
History	Excellent. Results are well above the national average. Teachers have strong subject knowledge and teaching is consistently very good. Students' attitudes and commitment are excellent.
Psychology	Very good. Teaching is very good and students respond with enthusiasm and energy. The size of classes limits the range of more practical activities that can be undertaken in a few lessons.
English	Excellent. Results are well above the national average. Staff have strong subject knowledge and teaching is excellent. Students' attitude and commitment are excellent. Leadership and management are outstanding
French	Excellent. Results are well above average. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and students' attitudes and commitment are excellent. Management of the subject is exemplary.
Spanish	Good. Results are average. The quality of teaching and learning are good and students' attitudes and commitment excellent.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Very good. Tutors know the students very well and make extensive use of assessment information to ensure that they all make good progress. Guidance for the next stage of education or employment is also very good. Attendance is monitored well, but patterns of unusual absence in ICT have not been addressed.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Very good. There is a clear vision that the sixth form should combine academic and personal development and this is achieved particularly well. All students have equal opportunities to excel. Performance at all levels is monitored well and good use is made of students' opinions to make things better. Financial management is very secure and the sixth form is very cost-effective.

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 range of choices • The quality of teaching, and the level of challenge • Being treated as a responsible person • Helpful assessment of work • Good support to overcome difficulties. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better advice about future options • More response from the school to students' views.

The inspection team agrees with the students' positive views of the sixth form. Nearly a third of the students said they would like better advice on options but the team found that a good range of information and support is available and so disagrees with this point. Similarly, although almost a quarter of students felt that the school should take more notice of their views, consultation is better than in most schools and the opportunity for students to comment on their teachers through the use of a questionnaire is unusually good.

COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

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

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Standards of attainment are very high and examination results are in the top five per cent of schools in the country

1. Results in the national tests that pupils take at the end of Year 9, in GCSE and at A level are all very high and better than could be expected even considering the very high attainment the girls have when they come into the school. Because the school is so popular it is able to select many of the most successful girls from their entrance examinations, so that most of the pupils are drawn from the ten per cent most academically successful. Overall performance at Year 9, GCSE and at A level, places the school in the top five per cent, outperforming most schools with a similarly advantaged intake.

2. Although results were already high at the time of the last inspection, they have improved at Year 9 and at GCSE even faster than in most schools. At A level they have stayed the same distance ahead of the national average. These improvements have been the result of the school's determination not to be complacent and the consequent developments that have been made to the quality of teaching, the atmosphere for learning and the highly effective use of assessment information. Particularly innovative curricular arrangements have been made in the years leading to GCSE which have led to improvements being even more marked at this stage than at A level.

3. The very high examination results are reflected in the standards of work seen during the inspection. The girls' written work is excellent. Ideas are expressed clearly and facts are emphasised in notes so that learning is focused on the main points. In lessons the girls respond very well to questions, thinking logically and expressing themselves very effectively. In discussion they marshal ideas well and present robust arguments for their point of view. In a Year 9 history lesson for example, pupils explored the reliability of evidence in considerable depth, comparing primary and secondary sources, considering possible motives for changing information and the relative reliability of photographs and written evidence. Girls then made their own very good notes summarising the main points that had been covered in the discussion.

4. Girls can take GCSE examinations earlier than usual in a number of subjects. Their results are just as high as those who sit the examinations at the usual time in Year 11. For example, all 61 candidates who took mathematics GCSE during their Year 10 achieved either A or A* grades, as did the 28 who took French in Year 10 and even the 22 who sat their French papers in Year 9. The extra time made available by completing courses early is used very effectively to develop the girls' independence and to broaden their understanding of the subject. In French, for example, these girls extend their fluency and deepen their understanding of the language and culture through reading the literature. They often work without direct supervision, showing considerable maturity and exemplary study habits, for example maintaining the discipline of discussing their work with each other in French.

5. The girls' skills as learners, their self-confidence and ability to communicate, which have been built up during their earlier years in the school, really shine out in the sixth form. The nature of the work at this level demands considerable depth of understanding, ability to analyse, compare and marshal arguments. The students rise to these challenges exceptionally well, master the subjects they are studying and as a consequence perform very well in examinations. Much of the students' work shows real scholarship, for example in English the students have a detailed understanding of the texts they are using, together with considerable background information of the period in which they were written. They used this

information very effectively in analysing Jane Austin's Emma and discussing why the author sometimes took the role of narrator herself, and at others passed it to Emma. The level of discussions, led by one of the students, was exceptionally high and included perceptive considerations of the difficulties faced by a female novelist cloistered within her family at the turn of the eighteenth century.

There is excellent provision for the girls' personal development

6. Girls are helped to settle into the school quickly when they start in Year 7. They come from a large number of primary schools and Year 7 staff are particularly careful to help them establish new friendships and feel comfortable in their new surroundings.

7. From the earliest stages the girls are actively involved in making decisions about their education. Form tutors play a central role in discussing the girls' progress and agreeing targets with them. As a result girls know very clearly how well they are doing and how they could improve. They also take increasing responsibility for their performance and develop considerable independence in their learning. They have a significant voice in deciding the subjects they study and the school responds positively to their views, for example the current accelerated French groups have decided jointly that they should take their examination in Year 10 rather than Year 9. The school has agreed, further re-enforcing its willingness to take the girls' views seriously.

8. The ethos of the school strongly supports the girls' developing independence. They are given considerable responsibility and respond very positively. In lessons their ideas are valued and the considerable emphasis placed on discussion helps to develop the girls' lively self-confidence. Teachers have high expectation of them which they accept readily. They are expected to be able to do things, find they can and grow in competence and confidence as a result.

9. By the time they are in the sixth form the girls have developed considerable interpersonal skills, understanding of the world around them and concern to make things better. For example a group has recently established a counselling service "one2one" to provide help for anyone with a problem. They have shown considerable initiative in starting the project, followed up by impressive organisational ability in developing it. To raise funds to extend the scheme next year the girls themselves organised a concert, calling on musicians from other schools to take part, arranging all of the details behind the scenes, placed plugs for the event on Classic FM and even persuaded the radio station to donate prizes for the raffle. The evening was not only a resounding musical success, but a wonderful testament to the girls' concern, skills and determination.

Teaching is very good and the girls have excellent attitudes to their work

10. Over half the teaching seen during the inspection was very good or excellent and the great majority of the rest was good. Teachers know their subjects very well and almost always make sure that their lessons match the needs of the girls.

11. The girls are very keen to learn and teachers both capitalise on this enthusiasm and develop it further by involving the girls closely in their lessons. They encourage questions and even at advanced levels, are confident in providing responses. In the best lessons they often encourage debate between the girls so that they deepen their understanding of the issues even further.

12. Lessons are planned carefully and often take account of particular areas which have been identified through the girls' targets, or address issues which have arisen through assessment. Marking is very thorough, supports the very good development of the girls' literacy through attention to grammar and spelling, and also provides clear guidance on how to improve. Teachers often include statements such as "you would have got higher marks if..." In the context of the high quality work the girls produce, suggesting such improvements requires the teachers to analyse the work very carefully.

13. Relationships in lessons are excellent and teachers use these very effectively to establish an atmosphere in which ideas can be exchanged freely and the girls' independence encouraged. For example in a French lesson considering the environment, the teacher made very effective use of her excellent relationships with the girls to explore the issues in considerable depth, constantly challenging them to give meticulous explanations and fine-tuning their responses with friendly good humour.

14. Many lessons are lively and stimulating, so that the girls' enjoyment of learning grows stronger. For example in a Year 12 biology lesson the concept of food webs was enlivened by the teacher taking the students outside to role-play the inter-relationships of organisms in a woodland habitat. They tested out various hypotheses with seriousness overlain by lively wit and humour. Back in the laboratory they continued to research the flow of energy in eco-systems with greater understanding and considerable commitment.

Curriculum arrangements are excellent and there is a very good range of extra activities

15. The curriculum is broad and very well matched to the need of the girls. It is particularly innovative leading up to GCSE, where it provides girls with the opportunity to take their examinations early in some subjects, spreading the load of examination preparations over two or three years. Consequently they are able to study more subjects than usual without undue pressure.

16. In modern languages a group is identified who expect to take their GCSE examinations in Year 9, whilst other groups will complete their courses in Years 10 and the normal Year 11. In mathematics a large proportion of pupils take their GCSE at the end of Year 10. These early entries achieve very high results, as explained earlier in paragraph 4.

17. In design and technology almost all pupils take their GCSE in Year 10. Two thirds of the candidates achieved A* or A grades, which is significantly higher than most schools achieve with pupils in Year 11.

18. Girls who finish a GCSE course early are not rushed into advanced level work. They are interviewed individually and involved closely in deciding their work-load. Pupils who plan to follow mathematics courses in the sixth form often begin AS level work in Year 11. Language students who have taken French early broaden their knowledge of the language through reading its literature rather than starting AS work. In design and technology, those Year 11 pupils who are considering taking the subject in the sixth form are engaged in an electric car project for an inter-school competition which is deepening their understanding of the design process and developing their skills of working in a team.

19. Provision for equal opportunities is excellent. These are all observed in practice. Provision for the few students with special educational needs is very good. Provision for the small number of students who have English as a second language is also very good although these students are fluent in English. Their knowledge and skills in languages other than English are credited and valued. They are well represented in extra-curricular activities.

20. The school goes to extensive lengths to ensure that students' individual needs are met. There is a flexible approach to the curriculum and students are able to take some subjects in half the normal time in order to make time for other subjects where they have particular interests and ability.

21. There is a particularly good range of additional activities alongside the academic curriculum. These include music, sports, art and design, drama, Duke of Edinburgh's Award and subject extension work. Many of these activities provide opportunities for especially gifted pupils to excel, such as the Motet Choir and some of the sports teams. Others cover the same areas and are open to all so that, for example music can be pursued simply for enjoyment and sport is available to all who want to play. The school has been awarded Sports Mark and Arts Mark Gold for its work in this area.

The headteacher's excellent leadership has led to a strong and distinctive ethos in the school which encourages everyone to excel

22. The headteacher has been in post since before that last inspection. Her determined and highly successful leadership lie behind all of the improvements that have been made and have resulted in the excellent standards the school now achieves. An unusually high proportion of parents commented on the effectiveness of the school's leadership.

23. She has a clear vision of the sort of education the school should provide for its girls. This includes challenging the stereotypes of what girls can and cannot do so that they grow in self-confidence and develop a broad range of capabilities. The excellent examination results follow from this approach, but are at least matched by the girls' excellent personal development, which it fosters so effectively.

24. This approach is now embedded in the school as part of its ethos. Everyone understands and supports it as a result of the headteacher's example over the years and her willingness to explain and persuade. Senior staff, in particular, support the headteacher very effectively, sharing her philosophy and helping to put it in place in everything the school does.

25. One of the effective strategies for improvement has been to establish two groups for steering the school forwards. One is the school management team, which deals largely with organisational issues, administration and ensures that the school runs smoothly. The second is the strategic management group, whose remit is to look to the future and search for ways of improving. Separating these two functions, which often reside together in other schools, has been particularly effective in generating new ideas, such as the curriculum organisation, which have been important in the school's success. The arrangements have also strengthened and clarified the governing body's involvement with the school. Governors meet regularly with the strategic management group to formulate policy, without having to become concerned with the day-to-day issues of the school management team.

26. Avoiding complacency in the school has been one of the headteacher's major accomplishments. This has been achieved by her own strong example and by the highly effective use of statistics. The school now compares its overall performance with a small group of other selective and successful schools. This gives a much more valid measure of how well it is doing and provides much more challenge for improvement. The quality of work in each department is monitored carefully and a cycle of detailed reviews has been established so that any necessary improvements can be instigated. This procedure had already identified ICT as needing support, as this report describes in the sixth form section. Assessment information is also used most effectively, to set targets for individual pupils and students. As with departmental reviews, this is a very interactive process so that pupils and

teachers are closely involved together, taking a shared responsibility for decisions and feeling they have power within the process.

27. The school's management is very outward looking. It has established close working relationships with other schools and has imaginative plans to develop these further. These links encourage a healthy flow of ideas. The school is also keen to play a role in the local community and very successfully encourages girls to take on responsibilities which are seen as being part of the privileged position they have as members of a selective school. The school itself has reached out to help a nearby school in difficulties. The deputy head has been seconded to lead the school and many staff, led by the headteacher, have devoted considerable time and expertise to overcoming its difficulties. It is an indication of the strength of the headteacher's philosophy that it has transferred so successfully to a totally different non-selective school. The pupils there have responded well to clear guidance, high expectations and involvement in their own learning. Examinations results have risen markedly and so has the school's standing in the community. The success of this venture is a shining testament to the quality of Tonbridge's management team and their willingness to share with other schools. It is a clear indication of how effective they will be as a Beacon School.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

A small minority of teaching, whilst satisfactory, is not up to the high standards set elsewhere in the school

28. None of the teaching seen was unsatisfactory, but a small minority of lessons, some seven per cent, were successful because of the girls' very positive attitudes to work rather than what the teacher did. In many schools these lessons would not have worked.

29. Two weaknesses are evident from these lessons:

- Sometimes the teacher does not seem to have a clear enough purpose for the lesson and does not organise the pupils well enough to provide a clear focus for their learning. For example in a Year 11 religious education lesson, the girls were asked to review St Marks gospel to find messages about living in the modern world, the teacher gave too little guidance to make this vast subject manageable, but the girls themselves, working in groups, decided to concentrate on specific aspects such as race and gender and so made the lesson effective. Similarly in a Year 13 biology lesson, students dutifully read through newspaper cuttings on genetic engineering despite an uninspiring introduction from the teacher, who gave little purpose to the activity. As a consequence they did not make the sort of progress they do in most lessons.
- Sometimes the teacher assumes that because the girls are working so well they do not need any help. This occurred for example in a Year 10 geography lesson where, although the teacher had given a very clear introduction and most pupils were able to proceed with the work, one or two had problems which the teacher did not notice for some time. In a Year 8 physics lesson on moments many of the girls had misunderstood parts of the teacher's introduction and in their own notes had written such things as 'a lever is a force'. Because they seemed to be working happily the teacher did not check what had been written and left them with the inaccuracies in their books.

30. In all of these cases the teachers were unaware of shortcomings of the lessons because the girls worked so well. Nor had the teachers compared their work sufficiently carefully with the high quality teaching in the great majority of lessons to see how it should be improved.

Arrangements for ICT in Years 10 and 11 do not give all pupils enough access to the subject

31. The school is improving its provision for ICT. It now has sufficient computers in central suites and effective arrangements for teaching ICT in Years 7 to 9. In Years 10 and 11 some pupils follow a short GCSE course, but the arrangements are for most pupils to be taught ICT through other subjects of the curriculum. At the moment this is working unevenly, with some subjects and some teachers giving their pupils more experience of ICT than others. Pupils are reaching the expected levels of competence in the subject but standards could be higher if provision were more consistent at this stage. In the sixth form there is an ICT course for all, but the quality of work varies between the different groups and attendance in some groups is low. Overall, most students become competent in ICT, but standards vary too much between the groups. Students also meet ICT through their main A level subjects, but there is the same unevenness as in Year 10 and 11.

Some of the school's accommodation is old and unsuitable

32. The school's accommodation has improved considerably since the last inspection with the completion of a new science and design and technology block. However the school still has many temporary classrooms scattered around the site with no covered ways to protect pupils in wet weather. Several classrooms are in a wooden structure, built as a temporary measure in 1917. Many of the permanent classrooms have faults, such as noisy and poorly controlled heating systems in mathematics and poor acoustics in modern languages.

33. The girls are succeeding despite these problems but the standard of accommodation does not match the school's aspirations. The school has well developed plans to improve its accommodation.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

34. To raise the standards of work and improve the quality of education even further, staff and governors should address the following points, most of which they have already recognised in their existing development plans:

- (1) tackle the small minority of teaching which is not as effective as most lessons, using the schools existing monitoring techniques to identify the problems and capitalising on the considerable strength in teaching to raise the teachers' awareness and provide support.
(Paragraphs: 29, 30)
- (2) strengthen the arrangements for teaching ICT in Years 10 and 11 so that all pupils receive broad experience of ICT regardless of which other subjects they study.
(Paragraph: 31)
- (3) seek to improve the schools accommodation by instigating the development plans as soon as possible.
(Paragraphs: 32, 33)

Sixth form

- (1) improve the arrangements for ICT as a key skill in the sixth form so that all students develop good levels of competence. The plans to introduce courses at AS and A level should be put into effect.
(Paragraphs: 119-125)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Year 7 – 11	43
	Sixth form	56
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		72

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 7 – 11							
Number	7	20	11	5	0	0	0
Percentage	16	47	26	12	0	0	0
Sixth form							
Number	12	17	22	5	0	0	0
Percentage	21	30	39	9	0	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	758	278
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	3	0

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	1	1
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	40	20

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	15

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	17
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	1

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	6.5
National comparative data	7.7

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.0
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2001	0	146	146

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Girls	145	145	144
	Total	145	145	144
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	99 (97)	99 (98)	99 (99)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	97 (97)	99 (98)	99 (97)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Girls	144	145	145
	Total	144	145	145
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	99 (100)	99 (99)	100 (100)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	99 (100)	99 (99)	99 (100)
	National	31 (31)	42 (39)	33 (29)

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	0	152	152

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Girls	150	150	152
	Total	150	150	152
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	99 (98)	99 (99)	100 (99)
	National	48 (47)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	73.6 (68.7)
	National	39.0 (38)

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

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

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	N/A	130	130
	Average point score per candidate	N/A		
National	Average point score per candidate	N/A		

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS examinations			For candidates entered for Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All	Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	N/A			N/A		
	Average point score per candidate	N/A			N/A		
National	Average point score per candidate	N/A			N/A		

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	3
Black – other	0
Indian	9
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	5
White	866
Any other minority ethnic group	12

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	0	0
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	63.4
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.3

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	11
Total aggregate hours worked per week	289.9

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	67.8
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y13

Key Stage 3	27.9
Key Stage 4	24.3

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000/2001
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	£
Total income	2 644 909
Total expenditure	2 669 555
Expenditure per pupil	2 602
Balance brought forward from previous year	84706
Balance carried forward to next year	60 030

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	22.89
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	17.70

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)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1036
Number of questionnaires returned	543

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	52	42	4	2	0
My child is making good progress in school.	65	32	1	0	2
Behaviour in the school is good.	50	44	2	0	3
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	36	50	11	1	1
The teaching is good.	47	49	2	0	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	37	48	13	1	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	58	35	5	1	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	86	14	0	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	33	47	14	1	4
The school is well led and managed.	71	26	1	0	1
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	57	37	3	0	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	47	41	7	1	5

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

35. Standards of attainment in the sixth form are very high and reflect very good progress from the exceptionally high GCSE results that the students have when they enter the sixth form. The school provides a wide range of 24 AS and A level courses and students almost always complete courses which they have begun.

36. Examination results are comfortably in the top five per cent of schools in the country, even when fee-paying schools in the independent sector are included in the comparison. Results have been maintained at this level for at least the last three years and are better than at the time of the last inspection. In the 2001 A level examinations, results were particularly high and in the top five per cent of schools in geography, history and government and politics; they were well above average in most other subjects, including art and design, biology, chemistry, English literature, French, German, mathematics and music. Results were above average in classical studies, economics, design and technology, general studies and physics. In Spanish, results were in line with national averages, other subjects had too few candidates for valid comparisons to be made. Overall, results in 2001 met the demanding targets that the school had set itself, as they had in previous years. The standards of work seen during the inspection reflect this pattern of examination results and students are achieving very well in almost all subjects, including mathematics, chemistry, design and technology, art and design, history, psychology. Achievement is particularly high in English and French. Achievement is not as high as in other subjects in economics, where it is satisfactory and in Spanish, where it is good. The school has very effective systems for monitoring how well each student is doing and comparing their progress with what could be expected, given their previous performance. All students have their own demanding targets for achievement arising from this system and virtually all are making good progress towards them.

37. Standards in the key skills of communication and use of number are very high. Students express themselves very clearly and confidently in speech and in writing. They handle numbers well and interpret graphs and other forms of data skilfully. Their ICT skills are satisfactory and they make effective use of computers for research, processing information and presenting their work clearly.

38. Students who need particular support because of special educational needs or because English is not their first language are helped very effectively and make the same good progress as other students.

39. The very good levels of achievement result from the very effective teaching in almost all subjects and the excellent attitudes to work that have been established in the school. The students work very hard but have a mature and balanced approach to their studies so that very few fail to complete courses. The great majority continue into higher education taking these positive attitudes with them, so that almost all complete their graduate courses with considerable success.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

40. Sixth form pupils have excellent attitudes to learning. They always strive to do their best and to match the high expectations of their teachers. In lessons and around the school their behaviour is exemplary. Relationships between pupils and between pupils and adults are excellent. The girls' response to the extensive opportunities that exist for them to show initiative and take on responsibility is outstanding. Attendance in the sixth form is very good.

41. Students are exceptionally enthusiastic about their work. They are highly ambitious and want to achieve the best possible examination results, so there is never any doubt about their commitment to study. In lessons, they ask questions and express opinions with confidence. They are always well focussed on their tasks and maintain high levels of concentration. Because they are so well motivated, they approach all their work with real interest. They are keen to acquire new skills and knowledge, to the extent that a number of girls have voluntarily undertaken extra work, for example in English, where they find that the Advanced Extension course provides them with the intellectual satisfaction of attempting study at a very challenging level.

42. Their intense desire to do well means that pupils work with a high level of independence. They are able to think and learn for themselves and show great confidence and composure, for example, in developing their ideas and concepts in art and design and seeking to communicate them clearly to others.

43. Their behaviour and attitudes in lessons and around the school are impeccable. They are polite, friendly and helpful to visitors and set a good example to the younger pupils. They participate with eager enthusiasm in all aspects of school life. There are extensive opportunities for girls to take on responsibility, and they take up these challenges with enthusiasm and vigour. A large percentage of sixth formers are prefects, with a very wide range of duties that include helping both staff and other pupils. The girls are happy to accept these opportunities to develop skills of leadership and organisation while also providing a very valuable service to the school community. They show considerable maturity of outlook as well as great personal confidence, for example in their provision of counselling and mentoring services for the younger pupils, as well as in their wide involvement in community service schemes.

44. Relationships throughout the sixth-form are excellent. Many teachers have easy, informal relationships with the students, which allow lessons to proceed enjoyably without ever losing sight of the mutual respect that is evident between pupils and their teachers. The girls themselves get on very well together and support one another appropriately in lessons and in the activities that they organise in their spare time. In all subject areas they exercise imagination and respond enthusiastically to the expectation that they are active learners with responsibility for their own learning.

45. As a result of the school's provision, students develop a strong social conscience, high self esteem and a sense of their own worth. They raise thousands of pounds each year for charities, identifying the charities they wish to support, responding to the most needy cases sensitively. Sixth Form students show very good initiative in helping younger pupils with their studies across a range of subjects. They work impressively as prefects and respond in a highly sensitive manner to the trust placed in them to develop a sense of community.

46. Their judgements are perceptive and thoughtful, for example, in the accounts read out in a Year 13 assembly about a trip to Marrakesh. As part of their preparation for the Gold Award in the Duke of Edinburgh scheme, a group of girls had visited Morocco to learn more

about the lifestyle and culture of the people. Girls sharply identified the differences in customs and living conditions between the two countries, while showing great respect for the values and beliefs of the local people. When discussing in an art and design lesson, their enthusiasm for the debate did not counteract the respect they showed for one another's views.

47. Sixth formers enjoy coming to school. Their regular attendance reflects their high motivation to succeed and contributes significantly to the standards they achieve.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

48. Teaching is very good in the sixth form. All lessons were at least satisfactory and over half were very good or excellent. This large proportion of high quality teaching re-enforces the students' excellent attitudes to their work and leads to the high standards they achieve and the very good quality of their learning.

49. Teaching is excellent in French and English, very good in mathematics, chemistry, design and technology, history and psychology. In almost all other subjects inspected it is good and in economics where the teacher is still inexperienced it is satisfactory and improving.

50. All teachers know their subjects well and bring real scholarship to their work. Teachers plan lessons carefully so that they are often lively and stimulating as well as covering the subject matter in appropriate depth and detail. The great majority of lessons involve the students in considerable analysis and discussion and teachers often use questioning skilfully to extend the students' thinking. In many lessons, the students are encouraged to raise their own questions and these are often searching and perceptive. Teachers have the confidence in their own subject expertise to answer these difficult questions effectively, giving factual information when appropriate, exploring views when issues are debatable and acknowledging any uncertainty they have with honesty. This approach builds upon and strengthens the positive relationships and mutual respect between students and teachers.

51. In the most effective lessons teachers often encourage the students to respond to each others questions, for example in a physics lesson looking at the trails left by sub-atomic particles, the girls were encouraged to challenge interpretations of the track that were different from their own, using their knowledge of the subject to justify their reasoning. By skilfully juxtaposing the students' statements the teacher led the whole class towards the correct explanation, helped them establish an even deeper understanding of the science and strengthened their confidence in tackling problems independently.

52. Teaching methods are almost always very appropriate for the work of this sixth form. Students are very well motivated and work very hard in lessons. Almost all teachers contribute to this very positive situation through the quality of their own preparation and their interactions with the girls. In a small minority of lessons the teacher relies too much on the girls' willingness to work, using their positive attitudes rather than contributing to them.

53. Teachers know the students very well and often address issues that have been misunderstood with students individually. Students and teachers know what targets are to be worked towards and the shared understanding contributes to the success of learning in lessons. This individual approach encompasses students with special needs, those who are particularly gifted and ones learning English as an additional language, so that all make good progress.

54. There are no special lessons to cover the key skills of communication, use of number and ICT, but these play a significant part in many lessons, particularly communication and use of number. Teachers expect students to communicate effectively, provide very good role models themselves and give support whenever it is needed. Similarly, students are expected to use mathematics whenever appropriate, for example interpreting census data in history. Their high level of mathematics skills makes this a matter of routine. Not quite such effective and regular use is made of ICT and in some cases it is the students rather than the teachers who are introducing ICT into lessons by their own use of computers for research and presentation.

55. The high quality of teaching is a significant strength of the school and an important area of improvement since the last inspection.

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

56. Curriculum provision in the sixth form is excellent. The courses offered, the flexibility of the way in which provision is made, together with the wide range of enrichment activities are designed to meet the individual needs and preferences of a high-attaining group of students and provides opportunities for them to develop independence. In addition to general studies, 23 subjects are offered at 'A' and AS level. Design of the curriculum is based on careful research with parents and pupils, to check that most needs and aspirations can be accommodated. Currently this does not include ICT at A or AS level, but plans are in place to provide courses in September 2002 alongside the current vocational course. The range offered includes some less common subjects such as psychology, classical civilisation, and government and politics. There is some joint working with neighbouring schools in physical education, drama and music. Provision has been made for students who have special talents; for example one student studies Japanese. Most class sizes are appropriate and planning in the majority of subject areas is very good. The school is very flexible in accommodating interests and abilities: students may study between three and five AS levels in Year 12. In Year 13, all or some of these courses can be followed to A2 level, and new AS levels can be studied. In exceptional circumstances, students have been enabled to study to A2 level within a year.

57. In addition to advanced courses, all students follow a well-organised core programme of activities including weekly personal, social and health education sessions. There is also a regular formal review of work, undertaken by the form tutor. Students attend two assemblies per week and assist in their planning and delivery. Key skills of communication, use of number and ICT are delivered through AS and A level subjects and a modular ICT programme, which is followed by most students. However, attendance at ICT courses falls close to examination times. During study time, students make use of the excellent library facilities; 'in-fill' the ICT room, study in a room dedicated to silent working, or do group work or relax in the common room. In Year 13, pupils pursue their interests or study elsewhere one afternoon per week, with parents' permission. These arrangements work well and students use their time productively. At the end of Year 12, students are supported in arranging a work-shadowing placement for themselves. Students have had some exciting and enriching experiences through this process, which is well prepared for.

58. All students have the opportunity to take part in physical education, religious education and the voluntary service unit during curriculum time. Many students follow a very demanding, rich and varied programme during the sixth form course.

59. Students benefit from an exceptionally wide range of high quality extra curricular activities, which are well attended. Over one third of students hold Duke of Edinburgh's Awards, and a number of students are involved in Young Enterprise. Through the voluntary service unit they are involved in work in the community, for example in schools, hospitals and clubs. Nineteen clubs and organisations are offered each week at lunchtime, including a wide range of sporting activities and clubs, and discussion and debating groups including Bar Mock Trials. Musical activities are a particular strength and include two orchestras and two choirs which perform to a very high level. There are many drama productions each year. Through extra curricular provision, students have an extraordinary number of opportunities to lead and participate in activities which develop their individual skills, talents and abilities to the full.

60. Overall, provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. These aspects are seen as essential to the education of the whole person and are embodied in the aims of the school. All these aspects are well integrated into a coherent philosophy of providing a high quality academic education and giving the students opportunities to mature into confident and accomplished adults.

61. There is a strong emphasis on the spiritual dimensions of life. In tutorial time students are given opportunities to reflect on how people relate to each other by considering the interdependence on each other. For example they consider the Christian ideals embodied in the consideration of "Who is my neighbour?" and an eminent Jewish person's philosophy on the nature of peace and the possibility of finding a new way. They are educated to be aware of their own powers and responsibilities

62. The school encourages students to be aware of their individual talents and to develop these to the highest possible level. The concert arranged by the Sixth Form students showed this with very impressive performances in music. There are ample opportunities for pupils to reflect on spiritual matters. There is an active Christian Union. Young church workers are invited into school. The school benefits from the presence of a young female Christian minister and a local church lay reader. There is a Communion service once a month. A prayer group meets in the early morning and also at break time. There is provision for parents to meet in the evenings. A quiet room is offered for Muslim prayer when needed. Students contribute to assemblies by writing short discussions and plays. They provide music that contributes to specific themes such as "There's a place for us" from West Side Story to complement reflections on conflict between different racial groups.

63. Provision for moral and social education is coherently linked. Students know right from wrong. They are made aware of their own privileged position and are given good opportunities to consider the needs of the less fortunate. There are links with other schools to ensure that students gain a wider vision. There is a strong tradition of students doing voluntary service overseas and past students return to school and are given wonderful support for their projects. These include digging wells in Third World countries and building playing fields for children in Africa. This work contributes to their awareness of living conditions in other cultures.

64. The school prepares pupils for life in a multi-cultural society despite its location. There is good improvement in this aspect since the previous inspection. There are small numbers of students from other European countries, from the Middle and Far East, America and Australia. These students are fully integrated and are valued members of the school. Pupils gain an awareness of other cultures in their general studies and in their tutorial periods. Cultural elements of the Agreed Syllabus for religious education are also taught within the tutorial periods. The depth of study that is the norm in all subjects ensures that students are educated as citizens of the world with impressive knowledge and understanding of global

issues in most subjects, including literature, science, geography, economics and social ethics.

65. The programme of personal, social and health education is carefully planned to cover issues of direct relevance to the sixth form students. Comprehensive exploration of the options available after leaving school is led by a specialist team of teachers, who help pupils to prepare themselves for the next steps, through visits to institutions of higher education, talks by past students and university admissions officers and careful study of application procedures. The programme is supplemented by outside speakers such as the police, on personal safety, past pupils, who talk about their experiences since leaving school and representatives of a range of professions. Sessions on personal finance for those living away from home for the first time are particularly appreciated by the students.

66. Careers provision is well planned and effectively delivered. A comprehensive scheme of work covers all aspects of self assessment, interview practice, self presentation, preparation of applications and exploration of the whole range of options available after school. The expertise of the knowledgeable head of careers is supplemented by the visiting careers officer, who provides information and individual guidance for students, as well as by a diverse range of outside speakers. A work shadowing scheme for pupils at the end of Year 12 gives them clear understanding of the realities of life in a variety of spheres, to help them in their eventual choice of which path to follow.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

Assessment

67. Procedures for monitoring and assessing students' attainment and progress are excellent. A range of performance data is carefully analysed to predict students' performance and is made available to all relevant staff. Predictions are recorded in individual student files. At regular intervals, students have individual reviews of their progress with their form tutor, at which projected grades are compared with the students' predicted grades supplied by subject teachers. Any problem areas are identified quickly and the students, in conjunction with their tutors, set targets for improvement, which are clear, realistic and subject specific. This early intervention is very effective in maintaining the high level of students' work and enabling students to take responsibility for evaluating and improving their own progress. Students and parents understand the system well.

68. Individual departments assess students' work regularly and thoroughly, using a variety of methods which include end of module tests, coursework, assignments, oral feedback and practical work. The quality of marking and assessment, whilst very good overall, is inconsistent across some subjects and within some departments. The best marking guides students on ways in which the work can be improved and challenges students to reach very high standards. It is clearly linked to examination criteria and grades. However, in a few instances, marking is not always sufficiently diagnostic, provides limited information on what students need to do to improve their grades or is not always clearly linked to examination demands.

69. Students receive two reports per year, a long report giving detailed information on students' attainment and progress and a short report. The reports give clear information about what students are capable of achieving, how well they are currently performing and show the students' targets. They contain good information on students' attainment and progress. They do not contain information on students' progress in ICT, which they should.

Advice, support and guidance

70. Overall, there is very good support and guidance for sixth form students. The school is very successful in its aim to support the individual needs of all students. The role of the tutor is crucial in this. There is clear written guidance to ensure that all tutors are aware of the schools' policies and the areas where students require individual help and support.

71. There are very good induction procedures. Year 11 students are invited to do a "taster" day that includes lessons in eight different A/S level subjects. The sixth form prospectus gives very clear guidance and advice on all aspects of life in the sixth form including the expectation that students will avail themselves of the very wide range of extra curricular provision. There are very good links with parents from the start. The tutor oversees the students signing the contract, meets all parents and completes the students' files.

72. The student planner provides a clear and comprehensive focus on what has to be achieved. Students' attainment and progress are tracked formally every half-term and targets are set. These are clear and realistic with specific subject targets. There is diagnostic work in lessons so that the students' grades can be predicted. Students know their predicted grades and can understand their own rate of progress. National data systems are used to project A/S and A Level grades from the students' GCSE results. Students have interviews with their tutors to review their targets. There are progress reports for Year 12 students in November and again in March. These early progress reports ensure that Year 12 students know how they are progressing from the start and can get help and guidance where needed. There is a report from each subject teacher where there is more than one teacher taking the subject. This ensures that students have full knowledge and understanding of their attainment and progress.

73. There is a very comprehensive personal, social and health education programme that supports students in all the relevant aspects of school life Post 16. This includes guidance on health, education on drugs awareness and sex education. Planning for these lessons is very good and appropriate, well informed speakers are invited into school. Aspects of the agreed syllabus for religious education are incorporated into this programme of work. Procedures for child protection are fully in place. The head teacher is the person responsible for this area.

74. There is very good careers advice. There is a separate co-ordinator for sixth form careers who liaises with the careers' adviser for students in the 11 to 16 age range. All students are given a very clearly written booklet that gives details of all aspects of preparation for university entrance including Oxford and Cambridge. Students have opportunities to attend career conferences and conventions run by outside bodies including the universities. Representatives from the universities' admissions staff visit the school to give advice and guidance on all aspects of applications procedures. There is also very good careers' advice for students wishing to enter the world of work and the appropriate contacts are made with the various professional and business institutions. Students are well prepared for interviews and some parents contribute to this provision.

75. The school is very conscious of the need to maintain a safe working environment for its students, and pays meticulous attention to the requirements of its thoughtfully documented health and safety policy. Equipment is checked annually. There is a special book to keep the site manager informed of health and safety concerns and these are attended to promptly.

76. There is very good provision for students with special educational needs. This emanates from the school's aim to be aware of and support all pupils' individual needs. There is only one student with statements of special educational needs in the sixth form and she

gets the appropriate help and support needed from teachers and from the learning support assistants. Students who need extra support have individual learning plans and all their teachers are aware of their needs within each subject area and give the appropriate support. Their progress is reviewed according to requirements. Text help has been installed on computer to help with writing. The special educational needs' co-ordinator has lists of all special needs and these are given to all teachers as appropriate. Where there is medical and physical need the care plan is noted and reviewed regularly. The largest group is asthmatics but most of these students no longer have special needs.

77. The pastoral staff work closely with the special educational needs co-ordinator to ensure that all special educational needs are met.

78. Up to this point the Local Education Authority has given very good support to pupils with special educational needs. There are three visits per year by specialists to do testing for dyslexia. There is very good support for students with dyslexia and they make very good progress. The behavioural service counsellor gives excellent support to the school and makes referrals for counselling. The counsellors come into school readily to do counselling. The school is able to call on the educational psychologist at any point and gets prompt support.

79. The communications and inclusion development team have arranged to come into school next term to do in-service training for the whole school. The co-ordinator attends courses to keep updated on new developments to support students with special educational needs such as Aspergers syndrome. She also attends meetings each half term with teachers in local schools to share good practice and to keep abreast of developments.

80. All students entering the sixth form have very high levels of attainment in GCSE and many are gifted and talented academically so the school makes very serious efforts to ensure that they are all stretched academically. In addition, the school has issued all departments with clear written guidance on how to identify the gifted and talented and how to extend the provision for their education in line with government guidelines. Music and drama are especially valued by students for the exceptional level of provision for the gifted and talented.

81. Students themselves feel that they are very well supported in all aspects of their academic and personal life. The only concern is that a few students needed more written guidance to support their independent learning in some mathematics and physics lessons and some students felt a need for clearer guidance on how art and design is marked at A/S and A Level.

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

82. As at the time of the last inspection, parents are generally very happy with the work of the school. They believe that it has high expectations and that girls are making good progress. Parents are particularly impressed with the way in which the school encourages students to become mature and socially responsible. They cite the extensive prefect system in the sixth form and the way older students support the younger girls as examples of opportunities for personal development which are very effective, and to which the girls respond willingly. For instance, sixth form students have initiated the "one2one" system, through which they provide confidential support on a range of sensitive issues. This has been well received and continues to run successfully. The fact that the school is popular and oversubscribed, with a larger than average sixth form, points to the satisfaction of both parents and pupils.

83. Students themselves are mostly very positive in their approval of what the school offers them. They think that teaching is good and find that staff are readily available to help them if they meet difficulties with their studies. They are particularly appreciative of the range of subjects provided for them and all agree that the purposeful working atmosphere is a strong feature of the school. They say that they are encouraged to work independently and are treated like responsible young adults. The majority enjoy school and would recommend the sixth form to others. Concerns about the quality of advice given by teachers centre around certain subject areas, where girls feel that information about the progress they are making, and written guidance, especially about homework, is insufficiently detailed. Students believe that teachers know them well, and that the regular review systems with form tutors and the director of sixth form are helpful in dealing with any personal or academic problems that may arise. Opportunities to show initiative are plentiful, including the prefect system and the wide range of clubs where sixth form girls play a leading role as organisers and helpers. Girls find that such activities help them to develop self confidence and a broader understanding of issues. Although a number of pupils who completed the pre-inspection questionnaire expressed concern about the school's response to their views, a system which regularly allows girls to give their own evaluation of the way they are taught, together with formal school council meetings, ensures that their opinions are taken into consideration.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

Leadership and management

84. The sixth form is very well led and managed. The head of sixth form has direct responsibility for its work. She is well supported by a deputy and together they form an effective team balancing a drive for excellent performance with a genuine concern for the students' well being. Management of the sixth form is thoroughly integrated into the school's overall management structure, there are close working relationships and frequent exchange of ideas and information. Integration is further strengthened by the start that many students make to some of their sixth form subjects in Year 11. Many sixth form students also work with pupils in other areas of the school as part of the prefect system or in support roles. Together these systems ensure that the sixth form is an integral part of the whole school rather than a separate unit. It both contributes to the school's distinctive ethos and benefits from it as a result of the school's very effective overall leadership.

85. Governors carry out their role very well. They are well informed about the work of the school and many are frequent visitors, adding first-hand knowledge to the wide range of documentation they receive. All statutory requirements for the sixth form are met, apart from the provision of a daily act of collective worship. Governors play an important role in shaping the school's future and have been closely involved with the strategic management group in developing innovative plans for new accommodation and deciding on the inclusion of boys in the sixth form.

86. There are excellent systems for assessing the work of the sixth form. These include management reviews of each subject area, which involve close scrutiny of the standards the students are achieving, review of departmental procedures and observation of teaching. Students themselves are playing an increasing role by completing questionnaires on the quality of teaching and support they receive. This innovation was strengthened as part of a research project in the mathematics department to investigate the most effective ways that the girls could be taught and has now been widely adopted by other subjects. Information from these sources and from review meetings with students is used to inform school development plans and staff development.

87. Financial planning is very good and thoroughly integrated with the rest of the school. Resources are deployed very effectively and there is a very close match between the funds provided for sixth form students and the expenditure directly related to their education. Spending decisions are based on careful consideration of alternatives to ensure that the school achieves the best value. Procedures for financial control are excellent and very effective use is made of information systems so that the effects of alternative spending patterns can be examined.

Resources

88. The school has sufficient accommodation for the sixth form, but many of the teaching rooms are old and barely adequate. Consequently the school has well developed and radical plans to improve its building in the near future. Staff are well qualified for the subjects they teach and there is a good match of subject expertise to the courses taught. This is demonstrated in most lessons where teachers' good knowledge of their subject helps them provide a range of challenging activities for students to help them learn. There are sufficient support staff to meet the demands of the curriculum. Planning for the induction of teachers and students new to the school, is very good and assists them in performing effectively. Development opportunities for teaching and support staff are very good. They are linked to school, departmental (where appropriate) and personal priorities. The school provides a well-organised range of 'in-house' development opportunities for staff, which are cost effective, and has been awarded Investors In People status. Learning resources are generally good as a result of prudent financial management over the years. ICT equipment has been enhanced significantly since the last inspection and there is now good central provision although subject departments have few computers for their own use. The library is large, well stocked and provides an important focus for the independent learning of the students.

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

In the inspection, 13 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 by students in 2001.

GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Biology	2	50	52	50	2	2.0	.8
Chemistry	2	100	43	-	5	1.5	.8
Classical Studies	3	100	-	33	-	2.7	-
French	1	100	78	-	13	3.0	1.6
German	1	100	82	-	13	2.0	1.8
History	2	50	-	-	-	1.5	-
Mathematics	11	91	62	18	15	2.5	1.5
Music	1	100	84	-	29	2.0	2.4
Psychology	2	100	74	100	11	5.0	1.5

(note, these figures do not include AS results for Year 12 students)

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	49	94	87	61	43	7.2	5.8
Biology	44	95	88	41	34	6.4	5.2
Chemistry	37	100	90	68	43	7.5	5.9
Physics	16	94	88	38	40	6.4	5.7
Design and technology	7	100	91	29	30	6.3	5.4
Economics	13	92	89	46	36	6.0	5.5
Art and design	18	100	96	72	46	8.1	6.6
Music	5	100	93	100	35	8.8	5.7
Geography	11	100	92	100	38	9.4	5.7
History	27	100	88	78	35	8.3	5.4
Religious studies	4	100	92	50	38	7.0	5.8
Psychology	50	100	87	68	34	8.0	5.3
English literature	40	100	95	60	37	7.4	5.9
French	30	100	89	60	38	7.6	5.6
German	8	100	91	88	40	9.5	5.8
Spanish	7	100	89	43	39	6.3	5.7
Other Languages	1	100	93	100	56	8.0	6.8
Classical Studies	16	100	95	63	49	7.7	6.5
General Studies	109	95	85	22	30	5.1	4.9

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

The focus of the inspection was on mathematics, biology and chemistry. Physics was also sampled; the lesson was excellent, with the Year 13 students making significant progress as a result of very skilful teaching and their own very positive attitudes to work.

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- Examination results are at a very high level that has been maintained over many years.
- Teaching and learning are very good, very secure subject knowledge is used to plan lessons very well.
- All students are highly motivated.
- Excellent leadership has led to stability without complacency.

Areas for improvement

- Computers are not used enough in lessons as a way to further enhance learning.

89. The 2001 GCE A-level examination results were very high when compared to all schools and well above the average for grammar schools. A majority of students gained grades A or B and no students were ungraded. All students completed the course. The results, when compared to the very high GCSE results, indicate that students achieve well and show good progress in relation to their results at 16. Results for Year 12 students at AS level are very good, a small number of students in Year 13 also sat AS-level mathematics and only one did not receive a grade. The results, when compared to national figures were also very high.

90. The standards of the work seen by current students are equally high. A high proportion of students take GCSE mathematics in Year 10 and gain either A* or A grades. These students and those who commence their A-level course in Year 12 build upon their previous knowledge of algebra to use calculus to evaluate gradients of curves and the areas under curves. They also understand the use of radian measures when solving equations in trigonometry. They study modules in mechanics, statistics, and decision mathematics as part of the course. These modules are chosen to suit individual preferences. Some students also study further mathematics as part of their A-level course. In Year 13 these modules are developed to a higher level and include differential equations, Poisson and normal distributions and significance testing. Students are highly numerate and use calculators effectively as part of their work.

91. Teaching is very good. During the inspection all classes in Years 12 and 13 were revising for their forthcoming examinations. Lessons only had a small input from their teacher at the start and the teaching seen was good. Much of the work was on an individual basis. The very good subject knowledge of teachers enables them to move from one topic to another with ease, explaining to students their areas of difficulty and pointing the way forward. This also sustains pace throughout the whole lesson. Some lessons had brief introductions that revised previous work and gave a starting point to the whole lesson. This is particularly effective in ensuring that students learn their work as they progress. All lessons had a high degree of challenge but this was not so high that students became discouraged. Students' work is marked promptly and all students receive prompt, positive feedback on their work;

much of this is verbal and encourages a dialogue between teacher and student to ensure that any difficulties are fully understood.

92. Students learn very well, they are highly motivated and respond very well to the good teaching they receive. They always work hard and have established very secure relationships with their teachers; this leads to a very good atmosphere in lessons. They make good notes from all lessons and use these as an aid to revision. They and their teachers work together very effectively to correct errors and to point the way forward by annotating these notes and much of their work. Students rise to the challenge of their lessons and are willing to participate in discussions and often offer alternative methods of solving problems. They are mutually supportive of each other and on several occasions students solved questions on the board for the whole class and explained their working clearly and logically. On these occasions all students contribute by asking questions to clarify their own understanding, and the teacher intervened sensitively to expand and confirm students' knowledge.

93. Excellent leadership and management of the department ensure that current high standards are maintained and that there is no complacency in teaching. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. This is achieved by regular monitoring of teaching and learning. There is a very good level of unity within the department and a commitment to sustaining very high standards and if possible to improve them. The scheme of work is detailed and developments to this scheme to give greater emphasis to teaching methods are currently being considered. The resources are adequate but there are no computer facilities in the classrooms to enhance learning further although very good use is made of graphical calculators throughout the course. The department is housed in a suite of adjacent rooms and these have good displays of work to sustain the mathematical environment. These rooms, however, suffer from the extremes of heat and cold and at certain times of the year are uncomfortable to work in and the quality of students' work suffers.

Biology

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

Strengths

- Teaching is good; most lessons are well structured, with a range of activities which maintain interest and help to build up students' knowledge and understanding effectively.
- Students have a good grasp of concepts and apply them well in class work.
- Good relationships between the teachers and students means that individuals are monitored well and receive good support.
- The subject is very well led and managed.

Areas for improvement

- The use of ICT to support teaching and learning, particularly data logging.
- Monitoring across teaching groups to ensure consistency of teaching and learning.

94. The A level examination results for 2001 were well above average for all maintained schools, but were average for similar grammar schools. The proportion of higher grades A and B was below the average for similar schools. There has been a decrease in the number of students achieving grades A and B since 1998, although the pass rate, A to E grades, is slightly up. Of the 35 students who started only two failed to complete the course. When account is taken of students' GCSE grades at the start of the course these results represent a good achievement.

95. The standard of current students' work is similar to that indicated by students' results in the A level examinations in 2001. In Year 13, students are achieving well in relation to

predictions based on their GCSE results. The very best work makes hypotheses explicit, conclusions consistent with the results, and provides good critical evaluations. Generally there is good and accurate use of statistics, for instance in work supporting the hypothesis that light intensity under a single tree on grassland will affect the diversity of species on the ground.

96. The standard of work from current students in Year 12 is better than from Year 13, and well above national averages. In a lesson about cell division, students of all levels of ability were able to explain the various stages of mitosis. Higher-attaining students had a very good understanding about the structure and replication of chromosomes.

97. The overall quality of teaching is good, with some notable examples of very good and excellent teaching, which was reflected in the quality of students' learning. Attainment is significantly affected by the variable quality of teaching. The best teaching has high expectations of what students are capable of achieving; has clearly planned, stimulating activities, and is imaginative in the choice of activities used to explain complex ideas. For example a Year 12 class gained a very good understanding of the dynamics of food webs through role play in which students represented various organisms; and coloured strings between them represented the direction of the flow of energy. In the enjoyable, but educational activity, everyone learnt much more about energy flow through the ecosystem and of factors, such as pollution, which affect population growth and decline. Students were able to explain what effect a sudden increase or decrease in population at a given point in the web would have on the size of the population in another.

98. Some of the features which made lessons excellent or very good, namely the active involvement and participation of students in their own learning, the careful structure of the lesson, the provision of a wide variety of teaching and learning methods, including the effective use of paired and group work, were not always prominent in the good and satisfactory lessons. This meant that some students were more passive learners, making relatively less progress. Most teachers mark work in encouraging ways so that students know how well they are doing and how they can improve.

99. Students' very good behaviour and their very positive attitudes creates a very good climate for learning. Accordingly, when given the opportunity, students work well as individuals, in pairs and in groups to develop their skills of independent learning. Most students extract information from books and use ICT to help them compile well organised, high quality, notes. ICT skills are good, but progress in data logging techniques are hindered by a lack of opportunity to use the computer as a tool in science.

100. Leadership and management of the department are very good. Staff work well together with a commitment to building on what has already been achieved and to improving standards further. The monitoring of teaching to ensure consistency of teaching and learning and to raise standards is not quite rigorous enough. New schemes of work have been produced by various members of the department, most of which are very good. However, a few of them need reviewing as they do not sufficiently identify a range of approaches to encourage more effective learning. Improvements since the last inspection are good.

Chemistry

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

Strengths

- Very good teaching underpins the very good progress which students are making in their knowledge and understanding of chemistry.
- Meticulous planning ensures that students are challenged to give of their very best and standards are high compared with the national average.
- Very good use is made of assessment to give students a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the work, and what they must do to improve.
- Leadership and management of the subject are excellent and provide a clear direction for the department.

Areas for improvement

- The use of ICT to support teaching and learning, particularly data logging.

101. Results are high. In GCE A level chemistry, the examination results are considerably higher than the average for all maintained schools and for similar selective schools. Chemistry has been the science department's highest performing A level subject since 1998 and is one of the school's better performing subjects with well above average percentages of students obtaining the higher grades A or B. When account is taken of students' GCSE grades at the start of the course these represent very good achievement.

102. The standards reached by current Year 13 students, as seen in lessons and written work are very high compared to the national average, and are better than those indicated by the A level examination results in 2001. Students have made excellent progress in their study of organic chemistry. They have learned how the discovery of the structure of benzene has led to the understanding of chemicals used to make drugs. They use their knowledge of organic reactions to devise ways of synthesising medicines such as aspirin and paracetamol. They understand the chemistry of noradrenaline and know how this is used in the treatment of asthma and about salbutamol, and how these molecules bind to receptors in the body to reduce pain. Students do well in their chemistry because they see the relevance of the subject and are able to apply their knowledge to industry, medicine and to the world around them.

103. Students in Year 12 are achieving very well in relation to their prior attainment at GCSE. In one lessons about air pollution, students demonstrated a very good understanding of the role of methane within the greenhouse effect. The teacher extended their knowledge of how infra red spectroscopy is used to measure carbon dioxide concentration. Students analysed, with confidence, a graph produced from the results of infra red measurements to see how carbon dioxide concentration in the atmosphere has changed over the years.

104. The overall quality of teaching seen was very good, with some notable examples of excellent teaching, which were reflected in the quality of the students' learning. Teaching is characterised by careful planning; effective use of clearly defined learning objectives, which set clear targets for students' attainment; well chosen material; and effective direct teaching and presentation. Systematic and helpful intervention by the teacher promotes pace and sustains the students' progress. Teachers show good knowledge of their subject in their questioning and explanations and in the tasks they set. In a Year 13 lesson, through careful questioning, the teacher helped students to analyse the infra red, nuclear magnetic resonance and mass spectra of some organic molecules used in the synthesis of anti-inflammatory medicines. As a result of this students were able to identify, with reasons, many

of the main features of the complex spectra for the medicine. The enthusiasm of the teacher created a very positive environment for learning.

105. Teachers know their students well. Lessons are well prepared to meet the needs of students with a wide range of attainment levels as well as degrees of self confidence. Analysis of work highlighted that most teachers mark work in encouraging ways, giving clear indications about how well students are progressing, correcting work rigorously, where necessary. The best practice gives students 'cause for thought' in encouraging further progress, and checks that comments made have been acted on.

106. Students are highly motivated, keen to do well, and when questioned, express very positive views about the subject. They are co-operative and willing to help each other. Relationships are very good and students listen intently to the teacher and to the views of others. They work well when taking part in collaborative activities as a result of the approach taken by the teachers. The independent work, including coursework, is very well prepared and tasks complement the content of the lessons well. Analysis of coursework indicates that most students' practical and investigative skills are well above average. Their investigations have clear aims based on clear scientific knowledge and understanding. They plan their own investigations, often with plenty of technical challenge and meticulous attention to detail. They invariably obtain a comprehensive range of observations and measurements which they interpret and evaluate critically. The standard of communication of the very best coursework was impressive throughout. ICT skills are good, but progress in data logging techniques are hindered by a lack of opportunity to use the computer as a tool in science.

107. Leadership and management of the department are excellent and provide a clear direction for work in the department. There is a strong commitment to success and continued improvement. The new Salters course has been implemented successfully. There is a very clear vision as to the purpose of the course and how to teach and assess it. A new and excellent scheme of work effectively reflects the subject requirement and sets the stage for excellent teaching. It identifies a range of approaches to encourage effective learning. Very good monitoring and evaluation is leading to improved standards in attainment in the current Year 13. Target setting, based on careful analysis of students' performance in tests, is becoming well established, although targets in reports to parents are not always focussed sharply enough on specific learning goals.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

The focus of the inspection was on design and technology.

Design and technology

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

Strengths

- Standards of work are well above average and students have a very good level of understanding, knowledge and skills, which they apply well to their design and make projects.
- Results are above average.
- Students achieve well, make good progress and produce high quality work.
- Teaching is very good and teachers have very good subject knowledge which is used well to help students to build up their understanding of design practice.
- Leadership and management of the subject are very good.

Areas for improvement

- The department's own analysis of results shows that the number of top grades at A level should be better.
- The pace of learning is sometimes set by students rather than maintained by the teacher.
- CAD/CAM facilities are not used extensively enough.

108. Two courses in this curriculum area were inspected: GCE A/AS level courses in product design and textiles. Standards in the two AS/A level courses are high. Examination results over the last few years are above average. In recent years all students achieved a pass, and in 2001, 29 per cent gained A and B grades which is in line with the national average.

109. In lessons seen, standards are above average and the quality of work has many outstanding features. All students show a very good understanding of design practice and make substantial gains in their knowledge, understanding and skills throughout the course. For example in a Year 13 lesson, the students were completing the evaluation of their major project. They showed good knowledge and understanding of the materials and processes they had used as they reviewed their work, explaining how they had reached their decisions and where and why they had been successful or unsuccessful.

110. Students achieve very well and make very good progress through Years 12 and 13. Students in Year 12 on the product design course have a very good grasp of product analysis techniques, which they apply with understanding to their 'Product Study' project, and they develop ideas for modification and produce a 'test rig' very well. Students following the product design course and the textile course in Year 13 have a well developed understanding of design processes, and their design notes and sketches proposing ideas for their products are rigorously researched and recorded.

111. Students learn very well. They make very good progress, concentrating hard and taking pride in producing high quality work. This results from teaching which overall is very good. The principle features of the best lessons are clear planning with specific learning objectives, organisation and good pace, setting tasks and time deadlines. Teachers show very good subject knowledge in their questioning and explanations, and introduce new knowledge and reinforce existing learning. For example, the lesson where students are completing the very final stages of their design portfolio for submission, the teacher works

with each student, reviewing individual progress, discussing details of their project work, challenging students to think technologically and justify their decisions as they evaluate their work.

112. Teachers expect students to work hard. Learning is continually assessed and students are aware of how to improve through individual discussions and clear targets. However, there is a lack of evaluation at the end of lessons to check if objectives have been achieved and to inform planning. Students are attentive, work productively and respond well to the supportive teaching and the different learning styles they experience. However, although students are highly motivated and engrossed in their work, in some lessons seen they, rather than the teacher, set the pace of learning. This is an area for improvement in the context of teaching that has many strong features. Students support and help each other effectively, in groups they show mutual respect, they talk and listen to each other, share ideas openly and work collaboratively. Students are confident in using resource material and ICT, and their skills in accessing and selecting information on the websites are developing. They approach this work maturely, and are very willing to explore and innovate. They enjoy creating new and unusual products. There is a high level of individual support for students at all times both in and out of lessons, and teachers take these opportunities to raise standards through rigorous questioning and discussions.

113. The teaching encourages a mature approach to work and students have excellent attitudes to work and are very positive towards the subject. The curriculum offered provides very good opportunities for students to progress well. There is, however, need for further recognition of the particular contribution design and technology can make to students' spiritual and cultural development.

114. The very good teaching and learning results from work in the subject being very well managed by a highly committed head of subject. All staff work together as a team and there is a commitment to build on what has already been achieved, and to improving students' learning and personal development. There has been good improvement since the last inspection in the provision for ICT and CAD/CAM. However, further provision for the use of CAD/CAM work which is fundamental to the design activity is needed at this level.

BUSINESS

The focus of the inspection was on economics.

Economics

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

Strengths

- A level results are above average and improving.
- ICT is used well as a resource to provide on line up-to-date information and support materials for students.
- Students are involved well in enrichment programmes including Young Enterprise Scheme and Young Consumer of the Year competition.

Areas for improvement

- Management does not monitor and support teaching effectively enough.
- One newly qualified teacher takes almost all sixth form economics without a specialist room.

115. Over the past four years, there has been a rising trend in A level economics examination results, though they fell in 2001 having reached a high of 53 per cent in the higher AB grades and one hundred per cent pass rate in 2000. However, with an average point score of six last year they are still above the national average. The number of students studying economics has increased considerably over the past few years and there are currently 31 students in Year 13. Retention rates are good, only 2 girls did not continue from AS to the full A2 course. Students make satisfactory achievement in terms of their prior attainment.

116. The standards reached by current Year 13 students, as seen in lessons and in their written work, are above national averages and reflect their AS results when 48 per cent, of the 33 candidates entered, attained either A or B. They have a good knowledge and understanding of the economic topics they have studied. For instance, Year 12 students have a good grasp of a range of economic theories and concepts associated with market systems. In Year 13 they can apply the concept of market structure and competitive behaviour to economic issues such as transport as was seen in a Year 13 lesson looking at the development of an integrated transport policy. In both years students showed good understanding of the use of number and used appropriate graphical techniques to analyse markets. Students have very good ICT skills and use the internet extensively to research up-to-date information on topical issues. Many students use the free on-line information service that provides a range of notes and worksheets for A level economics and there were examples of completed self assessment tasks in their files. Overall though, there was insufficient evidence of students reading economic journals and good quality daily newspapers, in spite of their availability, to improve their understanding of the complex current economic issues. Moreover, although these students have very well developed writing skills, there was little evidence of extended writing in their files, of any written discussion, analysis or review of present economic problems or government policy such as the recent budget. Debating skills are underdeveloped in the subject and students do not feel confident in taking part in oral discussion work. Students generally make satisfactory progress but there are four Year 13 students who have had attendance problems and are underachieving.

117. Teaching and learning in economics are satisfactory with some good features. Subject knowledge and expertise are strong and students are challenged to think independently and to carry out their own research with the help of useful resources. However, lessons do not always have a clear structure and class time is not always used effectively. Some of the planned activities could more profitably be undertaken by students in their study time. Students do not feel comfortable taking part in oral discussion as was seen in a Year 13 lesson on "Green" issues concerning transport policy because the teacher, through lack of experience, was not effective in phrasing and re-phrasing questions to prompt discussion. Students' work is marked thoroughly with detailed comments designed to help progress, but overall there was a lack of planned assessments in students' folders and some gaps in content.

118. The department offers a good programme of enrichment, including educational visits, participation in competitions run by the Bank of England and the London School of Economics and pre-university taster courses. A high proportion of economics students are actively involved with the Young Enterprise Scheme. However, a number of management issues arise because the department is managed by a teacher who only teaches 2 periods per week of economics whilst a newly qualified teacher teaches the rest. Whilst the new teacher has induction support, there is an absence of day-to-day dialogue on subject specific issues and a failure to monitor and support her teaching effectively. There is also insufficient monitoring of student's files to ensure that they are progressing as well as they should. These aspects of management are unsatisfactory. Accommodation arrangements are

unsatisfactory for economics. There is no base room and teaching takes place in a variety of classrooms with the teacher having to carry resources from place to place. Economics was not identified in the last inspection but standards have improved since that time.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

The focus of the inspection was on ICT.

Information and communication technology

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

Strengths

- There has been recent rapid growth and improvements in ICT to support students' learning
- The Internet is used well for the exchange of information and for research.
- Leadership is good and the planning for the teaching of new courses in ICT is very good.

Areas for improvement

- The range of courses does not meet the needs of all students in the sixth form, in particular, there is no A level course.

119. In 2001 results for vocational ICT were too small to make valid statistical comparisons. The subject was not available at the last inspection. At the moment ICT is available in the sixth form as a vocational course. Some students will have previously followed a short course in ICT at GCSE level. There are plans to introduce a full GCSE course for all pupils in Year 9 and 10 This will provide an enhanced foundation for the sixth form. Vocational Diploma ICT courses for higher attaining students and AS Level are planned to commence in the next academic year.

120. In Year 12 vocational ICT students are achieving as much as expected except for higher-attaining students who are limited by the lack of extension activities. Most students have not followed an ICT course since Year 9 when all pupils achieved well above the national average in teacher assessments. Most students are tackling their new sixth form course with confidence and can work independently and as a member of a group using presentation software, word processing and Internet research. Students use their prior knowledge of a range of software applications including spreadsheets and databases. Currently, many students following the vocational ICT course are underachieving due to the lack of time available for lessons and inconsistency in attendance. Students achieve very well in the multiple use of ICT to simulate, create, record and playback compositions for AS level music.

121. In Year 13 vocational ICT attendance has declined over the year. Currently, this is an assured group who deal with tasks in a variety of ways by relating ICT concepts in other subjects being studied in their examination courses. There is good achievement using research skills and in the interpretation of data in general studies, modern foreign languages and design technology. In an economics lesson students benefited from a very good ICT presentation by the teacher but notes were copied down by hand where an outline printout would have sufficed. In design technology computer-aided design was used in three-dimensional coursework to model simulations of a potato peeler for users with arthritis. ICT rooms and the library are available throughout the week and are used well at lunch times.

122. Overall, teaching is good. In over four-fifths of lessons it was good or very good. Teaching is very good for a large Year 12 group where students are engaged in several tasks

that the teacher manages with a calm confidence and thorough preparation. Solutions to individual needs are crisply provided and common faults are outlined for the whole group. In Year 13 vocational ICT, students are challenged by a presentation project although there are omissions in the work that may prevent full marks. In both Years 12 and 13 the work for the course material and guidance can be found on the school Intranet. From evidence around the school many students draft work on graphs, data collection and for simulations without using a computer. In Year 13 students describe alternative solutions for setting margins using a pro-forma. Vocational ICT lessons are too short but time is used effectively when up-dating students skills. There is a mismatch of teachers' expectations to students' need especially for high-attaining students who need more challenge. In other subjects ICT is used to support analysis, design and implementation of project activities especially in design technology, French, Spanish and music. Students identify visits to local organisations to investigate good business practice but these rarely include ICT. The school displays posters about the potential for women in the ICT world of work but currently provides inadequate courses to prepare students for this.

123. Little written work in ICT for the vocational course is required of the students but printed projects are good although some lack a good index. A random sample of students' work on the network server reveals gaps in the use of presentation software for some students.

124. Students of ICT are conscientious. Students achieve satisfactorily overall. In Year 12 some students use a trial and error method of charting information rather than using short cuts. Students are confident in multi-tasking and keyboarding skills but many find the work repetitive and lose heart easily.

125. The school is currently reviewing its strategy to improve standards of teaching that have resulted in consistently high standards at GCSE. There is a shared willingness to succeed and planning and assessment of ICT are robust. Schemes of work strongly underpin teaching. Some sixth form students do not attend compulsory vocational ICT because of a mismatch between courses and students needs. The mapping of distinctive learning outcomes in ICT to support teaching and learning especially for the higher attainers will ensure a more coherent policy and culture for ICT in the sixth form and the school as a whole.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The focus of the inspection was on art and design.

Art and design

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

Strengths

- Results at A/S Level and A Level are well above the national average.
- Students are given the freedom to explore their own concepts, ideas and beliefs.
- Teaching is good; lessons are well organised and challenging tasks are set for students.
- Students have acquired the capacity to work with a high degree of independence.
- The subject is well led and appropriate management structures are in place.

Areas for improvement

- At present insufficient use is made of objective data to set realistic targets for students.
- Assessment and recording documentation could be improved.
- Insufficient use is made of modern technology in the form of photography and ICT.

126. The AS Level results for 2001 showed a significant improvement over earlier years as all of the students were successful in achieving A – C grades. The percentage of students who achieved the highest grades A – B was very much higher than the national average. The GCE A – Level examination results for 2001 showed that the students maintained a very high standard of work at this level. All students who sat the examination achieved grades and the percentage gaining the highest grades was well above the national average. In relation to their GCSE results these students achieved very well in the sixth form.

127. The standard of work presently being produced by students is well above average. Year 13 students apply themselves readily to the task of developing their own ideas and concepts through art and design and craft activities. From the quality of the two dimensional drawn and painted studies in their visual diaries and in their sketchbooks, it is apparent that they have acquired the capacity to base their work on their own attitudes, values and belief systems. In lessons seen, most students are productive and work at a good pace. They show real interest in the set tasks and are capable of sustaining concentration over time. The majority work with traditional materials and media such as pencils, oil crayons, watercolour and acrylic paint. However a few are beginning to use modern technology in the form of photography and ICT as a means of collecting information and producing interesting final images. For example, one student had collected material on her chosen theme of 'Political Art' from the Internet, while another had located the work of the American photographer Diane Arbus from the same source. This information is then stored in the students' visual diaries and is used as source material from which they later develop their own final images.

128. Students in Year 12 are already working in a highly organised and well-structured fashion. Their visual diaries contain very well-researched material that demonstrates their capacity for independence of thought and action. They are very keen to develop their own concepts, ideas and also to acquire new knowledge, understanding and skills. Most of these students have already acquired the confidence to experiment with a wide range of different media and materials that enable them to communicate their ideas, concepts and feeling to others. One of these students was producing very personal and thoughtful art and design work, by combining photographic images of the events that took place in New York on September 11th with Edvard Munch's painting of "The Scream." Other students have begun to use photography and ICT to explore their ideas, concepts, attitudes and beliefs.

129. Teaching is good overall and this has a distinctly positive impact on students' very good learning. The teachers possess good subject knowledge which ensures that they are well placed to offer informed advice and support to students. There is good planning prior to lessons and very good organisation during lessons. They set very clear objectives for students, who then know what they are expected to do. Management of students is good and the teachers have succeeded in establishing very good working relationships with the students who are encouraged to work with a high degree of independence. Teacher expectations are high and students are obliged to work purposively and with concentration to achieve the standards that are set for them. It is a regular feature of teaching that students are engaged in discussion about their work, during which they are expected to explain to others in the group why they have made particular choices. This process ensures that students develop the ability to critically evaluate the quality of their own ideas and their final art and design pieces. Most students respond positively to these challenges.

130. Assignments are set for students on a regular basis and they are expected to carry out their research independently, at home or on location away from the art and design studios. Work is assessed by staff, graded and feedback given to students. The process of setting briefs, assessing work and recording grades could be improved to ensure that students are provided with more detailed suggestions as to how they could improve the overall standard of their work. Greater use should also be made of objective data to inform the setting of targets for individual students. This is an area for improvement in the context of teaching which otherwise has many strengths.

131. Students respond very positively, they are highly motivated, very interested in the art and design and make concentrated effort to produce work of a high standard. They have developed the confidence to explore their ideas, concepts, attitudes and beliefs through a range of different media and materials. Very good use is made of the visual diaries and the sketchbooks as an effective means of collecting and recording information from which they can work later to develop highly personal final art and design pieces. For the most part, they make very good use of time, both in lessons and out of school when they carry out independent research. Students are expected to work with a high degree of independence and they enjoy the freedom that this gives them to pursue those ideas and themes that they find relevant and interesting. In both Years 12 and 13 most demonstrate the capacity for carrying out initial research in a wide variety of locations, for processing this material and for producing final pieces that are thoughtful and well-executed. The students demonstrate good technical control over a wide range of media and materials including photography and ICT.

132. Leadership and management are good. The schemes of work for the sixth form have been written by the head of department and individual teachers are responsible for writing assignment briefs. This process ensures that the subject matter can be designed to meet the requirements of particular groups of students. This leads to a high level of achievement on the part of most students who are actively involved in writing specific assignment briefs. However, much greater use should be made of objective data to help the setting of realistic targets for individual students.

HUMANITIES

The focus of the inspection was on history and psychology.

History

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

Strengths

- A level results are consistently high, well above the national average.
- Students achieve well in relation to their prior attainment.
- Teaching and learning are very good.
- Lessons are well planned and reflect the strength of teachers' knowledge. They challenge students appropriately.
- The subject is well managed.
- Students are offered an excellent range and quality of learning opportunities.
- Students have excellent attitudes towards the study of history and the numbers who wish to study the subject are growing.

Areas for improvement

- The department has no significant areas for improvement.

133. Students' performance in A-level examinations over the past four years has shown a steadily rising trend in terms of the highest A and B grades. Over the same period the school has maintained a 100 per cent pass rate. In 2001 students did particularly well, achieving results that were very high in comparison with the national average and within the range of the top 5 per cent of the country. In the past two years girls have done better in history than in their other A level subjects. These results show an impressive improvement in the attainment of students compared with examination results at the time of the last inspection when they were already above national averages. In September 2000 at the beginning of Year 12, 48 students began the AS course. All passed with, 86 per cent achieving an A or B grade. Retention rates are good: only four girls have not continued to the A2 course. History is a popular course with 53 girls studying the AS course in Year 12, compared with an average of 30 taking the A level exam over the past 4 years. Students show good achievement in relation to their prior attainment.

134. Observation of lessons and a scrutiny of samples of students' work confirm that standards are high and achievement is very good. Year 12 students have already developed skills of communication and evaluation of evidence. Essay writing is well structured with evidence to support individual judgements, as was seen in a written evaluation of the effectiveness of Edward IV. Year 13 students show highly developed debating skills and contribute confidently to oral discussion. They are able to articulate their view with confidence and persuasion in whole class debate as with their assessments of Philip II of Spain. Students analyse historical sources critically and evaluate a wide range of evidence effectively, for instance, to determine provenance or reliability and to produce well-balanced and effective arguments. Written work is of a high standard and demonstrates a good command of the higher order skills of analysis and synthesis. Students show an excellent knowledge and understanding of the periods and topics being studied. They have well-developed research skills and use the internet and ICT to add to their knowledge. However, only a few show evidence of having read widely around the subject. In spite of this, and because teachers provide them with a wide range of support materials, students make rapid increases both in the range of their knowledge and the depth of their understanding. As a result, their learning is very good.

135. The quality of learning in history is very good. This results from the very good, well-focused, experienced teaching in the department and from the students highly committed application to study. The quality of teaching the girls receive is very good. Excellent subject knowledge and expertise is used to motivate and inform students. Teachers create a powerful learning ethos by imposing an intellectual rigour that has high expectations of learning outcomes. Girls are encouraged to develop as historians, to think as historians and to recognise different interpretations of historical events. An example of this was seen in a Year 13 lesson on post-war Berlin. Relationships between teachers and students are extremely positive and underpin the work of the department. Very good management of classroom discussion leads to good quality oral analysis where girls have developed the confidence to put forward their views. Teachers' marking is thorough and detailed comments are made, designed to improve progress. For example for the structuring of essays helpful exemplars are designed to develop key communication skills.

136. The good achievement and very good teaching can be attributed to the fact that the subject is extremely well managed by a very experienced head of department assisted by a team of hardworking teachers. Students are offered an excellent range and quality of learning opportunities to choose from. They receive excellent support from teachers. Assessment is regular and the department carefully monitors students' progress, often on an individual basis. Leadership ensures a clear educational direction and a commitment to the maintenance and further improvement of the high standards established in recent years. There has been considerable improvement since the last inspection and the issues raised then have all been addressed very successfully.

Psychology

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

Strengths

- The attitudes towards learning and the enthusiasm for psychology demonstrated by the students are impressive.
- The teaching is very good - teachers are knowledgeable and plan lessons very well.
- Students benefit from the strong focus on speaking and listening skills in lessons.
- Procedures for monitoring students' progress are very thorough.

Areas for improvement

- Class sizes are too large in some lessons, which limits the range of more practical activities that can be undertaken.
- In some lessons, work could be adapted better for specific groups or individuals, including those attaining high levels and those with special learning requirements.

137. Psychology is a popular subject that has been introduced since the time of the last inspection. The results gained at both AS and A level have improved steadily over the last five years. Data on the performance of the students in comparison to their GCSE results also shows a steady increase over this period. For example, at the end of 2001, 80 per cent of the students were doing better than their previous examination results would have suggested likely. There are no national comparison figures available for psychology. However, the department gains figures which for AS level are the second highest in the science department and for A level, the highest. The department analyses all assessments and results in detail, though this analysis is focussed mainly within the school.

138. During the inspection, students were seen learning about a wide range of psychological topics. They demonstrate good understanding of the psychological issues

when revising three of the main debates: nature vs. nurture, freewill vs. determinism and reductionism vs. holism. They show good knowledge of different ways that stress management can be successful and are confident speaking about human resource issues such as appraisal and performance management.

139. Psychology has a positive effect on students' literacy and numeracy skills. In particular, students debate issues with great skill and sensitivity. Students take time to consider how to answer essay questions correctly, including planning and make full use of their literacy skills. Statistical requirements and considerations, particularly in cognitive psychology, use and expand the students' mathematical understanding. More limited use is made of ICT.

140. The students' attitudes to learning are excellent. Their response to psychology lessons is very good and the enthusiasm and energy that students put into their learning, are an important facet of the success of the subject. All have a responsible attitude to each other, even when they disagree, and are tolerant of one another's opinions. They share their ideas freely and offer opinions without fear of embarrassment or inhibition. It is noticeable that the students mirror the teachers' enthusiasm. Behaviour is generally exemplary in lessons. There is no evidence of racial disharmony.

141. Relationships are very good, both between the students themselves and with the teachers. The students respond well to the high expectations of teachers and as they gain in confidence they feel able to seek help and assistance when needed. They also seek appropriate help from one another. There is good co-operation with one another in lessons and this all supports the positive atmosphere for learning in which all students make progress. They react positively when asked to do something that is difficult. There were instances of mature and responsible behaviour, for example helping late arrivals to catch up quickly unasked by the teacher. They show good awareness of others and assist or co-operate appropriately in lessons and activities.

142. Teaching is very good, and in many lessons it was excellent. In all lessons, teachers' subject knowledge was strong. They demonstrate an excitement for psychology that rubbed off on the students. There was a good variety of methods used to encourage learning. For example, in one very good lesson, students learnt through direct teaching, followed by brainstorming ideas, group discussion and whole class discussion. In the best lessons, the teacher's relationship with the students was excellent. Students were treated in friendly but firm and age-appropriate manner. They learnt especially well because of this. Students felt confident and there was an atmosphere of enthusiasm and collaboration in the lessons. There was excellent use of humour to emphasise points and to direct students' learning. In a few lessons, teaching could be improved by tailoring work more specifically for groups or individuals, including those who are attaining very high levels and those who have special learning needs.

143. Learning is very good, as would be expected with quality teaching. In discussions, students could talk with knowledge about the different approaches to psychology about which they had learnt. The popularity of psychology generally has two noticeable effects. First, there is a very low drop-out rate between AS level and the A level. This is an excellent indication of students who are enjoying learning and are well provided for. Secondly, some class sizes have become large, over 30 in one instance. An immediate effect of this, apart from the large amount of marking that is generated, is that teaching methods become limited by space.

144. Resources available for the subject are adequate and it benefits from there being a physical base which may be defined as "the psychology department". This also has benefits for the students' learning: wall displays on vocabulary such as 'humanistic',

'anthropomorphism' and 'cognitive dissonance' and work on the frustration-aggression hypothesis and different styles of management all support the students' retention of psychological facts and ideas. Resources are readily available to staff and student alike.

145. With three teachers working within the department, all of who are part-time, opportunities for staff to observe and learn from one another are limited. Their work is managed and co-ordinated well. Nevertheless, the school should ensure more opportunities are made available for group planning and for good practice to be shared.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus of the inspections was on English, French and Spanish.

English

Overall, the quality of provision in English is **excellent**.

Strengths

- Results in the GCSE A-level examination in 2001 were well above average.
- Teaching is excellent: teachers' knowledge is of a high academic standard.
- Students' oral and written work is very good.
- Their attitude to the subject is extremely positive.
- Leadership and management of the subject are outstandingly good.

Areas for improvement

- There are no significant areas for development.

146. Results in both AS and A-level examinations in 2001 were well above average. In A-level literature marginally more students achieved A and B grades than in the previous year. The percentage of students achieving these grades was well above the national average as it has been for the past three years. Almost all students maintain the high standards they achieved at GCSE level and many exceed them.

147. The standard of students' oral work in both Year 12 and Year 13 is significantly above average. They express themselves articulately and make detailed and thoroughly prepared presentations with great confidence. In a seminar on Jane Austen's *Emma*, one very high attaining student conducted a brilliant analysis of the author's use of various narrative voices in the novel. The argument was lucid, cogent and based upon very thorough knowledge of the text and also drew upon a range of wider reading, both of Austen's works and relevant literary criticism. The student led the session with great confidence, answering questions with authority. All students speak easily and are always audible and fluent. In a Year 13 class studying *Othello*, for example, two students took on the role of lawyers cross-examining others about the murder of a character in the play. Questioning was penetrating and was always based upon detailed knowledge of the play and its plot, characters and themes. Students following the language and literature course handle the terminology of linguistics and literary criticism appropriately and accurately.

148. Another impressive feature of students' achievement is the breadth of their reading. In addition to their detailed study and analysis of texts for examination, they read other works by the set authors and relevant books in the same genre. Students also draw on a wide range of other sources of information to research the literary background of their projects. A gifted student in Year 13, for example, gave a well-informed and lively presentation upon Chaucer's poetic style in *The Merchant's Tale*, basing its soundly in its medieval European context.

149. Students' written work is of a high standard, well above average, and the best is of outstanding quality. Essays are always based upon detailed knowledge of relevant texts and show a maturity of judgement and sensitive appreciation of literature. Such writing is carefully planned, well thought out, skilfully crafted and accurate in expression. One substantial piece by a student in Year 12, on Shakespeare's use of contemporary historians' work as a basis for the plot of Antony and Cleopatra, was impressive in its scope and accuracy.

150. Teaching and learning throughout the sixth form is excellent. Teachers themselves have very high academic standards and they communicate these very effectively to their students. More importantly, perhaps, they enjoy the subject themselves and their enthusiasm is largely responsible for their students' commitment. Lessons are very carefully planned and prepared and are presented with a lively professionalism which wins the respect of students. Relationships are mutually respectful and purposeful. Teachers have very high expectations of students. Questioning is rigorous and insists upon reasoned answers supported by detailed justification from texts or other sources. Some teaching is particularly stimulating as, for example, that in a lesson exploring the symbolic association and resonance of water in preparation for a reading of Dover Beach by Matthew Arnold. A wide range of teaching approaches is used and students are expected to participate actively at all stages, often by making prepared contributions to lessons. By the end of Year 13 students are skilled independent learners and have developed a wide range of presentational skills both spoken and written. Within lessons a variety of language activities are included which sustain students' interest. The pace of lessons is brisk and students are constantly challenged and pressed to reach the highest levels of understanding and awareness. Many lessons take the form of seminars in which all students are closely involved in discussion. Such is the enthusiasm of many students that they have volunteered to take part in the pilot project for the Advanced Extension Award for which many are well suited academically. Students' written work is marked and assessed with great care and much detailed comment is given. Alongside praise and encouragement, valuable guidance for improvement is included. At all times students are encouraged to read as widely as possible.

151. Leadership and management are excellent. Staff share the same vision and approach. The ethos of the subject in the sixth form is both supportive and demanding.

French

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

Strengths

- Standards achieved in A/S and A level examinations are high.
- Students are confident and independent linguists who take responsibility for their own learning.
- Students' attitudes towards their learning are excellent.
- The quality of teaching and learning is excellent.
- The leadership and management of the subject are outstanding.
- The provision for gifted and talented students is excellent.
- Resources available to the subject are excellent

Areas for improvement

- There are no significant areas for development.

152. Results achieved in A/S and A level examinations in 2001 are high in comparison to national averages and when compared to similar schools. This represents very good achievement in relation to prior attainment. In lessons and in work seen during the inspection standards achieved by students are very high. Students use an excellent range of vocabulary and structures. The majority have an excellent understanding of grammar and are able to read and understand a variety of texts including literature and articles from the press with ease. They write to a high standard for a variety of purposes for example to present arguments on moral issues and to discuss cultural and contemporary issues in France. In lessons all students respond appropriately and promptly to French at normal speed and display a high degree of fluency and independence in manipulating the language to express their own ideas both in formal situations and when working informally in pairs and small groups. Students have an excellent understanding and appreciation of contemporary issues in French society and culture and draw on this knowledge to reinforce their arguments both in discussion and in their writing.

153. The quality of teaching and learning is consistently excellent. Teachers' subject knowledge is excellent, expectations are very high and lessons are conducted entirely in French; this is very effective in developing students' listening skills and increasing and reinforcing their knowledge of the language. Lesson planning is excellent and enables all students to make excellent progress both within lessons and over time. Very well sequenced and imaginative activities coupled with excellent use of resources provide an appropriate challenge and maintain students' interest. In a Year 13 lesson, for example, students made excellent progress in increasing their knowledge and understanding of the language used to discuss the topic of terrorism through the effective use of radio reports and transcripts. Students rapidly assimilated and used the new language themselves in translation in response to the very high expectations of the teacher and the effective support given during the tasks. Similarly, in a Year 12 lesson students made rapid progress in expressing their ideas in response to a video on the disappearance of the Rainforest because of the rigorous questioning by the teacher, the appropriate range of activities and the challenge to prepare and present their views to others. In both cases students were entirely engaged by activities and maintained a high level of interest and productivity throughout. Students are actively encouraged to increase in independence and to use the language creatively. Marking is very thorough and gives very clear guidance about how to improve; students are required to spend time considering and correcting errors in their writing and as a result progress is rapid. By the end of the course students are confident and independent linguists. Excellent relationships exist between students and their teachers. The students appreciate the efforts made by their teachers and display a very mature attitude towards their learning. They display a high level of independence and enjoyment in their learning. Resources available to the subject are excellent. Students have excellent attitudes towards their learning and display enjoyment and engagement in activities. They work together with their teachers to maintain an up-to-date resource bank of materials gathered from sources such as satellite television, the press and the Internet.

154. A major factor in ensuring students make excellent progress and achieve their potential in A/S and A level courses is the provision the department makes for gifted and talented linguists in the main school where they are given the opportunity to enter GCSE examinations in years 9 or 10 and then to follow a post GCSE course during Years 10 and 11. This course presents pupils with a high level of challenge and provides a very effective link between GCSE and the requirements of A/S and A level courses while at the same time responding appropriately to pupils' needs and aspirations. It is characterised by pupils' evident enjoyment and enthusiasm both in using and developing their use of French and in reading classical French literature such as St Exupéry's 'Le Petit Prince' in the original form and in explaining the main points of the novel to each other through drama and discussion. In the lessons seen pupils worked independently of the teacher and were entirely

engaged by tasks, many remaining in French when working together to prepare a résumé of the chapters they were studying and engaging in discussion about characters and plot with the teacher. All pupils make excellent progress and achieve at an excellent level during the course.

155. Management of the department is exemplary; since the last inspection standards have improved significantly and continue to rise. The quality of teaching and learning has also improved significantly. The techniques employed to evaluate and develop teaching and learning strategies have resulted in a high degree of consistency across the department and have also resulted in a significant rise in numbers of students opting to study French in the sixth form. The procedures and the use of assessment have been very successfully developed to diagnose and meet students' needs and plan for individual progress. Students take responsibility for their own progress, fully understand how they can improve and take effective action to do so. Teachers work very effectively as a team and pass on their love and enthusiasm for the language to their students. The subject curriculum is significantly enhanced by opportunities for students to take part in exchanges to France and by contact with native speakers. Accommodation for the subject is satisfactory but acoustics in some classrooms make listening and speaking activities difficult. Access to ICT is satisfactory but students cannot always benefit from specialist guidance in using Internet sources because this facility is not available within the languages area.

Spanish

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

Strengths

- Standards achieved in lessons, particularly in speaking and listening, are well above average.
- Students' attitudes towards their learning are excellent.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good.
- Leadership and management of the subject are good.
- Students have opportunities to participate in work experience in Spain.
- Resources available to the subject are excellent.

Areas for improvement

- The accuracy and depth of students' writing and the standards of their listening and responding.
- Teaching is not consistent enough across the department.
- Marking is not consistently helpful enough.

156. Standards achieved in A/S and A level examinations in 2001 are average compared to the national picture and when compared to similar schools. This represents good progress and achievement in relation to prior attainment. In lessons and in work seen during the inspection standards achieved by students are well above average, indicating both that standards are rising and also that students have not always done themselves justice in the written part of examinations. Students make significant progress during the course in speaking and listening and by the end of Year 13 display a high level of fluency in discussion and respond promptly and appropriately to instructions and questions in Spanish at normal speed. However their ability to respond spontaneously to the views of others is less secure. Students write largely accurately for a variety of purposes and on a variety of topics but, particularly during Year 12, their writing tends to be brief and arguments are not always fully developed. Reading is well developed and students identify the main points and specific detail

from texts from a variety of sources, including the press and the Internet, using their knowledge of the language to infer the meaning of unfamiliar language.

157. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Occasionally it is excellent. Teachers' subject knowledge is excellent and they use this very effectively to conduct activities entirely in Spanish and to provide appropriate and well sequenced activities to enable students to build effectively on previous learning. Relationships are very good and teachers react promptly and effectively to support students during tasks. Although activities and resources are appropriate they are not always fully exploited or focused to ensure all students make as much progress as they might. For example in a Year 13 lesson students were given the opportunity to explore and express their views about a variety of aspects concerning domestic violence; this was effective in developing their speaking and listening skills but opportunities were missed to develop the skill of responding spontaneously to the opposing views of others. In a Year 12 lesson effective use was made of a video clip to enable students to develop their speaking skills but because appropriate structures and vocabulary were not practised beforehand some students had difficulty retelling the story and the pace of progress slowed as a result. In another Year 12 lesson however, students made excellent progress in understanding the issues involved with ecotourism in Valencia. They rapidly assimilated and used the new language items themselves and practised using the subjunctive to express their views because of the very effective use of the overhead projector as support. Students developed significantly in independence and confidence in manipulating the language themselves. They were helped in doing this by very effective and sensitive monitoring of individual progress and intervention by the teacher while they worked in small groups to explore and practise expressing their ideas. Some marking is regular and helpful but this is not consistent across the department and as a whole lacks sufficient rigour to ensure all students understand how they are doing in relation to examination requirements or how to improve.

158. Students have excellent attitudes towards their learning and display enjoyment and engagement in activities. They appreciate the very good relationships with their teachers and the opportunity to develop their speaking and listening skills especially in work experience placements in Spain. Resources available for the subject are excellent. Students work together with their teachers to maintain an up-to-date resource bank of materials gathered from sources such as satellite TV, the press and the Internet.

159. Leadership and management of the department are good. The head of department has a clear idea of the strengths of the department and of the areas for improvement and has taken appropriate action to raise standards. Since taking up his post schemes of work have been reviewed thoroughly and assessment procedures and the use of assessment has been developed effectively. Standards, particularly those of speaking and listening, have improved and continue to rise. Considerable work has been done on the evaluation and development of teaching and learning and the department meets regularly to share ideas. Effective strategies are employed to raise standards and improve the consistency of provision for all students but there is still scope to develop these further. A major factor in raising standards and increasing students' confidence and independence in speaking and listening has been the introduction of the opportunity for students to participate in work experience in Spain. Although accommodation for the subject is satisfactory, acoustics in some classrooms make speaking and listening difficult. Access to ICT is also satisfactory but students cannot always benefit from specialist guidance in using Internet sources because access is at a distance from the languages area.