

INSPECTION REPORT

COOPERS COMPANY AND COBORN SCHOOL

Upminster

LEA area: Havering

Unique reference number: 102353

Headteacher: Dr D Lloyd

Reporting inspector: Mr W K Baxendale
02928

Dates of inspection: 3rd - 7th February 2003

Inspection number: 249562

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Voluntary aided

Age range of pupils: 11 to 18 years

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Saint Mary's Lane
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Essex

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Appropriate authority: The governing body

Name of chair of governors: Mr M Housley

Date of previous inspection: 3rd – 7th March 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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01407	Mr P Scott	Team inspector	Mathematics	Leadership and management
12356	Mr R Dickason	Team inspector		Curriculum
20421	Mrs E Raitt	Team inspector	English literature	
20420	Mr S Rawcliffe	Team inspector	Biology Chemistry	
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08502	Mr K Mc'Kenzie	Team inspector	Computing Economics	
11975	Mrs T Mackintosh-Clarke	Team inspector	Music Drama	
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Coopers Company and Coborn School is an above average sized voluntary-aided school educating 1271 boys and girls in the 11 to 18 age range. The large sixth form of 343 students has more boys than girls. Although selection for grammar, denominational and private schools affects recruitment, the school is very popular and is massively over-subscribed. Admission criteria require written parental support, membership of a recognised world faith and significant prior involvement in activities that reinforce the school's musical, dramatic, social or sporting strengths. For example, about half of the pupils play a musical instrument. The pupils are from above average socio-economic backgrounds and the rate of entitlement to free school meals is well below average. Attainment on entry is, each year, well above average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is very low; one pupil has a statement of special educational need. About one pupil in ten is from one of numerous ethnic minorities found in the school; nearly all of them have English as an additional language, though none is at an early stage. The school is closely linked with the Worshipful Company of Coopers through its Educational Foundation. The school recently won specialist Sports College status.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is an exceptional school of real excellence that provides a very high quality of education all round. It produces outstanding pupils whose very high attainment in national tests and examinations is only part of their excellent personal development. Excellent attitudes to work and to play mean that the pupils, supported by much very good teaching, learn and achieve very well. Excellent leadership by a tenacious, very dynamic headteacher has brought very good improvements and has steered the school admirably through high and low times since the previous inspection. The school receives very strong support from the parents, its education foundation and from an increasingly critical but helpful governing body. With a very cost-effective sixth form, careful, but sometimes restrictive, stewardship of a well above average budget for educating each pupil, the quality of provision is such that the school provides very good value for money.

What the school does well

- The school's very distinctive character and traditions promote excellence in the pupils' personal development.
- Its success culture helps pupils to achieve very well and to reach very high standards.
- Very good learning is the result of very good teaching.
- Procedures for the care and welfare of pupils are very good.

What could be improved

- Some managers' promotion of high standards by checking on performance and sharing good practice within and between faculties is too patchy.
- The use of ICT (information and communication technology) to help learning is insufficient in a number of subjects.
- Specialist accommodation for some subjects is insufficient and some parts of the school are poorly maintained.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Improvements since the previous inspection in March 1997 are very good, although there is scope for further refinement in the ways monitoring and evaluation are used to raise standards. GCSE and A-level performances have risen year-on-year and are now very high compared with all other schools and colleges. The school now meets statutory requirements in its provision for pupils with special educational needs and practice is improving. Excellent provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is planned thoroughly throughout the curriculum. Overall, standards have risen; the school now uses assessment results to set very high targets for individuals and for departments and is successful in meeting them.

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
	2000	2001	2002	2002
GCSE examinations	A*	A*	A*	A*
A-levels/AS-levels	N/a	A*	*	

Key

well above average A

above average B

average C

below average D

well below average E

* National comparison data for AS/A level results in 2002 are not yet available.

Standards are exceptionally high. Academic attainment is well above what would be expected. It has risen substantially since the previous inspection, mainly because teaching and learning are much more focused on what pupils need to do to improve. Provision for pupils with special educational needs is now raising standards well. Boys and girls do equally well and those from an ethnic minority easily keep up with the rest. The school produces very good all-rounders who, between the ages of 11 and 16, achieve very well and obtain GCSE results that are very much higher than analytical predictions made when they start at the school.

Progress is very rapid. By the time they take the national tests at the end of Year 9, pupils' attainment is high in English and very high in mathematics and science; the English results have fluctuated oddly over the recent past, not matching some subsequent very high results. Hardly any pupils fail to reach the nationally expected standards as 14-year-olds.

Year 9 pupils' achievement is very good over the time they have been in school. Higher attainers' beautifully presented work misses just a touch of originality but is of a very high standard in all subjects. Lower attainers write fluently, punctuation and presentation are good; they write well at length, but their analytical skills are weaker. Pupils make good, wide use of ICT to present their work, but its contribution to raising standards in class is too low. Artwork is outstandingly good and the often excellent work in design and technology, drama, art and design, music, physical education, history and geography, for example, clearly demonstrates the strong influence their studies have on the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

GCSE results are also well into the top five per cent nationally and the proportions of students obtaining five or more high-grade, A*-C, passes (most obtain at least nine) outstrips those of nearly all other schools nationally, including most grammar schools. Very nearly half of all the grades are in A*/A categories and only four per cent are below a C grade. Current Year 11 pupils' standards are very high across the board; they suggest very high results will be sustained. Above average attainers still lack some flair, but write very perceptively on poetry and imaginatively on set literary pieces. They make copious notes in science and get through large amounts of work in mathematics, where the work of lower attainers is more carefully and helpfully checked, helping them to achieve very well. These pupils make some punctuation errors when writing English, but the work has reached a well above average standard.

A-level results have risen very substantially, at an even faster rate than those pre-16. The 2001 results were very high compared with all other providers and although not validated, the 2002 results were very similar. Patterns of improvement over the past four years are upward so that results in nearly all of the 23 A-level subjects are at least well above average. Work scrutinies suggest a continuing very high attainment pattern, although, here too, there is a weakness in the contribution ICT makes to learning and to raising standards in several subjects.

Also, taking also into account so many pupils' and students' excellence in after-school sporting and cultural activities, standards overall are quite exceptional.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Very good attitudes underlie the very high standards and quality of education provided. Interviews with pupils and observed lessons confirmed at least very good, often excellent, attitudes.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Excellent. There are low levels of temporary exclusions and excellent standards of behaviour help pupils to reach their very high standards. The pupils have a real pride in their school.
Personal development and relationships	Excellent. The school produces very mature, engagingly communicative, tolerant young persons. Pupils and students combine their enthusiasm for participating in the excellent range of after-school activity as well as a very strong commitment to do well in lessons.
Attendance	Very good. Attendance rates are well above average and there are no unauthorised absences. The pupils clearly enjoy school: many start work very early each morning.

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.

There has been a substantial improvement since the previous inspection, with resulting higher standards. The experienced, flexible staff are willing to accept innovation so, complementing the pupils' very good attitudes and behaviour, the quality of teaching and of learning is now very good. It is reflected in the very positive relationships that abound in lessons and also in the excellent after-school activity programme. Literacy and numeracy are taught well. A temporary special educational needs co-ordinator has improved provision well; pupils with identified special needs learn well and are more easily able to keep up. Because good teaching helps to raise their literacy skills, those who have English as an additional language also reach standards that equate with those of the rest of the school. The pupils are avid learners. Very unusually, the quality of learning is sometimes better than the quality of teaching in Year 9 and in the sixth form. So mature and keen are the pupils and students that, for example in some art and design and mathematics lessons they organise themselves, get on with their work without prompting, or suggest what the homework should be.

Inspectors saw no unsatisfactory teaching or learning during the inspection; most were very good and a high proportion excellent. Very good teaching and learning span the whole range of subjects and of other activities. Learning is best in lessons that require pupils to be actively involved, when for example, probing questions, penetrative class discussions, rapid pace, video and audio sources stimulate them. The pupils respond very well to opportunities to come up with solutions from discussions in small groups. The pupils' listening skills are very good and they know how to learn. However, although there are examples of good personal use of computers for the presentation of work, ICT is not widely enough used to help the pupils to learn, especially in the sixth form. The school's careful planning to improve the quality of teaching and learning is bearing fruit; measures still need to be taken to eradicate any teaching that falls below good. The patchy nature of the way some subject leaders check on the quality of the work of their colleagues is a weakness, particularly in mathematics and modern foreign languages, as good practice is not shared widely enough. Sometimes, teachers' expectations are not high enough. Time limits for the completion of work are not set and the teacher can spend too much time talking with, in science for example, no practical work to consolidate learning.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Very good. The governors provide a curriculum that fulfils the school's aims very well. An excellent range of very well supported after-school activities complements a broad range of subjects.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. The school now makes better provision, so that pupils are not disadvantaged; they make good progress.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Very good. There is no discernible difference in their performance by the time they take GCSEs.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Excellent. Lessons, which often stimulate broader interest, for example music, cultural visits, and the excellent after-school activity programme of sport, music and theatre produce mature, eloquent, engaging young persons.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very good. The pupils are made more and more aware of how well they are doing and how to improve. Health and safety issues are taken very seriously and child protection measures are very good.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good. The headteacher's excellent leadership gives the school its distinctive, very clear direction. Very well supported by the permanent and temporary members of the senior team, she has set up very effective systems that have helped standards rise and extended the outstanding learning experience for pupils and students alike. There are weaknesses in the way some middle managers check the quality of their colleagues' teaching and marking.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Good. The governors know the school very well, provide improving critical scrutiny of its running and first-hand help with numerous aspects of its organisation. They fulfil their statutory duties in all respects, although the provision of ICT does not meet fully the pupils' and students' needs. Closely attached to each department it is surprising that no governor has specific oversight of the sixth form.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Very good. A very good performance management system for staff is complemented by very thorough whole-school and individual analyses of how the pupils and students perform in examinations, with action taken where needed.
The strategic use of resources	Very good. The carefully, but sometimes restrictively, managed budget balances and the principles commonly used to make sure expenditure brings best value are meticulously respected. The school uses finances dedicated to specific purposes very well.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school expects their children to work hard and to achieve their best; they do so and make good progress. • The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons. • The school is helping their children to become mature and responsible. • Their children like school. • The school is well led and managed and the teaching is good. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The closeness with which the school works with parents.

Inspectors noted the unusually high parental agreement with nearly all the questions and this report upholds the sentiments registered. Inspectors agree fully with parents that the school does get the pupils and students to work very hard and do their best; achievement is very good. It also helps pupils and students rapidly to become mature and responsible. The few who have some difficulty coming to terms with what they find as a demanding regime do well and understand how the school helps them to do so; very few fail to flourish. Inspectors also find that the school does provide all the required information on pupils' progress and note that parents feel comfortable approaching the school with questions or problems.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form is much larger than sixth forms in other schools. There are 343 students with more boys than girls. In Year 12 there are 167 students, the rest are in Year 13. Nearly all the Year 11 pupils continue their education into the sixth form. Around 20 pupils from other schools join the sixth form each year. The number of students in the sixth form is growing steadily. Requirements for entry to the sixth form are demanding and overall standards upon entry are very high. The school provides an academic education teaching a wide range of subjects to GCE A-level standard. There are no vocational courses and there are few students taking AS level examinations. No student has special educational needs. There are 71 students with English as an additional language and none of these are beginners or refugees. There is a large number of higher-attaining students of whom many are gifted and talented. Most teaching groups are relatively large and are cost effective. Very few students leave the sixth form before they complete their A-level courses. Nearly all students continue their education at university or colleges of higher education.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

There has been a remarkable improvement since the previous inspection. Standards in nearly all subjects taught at GCE A-level have improved in recent years, whilst other subjects have maintained their high standards. Overall, standards at the end of Year 13 are well above the national average and are in line with those expected of the students who enter the sixth form with very high levels of achievement at the end of Year 11. Students' high achievement arises from their very positive attitudes towards learning, very good teaching and the school's effective use of test and examination data to set individual targets with high expectations. In design and technology, biology and geography standards are very high. In all other subjects they are high, but in general studies, some students do not achieve as well as expected at the end of Year 13. Excellent subject knowledge, expectations, relationships and individual support and guidance in lessons are strong features of the overall very good quality of teaching. With the students' commitment to learning as a virtue and their ability to work hard, this means that a high level of education is provided. Leadership and management of the sixth form are good; a marked improvement since the previous inspection when some aspects were judged unsatisfactory, although attention to detail is still weak in written publications about the sixth form. The needs of most students, including those for whom English is a second language, are fully met. The high quality of education provided, and the high standards reached by the students, indicates that the effectiveness of the sixth form is very good. The sixth form gives very good value for money and is very cost effective.

Strengths

- The school makes excellent provision over and above academic studies, so the students' personal development is excellent.
- Attainment is very high.
- Teaching and learning are very good because teachers' knowledge and expectations are excellent and students have very positive attitudes towards learning.

What could be improved

- The range of methods for teaching, including more use of ICT, is not wide enough.
- The management of the sixth form does not have the status it merits in a sixth form of this size.
- Some accommodation is sub-standard.

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	Very good. Students' attainment is well above average because their attitudes towards learning are very good and teachers expect high standards. The use of ICT to help learning is unsatisfactory.
Biology	Very good. Students attain very high standards because teachers have very good knowledge of the subject and students' attitudes towards learning are so positive. Teachers do not use a wide enough range of teaching methods.
Chemistry	Good. Students attain above average standards. Good teaching with a developing range of teaching methods leads to good learning. Students achieve satisfactorily in the sixth form.
Design and technology	Excellent. Students' attainment is well above average and they achieve exceptionally well as a result of very good teaching, which motivates them to learn successfully. Leadership and management are excellent.
Economics	Very good. Students' attainment is well above average and they achieve very well as a result of much excellent teaching. ICT is not used sufficiently to analyse data.
Computing	Very good. Students' attainment is well above average and they achieve very well because of very good teaching, well-planned courses and good use of resources. Aspects of the accommodation are unsuitable for sixth-formers.
Physical education	Excellent. Students' attainment is well above average and they achieve very well because teaching and learning are very good. Outstanding relationships underpin students' excellent personal development.
Music	Very good. Students' attainment is well above average and they achieve well because they are provided with a very good breadth of opportunities. The provision for out-of-school music is exceptional. Some procedures for assessment are in need of improvement.
Art	Very good. Students' attainment is above average and they achieve well because they are very good learners. The subject does not attract sufficient boys and ICT is underused to help teaching and learning.
Drama	Very good. Students' attainment is well above average; they achieve very well because of very good teaching and learning and the effective use of assessment. Vocal techniques are in need of improvement.
History	Very good. Students' attainment is well above average because teachers use very good teaching methods that inspire students to learn and to achieve very well, but there is insufficient access to ICT facilities.
Geography	Excellent. Students' attainment is well above average because very good teaching motivates students to learn and to achieve excellently. Leadership and management are excellent.
Politics	Very good. Students' attainment is well above average and they achieve very well. Very good teaching leads to very good learning, but there is insufficient access to ICT facilities.

English literature	Very good. Students' attainment is well above average in their work and examinations. Very good achievement is the result of their excellent attitudes to learning and of the very good, stimulating teaching which encourages perceptive reading, independent and mature reflection and much skilled essay writing; note-making is less skilled. Most find the transition from GCSE to A-level English very demanding. Too few boys choose the course.
Spanish	Very good. Students' attainment is well above average and they achieve very well because they have good listening and speaking skills. Very good teaching and students' positive approach mean that learning is very effective. Standards could be raised further if more speaking practice was provided.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Very good. The provision for equality of access and opportunity is very good. A very positive work ethic is quickly established and maintained throughout. Students are expected to take real responsibility for their academic progress and personal development. Nearly all do so. Ongoing assessment is very good. Excellent information and support are provided to students about academic progress, university applications and courses. Advice and support is very good for the few students who take up career paths not requiring university entrance.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Good. Students benefit greatly from the developing ethos in which morale is good, relationships excellent and attitudes towards learning are very positive. These strengths are contributing markedly to the students' high achievements. Leadership and management of the sixth form do not have the status they deserve in the dealings of the senior management team. The governing body has insufficient involvement in the work of the sixth form and its future development. Attention to detail in written communications with the public is a weakness.

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"> Choice of courses suited to their aptitudes and aspirations. The very good teaching which is challenging and has high expectations. The help and advice given by the teachers. The enjoyable atmosphere in the sixth form. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The advice on their future education. The school not listening or responding to their views.

About one in seven students completed the questionnaire. The views expressed in interviews with the students confirmed those opinions expressed in the questionnaire and these were confirmed further in the findings of the inspection. The inspectors noted that comprehensive information sessions on future education possibilities were about to be held. The reintroduced sixth-form council provides a good forum for sixth-formers to have a stronger voice in the running of the school.

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

The school's very distinctive character and traditions promote excellence in the pupils' personal development.

1. The Coopers Company and Coborn School nurtures excellence; it provides the pupils with an outstanding education and produces young persons of quiet, mature assurance who are ready for their next steps in life.
2. A tradition of very strong collaboration between pupils, staff, parents and the community is a pillar that supports school life and is reflected in its simple motto, 'Love as Brethren'. Careful admissions' procedures help to retain the school's character by selecting pupils who are promised strong parental support and who are purposefully gregarious, with interests in activities that complement academic study. The positive results are manifest in the very high quality of education the pupils enjoy; they support each other admirably and are keen to achieve very well, not just in examinations. Race relations are, for example, exemplary.
3. Excellence comes from what most see as pleasurable hard work. For the pupils, excellent personal development is synonymous with school life. The school provides a very well-balanced, broad curriculum that is untrammelled by innovation. It meets all legal requirements and pupils' successes within the subjects of the original National Curriculum are complemented by the way they flourish in the many after-school cultural, sporting and social activities that satisfy their interests. Provision satisfies fully the requirement to teach citizenship. The school's long tradition of excellence and the privilege the pupils and staff feel to be part of it have the effect of raising standards to very high levels in all walks of school life. The school's traditions clearly help to make learning interesting. Typically, the homework diary of any Year 9 pupil has, over the course of a term, a record of numerous study visits, for instance to a music centre, to Ypres to reinforce historical, geographic and linguistic studies, as well as off-site sports activities. No pupil is debarred from participation because of financial constraint.
4. Tradition requires that pupils have free rein to learn and to exercise self-discipline, which is excellent. No room is locked during recreation times and the premises are treated with great care. In the pupils' eyes, the school comes first; they are team players, occasionally foregoing opportunities to pursue personal interests in outside activities to represent it. Staff and pupils see the few temporary exclusions as inexcusable major offences that let the team down. The school's traditions generate great passion and commitment amongst the pupils, staff and parents. For example, in their returned questionnaires very nearly all who responded said the school provided an interesting range of activities and that it made their child work hard to do well, so becoming a mature young person. Inspectors agree fully with these sentiments. The school is a hive of activity in which standards have risen very substantially since the previous inspection; they are well above what would be expected from most pupils' starting points as 11-year-olds. Of particular note is the way lower attainers are caught up in the vibrant ethos and achieve remarkably well.
5. In similar vein, very many members of staff are highly committed to raising the pupils' standards by engaging with them in the legion of after-school activities that typify the excellent provision for pupils' personal development. The school's success in being awarded specialist sports college status complements its acumen in other cultural pursuits that are of long standing and are cherished by all concerned. Its traditions of artistic, musical and theatrical activity are prominent features that make the quality of

education so good. The headteacher's annual speech day report and the excellent, annual magazines amplify the dedication to quality found in the school.

6. Excellence in personal development is found in the pupils' courtesy, consideration and keenness to do well. Pupils find inspiration in, for example, musical activities that let them produce numerous concerts, travel in this country and abroad making music, celebrate annually the school's young musician and join the National Festival of Music for Youth. Such remarkable opportunities are found in choirs, orchestras, ensembles and bands. High quality, live music meets pupils and adults at every turning in the school, bathing them in a culture of excellence.
7. Plays and musicals, theatre visits and productions by touring companies lift the quality of pupils' lives and promote excellently their own development. The range is very wide from Shakespearean festivals to rehearsals for 'Guys and Dolls', which latter, during the inspection, exemplified the quality of work the pupils produce. Rivalling the original film sequence, the choreography and solo work really did make inspectors sit down whilst the boat was rocked. Vibrant artwork, often of very high quality, is the result of pupils' talent and hard work, some winning regional and national prizes by Year 10.
8. The sports college award is built on a tradition of excellence in very many disciplines. Hockey, swimming, rugby, rounders, soccer and gymnastics are just a part of the programme that has dance, fencing, and netball as other prominent features. Excellence in performance is commonplace and the ambition rapidly to become the best sports college nationally typifies the school's traditions of wanting to do the best for, and with, its pupils.
9. In school, pupils work and play very hard. The round of lessons is complemented by numerous after-school activities that make very significant contributions to pupils' personal development. Prize givings, parties, fashion shows, essay prizes and top of the form competitions are typical of the life of the school. Pupils now debate through a reconstituted school council run by sixth-formers, who take responsibility without the badge of prefect office. Careers education, which is a model of good practice, includes a very good programme of work experience with, for example, 197 placements arranged for Year 10 during the last two weeks of the summer term. In 2002, pupils had a range of fascinating experiences, for example working in a regional zoo, working on an American soap opera at the CBS studios, shadowing an MP, and helping with Channel 4 News.
10. Out of school, pupils have many opportunities to extend their learning though field study visits; the geography department has an exemplary programme covering Years 7 to 13. Science museum study visits, numerous trips to complement the study of English and on-site visits to support business studies are good examples of how learning is made more interesting. Boat trips, walking weekends and public speaking in which the pupils do very well, lampooning heartily their school life, all provide purposeful recreation.
11. Many charity activities and very valuable educational visits abroad complete the excellent provision for the pupils' personal development. Exchanges and language study visits to France, Germany and Spain raise standards. Personal development reaches its summit in pupils' frequent expeditions to underdeveloped countries, for example to Bolivia to help build a school kitchen. Through such experiences, which are ingrained in the tradition of the school, the pupils mature and become the often disarming young people whose work inspectors found to be of a very high standard in all respects.
12. Deserving of wide imitation, very good assemblies that have a different theme each

week provoke thought and, each Friday, allow the pupils to draw together what they have learned from them. The theme of Equality during the inspection week culminated in an outstanding Year 7-led assembly for the lower school. It left not a dry eye in the sports hall, as groups of pupils re-enacted the American fight for equality in '50s Alabama, the Martin Luther King vision, declaimed without script and ended with an exquisite solo of Lennon's 'Imagine'. Staff, pupils and inspectors acknowledged the privilege of being present. The activity was but a customary Friday morning assembly that said so much about the quality of education and personal development provided in the school.

The school's success culture helps pupils to achieve very well and to reach very high standards.

13. Excellently led from the front by the headteacher and with very strong support from the staff, success is the cornerstone of the school's culture. Since the previous inspection they have overseen substantial rises in standards and the school's continually improving provision for its pupils and students of whom, rightly, they are ardently proud. The headteacher leads by example, supporting the pupils' successes and initiatives unstintingly. Under her leadership the school's profile has gone on improving. Clearly never content, her drive and that of the whole school, staff and pupils, for further improvements, is infectious.
14. The genteel way in which a parents' evening enquiry about the organisation of GCSE re-sits in the sixth form was handled by the head of Year 9 and the headteacher exemplified the school's attitude to success. The questioner was persuasively informed there were none, as no pupil failed, so showing how the school expects and helps pupils to do well. Disappointments are very few.
15. The pupils' attainment when they start, as 11-year-olds, is well above average. They are stronger in using language than in other, non-verbal skills where their performance is just above average. No pupil is unable to cope with the demands of the secondary curriculum; they do very well in all aspects of the work they undertake and are good all-rounders.
16. By the time they take national tests for 14-year-olds the pupils have already reached very high standards and are in the top five per cent nationally, where they remain until they leave, mostly as 18-year-olds bound for higher education. A-level improvements have been particularly remarkable. The school is not, however, an examination factory. The expectation is that pupils will participate wholeheartedly in the very broad cultural and social opportunities school life affords; they do so with gusto, creating the vibrant atmosphere that pervades the premises from early morning to late evening.
17. Achievement is, at each stage, very good. By the end of Year 9, the lower attainers have made sufficient progress to do well in national tests; hardly any pupil fails to reach the expected standard in English, mathematics or science. Most pupils are already well above expected standards, and many have reached equivalent GCSE levels. The lower attainers' writing is technically correct. Their punctuation is good and they write fluently, presenting their work well, often, as with most pupils, using ICT to embellish and check its accuracy. Their analyses of literature are weaker, but they write well and at some good length. Other pupils' very good achievement leads to very high attainment. Often beautifully presented work is reinforced by very helpful correction on the part of teachers, so leading the pupils to know how to improve their performance. Some lovely work in geography exemplified this. In history, achievement is spurred by educational visits, for example to First World War battlefields. Originality is sometimes missing in the English work of even the highest attainers, indicating a need to raise expectations and the demands made on the pupils by the department.

Pupils' speaking skills match those they have in listening and reading and are very high.

18. Because they are taught very systematically, Year 9 pupils' incisive thinking in mathematics is easily articulated when describing, for example, the number of rectangles formed from other two-dimensional shapes. They enjoy the intellectual challenge the subject brings, working speedily and at a high standard. Generally, they are well above expected levels. In science, pupils are very willing to speculate, as the best teaching has high expectations of them. Very demanding work is well suited to the pupils' already high level of attainment.
19. By the end of Year 11, continuing very good achievement ensures very high attainment and success rates in GCSE examinations. In 2002, very nearly half of the grades were in the highest, A*/A ranges and only four per cent of the results were below the C grade. These results represent a very substantial improvement since the previous inspection. In English lessons, pupils apply techniques used in stories they have read very successfully to their own mystery tales. Having built on original drafts, they produce detailed and perceptive writing on poetry at a high standard. Mathematics work is produced in profusion; reinforcement leading to very good understanding is the result of the systematic approach that produces the very high standards. Lower attainers' achievement is very good in mathematics because their work is carefully checked and monitored by the teachers, so they do well. In science, lower attainers reach, for example, a good understanding of the process of evolution and other pupils' very good achievement culminates in their high procedural and practical skills, coupled with excellent listening and social skills.
20. There are no clear weaknesses in any subject and boys and girls do equally well. At each stage, the very high standards reached by pupils from ethnic minorities equate with those of others.
21. Achievement is very good all round. The way their studies contribute clearly to the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is much improved since the previous inspection. Departments now devise themes that promote cultural awareness. Music, for example, makes very strong contributions to the pupils' appreciation of South Indian music, so inculcating moral respect for other cultures. Moral issues such as prejudice and exclusion are explored thoroughly in drama. Very good debates take place in many classes. The quality of work in art is outstanding. Very well researched, evaluated and carefully presented work shows very good achievement in some outstanding sketchbooks that, in turn, again show the pupils' care and pride in what they do and their very high for standards.
22. Combining the pupils' excellence in after-school cultural and sporting activities with the work they do in class and at home gives a very clear picture of quite exceptional standards and the very high quality of education they enjoy.

Very good learning is the result of very good teaching.

23. Very good school improvement planning, which is closely focused on teaching and learning, has produced a substantial improvement in quality since the previous inspection. Inspectors found no unsatisfactory teaching or learning. The experienced staff has shown great willingness to be flexible and to innovate. As a result, very good teaching and learning complement the pupils' very good attitudes and behaviour, confirming the parents' views expressed in their returns to the governors' questionnaire.
24. Learning has improved because the pupils now know much more precisely how to

make progress and to do very well in examinations and tests, as the work is geared more directly to such ends. Collaborating very well with each subject department, the pupil support system plays a large part in following up the pupils' achievements.

25. Teaching and learning are characterised by the teachers' excellent knowledge and understanding of the subjects they teach and by the pupils' very good learning skills. Because they are nearly all good readers when they start the school, the pupils have the advantage of being able to tackle the work set in each subject, so helping them to pick things up rapidly.
26. The best teaching, of which there are substantial amounts, is often inspirational; such teaching transcends classroom lessons and occurs in out-of-school activities and personal, social and health education (PSHE) as well. Lessons bustle along, challenges are very high and the pupils respond magnificently. A typical example saw Year 11 students' learning develop very well in a PSHE lesson on cardio-pulmonary resuscitation. The teacher's very engaging presentation that interspersed humour with serious intent, and very effective use of proper apparatus, of pupils with some previous experience and of a colleague assistant, brought home to the class the need for precision and courage. Subsequent practical work reinforced the procedures and elicited spontaneous applause from the class. Such experiences also fit fully into the aim of the school and promote very well the pupils' personal development. As a result of such very good learning experiences, the pupils become more and more at home with transferring skills they acquire in one subject directly into another. In this one, the pupils drew from physical education and biology. Similarly, learning in science is very often helped by the ability pupils have to draw on mathematics.
27. Because teaching is more closely allied to the pupils' personal development, numerous good lessons back up the weekly assembly themes very well indeed. For example, a very good Year 11 history lesson on women's rights stressed admirably the week's equality theme. The teacher teased from the pupils clearly expressed and cogent points of view that showed some very high thinking skills reinforced with unusually sophisticated turns of phrase, such as, 'It's just a metaphor, or is it ironic?' 'It does it particularly well, both visually and textually' as they studied cartoon examples from the early twentieth century. In English, themes such as the 1930s depression and backgrounds to racism and religious references in set poetry help the pupils to learn and to develop personally through thinking deeply about the issues. Nonetheless, in an English lesson in the same year, words such as 'vociferous' and 'infamous' were unknown to the pupils. Some excellent music teaching illustrates new techniques and celebrates successful work. The teaching had very high expectations of the pupils' capacity to work hard on their own, which they did, then receiving critical comment from their classmates after performance.
28. The pupils' acquisition of skills, knowledge and understanding is excellent and leads to their very good achievement. They try very hard and are interested in what they do, working at a good pace. Learning is reinforced very well by homework; parental support in its completion is also very good.

29. Making sure that all pupils are included in the school's success involves some specialised teaching of smaller groups of lower attainers. A Year 11 French lesson exemplified some very good teaching skills with pupils who had brief attention spans. The lesson was broken into very short sections, based around the school's expectations on behaviour and attendance and gave the pupils a good chance to succeed in an atmosphere of patience and humour. They learned well.
30. Teaching is normally broken down into segments that have connecting themes to help the pupils learn material that has been shared with them at the start of a lesson. Practice is not uniformly good in this respect, although training programmes have emphasised the importance of such basic teaching craft, not enough attention is given in departments, such as modern foreign languages and mathematics, to the sharing of good teaching and learning practice. Since the pupils' attitudes to learning are so good, it is unfortunate that a proportion of teaching did not reach a good quality, which in the circumstance should be a minimum if the students' aspirations are to be met fully. Teachers' use of ICT to extend learning opportunities is also patchy.
31. The ways teachers organise and run so many out-of-school activities contribute very significantly to the overall very good quality of teaching and learning that goes way beyond the classroom. As the pupils become more adept at learning so teaching improves; both reach their peak in the sixth form. A particularly important part of the way the school helps the pupils to learn is the large number of study visits that make learning more pointed and fun, raising standards substantially at the same time.

Procedures for the care and welfare of pupils are very good.

32. Very good, secure arrangements are in place to ensure child protection. Relevant data is kept securely and close associations with outside agents, including the local education authority are effective. Procedures for ensuring attendance are very good and the rates of attendance are above average. The pupils enjoy coming to school; they are punctual and many arrive very early each day to begin work.
33. Winning the plaudits of parents, the headteacher has managed to steer the school very well through recent trauma caused by the lengthy absence and death of a very senior colleague, whose replacement is still awaited. Because of this, she and other senior colleagues have undertaken rescheduled duties. They are managing very well. The care and provision for pupils with special educational needs (lower and very high attainers) has improved substantially under the temporary stewardship of the head of English. Statutory obligations are now fulfilled and the post holder knows how well each identified lower attainer is doing by checking very closely in weekly sessions with them. He has provided teachers with suitable hints on how to help and, as a result, the achievement of lower attainers, buoyed by such help and caught up in the very good learning atmosphere in the school do well. Parents are involved very quickly if need is found.
34. Provision for the gifted and talented is excellent. They have attended what were reported to be disappointing regional courses but are fully involved in the out-of-school activity programme and are fully stretched by their work in school. Cambridge study visits have given older pupils good insights into university life. The very high success rates of all pupils and the very good quality of education meet fully the requirements of these pupils.
35. The transition arrangements are stamped by excellent induction procedures. The school issues comprehensive questionnaires to incoming pupils and the head of lower school is a firm point of contact in an exercise that includes very helpful half-day induction sessions. From the start, pupils are trusted to be responsible and this is an

integral part of their early personal development in the school.

36. The very good oversight of the care and welfare of pupils exercised by the sole deputy headteacher has produced a much more supportive system in which pupils' learning and other personal needs are equally important. The very good contribution of tutors through purposeful dialogue with their pupils is a major contributor to the rising standards since the previous inspection. The whole staff is very focused on getting the pupils to improve, working with them outside lessons and providing sessions devoted to examination techniques. Each year pupils have two sessions in private tutorial with a member of staff to assess how they are doing across the board and to decide what they now need to do to make even greater progress. The arrangement meets with strong parental approval and is a main factor in raising standards, as it complements and extends the work of subject departments very effectively, getting the pupils to think about their targets very carefully. The school provides the pupils with pragmatic ways of getting results and persuades them that they will be successful; it works. In English, for example, the pupils are given the criteria for obtaining an A* grade and they are constantly checked upon as they work to get it. The geography department's close analysis of performance is an exemplary case of how to care closely for the pupils' welfare and academic performance.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Some manager's promotion of high standards by checking on performance and sharing good practice within and between departments is too patchy.

37. The pursuit of excellence and the raising of standards have produced impressive results since the previous inspection, but the interpretation of their substantial individual responsibilities on the part of heads of subjects such as mathematics and modern foreign languages, especially is too patchy. Outside the very good performance management system, teaching quality is not checked rigorously enough. The control of how well books are marked in compliance with policy and seeing if, for example, correction gives enough information on how to do better is not systematic. Lesson observations to identify and to share good practice or to see where improvements might be made to bring teaching up to at least a good quality are not completed regularly enough.
38. Because of the gap in the senior team, line management duties have become stretched. A new appointment should provide a good opportunity to re-establish a more rigorous programme of checking on management practice to match the already rigorous and very effective reviews of performance in examinations carried out by the headteacher and governors each year.

The use of ICT to help learning is insufficient in a number of subjects.

39. The quality of teaching and of learning is very good and the pupils are adept users of ICT, but ICT applications to help learning in class are uneven, especially in the sixth form. Although the school's provision has grown since the previous inspection it is not yet good enough to satisfy need. The teaching force has not yet seen the value of adding extra dimensions to pupils' learning with ICT applications, although model practice can be found in, for example, PowerPoint presentations in science and design and technology. Numerous references in subject paragraphs identify the weakness in under-usage, difficulty of access, inadequacy of equipment, for instance in design and technology, or unsuitability of provision for pupils' and students' comfort in computing.

Specialist accommodation is insufficient for some subjects and some parts of the

school are poorly maintained.

40. Whilst much has been done to improve provision since the previous inspection with a very impressive modern foreign languages block and a brand new music block about to be commissioned, there are areas of the school that compare adversely. Many of the older sections are unappealing and do not match the quality of education that takes place within them. There are too few science laboratories for the school's need and analysis carried out by the local education authority has shown the school's case to be most compelling; as a result the quality of teaching and learning is lower and standards suffer.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

41. In order to improve provision even further, the staff and governors should:
- (1) Make sure that line managers check carefully and regularly on how well heads of subject are making sure that each of their colleagues is preparing stimulating lessons and is correcting written work so that it helps the pupils to do better.

(See paragraphs: 37, 38, 89, 97, 113, 166)
 - (2) Broaden the availability and use of ICT in lessons so that the pupils' range of learning experiences is improved; this may have financial implications.

(See paragraphs: 30, 39, 43, 63, 92, 93, 95, 119, 120, 142, 166, 173)
 - (3) Approach the Coopers Coburn Educational Foundation to release some capital, if available, to refurbish the parts of the school that do not match the very high quality of education provided in them. Pursue plans further to provide enough accommodation for need.

(See paragraphs 87, 92, 95, 104, 135, 140, 147, 179)

Sixth form

- (1) Item 1 above applies; see same paragraphs for reference.
- (2) Plan to create a leadership of the sixth form that has the status its size and success merit.

(See paragraphs: 84, 86, 87)
- (3) Item 3 above applies; see same paragraphs for reference.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	44
	Sixth form	72
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		45

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
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Years 7 – 11

Number	5	20	12	7	0	0	0
Percentage	11.4	45.5	27.2	15.9	0	0	0

Sixth form

Number	8	40	20	4	0	0	0
Percentage	11.1	55.5	27.8	5.6	0	0	0

The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching. Care should be taken when interpreting the percentages for Years 7 – 11, as each lesson represents more than 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	928	343
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	18	1

Special educational needs

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	1	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	59	5

English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	71

Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	4
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	10

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	94.8
National comparative data	90.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.1
National comparative data	1.2

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	2002	96	83	179

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	95	95	95
	Girls	82	82	80
	Total	177	177	175
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	99 (99)	99 (100)	98 (98)
	National	66 (64)	67 (66)	66 (66)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	97 (95)	98 (99)	83 (90)
	National	32 (31)	45 (43)	33 (34)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	96	96	95
	Girls	82	82	82
	Total	178	178	177
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	99 (100)	99 (100)	99 (100)
	National	67 (65)	70 (68)	67 (64)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	92 (83)	98 (99)	86 (95)
	National	32 (31)	44 (42)	34 (33)

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
	2002	106	72	178

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	105	106	106
	Girls	71	71	71
	Total	176	177	177
Percentage of pupils achieving The standard specified	School	99 (100)	99 (100)	99 (100)
	National	50 (48)	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	63.92 (63.8)
	National	39.8 (39)

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	91	81	172
	Average point score per candidate	25.7	27.0	26.3 (26.08)
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.7	17.4 (18.5)

		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	91	81	172	0	0	0
	Average point score per candidate	25.7	27.0	26.3	0	0	0
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.7	17.4	*	*	*

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

Ethnic background of pupils**Exclusions in the last school year**

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	1124	22	3
White – Irish	0	0	0
White – any other White background	10	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	0	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Indian	29	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	13	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	2	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	3	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	6	0	0
Black or Black British – African	7	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	0	0	0
Chinese	44	0	0
Any other ethnic group	27	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	13	1	0

The 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)	77.74
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.35

Education support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	13
Total aggregate hours worked per week	334.75

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	73.5
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	27.0
Key Stage 4	21.0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2001-2002
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	£
Total income	4,254,451
Total expenditure	4,152,639
Expenditure per pupil	3,317
Balance brought forward from previous year	24,043
Balance carried forward to next year	125,855

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	17.5
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	26.18

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

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out

1271

Number of questionnaires returned

374

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	65	31	3	1	0
My child is making good progress in school.	65	33	1	0	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	46	48	2	1	3
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	40	47	10	1	2
The teaching is good.	52	43	2	0	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	38	46	13	1	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	63	30	5	2	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	87	12	1	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	33	51	12	1	3
The school is well led and managed.	66	29	2	1	2
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	62	34	1	1	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	80	17	2	0	1

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

42. Annually, very nearly all Year 11 pupils carry on to the sixth form. Entry requirements into the sixth form reflect the very high GCSE results and are demanding. Even more stringent requirements apply to the few new students who join from elsewhere. There are five students with defined special educational needs in the sixth form. Retention rates are very high; virtually all students complete their A-level courses.
43. Sixth form A-level results are very high. In 2001, the latest year for which validated national comparisons are available, results were well into the top five per cent nationally. A similar level of performance was recorded in 2002. There are no discernible differences in standards attained by different groups of students, including those from minority ethnic groups, whose use of English equates with that of native speakers. Meeting the school's demanding targets, these results show a very good rate of improvement since the previous inspection, which found A-level standards below what they should have been. All students are literate, numerate and very capable users of their own and often, but not always, the school's ICT to improve their own learning and raise their standards. They collaborate very well individually and in groups or pairs.
44. Attainment is well above average and, often, well above that anticipated when students' attainments in GCSE are taken into consideration, although there is still room for further improvement. A widely-used system of assessing how well students do compared with their previous GCSE performance does show that in mathematics, biology, chemistry and sociology, especially, numerous students did not reach the minimum anticipated target grade, (the expected standard). On the other hand, in English literature, where there has been some underperformance at GCSE, results were very high, with many students obtaining grades that were well above the minimum expected. Such performances were also recorded in Spanish, German, music, psychology, physics and geography. The school builds well on the students' strengths and also raises their overall performance. Generally, it is in subjects that make the greatest demands on the students' literacy skills that they do best, so mirroring their strengths as 11-year-olds, starting the school. Outstanding results in product design, however, show how well the students come on generally; they are very good all-rounders. The records show strength in depth; there are no weak subjects.
45. In 2001 and 2002, over half of the A-level passes were in the highest A/B grade range, which is very high compared with available national figures, especially as, in 2002, there were more grades A obtained than there were grades B. There were very few failures. It is mainly in general studies that some students receive unclassified results. However, overall performance in this subject is well up to the rest and is well above average nationally. One of the main reasons for rising standards and very high attainment is because the school knows its students so well. As a result, it feels confident in approaching examination boards for re-marks if results are at variance with its own expectations and pursues this fastidiously and with success.
46. The AS results obtained by those who did not continue the study of given subjects to A-level indicate a good rate of success in broadening the students' range of studies, as only two entries were unclassified. Although the largest fallout was from modern foreign languages, it is a good sign that numerous students are seeing the value of

studying a language beyond GCSE. The large reduction in numbers studying French is, however, a disappointment.

47. A regime of hard work and play and very strong support helps the students to evaluate their own progress and keep on course. They are effective in producing year-on-year rises in academic performance and helping the students' excellent personal development by participation in the very many other activities that complement A-level courses and make the school such a stimulating place in which to learn. Conscientious study promotes their excellent personal development particularly well.
48. The very high standards in past examination results are confirmed in current lesson observations and through looking at students' written work. Standards of work rise over the two years, as students develop greater skills throughout the A-level courses.
49. Written English essays show well above average attainment, the most recent Year 13 ones are reflective on the language and power of good and evil in Shakespeare's 'The Tempest'; the best make seamless references to the play in arguing linguistic, moral and aesthetic issues. They are also sophisticated in expression whilst the weaker ones have some technical errors and insufficient use of literary terms to gain the highest grades. Students are able to criticise literature and make relevant associations with other texts in high quality discussions, which they lead; their achievement is very good. The students use critical texts, bibliographies and the Internet very effectively in researching material for essays. However, their note making is sometimes not good enough to be useful in further revision.
50. Prodigious amounts of consistently marked work characterise what is very good achievement in mathematics. The students learn thoroughly by working on many practice examples; they know what is expected of them and only when they are secure in a topic does a new one begin. Well above average attainment is realised by a simple strategy, teach then learn, practise until perfect. Sometimes practice goes on for too long for some, but if there is misunderstanding then suitable steps are taken to get things right, so high achievement is sustained. The coursework Year 12 students prepare is of a very high quality in biology, meriting very high marks in planning, implementation, analysis and evaluation. By Year 13, excellent work in all areas shows good achievement with the use of statistics to analyse results. Less high attainers' written work is sometimes too wordy; their skill in report writing needs improvement. In chemistry the students' note making is a comparative weakness amongst what is work of a generally above average standard that shows satisfactory achievement over time.
51. Achievement in product design is particularly good considering the lack of depth of study for some before they start the course. Attainment is very high and their excellent making skills in numerous materials always relate very closely to the original specification. Attainment is well above average and achievement is very good in computing, as the students' projects place heavy demands upon them to solve real-life problems. In this and all other subjects, keenness and passion for learning are prime motivators to very good achievement. In physical education students' performance skills show very good improvement, as does their knowledge of physiology. Good achievement in art stems from very high attainment as students begin the course; written work is well researched and the highest attainers produce work of increasingly high standards. It is only in art where there is a clear difference in the standards of males and females; males' output is less wide ranging and they have lesser practical skills.
52. Students benefit highly from their experiences with professional actors and visits to theatres to achieve very well in drama, where their understanding of stage craft

improves very well through better projection of the voice, pace, gesture and expression. Similarly in music, high performance goes well beyond the requirements of the examination course, the only foible being in the use of music technology. Achievement and standards are very high.

53. Well above average attainment and excellent achievement characterise the students' performances in human and physical geography; students use statistics very well from in-depth research and benefit greatly from practical fieldwork. In history, politics and economics, achievement is also very good. Students handle information very well and can conduct very effective debates and research, for example into transport economics.
54. Very good achievement in Spanish reflects that in all other subjects, so here too, the students attain very high standards. Their competence in spoken Spanish is remarkable and they write on numerous topics using varied styles well.
55. As a result of the students' hard work and very high success rate in examinations, nearly all go on to higher education, numerous benefiting from the school's close associations with several universities. Admission to Cambridge is good, but Oxford is a more distant ambition, as the number of students going on to study there is very small.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

56. Students have excellent attitudes towards school and their work. They value the excellent help they get from all staff, the extra freedom they enjoy compared with the main school and the strong sense of student community that prevails. A group of Year 13 students justifiably consider that they are very privileged to be at this school when they compare their experiences with friends in other schools and colleges. They were all very happy with their choice of subjects, enjoyed their studies and appreciated the opportunities offered in preparing them for the next stage of their education and life. Nearly all students apply themselves fully, leading to a very strong work ethic among students. Behaviour is excellent, attendance is very good and race relations are exemplary.
57. Students' personal development and relationships are excellent. Students interviewed during the inspection were mature, reflective and measured in their judgements about the school. They had much to say that was very complimentary about their school and relatively few suggestions about where things could be improved. Most involve themselves readily in the life of the school and are well aware of their responsibility to set a good example to younger pupils. They help with sports clubs, science classes and fundraising. Many are involved in the wide range of sports clubs and other after-school activities. They organise charity shows, lower school discos, the leavers' show and there is a number of student music bands. In a sixth-form assembly seen at the inspection, students were respectful, attentive and a number confidently took a leading role in front of a large audience of their peers, staff and inspectors.
58. In lessons, students respond very positively to questions from teachers, opportunities to work independently and back this up with much insightful questioning of their teachers. Overall, students are developing attitudes and approaches that equip them very well for future studies and wider adult life. Sixth-formers work together very effectively in groups and, whilst prepared to challenge each other's viewpoints, they show respect and are very supportive. During the inspection many examples were seen of the way in which positive attitudes of students helped very good learning to take place.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

59. The students' quite outstanding disposition towards learning and their very good learning skills make teaching a demanding but highly rewarding task. Teaching measures up to the demands and is very good; it has led to the rises in standards and to the students' increased knowledge of how well they are doing and what they need to continue to do to improve. The combination of teachers' work in lessons with the much more supportive roles of tutors who oversee progress and, twice yearly, conduct very effective reviews of where students are and of their immediate learning needs are key features of the improvement in the quality of teaching and learning. Very nearly all subjects are very well taught, with none less than well taught. There are numerous examples of excellently taught lessons, but some teaching lacks the pace and inspiration the students' very good attitudes merit.
60. Particularly strong are the teachers' knowledge and understanding of their subjects and how to teach them; they have excellent expectations of the students, whose intellectual efforts and creativity match them. As a result, their acquisition of skills, knowledge and understanding is first rate. The students with English as an additional language learn as well as the rest. The ways students are able to transfer learning from one subject to help in another are very good. For instance in a physical education lesson the students drew, without prompt, on work done in biology to reinforce learning about the human frame. The teachers' great commitment not only provides extra sessions to help amend weaknesses, but also supports the students' very many extra experiences in complementary cultural, sporting and recreational enrichment activities that contribute so well to students' excellent personal development.
61. Teachers devise work very well to allow individuals to pursue particular interests or to work things out in pairs or small groups. For example, in a very good general studies lesson on religious ethics, small group debates were particularly effective in developing thinking skills; the teacher's probing questions brought out well-reasoned arguments and some lateral thinking that put the teacher on the spot on what constituted religious credo. The particular lesson and very many others make a strong contribution to the students' spiritual, moral and cultural development, in this instance by exploring similarities in the dogma of numerous religions represented in the students' many cultural backgrounds.
62. Lessons are very well planned, so students know what they are intended to do and can assess their progress as learning unfolds. In drama, students' open-minded attitudes to the challenges teachers and professional theatre groups set them raises standards; they rise to them in lessons and in performance. Similarly in music, very good teaching produces enthusiastic individual and group responses in some very high quality music making. Such very high expectations are commonplace across all subjects, although in both biology and chemistry there were occasions where the teacher talked too lengthily, assuming the students knew more than they really did.
63. Teachers' assessment of students' work and progress is a great strength. Written work is carefully and helpfully corrected and homework plays an important part in raising standards, as students know very well how they are doing. Interestingly, mathematics students made their own decisions, on occasion, as to what work should be done as a follow up to lessons. Regular assessments and the setting of achievable targets help students to make good progress. The students' abilities to communicate and to demonstrate their numeracy capacity are frequently and successfully fostered in lessons; coupled with a good knowledge of computing they have good opportunities to practise basic key skills that help them to learn. However, a frequent weakness is the unavailability of ICT to make sure the students are able to

learn independently in, for example, mathematics, economics, music, drama, history and politics lessons.

64. The professional development of staff contributes very well to their effectiveness. Individual professional development needs are directly linked to their performance management objectives and the teachers' standards framework document defining a typical range of training and development for staff, at different stages in their career. All staff have to justify their choices of courses and subsequently evaluate how the learning gained will improve student teaching and learning, complete with associated targets and plans to share the learning with others. As a result, both the school and the individual benefit.

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

65. The sixth-form curriculum is very good. A very wide range of courses is available to students; twenty-six subjects can be studied at A-level and twenty-eight at AS level. The curriculum meets the needs and aspirations of sixth-form students very effectively; 95 per cent of the students continue their studies at university. Almost all students are able to study their first choice of subjects at the school, but there is a small number who have to change one of their chosen subjects. There is, in addition, a strong emphasis upon students being developed not only academically and intellectually, but also personally and socially. The pastoral curriculum, followed by all students, is a PSHE programme that includes citizenship and general studies. It has a strong element of careers guidance, with advice about university applications, gap years and teaching abroad. Speakers from a variety of organisations contribute to the course; examples include Amnesty International, the Electoral Reform Society, the Police and an MP. All students take part in games and they have an exceptional range of activities to choose from.
66. The general studies programme includes the key skills of mathematics, ICT and communication studies. The curriculum for ICT is well organised, but for mathematics and communication studies it needs to be improved. Other topics in the course are social science, ICT, science and morality and culture. This is very well organised so that each student follows a selection of topics that meets their needs, thus making good use of their time. Religious education is well provided for all within the morality and culture course. Field trips in geography and by physical education students to the Brecon Beacons are provided, art and history students visit exhibitions and museums and many students attend conferences.
67. Since the previous inspection the school has thoroughly reviewed the sixth-form curriculum in order to ensure that it meets the needs of as many students as possible. The school ensures that students are aware of the vocational courses that are available nearby and that students are supported if they wish to follow them.
68. Provision for students' spiritual and moral development is excellent. The sixth-form pastoral programme includes a section on morality and culture that is taken by all students. In lessons they debate religious ethics and are challenged to think very deeply about theistic issues. Historical studies of the influences of Martin Luther King and Malcom X on the American Civil Rights movement provide students with a clear understanding of civil rights issues and the impact of religious leaders and others on them. In drama, students show a very good understanding of spirituality. Environmental, social and moral issues raised by the use of technology are debated in ICT and in technology classes. During economics lessons detailed discussions about economics in the developing world take place and students develop an excellent understanding of social, moral and cultural issues. All students follow a

course in ethics as part of their general studies programme and respect for others is a very strong feature of students' behaviour in the sixth form.

69. Provision for students' cultural and social development is outstanding. The range of activities available in the expressive arts is exceptional; students play in many bands including a symphonic orchestra and a jazz band, and they take part very successfully in competitions and festivals. Many take part in high quality dramatic productions such as the Singing Detective and the two Year 12 pantomimes that were performed in local primary schools. The Year 13 theatre studies group performed extracts from Metamorphosis, the Bald Prima Donna and Shakers. After this came performances of Dennis Potter's The Singing Detective. Seven pieces of work were entered in the senior section of the 'Havering Young Artist 2002' competition, one of which won the competition.
70. In lessons there are many opportunities for students to learn to work together. Fund raising is very successful and supports many charities but particularly the Marie Curie Cancer Trust. Students take part in these activities enthusiastically and benefit from the opportunities they have to think about the needs of others so that the sixth form is a caring and supportive community. Nearly £13,000 was raised for an expedition to Fiji during which a hostel for school children was decorated and furnished. Field trips for geography and physical education took place, students visited Ironbridge, the Tate Modern and there was a ski trip to North America. Students take part in a speaking competition organised by the Rotary Club.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

Assessment

71. Assessment in the sixth form is now very good. The school has made good progress since the previous inspection. It has moved carefully so that all teachers might understand the system for consistently entering and using data in order to set students' personal targets.
72. Procedures for assessing attainment and progress are very good. They are excellent in geography and design technology and very good in English, history, politics, science and ICT. The best practice consists of very thorough marking, not only of essays and coursework but also of notes and folders, close attention to the syllabus criteria and to examiners' reports, and students' assessment of each other and of themselves. The result is that teachers are paying very good attention to students' learning needs and students themselves know how well they are doing and what they should do to improve. Mathematics teachers make sure, through their perpetual ongoing assessment in class, that all students understand the topic, although written work is sometimes ignored for too long.
73. Procedures for monitoring and supporting academic progress are also very good. On their induction day at the start of Year 12 students are shown what grades they should aim for in the sixth form considering their attainment at GCSE. Progress towards these targets is reviewed on the very effective review days in November and March. Science and design technology hold further individual subject tutorials.
74. The school is now amassing a good deal of data as students move through the school and will soon be in a position to get a full long-term view of each student's achievement. In the sixth form teachers are using the data to write increasingly informative reports. The school has collated data to enable it to analyse the attainment of boys and girls but has not yet analysed the results of different ethnic groups, although there is no discernible difference in the overall performance of students from

ethnic minorities.

75. The use of assessment to guide planning is good. Some heads of subject are more confident in interpreting the value added data than others but generally this and the relative performance of subjects has given them food for thought. After scrutinising examination results, mathematics has significantly raised standards through more focused teaching; similarly, geography identified a particular area that needed more attention and English realised that it needed to improve the transition from GCSE to sixth-form work.

Advice, support and guidance

76. Before they join the sixth form potential students are given excellent help and support to make the right decisions from the courses on offer. As a result, there is scarcely any drop out of students and those interviewed during the inspection were very happy with their subject choices. In the second term of Year 11, candidates are made very well aware of entry requirements. They are also made well aware of opportunities available at other institutions and the very few who want to enter the world of work are very well supported. The motto on the attractively presented sixth form prospectus - 'Carpe diem, quam minimum credula postero', 'Seize the day, put no trust in tomorrow' - gives an indication on expected work attitudes. Subject outlines, examination and assessment procedures and potential career paths are very clearly set out. The induction day for all Year 12 students and their tutors is very good practice. As well as teambuilding activities, each student uses their GCSE results and ALIS data to predict minimum A-level grades. As a result, students have a very clear initial understanding of likely outcomes and the key message about students' responsibility for their progress is very effectively introduced. Difficulties encountered in the early stages of settling into the sixth form are picked up and dealt with promptly and well. The fact that nearly all students in the sixth form have spent their previous secondary education at the school simplifies the settling in and the diagnosis process in cases of difficulty.
77. The support given to students is very good throughout the sixth form. The very good and widely appreciated progress review meetings in autumn and spring terms systematically identify issues in relation to both academic progress and students' personal development. The use of form tutor periods is very good. In particular, the practice of using a wide range of external speakers for one of these periods each week is an innovative and effective initiative. Year 13 students speak very positively about these sessions, as they provide them with firsthand insights into a wide range of issues. The early completion of personal statements for UCAS forms is emphasised and very well supported. As a result, most students are in possession of university offers in the autumn term of Year 13 and, thereafter, can concentrate on their studies. Very good immediate support is available for students when they get their AS and A-level results.
78. Advice on the next stage of students' education is very good. There is a very wide selection of university and college prospectuses and good vetting by the head of the sixth form to ensure that institutions are well chosen. Inspectors judge arrangements for careers advice to be exemplary, with the annual careers convention, open to Years 9 to 13 students, a key feature. A wide range of professions, higher education colleges and the public services are represented, providing pupils and students with a wide range of first-hand advice and links with the world of work. Provision is a model of good practice.
79. There are very good arrangements in the sixth form to ensure students' very good attendance. There is a clear expectation that students are at school throughout the

day, unless they are unwell or fulfilling an outside engagement. Students complete an absence card in the event of planned absence and are responsible for providing a note on the first day back following illness.

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

80. Students are very positive in their views about their experiences in the sixth form and inspectors' judgements support those views. Students are proud of their school and what it stands for. They recognise and appreciate the help they were given to settle in and were impressed with the induction programme. Nearly all feel they are being taught well, challenged to do their best and encouraged to study. Students feel that their work is thoroughly marked. They are particularly positive about relationships with teachers, who are readily accessible and very willing to help with questions or uncertainties about their subjects. Increasingly the dialogue occurs by e-mail, which students find very helpful. In addition they are very clear about the strong support provided, primarily by form tutors, to deal with any personal problems. In all these key areas the school works closely and very successfully with students.
81. Based on the questionnaire returns, around half the students would like the school to pay greater attention to their views. They speak of the sixth-form staff and its management as being very responsive in relation to matters within their authority. However, there are also occasions when some feel they are not treated as responsible adults. For example, they cite the need to bring a note from parents following unplanned absence and the need to fill a form in relation to planned absence. Most, however, value this additional support and guidance.
82. The recently re-launched sixth-form council has an important role to play in bridging the perceived gap between suggestions on the part of sixth-formers and the school's responses. This is something for school's senior management and governors to monitor and, if necessary, act upon. The less positive comments made by students should be seen in the light of the much satisfaction which they express about their experiences in the sixth form.
83. Inspection evidence supports the parents' very positive comments about the sixth form and the rest of the school. Parents' evening is an important opportunity for dialogue and very well supported with around 95 per cent of parents attending. The practice of having students in attendance as a part of the discussions adds to the occasion, making the exchange of information more meaningful and shared. The good quality of information in reports, combined with the outcomes from the review weeks in the autumn and spring terms, provides a frequent coherent picture on progress and any issues arising.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

Leadership and management

84. Overall the leadership and management of the sixth form are good but, as yet, they do not have sufficient prominence in the overall management of the school. Nonetheless, the current situation represents a marked improvement since the previous inspection when aspects were unsatisfactory. Following the appointment of a middle manager, as pastoral head of the sixth form nearly two years after the previous inspection, numerous successful initiatives have been implemented. The sixth form has grown and is a large, vibrant and cohesive community of mature, responsible and satisfied students. Morale amongst students and staff is good. Standards are rising. There is now a clearer educational direction and purpose. The sixth form has an ethos that

matches closely the aims of the school with its strong commitment to equality of access and opportunity. Since the previous inspection, improvements include a better, more effective form tutor system with well-defined responsibilities, from which tutors exercise good leadership. Similarly, there is now a thorough system for advising and supporting the over four in every five students who enter higher education each year.

85. New leadership has contributed significantly to the excellent attitudes the students have towards school, to the information students have on how they are progressing and these, together with very good teaching in the sixth form, have resulted in the significant improvements in their achievement since the previous inspection. Issues surrounding the responsibility for the A-level general studies course remain indistinct, as reported at the previous inspection. For all other responsibilities the head of sixth form, who is not a member of the school leadership group or the senior management team, is accountable to the deputy headteacher. The day-to-day administration of the sixth form is very good. There are, however, some areas for improvement in the organisation of sixth-form events, for example in a school that prides itself on precision and standards, paying sufficient attention to detail when making arrangements for sixth-form parents' evenings and editing publications.
86. The school improvement plan has evolved considerably since the previous inspection. It embraces each part of the school in commonly agreed areas for improvement. These are prioritised, costed and assigned responsibility against suitable success criteria. The plan details the medium-term developments over a three-year period and focuses on improving standards, which has been accomplished with a large measure of success.
87. The sixth-form improvement plan is weaker; it misses the authority of full leadership and fails to match either the whole-school priorities or the quality of other contributions to planning. It is less specific on improvements in the long-term where the anticipated growth of the sixth form, based on its increasing success, is already stretching the available accommodation, only opened in the year following the previous inspection.
88. Planning for the future of the sixth form awaits further action. The governing body fulfils its responsibilities toward the sixth form satisfactorily. However, closer involvement with the leadership and management of this large and important area, as it continues to develop, would mean better-informed decisions when undertaking strategic planning for the future.
89. Performance management has a positive impact. Lesson observation is well established. Individual needs are effectively linked with school and departmental plans, in most departments. As a result, staff are clearer and more involved in the key school priorities. Also, where there are individual concerns or issues, a real opportunity for constructive dialogue is in place. The key link between individuals' needs and their professional development is a significant feature. However, the school recognises that improvement is still needed to make team leaders' monitoring and evaluation skills, especially in mathematics and modern foreign languages, more consistent and rigorous. Current practice is patchy because of over-stretched line management in the absence of senior leadership with direct responsibility to ensure coherence.
90. The monitoring of students' progress and achievement is mainly through quantitative analyses, opinion from questionnaires and oral surveys, which the sixth-form management does well.
91. The sixth form is very effective. In common with the very good practice exercised in

the rest of the school, the principles of getting best value are strictly applied; the sixth form gives very good value for money. Improvements since the previous inspection are good and the sixth form is well poised to improve further.

Resources

92. Resource provision in the sixth form is good and staffing is very well matched to the needs of the students. Whilst students have good access to many resources, both inside and outside the school, such as field study visits and access to the Internet, which raise standards, opportunities to extend their learning through the use of ICT lack uniformity. They are very good in modern foreign languages and good in, for example, biology and chemistry; they are unsatisfactory in mathematics, product design, economics, art, drama, music, history and politics. Technical help is also in too short supply in product design, so the smooth running of the department is adversely affected. A main weakness is in the unsatisfactory quality and sufficiency of accommodation, particularly in the under-provision of laboratories for science, which undermines standards and the quality of teaching and learning. Other parts of the building are drab or poorly maintained.

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

In the inspection, 15 subjects and courses were inspected and are reported on in detail. Work in other subjects and courses was sampled and contributed to the overall picture of teaching and learning in the school.

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2001.

GCE A level and AVCE courses 2001

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	53	98	87	51	43	6.7	5.8
Biology	32	97	88	66	34	7.5	5.25
Chemistry	25	100	90	56	43	7.3	5.9
Design and technology	8	100	91	75	30	9.00	5.4
Economics	38	89	89	29	36	5.2	5.3
Computing	28	89	86	21	23	4.6	4.6
Physical education	33	100	92	45	25	6.9	5.1
Art	8	100	96	88	46	9.0	6.6
Drama	12	100	N/a	83	N/a	8.5	N/a
Music	15	100	93	47	35	7.1	5.7
Geography	11	100	92	55	38	6.9	5.7
History	29	100	88	48	35	6.6	5.5
Politics	47	100	87	40	34	6.6	5.3
English Literature	54	98	95	74	37	8.0	5.9
Spanish	9	100	89	78	39	8.2	5.7

N.B. The 2002 national comparative figures were not available at the time of publication of this report.

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. In physics, examination results were very high compared with national averages in 2001. Of a large entry, 80 per cent obtained grades in the high, A/B, range. Results were similar in 2002, although with fewer numbers entered. Standards in physics are higher than in other science subjects. One lesson was observed. The students learned very well and in it they showed a clear understanding of the principles underlying the function of an electric motor and the purposes of component parts such as a commutator.

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- A-level results in recent years are well above national averages and are improving.
- Students' very good attitudes to learning and the teachers' very high expectations underlie the students' very good achievement.
- Teachers' knowledge, understanding and skills in teaching mathematics are excellent.
- Relationships between teachers and students are excellent and these contribute significantly towards effective learning and personal development.

Areas for improvement

- ICT does not figure extensively enough in teaching methods and learning opportunities.
- Monitoring aspects of teaching and learning needs to be closer to improve standards further.

93. The school does exceptionally well for the one in every three students who, each year, continue mathematics from Year 11 into Year 12. Standards have continued to rise since the previous inspection. In 2001, standards were well above the national average. In 2002 there was a significant improvement and early indications suggest that the students' performance is very high. All candidates obtained a grade within the A-E range and about three-fifths obtained the highest grades (A-B). Overall, girls and boys have performed similarly since the previous inspection. There is no significant difference between the performance of students whose first language is not English and that of all other students. In 2002, about one in two students taking the A-level examination did not reach the outcomes predicted from their very high grades obtained at GCSE and the school recognises the scope for further improvement. Students' performance in mathematics, based on their prior attainment in recent years, has been lower than, but close to, the overall performance in all other subjects offered by the school at A-level.

94. From talking with them, looking at their work and observing them in lessons, students' current attainment is very high and mirrors closely their attainment in tests and examinations. This represents very good achievement from the time they started the course. They engage in a prodigious amount of work and have high expectations of themselves. This is seen in the number of worked examples they complete until they understand thoroughly the mathematical ideas associated with any topic. Students' interviewed expressed satisfaction at the simplicity and similarity of teaching when a new topic is introduced. They liked the way it is then clearly explained with worked examples shown and followed by further extensive practice until fully understood. This style, linked to the students' exemplary commitment, application and motivation, and the high level of teacher support, ensures that learning is very good. The style does

not, however, produce a wide enough range of teaching methods, in particular the use of ICT to extend learning and teaching, reported as a weakness at the previous inspection, remains under-used. The students receive a very good grounding in all aspects of the application and use of number. As a result, they transfer their knowledge and understanding of mathematics readily and easily into new areas and other subjects to extend their learning successfully. For example, in an excellent lesson in Year 12 in which logarithmic theory was being taught the teacher seized the opportunity to introduce the application of the theory to the use of pH measurements in chemistry, which all students understood well because they remembered it from GCSE science work.

95. Teaching and learning are very good; this is a considerable improvement since the previous inspection. The significant strength in the teaching arises from the complete, confident command that teachers have of the subject; this has a significant influence on the students' learning. This strength is used very effectively to assess students' progress using well-constructed and probing questions and to answer their searching questions for explanation simply and correctly. The strength is also used effectively to adjust the pace of lessons to accommodate the students' differing rates of learning. In an excellent lesson in Year 12, the teacher, realising that the differential calculus was proving difficult for some students, slowed down the pace of the teaching, increased the probing questions and used more examples until finally the content was fully understood. Relationships are excellent. Lessons are relaxed and purposeful. Humour is shared and students and teachers enjoy each other's company. As a result, achievement in lessons is very good and students make good strides in learning, achieving at levels well above expectations.
96. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good. The department benefits from good leadership and management. Its work reflects fully the ethos of the school through its aims and values, which an experienced and effective team of well-qualified and committed teachers promotes with significant success. The direction of the department is well documented in a coherent, realistic and comprehensive improvement plan that seeks to improve standards through the use of targets to help individual students achieve well; in these it is successful. This is an improvement on the previous inspection. Less attention has been paid to systematic monitoring and evaluating aspects of the quality of teaching and learning, for example the effectiveness and consistency in the marking of students' work. Display in badly maintained classrooms does not celebrate the best of the students' learning. Resources for learning are good, except for insufficient equipment for use of ICT to improve further the learning and teaching in the department.

Biology

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

Strengths

- The students' attainment is above average.
- Relationships are very good.
- There is a high commitment to personal effectiveness and student success.

Areas for improvement

- The monitoring of teaching and learning is not rigorous enough to eliminate over-reliance on prepared notes.
- Not enough consideration is taken of students' concentration spans.
- Very able students are not always challenged enough and there is not enough writing about biology.
- Not all students achieve their minimum target grade.

97. Compared with national data, A-level results have been very high over the past few years. The 2001 results were also significantly above other subjects in the school, indicating good value added by the department. The 2002 results show a slight fall. The results show that the most able students make excellent progress achieving well above their target grades. However, a significant proportion did not reach their target grades, suggesting a need to devise means of helping these to achieve more highly, both at AS and at A-levels.
98. Overall standards seen in Years 12 and 13 are above average, which represents good achievement from Year 11. Students produced very good files, showing in-depth coverage of A-level material. They contain notes of a very high standard, supplemented by annotations. Biological drawings are good. Students have developed very good computer-aided presentations for parts of the course. Coursework is also of a very high standard, incorporating good background science, finesse and accuracy in practical techniques and appropriate use of statistics to analyse results. During lessons students demonstrated very good understanding of photosynthesis, its fundamental chemistry and the concept and importance of compensation point. Students were able to explain details of leaf structure and adaptations for sun and shade survival. One student gave a very clear account of the detail mechanism involved in the opening and closure of stomata.
99. Students in Year 12 also produced very good files, with a format similar to those from Year 13. Computer-aided presentations also help learning. Good quality coursework is also evident. In lessons students demonstrated very good recall of blood composition from GCSE work, the role and structure of blood cells, extending this to describe the quaternary structure of proteins related to haemoglobin. Students could relate the structure of blood cells and blood vessels to their function.
100. Students' attitudes to their work, to each other and to their teachers are very good. Students typically show good understanding of their work, present it well, are keen to learn and a pleasure to work with.
101. The quality of teaching and of learning is good. In the best teaching, for example in a lesson about the composition of blood, the good opening questions and answers established understanding. The teacher made a very clear presentation, with a micro-projector to show real blood cells. Good, progressive discussion helped students make progress. Supporting notes helped concentration. Examination questions were built into the lesson, allowing students to relate their learning to examination techniques. Where teaching showed room for improvement, there were over-long presentations by the teacher and a shortage of stimulus material. As a result, there was a lack of pace and challenge in the work. Although students have been encouraged to enter a national science essay writing competition, there is insufficient free writing to develop students' ideas, explain their understanding, consolidate thoughts and allow weaknesses in understanding to be identified.
102. Students are set regular homework; this is well marked with good feedback suggesting improvements. Each unit of work is tested, helpfully marked and related to A-level grades. These results, homework marks, GCSE grades and minimum target grades are carefully recorded in a database, allowing interim monitoring of progress and action to help support students who are falling behind. Currently coursework is well marked with good feedback to students and to the moderator to explain the reasoning behind marks awarded.
103. The department has taken steps to develop independence in students' learning through coursework, research into course topics, computer-aided presentations, unaccompanied visits to university departments and mock interviews to develop

confidence and skill in dealing with such situations independently. Freely available to students, the department has software on the network that allows students to work independently on topics set for research or homework but also for free access on topics any student wishes to target for further work.

104. The department is well led and managed. Considerable efforts have been made to address issues raised by the previous inspection report, facilitated by the line manager and progress has been very good. Well-developed schemes of work are in place. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects of particular units or lessons feature clearly in the scheme of work as do health and safety issues. Assessment data has been collected, reviewed and used to monitor progress. A wider range in styles of teaching has been developed now making very good use of ICT. There are good new texts and good use is made of past examination papers during lessons and for homework. Relevant practical work now forms a balanced part of the teaching and learning programme. Students' independent learning skills have been improved. Good display materials creating a positive image of biology in action have improved the learning environment. Relevant key words are also displayed. The impact of Sports College status is seen in closer links being set up with the physical education department since a significant number of students study in both areas and the human health and fitness option has been chosen as part of the A-level course.
105. The recently built laboratories are very good. However, they are insufficient for the rising number of students studying science. Current arrangements drain energy and impede teaching because teachers have to move equipment too frequently; this was a contributory factor to the good (but lower quality) of teaching and learning in classrooms compared with laboratories.

Chemistry

Overall, the provision for chemistry is **good**.

Strengths

- Students' attainment is above average.
- Relationships are good.
- There is a high commitment level to personal effectiveness and student success.
- A relaxed, friendly approach to teaching raises standards.

Areas for improvement

- The monitoring of teaching and of folders, to ensure consistency, is not frequent or rigorous enough.
- Some teaching is not tailored well enough to let all students fully understand concepts and procedures.
- Already improved, the range of teaching methods requires broadening.
- Not all students achieve minimum target grades.

106. Over the last few years, students have obtained A-level results that are very high compared with national averages. Students starting the subject in 1999 had very good GCSE grades. The results in 2001 show results that are just in line with other subjects in the school, indicating satisfactory value added by the department. The 2002 results show a fall on those in 2001. The results indicate that the most able students make good progress achieving above their target grades. However, a significant proportion of students did not reach their target grades suggesting a need to help them to achieve more highly. AS results for 2002 show two-thirds of students at least achieving their minimum target grade leaving one-third underperforming.

107. Current attainment is above average and students achieve satisfactorily. Students in Years 12 and 13 produced files showing appropriate coverage of A-level material, much of which is developed well and is supported by comprehensive duplicated notes provided by the teacher. It is of an above average standard and shows real understanding. Some explanations of basic principles and applications, on the other hand, were not well enough developed. However, work on extra nuclear electrons was very good and of a high standard. Extensive use is made of past examination papers to consolidate learning. Coursework is also of a very high standard. Practicals set by the examination board are marked appropriately using the mark schemes provided. Records are well maintained and students have sufficient opportunity to gain high scores.
108. During lessons Year 13 students showed good understanding of organic chemistry principles applied to amino acids. They could explain the electronic ideas behind charges on an amino acid molecule in different chemical environments and quickly grasped the concept of a Zwitterion; (one girl showed excellent transfer of skills, relating this term to her knowledge of German and explained this to the class). The group showed good understanding and application of technical terminology. During Year 12 lessons students demonstrated very good understanding of redox reactions; they showed skill in using redox equations and an extremely able student gave a 'word-perfect' description of the basis of oxidation numbers and how these are used to produce balanced redox equations.
109. Students' attitudes are consistently excellent. Students typically show good understanding of their work, present it well, are keen to learn and are a delight to work with.
110. The quality of teaching and learning is good. The best teaching, for example in a lesson about amino acids, had a relevant introduction that led successfully to a range of practical tests to relate theory to practice, develop practical skills and consolidate learning. The lesson then developed logically building up the ideas of charges on amino acid molecules leading to the concept of positive and negative charges on a single molecule. The appropriate use of interesting practical work, such as the extraction of essential oils from citrus fruit skins and detection of glucose in commercial soft drinks, stimulated students' interest. Weaker teaching failed to note the passage of time, so all intended learning was not achieved. Occasionally, review time at the end of lessons to consolidate key points does not take place. Sometimes assumptions are made that students understand more than they do. Opportunities to develop free writing skills are too few, so students are unable to develop ideas and explain understanding to consolidate thoughts, work with the notes provided by the department and enable weaknesses in understanding to be identified.
111. Homework is marked, but feedback informing students how to improve is not consistent. Test results, homework, GCSE grades and minimum target grades are carefully recorded in a database, allowing interim monitoring of progress and action to help support students who are falling behind. Considerable effort has been made to establish correct marking standards and procedures for coursework. The subject leader has, for instance, taken a post as moderator with the examination board to improve moderation principles and to raise standards.
112. The recently built laboratories are very good. They are, however, insufficient for the number of pupils studying science (and the number is rising). Teachers do not have their own teaching room; they have to move resources about and this drains energy and makes teaching less easy. The storage provision for equipment and chemicals is satisfactory, but is in need of improvement.

113. The department has taken steps to improve learning through coursework, research, unaccompanied visits to universities and mock interviews to develop confidence and skill. The students make good use of the department's suitable software for independent research, homework and revision.
114. The department is well managed. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good. Assessment data is collected, reviewed and used to monitor progress. Schemes of work are well developed and the accompanying practical resources file saves preparation time for both teachers and technicians. Health and safety points are also identified in the schemes. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects of particular units or lessons also feature clearly in the scheme of work. A better range of teaching methods has been developed, with relevant practical work forming part of the programme. The direct observation of teaching is underdeveloped. Considerable energy has been expended on managing long-term staff absence and helping a newly qualified teacher. Good display materials creating a positive image of chemistry in action have improved the learning environment, as has the display of relevant key words.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

The focus of the inspection was product design. Food technology was also sampled. A-level examinations are taken at a local girls' school. In 2002, a single student left the course with a high, B grade in the AS level examination. One very good lesson was observed where students' attainment was very high; their critical evaluations went well beyond the obvious. The teacher's pertinent questions helped the students' thinking, so they had a deep knowledge base on which to conduct their own investigations, which they did very well.

Product design

Overall, the quality of provision in product design is **excellent**.

Strengths

- Standards are very high.
- The very good teaching results in students' excellent achievement.
- The very good leadership and management give a clear direction to the subject; teamwork is strong.
- Relationships are very good and consequently pupils strive to do well.

Areas for improvement

- The inadequate time allocation for technical support results in an inefficient use of teachers' time. This was noted in the previous report.
- The number of computers is inadequate to allow their full use as an aid to learning, and computer-aided design and manufacture is not fully delivered.
- The Year 10 choices let pupils select a short course in design and technology, so limiting the pool from which to draw A-level students.

115. The product design course caters for 50 students following AS and A-level courses. The retention of students is very good.
116. The 2002 A-level results in product design were better than the average of other subjects in the school. Over time, the numbers taking the subject have been too small to make significant comparisons, but the results have improved since the previous inspection. The results reflect excellent achievement by students, because very few have taken the full GCSE course in resistant materials. Therefore, they have to cover

far more than most students who take other A-level subjects.

117. Through the observation of lessons and an analysis of work, attainment is very high. Students make substantial gains in knowledge and understanding with the focused support of the teachers, who provide them with extensive details of areas not covered in sufficient depth beforehand. Students all have an excellent understanding of the design processes, and undertake detailed relevant research. This was seen in their research on facilities for disabled persons, when users, managers of premises and laws relating to disabled persons were thoroughly investigated. The students' work always has a high standard of presentation, but without computer-aided design, because the relevant programme has only recently been acquired. Students' making skills are very good, and many different materials are used. Students solve difficult problems effectively, for example by making a jig to bend strip aluminium around the end of a windscreen.
118. Students make rapid progress in the acquisition of knowledge and skills, because of their determination to improve. This is because of the very good teaching that motivates them to succeed. They are very independent in their learning; this is seen in the tremendously wide variety of subjects chosen for research. Students state that this ownership of the project motivates them to achieve a very high standard.
119. The quality of teaching and learning is very good; it has improved since the previous inspection. Teachers waste no time, and do not expect students to waste theirs, which leads to students' total engagement in the lessons. Questioning is very good, for example students were asked what value clipart added, leading them to think and critically evaluate their work. Relationships are very good; this encourages students to explore ideas and learn independently. Individual tutorials encourage students to focus very effectively on improvements. The consistent emphasis is on putting the responsibility for learning on the students, which results in huge gains in knowledge, skills and understanding.
120. Leadership and management are excellent. There has been a very effective drive to improve standards and the subject's status. Teachers work as a close team, and students acknowledge that they benefit from that co-operation. The department does not have sufficient technical support and the use of teachers to do basic tasks is a very inefficient use of their time. This situation was noted in the previous report, and the changes to support have been minimal. The provision of ICT equipment is inadequate. Computer-aided design and manufacture is an element of the National Curriculum and students should be competent in their use. However, the design element had to be taught in Year 13 because of the lack of previous experience.

BUSINESS

The focus of the inspection was on economics at GCE AS and A-level. In economics, the 2001 A-level examination results were consistent with the national average but below that of the school. Results showed a significant improvement in 2002 and are consistent with the school average. Teaching is very good and students' achievement is very good.

Economics

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

Strengths

- Teaching is very good.
- Teachers analyse assessment data in great detail and make effective use of the results to help planning.

- Students make very good use of ICT for presentations in lessons.
- Departmental planning makes best use of the teachers' strengths.

Areas for improvement

- Students do not use computers regularly enough during economics lessons, for example to analyse economic data.

121. Standards are well above average. A-level results were average in 2001 but the number of students who obtained the higher A and B grades improved significantly in 2002, reaching the school average. However, when account is taken of students' GCSE grades the achievement of some should have been better. Current attainment, as seen in lessons and written work, in both Years 12 and 13, is well above average. Evidence in students' folders shows that the use of ICT for data analysis, particularly through the use of spreadsheets, is insufficiently developed to enable students to use information to the full.
122. Achievement is very good. One Year 12 group had an impressive understanding of inflation and economic management, and in a whole class question and answer session they were able to compile convincing and fluently expressed arguments for their conclusions. This work was then consolidated as students applied their understanding through effective work in pairs or small groups. Another Year 12 group was able to demonstrate an impressive understanding of transport economics in exceptionally well-researched and very effective presentations using computers. In a Year 13 lesson on development economics students demonstrated an impressive ability to read and interpret numerical and written information as well as an ability to work in groups to pool their research and draw appropriate conclusions; their achievement was very good. Moral, social and cultural issues arise in many aspects of the courses and students benefit from these within an informed and mature manner, while maintaining an economics perspective. Many students have the confidence and appropriate analytical skills to criticise the nature of some of the data compiled by a wide range of international organisations' publications on the websites of governments and non-governmental organisations. Male and female students achieve equally well in lessons although the number of female students who take economics is small and proportionately less than in the school as a whole.
123. The quality of teaching and of learning is very good. Teachers have an impressive subject knowledge, which is used to very good effect to provide and support highly stimulating activities. All lessons are very carefully planned and a variety of appropriate, thought-provoking resources provides information, develops skills and stimulates students' interest. Challenging activities often include groupwork and presentations by students. Lessons have a good pace that is maintained throughout, always ending with an appropriate and effective plenary session to reinforce learning. In a few lessons teachers talked too lengthily. Computer projection facilities in rooms used for teaching the subject are far from ideal and do not do justice to the level of work produced by students and staff. Assessment procedures are very thorough and work is marked diligently. Detailed diagnostic comments provide good guidance on written work. Good oral feedback is provided to students during practical activities and their fellows often evaluate presentations in a very mature and effective manner. Assessment is also used to inform teachers' and students' planning. Students know how well they are performing and what they need to do to improve.
124. Leadership and management of the department are very good. Teachers work effectively as a team and responsibilities are allocated well. Teachers bring their wide perspectives to the teaching of economics. Performance is analysed in great detail and this information has been used to implement strategies for improvement, which has enabled the subject to recover well, from a fall in A-level results in 2001. There

has been good improvement since the previous inspection and the department has the capacity to improve further.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

The focus of the inspection was on computing. Key skills ICT was also sampled. In Year 12 students were making very good progress in developing their ICT skills, building upon previous GCSE work. Many students have a good level of skills and knowledge with limited previous formal ICT experience. Attainment overall in lessons and in the key skills test is good.

Computing

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

Strengths

- Teaching in the GCE AS, A-level and ICT key skills course is very good.
- AS and A-level coursework is based upon very interesting and challenging scenarios and the quality is often very good.
- Good use is made of available ICT resources.
- The ICT department has good links with parents and the wider community.

Areas for improvement

- The accommodation in which ICT equipment is housed is often unsatisfactory.
- Students would benefit from using more up-to-date versions of some sixth-form software.

125. The latest A-level results have shown a good improvement over 2001, when they were similar to the national averages for both A/B and A/E grades. The latest results represent good achievement for the students involved, based upon previous examination performance. A very high percentage of students who took AS computing in 2002 attained the higher A/B grades and many of these students are now taking the A-level course. Female students continue to be under-represented on computing courses.
126. Students' work seen in lessons, in portfolios and from conversations, confirms continuing improvements in standards, which are now very high overall in both Years 12 and 13. Students achieve very well, particularly in the content and complexity of their coursework. Many A-level students make good use of their AS level assignments as a basis for work in Year 13; the work shows that students set themselves significant challenges in their choice of assignment. All the work helps outside organisations or businesses overcome real problems. Typical examples include the management of orders and bills in a restaurant; a registration system for a nursery school; a system for managing staff discount in a large retail clothing chain and a railway safety system, designed in collaboration with a train driver. Students collaborate very effectively and make impressive, well-illustrated and very articulate presentations. For example, an impressive 'PowerPoint' presentation on artificial intelligence was just one of a series in a Year 12 session. In a mixed Years 12 and 13 session some very mature and detailed peer assessment and discussions followed presentations on current coursework.
127. Students have genuine interest in, and enthusiasm for, the subject. There is a very strong desire to produce work of a very high standard. Learning is very good; students discuss their work in detail, support each other very well and work very effectively with teachers. Much work is done at home and transferred to school by e-mail. Resources meet demand, so students have very good access to ICT facilities in school.

128. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers have a very good command of the subject and provide very good support for individual students during practical lessons. Schemes of work are very thorough; lessons are planned in detail and learning objectives discussed with students. Appropriate targets are set and lessons have good pace throughout. Teacher-produced resources are good and students find on-screen resources very useful. Students use the Internet very effectively as a resource for learning. Thorough assessment enables students to plan and improve their performance. The department has good links with parents, some of whom volunteer to bring valuable business perspectives to students' ICT work.
129. Some of the 'modelling' and 'programming' software is out of date and computer rooms are poorly furnished. Many machines are on unsuitable and uncomfortable tables or desks, sometimes with all but the smallest students able to fit their knees under them. There are too few suitably-adjustable chairs, so seating is bad for users' posture. A number of rooms have computer projection facilities and these are used well but there are no 'interactive whiteboards' or similar devices in rooms used for sixth-form computing lessons, which is a weakness.
130. Leadership and management are good. There has been a good improvement since the previous inspection. Systems for recording students' performance are firmly in place; results are carefully analysed and used to inform planning. Teachers work very effectively as a team. For example, a newly-qualified teacher has been well supported. The department tries to interest more female students in computer-based courses and there are now three good role models in the department. Students enjoy lessons and feel confident that they can make progress commensurate with their abilities and aspirations.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

The focus of the inspection was physical education. No other subject is taught in this curriculum area.

Physical education

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

Strengths

- Students achieve very well and standards of attainment are consistently well above average.
- Very good teaching with high expectations promotes very good learning.
- Students have excellent attitudes to the subject. They appreciate the high quality of support they receive and relationships are excellent.
- Excellent subject leadership and highly effective teamwork ensure high quality provision in a very wide range of curricular and after-school activities.

Areas for improvement

- The changing rooms are too small for the size of some teaching groups and the range of activities offered by the department.
- The heating system in the theory classroom is inadequate.

131. The 2001 A-level results were well above the national averages, both for the proportion of students obtaining a pass grade and for the proportion of students obtaining the higher A or B grades. These results were above predictions based on students GCSE grades on starting the sixth form. A-level results have been consistently well above national averages since the previous inspection. The 2002 results were, overall, consistent with those obtained in 2001. Although there was a slight drop in the proportion of students gaining A or B grades, the increase in the number of students entered for the examination (about 25 per cent) made this insignificant. AS-level results are consistent with those obtained in the A-level examination. In both 2001 and 2002 all students obtained pass grades with about a third gaining higher grades. There are no significant differences in the standards attained by male and female students.
132. Inspection evidence shows that the students presently in Years 12 and 13 are achieving well and producing work that is well above the standards expected for the stage of the course. Students' practical performances show successful application in a very wide range of individual and team sports. Standards in a Year 12 trampoline lesson were outstandingly high. Almost all students were able to complete a ten-bounce sequence with a high level of gymnastic skill. Students are able to analyse performance effectively and identify key coaching points. This enabled them to work effectively in pairs, to evaluate and to refine their work; as a result, performance improved.
133. Students have a very good understanding of the theoretical foundations of the subject. They demonstrate a very good knowledge of technical language and, in physiology, Year 13 students display a high level of understanding of the cardio-vascular system and the effect of different levels of exercise on the body. Similarly in Year 12, students display a very good understanding of the skeletal and muscular systems. One of the real strengths of students' learning is the way in which it is reinforced by their learning in other subjects. They show a sophisticated appreciation and understanding of the connections between the subjects they are studying. They do this without prompting from the teacher. Students convey their views very effectively and are able to identify and evaluate contemporary issues in sport.

134. Students' attitudes and behaviour are excellent. They show a high level of enthusiasm for the subject. They grasp willingly new ideas and concepts. They are keen to express their views and show respect for the opinions of others. In discussion they express their points of view thoughtfully and without rancour. The subject makes an excellent contribution to students' personal development.
135. The quality of teaching and of learning is very good. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and use this effectively to challenge and extend students' learning. The skilful use of questioning helps to clarify students' understanding of technical terms and concepts, and the pace at which lessons are conducted helps to ensure that students maintain concentration throughout. As a result they make clear gains in understanding. In one excellent Year 13 physiology lesson, for example, the way in which the teacher responded to students' probing questions helped them to gain a deeper understanding of oxygen debt and oxygen deficiency. All lessons are conducted at a challenging pace with high expectations. This makes a significant contribution to students' learning. In most lessons a very good range of teaching methods ensures that students are actively engaged. However, in a few lessons teachers talk too much, with students passively engaged in note taking. As a result, learning is not reinforced by practical experiences.
136. Excellent subject leadership and management provide a clear direction for work in the department. This is exemplified in the gaining of specialist Sports College status in the last school year. Excellent teamwork and relationships underpin the work of this large and highly successful department. Its growing contribution to regional physical activities in, for example, primary schools is a strength. The department makes excellent use of the indoor and outdoor facilities. However, the changing rooms are too small for the size of some teaching groups and the range of activities that may be taking place at the same time. The department's teaching classroom is used well to provide a specialist learning environment. However, the heating system is inadequate and the room is very cold in the winter. There has been an excellent improvement since the previous inspection and, with a high commitment to success and continued improvement, the department is well placed to achieve even greater excellence.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

No subject was inspected in this curriculum area.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The focus of the inspection was art, drama and music, each is reported. No other subject is taught in this curriculum area.

Art

The overall quality of provision in art is **very good**.

Strengths

- Recent AS and A-level results have been well above average.
- Students draw and paint confidently and produce expressive and imaginative work.
- Students are very good learners; they undertake extensive research and development in their preparatory work.
- The quality of teaching is good overall, the individualised approach and good grounding in basic skills enables students confidently to pursue their own lines of enquiry.

Areas for improvement

- The number of boys embarked on the course is low.
- ICT is not used enough.
- The accommodation is inadequate.

137. Overall, standards are very high. As in the previous inspection, GCE A-level results have been well above average. These results are satisfactory in relation to students' above average prior attainment. Few boys, however, study art; though above average, their attainment is lower than the girls', as it is nationally. In 2001, girls achieved significantly higher standards in art than in their other subjects. Most students proceed from AS to A-level. Increasing numbers of students continue to study art at university.
138. Standards observed during the inspection are well above average and achievement is good for students of this level of prior attainment. Current standards are, therefore, slightly higher than previous years' examination results. This is attributable to the changing ability profile of the students. Students draw and paint confidently and produce expressive and imaginative work that shows a deep understanding of the work of a wide range of artists. They relate this knowledge and understanding meaningfully to their own work and produce in-depth preparatory studies, which, as in the previous inspection, continue to show high levels of technical skill and imagination. Life drawings are accurate and well observed and relate well to the work of such artists as Degas and Moore. Boys' research and development work is less wide ranging and their practical skills are less accomplished. Written work is well researched and points are generally well argued; highest attainment is characterised by a thematic rather than a comparative study of a single artist or art movement. Gifted and talented students make good progress, they engage with the intellectual, aesthetic and practical issues and produce very high quality work.
139. Teaching quality is good. The predominant approach is one of individual tuition. This is highly effective because the teachers are very knowledgeable and provide challenging and helpful guidance. Students' response and learning are very good. They are confident learners and are very positively motivated. Concentration is generally good, but lapses were observed where teaching let students talk as they worked. When called upon to discuss each other's work they make perceptive and encouraging comments. Many visit art galleries and museums to extend their knowledge and understanding. The life class observed during the inspection provided a more formal structure with short timed poses, with close individual attention and several very good plenaries to enable students to discuss their work and receive general guidance from

the teacher. The pace was rapid and good use was made of examples to guide the students.

140. Assessment criteria are shared with students at the outset of assignments so students know exactly what is expected and what they have to do to achieve specified levels of attainment. Students receive very good spoken feedback and are informed of what they need to do to improve. Written work is thoroughly marked. Appropriate records are kept.
141. Students have very positive views about the course. They accept that they need to devote a considerable amount of their own time to research and enjoy the opportunity to express their own ideas. They have considerable confidence in the teaching; one described it as 'fantastic'. They find the teachers very helpful and encourage them to make a personal response. Information about careers in art and design and help with preparing portfolios for college interviews is helpful. The accommodation, they feel, limits the scale of their work and they regret that they cannot leave their unfinished work out.
142. Art makes a very good contribution to students' personal development because they use the subject to explore social, moral and sometimes spiritual issues in some depth. Students have an in-depth understanding of a very broad sweep of art history and their cultural understanding is very good.
143. Leadership is good and management is effective; good progress has been maintained since the previous inspection. A strong commitment to high standards is widely evident. The course is tightly focused on the syllabus requirements and is enriched with the provision of life drawing. Planning is thorough and the course organisation is informal yet effective. Sufficient resources and materials are provided and good use is made of galleries, museums and increasingly of visiting practitioners. ICT provision however, is unsatisfactory. The ICT centre does not have specialist art software and the department has neither computers nor software for students' use.

Drama and theatre studies

Overall, the quality of provision in drama and theatre studies is **very good**.

Strengths

- Standards of attainment are high.
- The quality of teaching is very good.
- Students benefit from an extensive programme of after-school activities and theatre visits.

Areas for improvement

- Students' vocal skills are not well developed.

144. Results in the A-level examination in 2001, when most students obtained grade A or B, were very high. In 2002, results published show a slight decline from this level, but there has been an improving trend over recent years. Almost all students who undertook the course at AS level went on to complete their studies at A-level. There is no significant difference in the achievement of male and female students.
145. Standards observed in work seen during the inspection were well above average. Students' achievement is very good; their performance skills have improved since the previous inspection. They have developed a good understanding of stagecraft and recognise the importance of voice, pace, gesture and facial expression in order to communicate effectively to an audience. Students at all levels of ability achieve well.

Their approach to production is innovative and imaginative, and they are not afraid to take risks to communicate their interpretations. One group of students in Year 13, rehearsing an extract from the surrealist play 'Ubu Roi', incorporated carefully choreographed, grotesque postures and groupings, and explored extremes of vocal pitch and tone. Most students act with great sensitivity and perception, and accept honest, supportive criticism of each other's efforts. However, several have not yet developed the vocal skills or control of gestures which will adequately portray a range of powerful emotions. Students have good analytical skills and, as a result of their study of Stanislavski techniques, understand the impact of a range of dramatic devices in manipulating audience reactions. Well-documented research, undertaken by students in Year 13 for their devised drama unit, demonstrated clearly the development through which they had progressed, from the initial stimulus to the final presentation. Having decided on a theme of 'appearances being deceptive', students showed very good self-awareness, presenting exaggerated versions of their personal idiosyncrasies in a provocative manner in order to challenge the prejudice of the audience.

146. The quality of teaching and learning is very good, characterised by very good subject knowledge and high levels of expertise. Lessons are well planned, their purposes clear, and relationships are based firmly on trust and mutual respect. By skilful questioning and discreet intervention, students are encouraged to be perceptive, independent thinkers. As a result, students in Year 12 spoke of their recognition of the need to preserve respect and integrity in their portrayal of the plight of homeless people, conscious of their lack of experience in dealing with this and similar social problems. Students' work is thoroughly assessed; students know the criteria against which they are marked, and are well informed about their progress. They are given time within the lesson to assimilate constructive comments on their written work, have regular individual reviews, and clearly know how to improve.
147. Students are open-minded and imaginative, and are exhilarated by the challenge of exploring different theatrical genres. They are particularly appreciative of the many opportunities organised by the department for contact with the professional theatre through workshops and visits to professional productions both in the immediate area and further afield. All are involved in an extensive schedule of performances that take place in school each year, from experimental pieces to conventional musical shows. At Christmas the pantomime they had devised was played to audiences from local primary schools and senior citizens' groups as well as to the local community.
148. The subject is very well led and managed. Teaching is monitored for consistency of quality, assessment systems are detailed and rigorous, and the range of different opportunities the department provides greatly enriches students' experience and enhances their personal development. Although accommodation is generally satisfactory, there is no specialist provision for small groups, and, when more than two classes take place simultaneously, unsuitable classrooms separated from the drama department have to be used. Resources are adequate, but there is no computer technology for planning and controlling sound and lighting plots.
149. Since the previous inspection, improvement is good, and the department is well placed for further development.

Music

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

Strengths

- Results in A-level music have been well above the national average in recent

years.

- Teaching is very good.
- Students are highly committed to learning and to participation in a wide range of musical activities.
- The range and quality of enrichment activities in music is outstanding.

Areas for improvement

- Further develop teaching in music technology.

150. Examination results at A-level in 2001 were well above national averages; the average points score was one of the three highest-scoring subjects in the school. Results, which have been consistently high over recent years, were similar in 2002. Numbers taking the examination have increased, and there has been an upward trend in the numbers of students obtaining higher grades. There is no difference between the attainment of male and female students.
151. The attainment of students observed during the inspection was well above average. Students' achievement is good. Standards of performing are very high, frequently at a level well beyond the requirements of the examination. Interpretation is stylistically convincing and most students communicate effectively with an audience. Students enjoy composing and understand its derivative nature. They work creatively and independently, drawing on a breadth of knowledge about different styles of music; they explore conventional and experimental techniques, and write equally confidently for small ensembles or large orchestral scores. They are prepared to familiarise themselves with sources as diverse as Gregorian chant and serial techniques to create pieces with a strong intellectual challenge. Although students understand the importance of unity, some longer pieces, while rich in imaginative ideas, lack structural coherence. Very few students exploit the potential of music technology, although they use it competently as an editing tool. Knowledge of conventional four-part writing is satisfactory, but skills in improvisation and keyboard harmony are less well developed. Most students have a good general musical knowledge acquired both during lessons and from their own extensive involvement in a broad range of musical activities. Their research is thorough and their analytical skills are secure. Many students play more than one instrument, and all sing very well. A group of Year 13 students made a very competent attempt at singing, in four parts, unaccompanied, Bruckner's 'Locus Iste', as a 'warm-up' for a lesson on sacred choral music.
152. Students learn very well because of the very good quality of teaching they receive. Members of staff have high levels of expertise. They know students' strengths and weaknesses, and lessons contain very clear objectives and high levels of challenge, which enable students to develop as independent, creative thinkers in their approach to their music making. In one very good lesson, Year 12 students, using their own instruments, improvised on motifs from the 'Symphony of Psalms'. They then went on to demonstrate to the rest of the group a series of motifs from different sections, showing their knowledge and understanding of Stravinsky's use of technical devices such as bi-tonality, polyrhythms and false relations.
153. Students are well motivated, highly enthusiastic about their music making, and deeply appreciative of the commitment shown them by all members of the music department. The subject's groups are expanding in size, with male and female students in roughly equal numbers. All are actively involved in several of the many ensembles, which range from small instrumental and vocal groups to choirs, concert bands and orchestras. All take advantage of the extensive opportunities to attend professional concerts and musical shows.
154. The music department is led and managed very effectively. Students' work is

assessed both on a day-to-day basis and by regular marking against examination criteria. Students benefit from the quality of individual advice available; each one is well informed about their progress. The department's provision for gifted and talented students is very good, and all are well prepared for their interviews and auditions for entrance to university or college of music. Opportunities for students' personal development are outstanding. There is a regular programme of concerts and recitals of many different types of music from formal recitals to musical shows. At the time of the inspection rehearsals were under way for a production of 'Guys and Dolls', and the Symphonic Wind Band, which is well known for the quality of its performances, was preparing for an appearance at the Royal Festival Hall. The school's musicians travel widely and foreign tours take place on a biennial basis. The music department's accommodation is about to be replaced with a purpose-built suite, which will further enhance opportunities for its students.

155. Since the previous inspection, numbers of students taking music have increased, already high standards of attainment have risen further, and improvement is very good.

HUMANITIES

The focus of the inspection was on geography, history and politics. Each is reported. No other subject was sampled in this curriculum area.

Geography

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

Strengths

- Standards in examinations are excellent.
- Teaching is very good, and leads to a very high level of achievement.
- Leadership and management are excellent, bringing about similar standards.
- Relationships are very good, which results in a high level of motivation by pupils.

Areas for improvement

- None.

156. The provision in geography caters for 53 students who follow AS and A2 courses. Retention is very good.
157. The 2002 results were excellent; all students gained a higher, A or B grade, which represents excellent achievement. The results are better than the average of most other subjects and have improved since the time of the previous inspection.
158. Standards seen from observations of lessons and scrutiny of work are very high. Students show a very good understanding of both physical and human geography. They undertake extensive research, and use it effectively in presenting well-structured and concise essays, for example, in marine ecosystem case studies. They understand and present well-argued essays on the complexities of possible remedial solutions, such as those relating to rivers that flood. Students use statistical techniques appropriately, for example in their fieldwork projects. These projects cover a wide range of topics and reflect students' interests, so contributing to the very high achievement in this area. For example, students use a variety of resources such as official data and that collected during the fieldwork. Field sketches and photographs are appropriate and of high quality, often of a professional standard, and are very well annotated.

159. Students enjoy the lessons, and apply themselves conscientiously to the tasks, whether these are individual, paired or in groups. Notes are very well kept, and students take care with the presentation of their work. They are tremendously enthusiastic about the subject, and this is exemplified by those who have worked extremely hard to create the geography website. Working similarly at their fieldwork projects, they are highly motivated to attain high standards.
160. The quality of teaching is very good, and has improved since the time of the previous report. Teachers have excellent knowledge and enthusiasm for the subject, which motivate students to achieve. They also have tremendously high expectations, to which pupils respond. This was seen when they had to critically evaluate a report, and grade it. The task was challenging, and from this the students gained clear understanding. Questioning is very good, as it makes students think and therefore learn. For example, when studying poverty in Cairo and the response of the authority, they were asked 'Who is in control, who is managing it, is it working'? Time is used well, so that much is covered in lessons. All work is meticulously marked, and students are given clear judgements on how to improve. Lessons are very well planned with a variety of activities, which keeps students focused on the lesson.
161. Leadership and management of geography are excellent and these, and the commitment of the whole team, have resulted in the excellent standards. For example, one question that gained low marks in a recent examination, has been the focus of study in order to raise standards. The excellent management is exemplified by the excellent variety of field studies that students produce, which places tremendous demands on the organisation. It is recognised that when students choose their project, they have a total commitment and they therefore achieve well. The use of relevant and recent case studies has also contributed to the involvement of students in issues. Assessment is excellent, and students know how to improve. Very good improvements have been made since the previous inspection.

History

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

Strengths

- Examination results are above national averages.
- Teaching and learning are very good.
- The attitudes of the students towards the subject are excellent.

Areas for improvement

- There is limited use of ICT.
- Monitoring and evaluation of teaching are undeveloped.

162. Standards of work seen during the inspection are very good. Students participate very well in the lessons and their files are very full, with many showing evidence of effective independent work. Numbers taking the subject have increased and group sizes are healthy. The students are enthusiastic and very well taught.
163. The A-level examination performance in 2002 was very good, exceeding national expectations. It was also better than the national picture in that all candidates, both at AS and A-levels, achieved pass grades and there was a higher proportion obtaining Grades A and B than was recorded in the national statistics for 2001, the latest available. Results have improved steadily since the previous report in 1997.

164. The attitudes of the students towards the subject are excellent. In discussion, they said that they were glad they had chosen to study history and praised the teaching they received. They expressed very positive views of the wide variety of courses they study within the subject. They have excellent relationships with the teachers and can easily approach them if they have any problems.
165. The quality of the students' learning and achievement is very good. Because of the very good teaching they receive, they have an excellent grasp of historical skills and can handle source information very well. This was shown in a Year 12 lesson on the struggle for Black Civil Rights in the USA in the 1960s, where students analysed very well contrasts between the ideas of Martin Luther King and Malcolm X. Another Year 12 lesson on the role of women in Nazi Germany also highlighted the department's strong commitment to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development when the students discussed very effectively these elements in contrasting views of women in the 1930s.
166. The teachers are well qualified and experienced. They have excellent subject knowledge, which the students respect. Lessons are very well planned, with a good variety of activities and clear purposes, which are shared with the students. Methods are very good, with basic skills being very well taught. The teachers support the students with careful checking for understanding. Expectations are very high and students are continually challenged to think about issues and problems involved. This was particularly true in lessons seen in Year 13 on the Irish Question after 1800, where students had to consider how the problem developed and what solutions were possible. The teachers greatly encourage interest in history and the students respond very well. An example of this is the large number of students who go on a visit to Berlin as part of their historical studies.
167. The quality of leadership and management is very good. Although the head of department has only been in post since September, he has made a very positive impact. Teaching methods have been revised in order to raise the profile of history. There is very good communication within the department, which meets regularly, but monitoring and evaluation of teaching is informal and undeveloped, so that best practice is not effectively shared. A very good scheme of assessment of students' progress has been developed. Students know where they are with their work and what they must do to improve it. There is also a very effective scheme of self-assessment, where students mark their own work and compare their judgements with those of the teachers. Future recruitment for the subject is promising. There is a good range of modern textbooks and source material, but there is limited use of ICT, with only one computer in the department, which is inadequate for the number of students who would benefit from its use. There is good, but limited, student display work on the walls. Accommodation is only just satisfactory, with some larger groups being cramped in the classrooms.
168. Improvements since the previous inspection are very good, with better results and a wider variety of syllabus work. Numbers have increased and the department continues to raise standards.

Politics

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

Strengths

- Examination results are above school averages.
- Teaching and learning are very good.
- The attitudes of the students towards the subject are excellent.

Areas for improvement

- There is too little use of ICT to assist learning.

169. Standards of work seen during the inspection are well above average. Students participate very well in the lessons and they have very full files of work, containing very good evidence of independent research. Students are very keen to succeed.
170. The A-level examination performance in 2002 was very good, with candidates outperforming other school subjects. This was in line with previous results and the subject has had many years of academic success. No national subject comparisons are available.
171. The attitudes of the students towards the subject are excellent. In discussion, they were enthusiastic about their studies and were pleased with the teaching they received. They appreciate the wide variety of material used to support them. They have excellent relationships with the teachers, respecting their knowledge and expertise in the subject.
172. Students have an excellent grasp of political theory and of ideologies. A Year 12 group showed this in a lesson where, based on prepared research, they were able to conduct very effectively a 'Mock Cabinet'. Students competently took on the roles of 'government ministers' and were able to discuss current political problems, reaching realistic conclusions. In a Year 13 lesson, there was a very good debate about the issues involved with feminism, with students arguing very well the advantages or disadvantages of this ideology.
173. The direct result of very good teaching, the quality of the students' learning and achievement is also very good. The teachers are well qualified and experienced. They have excellent subject knowledge, which supports students' learning very well. Lessons are very well planned, with a good variety of activities and clear objectives, which are shared with the students. Methods are very good and basic skills are well taught. There is careful checking for understanding. Expectations are very high and students are continually challenged to think about the issues involved in the topics they study. This was shown in a Year 13 lesson, where small groups of students made class presentations on fascism. They effectively used differing methods, including computer presentations of information based on independent research. The teaching was well used to make them compare different aspects of fascism. The students respond well, particularly to study visits to hear leaders of political parties, to the teachers' great encouragement, that stimulates their interest. Such experiences help revision and personal development.
174. The quality of leadership and management is very good. There is a clear educational direction for the subject. Teaching methods have been reviewed in order to improve standards. There is good communication within the department. There is a very good scheme of assessment of students' work, so that they know how well they are progressing. There is also a very effective scheme of self-assessment, where students compare their own ideas of their performance with those of the teachers. There is a good range of textbooks and source material, but there is little use of ICT; limited access to school computers restricts students from carrying out more independent research. Accommodation is only just satisfactory, with teaching being carried out in scattered classrooms.
175. The previous inspection report did not comment on the teaching of politics, but the department is very good, with some excellent features. It is one of the strengths of the school.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus of the inspection was English and Spanish. French was also sampled. In French, examination results are well above average. One good lesson of French was observed. The students had very good listening skills and they read well. The teaching pace was very rapid, but there were too few opportunities for the students to develop their comprehension or to re-manipulate the language.

English

Overall, provision for English is **very good**.

Strengths

- Students attain high standards in English literature both in examinations and in work seen.
- They make very good progress throughout Years 12 and 13.
- The very good, stimulating teaching strongly develops students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness.
- Students become perceptive, reflective, enthusiastic and independent learners.
- Very good leadership and management enable the whole department of well-qualified and committed teachers to contribute effectively to sixth-form teaching.

Areas for improvement

- Students do not make notes that are well-enough organised and full enough to support subsequent writing and revision.
- In some lessons some students are not sufficiently active learners.
- Current students have found it difficult to make the leap from GCSE to AS level work.
- The teaching rooms are mostly too drab to be a stimulating environment for learning.

176. English literature at AS and A-level is a popular subject and numbers have increased since the previous inspection, though more girls than boys select the subject. High attainment has been sustained over the last five years with average points scores in 2000 and 2001 that were equivalent to a grade higher than the national average. The proportion of A and B grades has increased from half in 1998 to four-fifths in 2002, and the proportion of D and E grades has steadily decreased to none in 2002. The 2002 A-level results show good value added since those students took GCSE. Four-fifths of the current Year 13 students gained A and B grades in AS level in 2002. However, as in earlier years in the school, students do not do as well in English as in some of their other subjects.

177. In the work seen students are attaining high standards in the quality and relevance of their discussion and in the best of their written work. They are making very good progress. They enjoy rising to the challenge of thoroughly understanding demanding texts and of reflecting on other points of view in literary and dramatic criticism. They make connections with other literature and other branches of knowledge and are enthusiastic yet focused and articulate, for instance in discussing appropriate sets for 'The Duchess of Malfi', and issues of language, land ownership and cultural identity in Brian Friel's 'Translations'. Discussions in Year 13 on the synoptic paper are at their best when students make precise reference to the texts. Many essays explore texts thoughtfully with expert reference to the text and to other points of view. The best are sophisticated in expression without being laboured and students are taught to append to their coursework references and a bibliography, which includes Internet sites. In weaker essays in Year 12, though students show understanding, they tend to resort to narrating the plot, do not refer enough to the text or the author's purpose nor use

literary terms with assurance; however, in these aspects such students make good progress by Year 13. In both years students' notes are not full enough or well enough organised to be useful for subsequent writing and revision.

178. Students' excellent attitudes to learning, their willingness to rise to challenges and to lead presentations and seminars, their very good relationships with their teachers and with each other and their readiness to ask if they do not understand are major factors in their achievement. They keep up their personal reading and find that by Year 13 they can grasp difficult texts on their own.
179. Another major factor in students' achievement is the very good teaching, which has improved since the previous inspection. Teachers now generally use a seminar style of teaching where either the teacher or students lead analysis of the text and discussion. This worked very well in a Year 12 class where a student pleasantly and perceptively led on a chapter of 'Frankenstein', and where she and the teacher invited further thoughts on themes of good and evil, self blindness, revenge, and responsibility. Teachers also encourage students to be creative, as in a Year 13 class, which had grappled with hearing the effects of poetic metre and then prepared lively choral readings of 'Prayer before Birth' by Louis MacNeice. A Year 12 class had written sensitive and credible alternative endings to 'Translations'. This is a predominantly literary course, so students particularly enjoy chances to write creatively, as they did in earlier years in the school. Teachers' very good knowledge of literature stimulates students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and contributes to marking that is both appreciative and helpful, often taking the form of a dialogue with the writer. Although most lessons include a variety of tasks, there are a few occasions where the nature of the lesson allows some students to be too passive for too long.
180. The leadership and management are very good. The well-qualified English team all share in sixth form teaching, standards are steadily rising, and improvement since the previous inspection has been very good. The team have used assessment very well to identify that pupils would benefit from more challenge in Years 7 to 11, and consequently find the leap from GCSE to sixth-form work less daunting. Not matching the other stimulating resources, English rooms are drab.

Spanish

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

Strengths

- A-level standards are excellent.
- Attainment in work seen is very good, particularly in Year 12. The quality of much of the students' spoken Spanish is outstanding.
- Teachers' subject knowledge and linguistic proficiency is excellent.
- Teaching and learning are very good, at times excellent.
- Students are intellectually mature and display highly commendable attitudes to their work.

Areas for improvement

- Approaches to the marking of students' work differs across the department.
- In some case, the frequency of opportunity for students to engage in speaking activities, such as paired work, is insufficient.

181. Over the last three years, all students entered for A-level Spanish have passed. At the time of the previous inspection, 30 per cent of students entered for A-level Spanish obtained grades A or B. In 2002, all six candidates achieved these top two grades; excellent results and progress since then.
182. Evidence from work seen in lessons and in students' files during the inspection shows that standards of attainment and levels of achievement are high. Male and female students do equally well. Listening skills, to both live voice and taped material, are very well developed. Students rarely hear anything other than Spanish; consequently, they demonstrate assured comprehension of full-speed Spanish and respond appropriately. The standard of students' own spoken Spanish is remarkable. This applies not only to the quality of what they say but also to their accurate pronunciation, their Spanish accent and even authentic intonation. This is extremely rare. Year 12 students are particularly impressive in this respect; their achievement is outstanding. Reading is highly competent, be it of course textbooks or of authentic materials downloaded from Spanish sites on the Internet. Written work is solidly good. Students write intelligently on a range of topics and in a variety of styles. Mature sentence construction, with frequent use of qualifying subordinate clauses, is a strong feature. Students respond to work that challenges their imagination or personal perceptions with writing that is characterised by cogent reasoning and impressively profound insight and sensitivity.
183. Teaching and learning are very good. There is a very close correlation between the quality of teaching and the effectiveness of learning. Teachers' linguistic proficiency is first rate and they use the foreign language to the full. They have high expectations of their students with whom they enjoy good relationships. Lessons, the pace of which is rigorous, are very well planned so that they maximise students' grasp of new material and their ability to re-use it. A major feature of the best lessons is that the teacher frequently provides appropriately focused and challenging opportunities, for example via paired work, for students to speak and re-manipulate new language. Such learning is assured and language produced is of the highest quality. This excellent practice is an area for further development across the rest of the department. Homework is marked regularly and corrected appropriately, but there is no departmental consistency in the application of grades and marks and in the use of formative comments, as a guide to improvement.

184. Students' learning and progress are very good. Students are mature, intellectually and socially; their approach to work is exemplary, their attitudes positive both in respect of what they expect of themselves and of what their teachers provide for them.
185. The relatively new head of department provides good leadership and has the vision and the ability to further develop the work of the department with a sensibly measured programme. There is a very good faculty handbook, but the sixth-form Spanish schemes of work are a little thin on detail.