

INSPECTION REPORT

THE KING'S SCHOOL

Ottery St Mary

LEA area: Devon

Unique reference number: 113500

Headteacher: Mr Roger Fetherston

Reporting inspector: Mr Martin Beale
19385

Dates of inspection: 27 – 30 January 2003

Inspection number: 249572

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Community

Age range of pupils: 11 to 18

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Cadhay Lane
Ottery St Mary
Devon

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Appropriate authority: The governing body

Name of chair of governors: Mr R Mitchell

Date of previous inspection: 20th January 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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11564	Jean McKay	Lay inspector		
4455	Robert Joslin	Team inspector	English	
12607	Simon Relf	Team inspector	Mathematics	
23268	Kevin Corrigan	Team inspector	Physical education	How high are standards? How well does the school care for its students? How well does the school work in partnership with parents and students? How well is the school led and managed?
4126	Clive Parsons	Team inspector	Physics	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to students?
18261	Tony Hill	Team inspector	Art	
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

This is an average sized mixed comprehensive school for pupils aged from 11 to 18. There are 794 pupils in the main school and a further 172 in the sixth form. Applications considerably outnumber places available each year. There are very few pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds and no pupils are at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils identified with special educational needs, including statements, is below average. The main reasons for higher levels of need are moderate learning and emotional/behavioural difficulties. The number of pupils entitled to a free school meal is also below average. A local grammar school selects about 10 percent of the pupils who might otherwise attend The King's School. In spite of this, attainment on entry is above average and is well above average in the current Year 7. The school achieved specialist school status as a Sports College in September 2002.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

The King's is a very good school with several excellent features. It plays a pivotal role in the community which it serves well, and in doing so provides very good value for money. Governors, staff, parents and pupils are strongly committed to the success of the school. Strong leadership has been instrumental in generating a culture in which all pupils know that they can succeed and that staff will help them to do so. Teaching is very good, enabling the pupils to achieve well above average test and examination results. Most pupils substantially exceed the standards that might have been expected when they entered the school. The pupils work hard, behave well and establish positive and productive relationships, all of which make for a very happy and harmonious school in which learning can thrive.

What the school does well

- Pupils make very good progress and achieve high standards particularly in tests and examinations.
- Pupils learn new skills and ideas rapidly because much teaching is well planned, lively, interesting, stimulating and generates confidence in the pupils to try out ideas and engage in discussion.
- Strong and very effective management coupled with astute leadership and a clear vision for the school's future are generating a culture in which achievement and the pursuit of high standards are goals that are shared by all.
- Pupils want to do well and they take advantage of the wide-ranging learning opportunities and enrichment activities that staff provide.
- The needs of pupils are met well because staff keep careful track of their academic and personal development and provide individually tailored support and guidance.

What could be improved

- The provision for information and communication technology (ICT) has improved considerably, but as the school recognises, skills are not developed and used sufficiently in other subjects.
- The benefits of the more advanced teaching skills adopted by several staff are not available in all subjects. The school is aware of this and is seeking to extend them to all subjects.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Improvement since the last inspection in 1997 is very good. The features requiring attention at the time have been tackled successfully and improving teaching and learning has been a continual focus for staff. Test and examination results have risen considerably faster than in other schools. Astute leadership and the willingness of staff to reflect on and refine the education that they provide place the school in a very strong position to improve further.

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 points 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	n/a	

Key

well above average A

above average B

average C

below average D

well below average E

The school is amongst the best in the country for the value it adds to the standards achieved by its pupils by GCSE. Not only have test and examination results improved more rapidly than in other schools, but they also represent good and often very good progress for individuals. Pupils with special educational needs and others who enter the school with below average attainment achieve particularly good results, considerably exceeding the standards that might have been expected. Girls achieve better results than boys although the gap is smaller than in other schools, and the boys' results have improved more rapidly at GCSE than the girls'. Female students have also achieved higher A Level results.

Test results for Year 9 pupils were well above average in English and mathematics in 2002 and above average in science. This difference was because fewer pupils exceeded the standard expected for their age in science than in English and mathematics. The proportion of pupils achieving at least five A*-C grades at GCSE was well above average in 2002 and all pupils achieved five or more A*-G grades. The proportion of the highest A* and A grades was particularly impressive in art, science, English language, geography and religious education. The school's targets were exceeded by a considerable margin and have been increased for 2003. A Level results were well above average in 2001 (the most recent year for which comparative data is available). Art and geography have been consistently amongst the best A Level results in the school and are regularly above average or higher. The pass rate was broadly unchanged in 2002 from 2001.

Current standards throughout the school reflect these very good test and examination results. Most pupils are making good, and in many cases, very good progress and are achieving higher standards than might be expected from their attainment on entry. This is the case for pupils across the ability range from those with special educational needs to the highest-attainers and those identified as gifted and talented. There is no significant difference between the progress of boys and girls.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	The pupils value highly all that the school has to offer them. The conscientious approach shown to their studies and the high level of participation in extra-curricular activities contribute substantially to the high standards achieved. Most have a strong desire to succeed.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	High standards of behaviour are evident throughout the school, enabling pupils to feel secure and generating a calm and harmonious environment.
Personal development and relationships	This is a happy school in which strong relationships make a powerful contribution. The pupils show great respect for their teachers because they recognise that they have genuine care and concern for their progress. The pupils increasingly take responsibility for their learning and undertake duties conscientiously.

Attendance	Attendance is above average and improving. There is little unauthorised absence. Pupils are punctual to school and to lessons.
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The attitudes, behaviour and relationships throughout the school are fundamental to the progress that the pupils make both academically and personally.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

Learning is seen very much as a collaborative venture for teachers and pupils. There is much high quality teaching from many very able teachers who recognise that pupils learn in different ways and adopt a wide variety of methods to enable learning to flourish. Teaching in these lessons is energetic and questioning used well to challenge the pupils' thinking. Most pupils respond well to the high expectations of staff and the time and support that their teachers are willing to give to them. Where lessons lack these qualities they tend to be dull with pupils having little involvement, partly because the teacher does not have a clearly expressed idea of what they want the pupils to learn. In spite of this, the pupils continue to try hard even though they are not always sure why they are involved in a particular activity. Some marking of work such as in English is exemplary and gives to pupils a very good picture of how they can improve their work and achieve higher standards. Most pupils' subsequent work shows that they have understood and taken the advice seriously. Literacy is promoted well both in English and in many other subjects. Whilst number skills are developed effectively in mathematics, they are not consistently given due attention elsewhere. The support for pupils with special educational needs is particularly effective without detracting from providing challenge for the more able. Of the core subjects, teaching is more effective in English and science than in mathematics where there is insufficient learning through investigation. Access to computers is limited and pupils use their ICT skills to support learning in relatively few subjects.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The broad and balanced curriculum is enriched substantially by a wide range of very well attended extra-curricular activities, trips and visits, all of which demonstrate further the commitment of staff to the pupils.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	These pupils benefit considerably from well-targeted support and intervention based upon a thorough assessment of their needs and careful tracking of their progress.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	The strong school ethos is instrumental in the very good promotion of the pupils' social, moral and cultural development. Spiritual development is good, with compulsory religious education playing an increasingly significant part.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Staff provide a high level of support, care and guidance for the pupils. Procedures to ensure their health, safety and well-being are thorough.

All National Curriculum requirements are met, although the application and development of ICT skills in subjects needs to be extended. The school has recognised that there is scope for citizenship and the

personal, social and health education programme to play an even greater part in contributing to and extending the pupils' personal development. Staff successfully promote high standards of attendance and behaviour. The personal guidance for pupils, based on a thorough knowledge of their academic and personal development, contributes significantly to the high standards that they achieve. Reports to parents give a clear picture of the pupils' standards and progress but would benefit from sharper targets that relate more specifically to each subject.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher has a clear vision of education that he puts over very successfully to all associated with the school. He has a strong presence around the school and is very well respected by pupils, parents and staff. He is very capably supported in putting thorough and rigorous management procedures into operation by an experienced deputy head and a strong team of senior managers.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors take their responsibilities very seriously and are very committed to the success of the school and the pupils. They have a clear picture of the school's strengths, hold staff accountable and share the headteacher's vision for its future.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Thorough and rigorous analysis of test and examination data and the review of the work of staff have been used to identify and take action over the aspects, particularly of teaching, that could be improved.
The strategic use of resources	Financial planning and control are thorough and resources are used well to meet the school's main educational priorities.

Staff work well as a team, sharing a strong commitment to the pupils and the school. The enthusiasm for their work and the willingness shown to reflect on their practice and seek improvements are tangible. This has been instrumental in helping to develop the strong ethos that pervades the school. The principles of best value are applied most effectively to inform financial decisions such as the successful application for Sports College status.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children like school • Teaching is good and their children are making good progress • They find staff approachable • Staff have high expectations of the pupils' work and behaviour • The school is well led and managed • The school is helping their children to become mature and responsible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents expressed no major concerns either at the pre-inspection meeting or through the questionnaire

The inspection team judges that the very high opinions that parents have of the school and the education that it provides are fully justified.

ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM

THE KING'S SCHOOL

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

There are 172 students in the sixth form, a figure that has risen in the last few years. Nearly three-quarters of the pupils in Year 11 continue into the sixth form. Their attainment overall on entry is above average. Most students follow two-year programmes leading to A Level, but with a small minority studying vocational courses at intermediate and advanced levels. The school offers 24 sixth form courses, three through collaboration with other providers and three courses through video-conferencing.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The focus placed upon improving the sixth form since the last inspection through strengthened leadership and management has paid dividends. This is a very effective and much improved sixth form. Most students exceed the standards expected of them based upon their GCSE results because much of the teaching is of a high quality. A Level results have risen and were well above average in 2001, with comparable results in 2002. The courses provided meet the needs and aspirations of students and build well upon their earlier experiences. This is achieved within the budget specifically provided for the sixth form and is therefore highly cost-effective.

Strengths

- There have been significant improvements in academic standards since the last inspection.
- The stimulating and well-planned teaching matches the needs and aspirations of students and as a consequence they make very good progress in lessons and over time.
- The very good leadership and management of the sixth form have been instrumental in the considerable improvements that have been made since the last inspection.
- The broad and balanced curriculum and the wide range of extra-curricular activities provide the students with enriching opportunities to develop fully both their academic and social potential.
- Students have a positive attitude to their learning, enjoy being in the sixth form and are appreciative of the caring attitude of subject teachers and tutors.

What could be improved

- The provision, use of and access to ICT as a resource to assist learning is under-developed.
- The accommodation for private study, social activities and assemblies for sixth formers is unsatisfactory.
- A few students have reported that they do not know precisely how well they are doing and exactly what they need to do to improve.

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

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

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

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
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Mathematics	Satisfactory. Teaching is effective and supports the students' learning well. Whilst standards have been above average in recent years, the 2002 results fell.
Biology	Very good. The very good teaching and range of enrichment activities is leading to a rise in the popularity of the subject. Standards are above average and are rising steadily.
Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Physics	Satisfactory. Teaching is good, with very good features including the effective use of ICT. Teachers have a good understanding of syllabus requirements and the standards expected. They use this well to challenge the students; however, this has yet to be reflected in examination results.
Physical education	Very good. The very good teaching and extra-curricular activities provide opportunities for all students to achieve well in their examination courses and generally in developing their sporting skills to the best of their ability.
Art	Very good. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers have an excellent grasp of the subject and promote high standards within a very broad curriculum. The opportunities for students to research and develop are a particular strength and lead to the very wide range of excellent work on display in art rooms and around the school.
Media studies	Good. Standards are above the national average and pupils achieve well. Teaching is always satisfactory or better and the students' learning is well supported by lessons that have clear objectives and where they make good progress.
Geography	Very good. A Level results were excellent in 2001 but fell slightly in 2002, although these still represented good progress from GCSE. The staff successfully apply their very good subject knowledge. Teaching and learning are very good and are supported by very positive student attitudes.
Religious education	Good. The new course has been successfully established and is developing into a popular choice. The good teaching is enabling the students to make good progress and achieve average standards.
English	Very good. Standards are above average. Very good teaching informed by excellent subject knowledge ensures that the students are motivated, enjoy the subject and learn effectively.

The students make good progress overall, building on previously acquired knowledge and understanding well and in most cases exceeding predictions from their performance at GCSE. In addition to the subjects inspected in detail some lessons were observed in chemistry, business studies, law, and health and social care. Standards were particularly high in business studies and law. Key skills ICT was also observed, where most students were making at least satisfactory progress.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Students are very appreciative of the support and guidance offered to them, especially the open access to staff when they have personal or subject difficulties. The head of sixth form and tutors show a caring attitude to the students and have in place effective systems for identifying students who may not be achieving their full potential.

Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Leadership and management of the sixth form are very good, with the recently appointed sixth form manager providing the necessary strategic direction to continue to raise achievement.
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STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The high quality and challenging teaching which brings out the best in them.• Help and encouragement to study and research independently.• Access to teachers• Help from the school to settle into the sixth form• The thorough assessment of their work.• The range and information about courses in the sixth form	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Not always being informed about progress• Sometimes views of sixth-formers are not responded to or they are not always treated as young adults• Some students feel that more activities could be offered outside the main curriculum

Inspection evidence supports the students' favourable views of the sixth form. There is some foundation for the only response in the sixth form questionnaire highlighting significant dissatisfaction, that concerning information about progress, and this was highlighted by the frequent use of very bland and unhelpful targets in student reports.

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

Pupils make very good progress and achieve high standards particularly in tests and examinations

1. Staff, parents and pupils are justifiably proud of the high standards that are achieved at the school. Parents cite this as a major reason why they choose the school for their children. Standards are high and rising at a more rapid rate than nationally. Test and examination results are amongst the best, and in some cases are the best, in the county. Nationally released data places the school in the top 80 maintained secondary schools for the value that it added to the pupils' academic achievement in 2002. The high achievement of individual pupils has been recognised by local and national awards such as for outstanding performance at GCSE. Perhaps the greatest success of the school is the achievement of pupils with special educational needs and the pupils who enter the school not having reached the standard expected for their age in their primary schools. Many do very well and achieve much higher results than could possibly have been expected of them, particularly in gaining A*-C grades at GCSE.
2. Year 9 test results have risen over the last five years. English results continued to rise in 2002, although mathematics and science fell, science more sharply than mathematics. Even so, results were well above average in English and mathematics and above average in science. The main reason for this difference was that the proportion of pupils exceeding standards expected for their age was higher in English and mathematics than in science. These overall results represented above average progress for the pupils, particularly for those entering the school with low Key Stage 2 test results. Progress was slower for higher-attaining pupils in science. Variations over the last five years between boys and girls have followed no significant pattern.
3. The rise in GCSE results from 54% in 2001 to 77% in 2002 of pupils achieving five or more grades A*-C is considerably above the nationally improving trend. Although girls achieve better results than boys, the gap has narrowed. Boys' results have risen more rapidly than girls' results over the last few years. By any measure the school is doing well at GCSE. Results in 2002 were well above both the national average and results in similar schools. They also represented very good progress and much more than might have been expected from the pupils' earlier Year 9 test results. All pupils achieved at least five grades A*-G, and some of the most impressive progress was made by pupils who entered the school with special educational needs or low attainment.
4. The proportion of A* and A grades was higher than national figures. Particularly noteworthy at this level in 2002 were results in English language, double award science, art, design and technology, geography and religious education. The introduction of religious education as a core subject in Years 10 and 11 since the last inspection has generated considerable interest, and significant numbers choose to continue their studies in the sixth form. Results were above average in all subjects in 2002 and significantly so in English, mathematics, science, design and technology, French, German and geography. Pupils achieved their best results in double science and geography when compared to the results in their other subjects.
5. Staff recognise that these test and examination results are a hard act to follow. They are not complacent and are striving continually to improve their teaching and the quality of the education that they provide. Year groups do vary and the school may find it difficult to maintain these high standards consistently. That said, the pupils currently in Years 7 and 8 are particularly capable and are achieving high standards in their work. Most pupils continue to exceed the standards by Year 9 predicted by their attainment on entry to the school and at GCSE based on their Key Stage 3 test results. Very few pupils fail to achieve standards expected of them. Evidence continues to show that pupils with special educational needs are catered for well and make very good progress in lessons and towards their individual targets.

Pupils learn new skills and ideas rapidly because much teaching is well planned, lively, interesting, stimulating and generates confidence in the pupils to try out ideas and engage in discussion

6. Many teachers are highly expert and have adopted quite sophisticated methods in their classrooms. The inventive use of 'accelerated learning' techniques and the development of the pupils' thinking skills are two of the most recently introduced methods that are achieving much success in some classes. Highly skilled questioning is used by teachers in many of the best lessons to gain and retain the pupils' attention and to extend their understanding of key knowledge, skills and ideas. Questions are carefully targeted to take account of the different levels of attainment in each class. They are used to challenge the more able to think for themselves, and to give confidence to those who show slower understanding that they can still succeed. Teachers rarely expect short answers, often using supplementary questions to probe the pupils' understanding, to bring out important points and to consolidate what has been learnt. In some cases teachers use their questioning to establish what has been understood and where any gaps remain. The teacher used these techniques to very good effect ensuring that the pupils were clear about the objectives of a religious education lesson on the disciples. It was also made clear that this teacher had high expectations of listening and behaviour. In another example, crisp questioning engaged and challenged the pupils in a Year 10 English lesson. Follow-up questions were used well to gain a thorough assessment of how much had been understood. Praise was used very appropriately.
7. Much teaching is lively and interesting from teachers who have a good command of their subjects. This enthuses the pupils who respond to the high expectations and challenge of these lessons by working hard and supporting each other well. Learning moves forward at considerable pace. New skills develop rapidly in these lessons as in the vibrant, lively, engaging and expert teaching from an inspirational teacher of a Year 11 German class preparing for GCSE oral and learning new vocabulary. This generated rapid learning of new vocabulary and consolidation of skills. Good pace to learning was also established in a Year 7 English lesson on ghost stories through the teacher's brisk style, good questioning and the well-managed class. The lesson and the pupils' learning also benefited from the use of a wide variety of appropriate methods.
8. One particular feature of the organisation of the school is that most lessons are taught to mixed-ability classes. This requires carefully planned lessons so that the needs of all are met. This is generally achieved well, because most teachers have established a secure environment for learning. They also use their enthusiasm for their subjects to involve all of the pupils. It is not necessarily because the teachers provide materials and tasks at different levels but because their drive and enthusiasm moves all pupils forward at a good rate. The very good relationships between the pupils and their teachers as well as between the pupils themselves promote a very good atmosphere for learning. This was evident, for example, in a Year 9 music lesson where the teacher used her personality to challenge and involve all pupils, controlling their enthusiasm well. Lower-attaining pupils and those with special educational needs achieve particularly well through this style of teaching and make rapid progress. Some teaching for pupils who have not reached the standard expected for their age takes place very effectively in small withdrawal groups. A very well-managed, thoughtful and challenging lesson for three Year 7 pupils from a highly expert teacher generated good pace to learning in a literacy catch-up lesson as they identified the important features of text that they needed to support their answers to particular questions.
9. The most significant reason why the pupils learn so well and make such good progress is because their teachers have high expectations of them, both in terms of the academic standards that they can achieve and their behaviour in lessons. Learning is rarely hampered by teachers having to remind the pupils about classroom rules. The pupils understand that their teachers expect much of them and respond with much effort and concentration. They rise well to the challenge of their lessons, whatever their ability. One outstanding example of learning being significantly extended was seen in a Year 11 lesson on *Macbeth*, because of the high expectations and challenge within the tasks set coupled with good questioning and thoughtful responses.

10. The headteacher saw improving teaching as a crucial matter when he was appointed. The evidence from the inspection is that he has achieved much success in this direction.

Strong and very effective management coupled with astute leadership and a clear vision for the school's future are generating a culture in which achievement and the pursuit of high standards are goals that are shared by all

11. Parents speak warmly of the atmosphere in the school and are very much in support of the values that the headteacher promotes at every possible opportunity and to a variety of audiences. While hard work and striving for excellence are at the centre of this message, parents and pupils also report that constructive and productive relationships are at the heart of what the school stands for. The school seeks and successfully achieves its aim of being educationally inclusive. Much of this comes down to strong staff teamwork, a willingness of teachers to reflect on their practice and to try to improve and a considerable commitment to the pupils. Very many pupils, from the youngest to those who have been at the school for several years, recognise this commitment by staff to them as individuals. Staff clearly appear to enjoy their work. This helps to generate a strong sense of a community in which all are pulling in the same direction, and which is happy and harmonious but with high expectations of what can be achieved. The culture is also one in which success and hard work are valued, celebrated and are promoted as a goal for all to achieve.
12. Much of this can be attributed to the clear-sighted and strong leadership of the headteacher. He has built well on the school's strengths and tackled head-on any complacency that has surfaced. He was not satisfied on his arrival almost six years ago that pupils were doing as well as they should have been. Challenging some attitudes and focusing on improving teaching and the quality of education have had their rewards in rapidly rising standards. He has a clear vision for the school based on the principle that all pupils can be successful and that barriers to learning are more emotional than down purely to capability. Hence the promotion of a secure environment in which the needs of all pupils are tackled, their progress monitored and support provided at crucial moments. Much work has also been put into ensuring that staff have the highest expectations of the pupils and that the most able are challenged and extended in lessons and through other activities. The well-being of the pupils is also of major concern for staff. One particularly bold action, which represents the school's view of how it wishes to promote a healthy life-style, is the banning of chips from the school canteen. This strong statement has actually resulted in an increase in the number of pupils eating school lunches rather than the decline that some feared.
13. The governing body is equally well led. It plays a pivotal role in helping to establish this strong culture and in supporting its promotion. Many governors have been associated with the school for several years. They give generously of their time and are very committed to the success of the school. Governors are very closely involved in shaping its strategic direction and invest much time and effort to gaining an understanding of the school and extending their expertise. The processes through which governors maintain oversight of the school's work are thorough and enable them to identify where the school's strengths lie and the challenges facing it.
14. Considerable time and effort have been put into recognising where the best practice is to be found in the school and using this as a model to improve the teaching of others. The work of staff is carefully monitored and steps taken where necessary to secure improvements. A thorough analysis of data is used to evaluate where the school is successful and to highlight areas of concern. A culture has developed where staff are keen to reflect on and review their practice and the quality of the education that they provide, and then to take responsibility for becoming better at what they do. The processes of review, monitoring and evaluation are used as a secure platform on which to base planning for the school's improvement.
15. Much work has gone into sharpening planning. The school has become increasingly skilled at reviewing its work, evaluating the success of action taken and identifying the next set of priorities. The school development plan is carefully constructed, and identified educational priorities are supported by careful financial management. This process in itself is very thorough. The priorities

identified are appropriate for the school's current position and represent the headteacher's efforts to keep high performance as a continuing goal for staff and the school. Resources are allocated carefully to meet the major educational priorities and there is a clear strategic view for the way forward over the next few years. Governors and senior management consult appropriately over major financial decisions such as the application for Sports College status. The targets that are set for the school are realistic but could now be more challenging bearing in mind its recent successes. Spending patterns are compared where possible with similar schools and value for money is rigorously sought. Very good use is made of resources. Prudent budgeting has directed the below average income that the school receives per pupil to very good effect so that it provides very good value for money.

16. It is because of the high quality of leadership and management and the strong, committed and expert staff team that standards have risen rapidly and the school has made very good progress since the last inspection. It is also because of these factors that the school is in a very strong position to build on this success and to use its recently awarded specialist school status for the considerable benefit of the pupils and the community that it serves.

Pupils want to do well and they take advantage of the wide-ranging learning opportunities and enrichment activities that staff provide

17. The pupils show their strong commitment to the school and to their studies in a wide variety of ways. They attend regularly, behave well, respond positively in lessons, complete assignments and participate in large numbers in the wide range of additional activities that the school provides. They also stay on in large numbers into the sixth form. Parents report that their children like school. Virtually without exception the pupils say that they like school and feel safe, happy and secure there. They speak with pride about their school and have much respect for their teachers, recognising and valuing all that they do for them. This is in part because of the strong, friendly and very productive relationships that exist throughout the school. Staff make clear to pupils that they also enjoy being at school and give very freely of their time, whether it be to help pupils with work or to run extra-curricular activities, visits and residential trips. The pupils recognise and respect that staff value each of them and try hard to help them to be successful in whatever field their interests and aptitudes lie.
18. High standards of behaviour both in lessons and at other times are the accepted norm. Staff manage the pupils well, and occasions of unruly behaviour are rare. The number of fixed-term exclusions is low for a school of this size and there have been no permanent exclusions in the last four years. Teachers have to spend little time in lessons reminding the pupils of how they are expected to respond. Consequently, there is little disturbance to the flow of lessons and to the pace of learning. Lessons start punctually and the pupils make maximum use of the time available by concentrating and working hard. Many readily respond to their teachers' questioning and are not afraid to ask in front of others if they do not understand. When this occurs, other pupils listen respectfully. This helps to build confidence particularly amongst the less able who feel they will not be ridiculed if they get something wrong. Conversely, high achievement is also valued. Parents reported, and the inspection team concurs, that there is a culture in which it is 'cool to succeed', not one where high-attaining pupils are made fun of. A most striking feature is the desire evident in the large majority of pupils, from whatever background and of all abilities, to do as well as they possibly can.
19. All of these features not only make the school a happy and harmonious place in which to be but also contribute significantly the rapid progress that the pupils make and to the high standards that they achieve.

The needs of pupils are met well because staff keep careful track of their academic and personal development and provide individually tailored support and guidance

20. The school not only seeks and promotes high academic standards but also takes great care to ensure that the pupils can develop personal skills that broaden their experiences and turn them into thoughtful young adults. Much of its success is built on strong relationships based on respect and trust. As a result, the pupils feel secure and develop into confident young adults. The provision for the pupils' personal development and the subsequent monitoring of their progress are strengths of the school.
21. The work starts while the pupils are still in their primary schools. Strong links have been established between The King's School and primary schools in the local area. This ensures that pupils are already known quite well before they come to the school. Year 6 pupils spend a full week in the school at the end of their last term at primary school prior to transfer. Parents and pupils speak highly of this induction programme and it is a major reason for the smooth and untroubled start most pupils make to Year 7. Key stage managers, heads of year and form tutors play a crucial role in building upon this successful start. They know the pupils in their care well and fulfil very effectively the role of personal and academic guide and mentor. The stability of staffing has also helped to support the development of strong relationships between teachers and their form groups. Good behaviour is promoted, rewarded and celebrated. Attendance is carefully and rigorously monitored. School staff work closely with parents to ensure that the good attendance figure is maintained.
22. The curriculum is also used as a vehicle in the school's drive to find courses that meet the aspirations and interests of as many pupils as possible, particularly in Years 10 and 11. Opportunities have been taken by the flexibility that changes to the National Curriculum have introduced to provide courses more relevant to the needs and aspirations of the pupils. This has enabled the school to cater well for pupils who might otherwise have found a narrowly academic diet difficult to cope with in Years 10 and 11. Links with local colleges provide good work-related courses, while subjects such as Latin have been introduced through video-conferencing. Programmes for pupils who are identified as gifted and talented extend these pupils in a wide range of subjects, not just those thought of as academic. For example, they have resulted in very high sporting achievement for several individuals at local, national and international level. Plans are in place to extend this provision through the school's newly won Specialist Sports College status.
23. The pupils' attainment is carefully and thoroughly assessed and their progress monitored. Targets are set and are translated into language that makes it clear to pupils what they need to do to improve their work and staff check that their advice is being followed. Where pupils appear not to be achieving as well as they should, intervention occurs early. Steps are taken to support and guide such pupils, with the constant aim being to enable them to become successful. Parents are kept regularly informed where action is being taken and are involved as much as possible in supporting the school and their children. Of particular note is the support that comes into play as GCSE examinations approach. The careful targeting of pupils who are capable of achieving a good set of grades C or better and who need extra help to get there is very successful. Individual mentoring by the staff enables them to make substantial progress in their last year and achieve much better results than looked possible.
24. Particular care is taken to ensure that pupils with special educational needs are identified at an early stage through the strong links with local primary schools. This early identification enables a smooth start to be made to their careers at The King's School. The specific difficulties of these pupils are assessed and support is carefully targeted to have the maximum benefit. Individual education plans are discussed with parents and the progress of the pupils towards meeting their targets is carefully monitored. The majority of support takes place in normal lessons and there is a small amount of withdrawal where necessary. Supporting the progress and achievement of these pupils extends to others who have not reached the standard expected for their age in National Curriculum tests. The impact of the school for these pupils is considerable. They make very good progress and significantly exceed the standards that might otherwise be expected of them.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

The provision for information and communication technology (ICT) has improved considerably, but as the school recognises, skills are not developed and used sufficiently in other subjects

25. The demand for access to resources and facilities for teaching ICT skills and for the application and development of these skills in subjects has out-stripped the school's capacity to provide them. The ratio of 10 pupils to each computer compares unfavourably with both other secondary schools and government targets. Resources are used almost to their capacity just for teaching ICT courses. This means that access in many subjects is irregular and can depend very much on the enthusiasm and interest of an individual teacher. Pupils are not, therefore, receiving consistently planned and coherent opportunities to use computers to support their learning in other subjects, although there are some exceptions to this such as art. The headteacher and governors are aware of these shortcomings and plans are in place to increase facilities in conjunction with a forthcoming building programme.

The benefits of the more advanced teaching skills adopted by several staff are not available in all subjects. The school is aware of this and is seeking to extend them to all subjects

26. The school has done much to improve teaching and many staff have adopted methods which support the learning of all pupils. The headteacher is rightly keen to convert more teaching to the high standard that exists in many classrooms, as the methods and techniques of the skilled teachers are not seen in all classrooms. The school is seeking to extend the skills of all teachers by providing training in such areas as 'accelerated learning' and 'thinking skills'. Where teachers use a narrow range of methods without giving full consideration to how pupils learn in their subject, lessons although generally satisfactory can be routine and uninspiring. These lessons are characterised by the teacher dominating proceedings with little opportunity for the pupils to participate. Too much teacher-talk with little questioning results in passive learning. In some cases more careful matching of the tasks set to the pupils' known attainment would generate more rapid learning. There is insufficient challenge for the highest-attaining in some lessons even when they are taught in classes set by ability. Another example of where learning could be extended is in mathematics where very few opportunities are provided for the pupils to learn and apply their skills to investigations and solving problems.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

27. To build on the very good progress since the last inspection, the school should:
- (1) Increase computer facilities so that they are close to national targets and monitor their use carefully so that all pupils receive consistent, planned opportunities to develop and apply their ICT skills to learning in other subjects. (paragraph 25)
 - (2) Identify those classrooms where teaching is routine and a narrow range of methods are used and institute a programme of training, peer observation and monitoring until improvements are embedded firmly in teaching practice. (paragraph 26)

Both of these matters have been identified by the school as priorities for development.

Sixth form

28. To continue the impressive development of the sixth form in recent years and to support the drive to raise standards further, the school should:

- (1) Develop the use of ICT across all subjects offered in the sixth form; this to include the development of exclusive areas and/or access for sixth form use. (paragraphs 41 and 54)
- (2) As part of a specific sixth form development plan, to improve the facilities offered to sixth form students, particularly for private study. (paragraph 54)
- (3) Review the guidance and reporting procedures to students to ensure that all know precisely how well they are doing and exactly what they need to do to improve. (paragraph 47)

Other issues which should be considered by the school

29. In addition to the items above, the governors may wish to consider the inclusion of the following points in their action plan:
- The sixth form tutorial system, especially for Year 13 students, needs to be reviewed to ensure that students feel they are receiving the same level of targeted support as that in Year 12. (paragraph 48)
 - Some lessons are not as stimulating as they should be for sixth form students; there are many opportunities for the sharing of good practice which the school should explore. (paragraph 42)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	34
	Sixth form	47
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		26

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
Years 7 – 11							
Number	1	7	14	12	0	0	0
Percentage	3	21	41	35	0	0	0
Sixth form							
Number	2	21	18	6	0	0	0
Percentage	4	45	38	13	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 and the sixth form 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	794	172
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	50	

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	8	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	59	1

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	4

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	25
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	24

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	7.7
National comparative data	7.8

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.3
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	77	73	150

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	63	65	67
	Girls	65	57	61
	Total	128	122	128
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	School	85 (83)	81 (83)	85 (88)
	National	66 (64)	67 (66)	66 (66)
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 6 or above	School	47 (39)	59 (58)	39 (52)
	National	32 (31)	45 (43)	33 (34)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	52	62	71
	Girls	59	58	63
	Total	111	120	134
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	School	74 (71)	80 (85)	89 (89)
	National	67 (65)	70 (68)	67 (64)
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 6 or above	School	34 (27)	53 (57)	37 (46)
	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	80	70	150

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	60	80	80
	Girls	56	70	70
	Total	116	150	150
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	77 (73)	100 (100)	100 (100)
	National	50 (48)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE points score
Average points Score per pupil	School	49.7 (50.0)
	National	39.8 (39.0)

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	6	100
	National		

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	39	31	70
	Average points score per candidate	284.6	281.6	283.3
National	Average points score per candidate	*	*	*

		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	39	31	70	3	2	5
	Average points score per candidate	278.5	276.4	277.6	80	60	72

National	Average points score per candidate	*	*	*	*	*	*
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* National comparison data for AS/A Level results in 2002 are not yet available. The points scoring system changed in 2002.

Ethnic background of pupils

Categories used in the Annual School Census
White – British
White – Irish
White – any other White background
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean
Mixed – White and Black African
Mixed – White and Asian
Mixed – any other mixed background
Asian or Asian British - Indian
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background
Black or Black British – Caribbean
Black or Black British – African
Black or Black British – any other Black background
Chinese
Any other ethnic group
No ethnic group recorded

Exclusions in the last school year

No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
904	25	
7		
1		
1		
1		
2		
50		

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)	51.2
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	18.2

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	14
Total aggregate hours worked per week	395

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Financial information

Financial year	2001/02
	£
Total income	2,360,703
Total expenditure	2,356,122
Expenditure per pupil	2,605

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	73.8
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y13

Key Stage 3	28.8
Key Stage 4	22.8
Sixth Form	21.0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Balance brought forward from previous year	62,301
Balance carried forward to next year	66,882

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	11.8
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	14.6

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

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	700
Number of questionnaires returned	144

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	49	47	3	1	0
My child is making good progress in school.	44	53	2	0	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	36	60	1	0	3
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	26	57	12	2	2
The teaching is good.	34	63	3	0	0
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	33	56	9	1	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	60	34	4	1	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	60	36	3	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	37	51	7	1	3
The school is well led and managed.	65	31	2	1	1
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	50	43	2	1	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	45	39	9	2	5

Other issues raised by parents

Parents who attended the pre-inspection meeting spoke very favourably of the caring and supportive atmosphere in the school while recognising that high standards were the goal that all were striving for.

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

30. Improving achievement in the sixth form was identified as a key area for the school to tackle at the last inspection. The attention paid to this and the action taken has been very successful. Not only have standards risen significantly but more Year 11 pupils are now choosing to stay into the sixth form. Much of the teaching is stimulating and challenging, and this, coupled with the students' desire to be successful are the major factors contributing to the high standards that are now being achieved.
31. The school has gathered and carefully analysed examination data and compared these with the students' predicted grades based upon their earlier GCSE results. These demonstrate just how successful the action taken has been. In the great majority of cases the students have exceeded the grades predicted for them from their GCSE results. This is particularly the case in English, geography and history.
32. Overall A Level results have steadily improved to 2001 (the latest year for which comparative data is available). From 1999 to 2001 there was an increase in total points scored from 16.7 to 18.9. Results in 2001 were well above average. The points scoring system changed in 2002, as did examination requirements; however, overall results in 2002 are comparable to 2001 particularly at the higher A and B grades. There has been some difference in results by gender, with female students achieving better results than their male counterparts.
33. Geography and art are the two subjects where results at A Level have been consistently above or well above average. Significant improvements had taken place in English, mathematics, history and physical education to 2001. Results improved further in English in 2002 but fell in history and substantially so in mathematics. Well above or above average results were achieved in all subjects in 2001. The exceptions to this were physics, where results were below average and business studies where results were well below average. In both cases the students achieved lower results than in their other subjects. Results improved in both in 2002. Computing has also been a subject where results have not been as high as the school has wanted and as a consequence it is being phased out.
34. A small number of students have been entered for intermediate level GNVQ in health and social care. All have passed in the last two years with six out of the ten entries gaining merits but none achieving a distinction. All five students who took leisure and recreation AVCE in 2002 passed, but none achieved the higher grades.
35. The retention rate from Year 12 to Year 13 is high and students are successful in progressing in large numbers into the higher education college of their choice. The school sets itself challenging but achievable targets as part of its drive to raise standards. The setting of individual targets for the students based on their GCSE performance and the careful tracking of their progress has also been a crucial vehicle for improving aspirations and performance. Inspection evidence is that most students currently in Years 12 and 13 are achieving well. They are making good progress in virtually all subjects, the exceptions to this being mathematics and physics where progress is satisfactory. At the earliest sign of any underachievement steps are taken to guide the students back on course. English, geography and art are the subjects in which the students make the best progress and where standards are the highest. Standards in business studies are continuing to rise.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

36. The students have excellent attitudes to the sixth form and to their studies. This contributes significantly to the progress that they make and the high standards that are achieved. They show

great commitment and a desire to be successful. They are very keen to learn, are very well motivated and respond well to all that the school offers both in and out of the classroom. Lessons are conducted in a friendly but purposeful manner and students respond to this by working hard in and out of lessons. Most students are able to work independently and prepare themselves well for lessons by undertaking background work. This was seen to be particularly valuable in the case of those studying law in Year 13 through video-conferencing. Students also overcome the unsatisfactory provision of computer access by using their own for research and completing work. Behaviour is also of a high standard and sixth form students present very good role models for younger pupils.

37. The students report that they found the help, guidance and induction into the sixth form to be very valuable, enabling them to have a smooth start to their studies. Students speak very highly of the support and guidance offered to them by sixth form teachers and the access they have to them; however, a small number feel that their views are not responded to and they are not always treated as young adults. Relationships are strong and productive, also helping to generate confidence amongst the students. They have a genuine respect for the views and beliefs of others as was particularly well illustrated during the bioethics conference that took place during the inspection. Opportunities for their personal development are extensive, one example being that they can train and then work as mentors for Year 9 pupils on the sex education programme. They also fulfil important responsibilities around the school, such as being on lunch duty, reading with Year 7 pupils, supporting creative writing sessions in the library, assisting in physical education lessons and organising events through their committee.
38. Attendance is very good and the students are punctual to school and to lessons. The school had identified some casual attendance and a failure to use free time effectively as factors leading to some students not achieving as well as they should have done. To help them to adjust to the rigours of studying at sixth form level, Year 12 students were required to attend all day with a room made available and supervised for their private study. The students could then gradually earn the right to organise their own free time. The substantial majority had achieved this by the time of the inspection.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

39. Shortcomings were identified at the last inspection in the learning of sixth form students. Much effort has subsequently been put into improving the quality of teaching and learning by ensuring that the students are challenged and extended to reach their full potential. Much teaching now is of a high quality and accounts for the very good progress that the students make in most subjects and the high standards achieved in examinations. As in the main school, much teaching is expertly undertaken by skilled practitioners who have a very good command of their subjects, make lessons lively and interesting, have high expectations and challenge the students' thinking. They are also skilled at developing an atmosphere for learning in which the students have confidence to try out new ideas and enter into detailed discussions.
40. Teaching in English, art and geography is consistently of a high quality and leads to rapid progress in learning. Much geography teaching challenges the students through skilled questioning such as in a Year 12 lesson as the students were learning how to design an unbiased questionnaire and in Year 13 as the students prepared answers for an examination-style question. The students rose to the teachers' high expectations in both cases as did Year 12 students studying Cairo and its development over the last century. This lesson was particularly well prepared and made good use of video-clips to extend understanding. The same high expectations and challenge are regular features of teaching in English. For example, the teacher's excellent subject knowledge, high expectations and pointed questioning generated much interest in a Year 12 lesson on *King Lear*. A challenging academic ethos was also established in an inspiring Year 13 lesson on critical analysis using *The Catcher in the Rye* as the text. Sharp questioning gave the lesson a rapid start and the enthusiasm of the teacher retained the attention of the students who contributed significantly and learned much. Art teachers also use their high level of subject knowledge and personal expertise as practising artists well to guide the students' learning and

skill development. The particular strengths lie in the confidence of the teachers and the commitment they show to the students' learning. Their excellent knowledge and understanding of the subject is used to bring fresh ideas to the students' work when it stalls. One particularly good example was observed where a very industrious atmosphere had been generated with confident, well-informed teaching as the students prepared individual A Level projects. The art teachers' enthusiasm for the subject also generates interest and gives the students the confidence that they can succeed. This was seen to particularly good effect in a 'twilight' art textiles lesson.

41. Many of the features seen regularly in these three subjects are also evident in lessons elsewhere in the sixth form. For example, constant challenge and a very good range of methods promoted good understanding and high standards in a Year 13 biology lesson on genetics, while the enthusiasm of the teacher motivated and interested the students in a Year 12 physics lesson on line spectra and quantum physics. Physical education teachers are particularly well prepared and their lessons have a good structure that builds understanding carefully, as in an interesting Year 13 lesson on the history of sport, which was taught in a stimulating and engaging manner and in a Year 12 lesson where a very good set of practices developed volley-ball skills into a game situation. Key skills teaching of ICT is satisfactory in discrete lessons, but more use could be made of the students' skills to support their learning in other subjects. Teachers carefully assess the progress of the students in their classes and give them good feedback so that they are aware of what they can do to improve their work and achieve higher standards.
42. There are very few shortcomings in teaching in the sixth form. Learning would be promoted more rapidly in a handful of lessons where teachers currently spend too long in direct teaching themselves. This hampers the involvement of the students with the subject and limits the pace of the lesson. Where this style is adopted regularly, the students' understanding develops more slowly than in subjects where their involvement is encouraged.

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

43. The school offers a very good range of courses for students that build successfully on their achievements at GCSE in Year 11. The courses offered meet the needs of students well and provide clear routes for their next stage of education, training or employment. Students are provided with effective support and guidance to enable them to make appropriate choices. Consequently a good proportion of students continue their studies in the school's sixth form. Those planning to study elsewhere are doing so to follow specific vocational courses or because they have positively opted for a different learning environment. The broad range of A Level courses offered is extended by 'twilight' sessions, outside the normal school day, and video-conferencing. This is proving a successful and innovative way of extending the opportunities offered. Some of the A Level courses lead to vocational qualifications. Intermediate Level vocational courses are also offered. An effective relationship with other schools and colleges is supporting the breadth of current provision. Plans are well established to extend this collaboration and the breadth of provision still further.
44. The statutory requirements of the sixth form curriculum are met, with satisfactory provision for religious education which has been strengthened by school-based day-long conferences with external speakers and workshops together with external conferences at places such as Buckfast Abbey. Religious education is itself an increasingly popular subject at A Level, and a very successful conference involving religious education and biology students was held during the inspection. There is also satisfactory provision for ensuring that the students have developed their key skills of communication, working with number and using ICT to a secure level to support their study. The school has recognised the need to refine the ICT aspect of this provision to meet better the individual needs of students. This is necessary because some students already have the skills required, but lack a formal qualification; others lack the skills and qualification. Some students see the benefit of the qualification; others do not. The school's well-developed plans to

provide much needed ICT resources will also enable students the access required to support study in other courses.

45. A Level students are expected to maintain breadth through studying a fourth subject or taking general studies in Year 12. Opportunities are also provided for all students to participate in physical or sporting activity. Sports College Status has provided an impetus and resources for extending the physical education curriculum, so that the interests and aptitudes of the students can be met even more fully. Many extra-curricular activities also enrich the personal and social development of students, as well as extending the gifted or talented. There are many good examples such as in sport, through Young Enterprise and the production of the school's variety show.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

Assessment

46. Arrangements for assessing the students' attainment and progress are now good. Extensive records are maintained of the students' prior attainment, their current performance and the grades that they are aspiring to achieve. These new, more robust assessment procedures have been developed to provide target minimum grades, making effective use of statistical analysis which details the grades that students should achieve based on their GCSE performance. In lessons, teachers are very well aware of individual learning needs and they provide very good support during group work and lesson activities. Homework is marked thoroughly and informative feedback given to students to assist them in making further progress.
47. The school uses assessment information to guide its curriculum planning particularly in the design of courses for students where A Levels may not be the most appropriate courses for them to study. The school has developed a system for contacting students shortly after their AS results are published and this provides an opportunity for them to discuss course options and which examinations they may wish to re-sit. Information about the students' general progress and their target grades are reported to parents and discussed with students; however, the targets detailed in the written reports are often vague. They are not targeted to the specific needs of individual students and do not say precisely what students need to do to improve.

Advice, support and guidance

48. Teachers know their students well and are always available for guidance and support, which students appreciate considerably. Students have access both to information and staff who can assist with guiding appropriate choices with regard to careers and higher education. Students value the time and caring attitude tutors have when discussing important choices and how their performance in their studies will impact on what they can do after they leave the school. Students are also very appreciative of the support and guidance offered to them, especially the open access to staff, when they have personal or subject difficulties. The head of sixth form and tutors show a caring attitude to the students and have in place effective systems for identifying students who may not be achieving their full potential. The students value their tutorial sessions in Year 12 and these are so successful that many would welcome them continuing in a similar format into Year 13.

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

49. The school provides a very good range of information for parents about studies in the sixth form. This is being extended with the planned post-16 consortium arrangements, which will enable students to choose from an even wider range of courses. Parents are provided with full, informative written reports once a year as well as interim reports which provide details of student progress and

effort. Sixth form staff make concerted efforts to keep in touch with parents through telephone calls and letters home. Student relationships with teachers are very good and the friendly but purposeful approach to school work produces a productive learning environment in which students make good progress and are valued for their effort and commitment. Students in Year 13 feel that the format and content of the formal tutorial periods that were offered in Year 12, should also be offered to them as a means of discussing further those general areas of personal development not covered in subject lessons.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

Leadership and management

50. Leadership and management of the sixth form are very good, with the recently appointed Key Stage 5 manager providing the necessary strategic direction to continue the drive to raise achievement. In addition, the head of sixth form provides the necessary pastoral leadership which ensures that the personal and social needs of all students are catered for and all are given the necessary support to achieve the best possible outcomes from their studies. The recent review of sixth form education has been an effective tool for identifying strategies to raise achievement in the sixth form and to highlight those areas where further development is required, for example in providing more computer facilities for sixth formers and in making better use of assessment information to monitor student performance. Action following reviews of departments has been rigorous, with the exception of mathematics where matters that were highlighted as requiring attention over two years ago have not been robustly tackled and remain as weaknesses. The two members of staff with management responsibility for the sixth form work harmoniously in providing an educational environment and support system which students appreciate and that ultimately leads to them achieving their full potential.
51. Good use is made of the resources available to the sixth form. The creative use of video-conferencing and twilight lessons and the developing consortium arrangements are enabling a very wide range of courses to be offered. Best value principles are used well, although a wider set of targets could be adopted to challenge the school. The sixth form is cost-effective at present not only because of the high standards that are achieved but as a result of the comparatively low teaching time allocated to AS and A Level courses. The school has plans to increase teaching time in the future while keeping a watchful eye on the financial implications of this decision.
52. The governing body fulfils well its responsibilities towards the sixth form and maintains a good oversight of provision and standards. What is currently not fully in place is a strategic plan with sharp associated targets, although this is partly because discussions are at an early stage over the planned expansion of consortium arrangements with other providers.

Resources

53. Teaching staff are well qualified and have a good level of expertise in the subjects that they teach. This has enabled new courses such as art textiles and religious education to be introduced smoothly. Expertise is extended through video-conferencing in A Level law and psychology.
54. There are some shortcomings in the accommodation, of which the school is aware. Governors and senior staff have explored ways of improving the social and study areas, recognising that these are not only poor but are inadequate for the increasing numbers staying on into the sixth form. The accommodation available in most subjects is satisfactory, but there are also some specific weaknesses, which would greatly enhance sixth form provision if given due attention. For example, there is no dedicated classroom for theory lessons in physical education and its associated vocational subjects such as leisure and recreation. There is also no designated studio area for art students. Resources are generally satisfactory in most subjects, but the weakness,

as in the main school, is the limited access for students to ICT either in lessons or to support their private study.

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

In the inspection, 11 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 2002.

GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average points score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	5	100	*	20	*	34	*
Chemistry	1	100	*	0	*	30	*
Biology	2	100	*	0	*	20	*
Physics	7	100	*	0	*	27.1	*
Computing	6	100	*	0	*	21.6	*
Physical education studies	1	100	*	0	*	20	*
Art	1	100	*	0	*	30	*
Music	1	100	*	100	*	50	*
Media studies	3	100	*	0	*	36.6	*
Geography	1	100	*	100	*	60	*
History	2	100	*	50	*	45	*
Sociology	2	100	*	100	*	55	*
Psychology	6	83	*	0	*	20	*
English	3	100	*	33	*	40	*
French	4	100	*	0	*	25	*
German	2	100	*	0	*	30	*
General studies	69	100	*	29	*	36.5	

GCE A Level and AVCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average points score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	7	57	*	42.6	*	60	*
Chemistry	8	100	*	63	*	72.5	*
Biology	26	96	*	27	*	70.8	*
Physics	16	87	*	31	*	63.7	*
Design and technology	6	100	*	50	*	76.6	*
Business	18	94	*	27	*	77.7	*

Computing	5	40	*	0	*	16	*
Physical education studies	12	100	*	25	*	78.3	*
Leisure and recreation AVCE	5	100	*	0	*	72	*
Art	8	100	*	63	*	100	*
Music	3	100	*	33	*	80	*
Media studies	13	100	*	54	*	95.4	*
Geography	29	100	*	59	*	91	*
History	11	91	*	18	*	74.5	*
Sociology	4	100	*	50	*	90	*
English	20	100	*	50	*	89	*
French	4	100	*	0	*	65	*
German	1	100	*	0	*	80	*

Intermediate vocational qualifications

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		Average points score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Health and social care	5	100	*	60	*	11.2	*

** No national comparative data is available at this stage.*

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

55. Mathematics, biology and physics were inspected in detail and some lessons of chemistry were also sampled. A Level results in chemistry were well above average in 2001 and improved slightly in 2002 from a larger entry. In a satisfactory Year 13 chemistry lesson, the students showed a positive approach as they reviewed the basics of Redox reactions. Similarly, the students worked co-operatively and productively in a good Year 12 chemistry lesson where they were using steam distillation to extract fragrant oils from oranges.

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- Teachers support the students' learning well, both within and beyond lessons.
- The students keep extensive, comprehensive and well-organised notes for all modules.
- Homework is set regularly, and the students' work is marked carefully.
- The teachers work together effectively.

Areas for improvement

- A limited range of teaching approaches is used.
- ICT is not used despite its potential to benefit student learning.
- Several previously recommended development initiatives have yet to be implemented.

56. Examination results at A Level in recent years have been above the national average, with five out of ten students entered in 2001 gaining the top grade; however, examination results at A Level in 2002 fell somewhat, with three students failing to gain pass grades. While these ungraded outcomes were in line with recent school predictions, they represented unsatisfactory progress from GCSE. AS Level results in 2002 were also disappointing, with over half of the students gaining grades that were below the predictions based on their GCSE results. The students achieved similar results in mathematics to the average of their other subjects in 2001.
57. In A Level work seen during the inspection, most students' attainment was at least satisfactory, and often good. The students' attitudes to their work are always good or better, and all show a determination to succeed. All make progress - some greater than others. Nevertheless, instances were seen where some students' familiarity with fundamental concepts was lacking, as in the case of two Year 13 students who needed considerable help to determine the integral of the derivative of a function, despite their extensive prior study of calculus.
58. Some teaching is challenging and draws well on the students' own thinking. In one well-taught Year 12 lesson the teacher first rehearsed the formulae for statistical variance before asking students to consider the effect on variance of adding or multiplying by a constant, a matter that they resolved quickly. In another very good Year 12 lesson the teacher first derived double angle formulae and the class then divided into groups to solve and present various related problems; however, students appeared surprised by this form of classroom organisation, and the teacher agreed afterwards that it was not often used.
59. More typically, lessons begin by introducing a new concept or procedure, which links to previous learning or serves some contextual need. Graduated worked examples follow and exercises are then set to consolidate the new learning. The teachers carefully monitor and support the work of individual students. This is an effective but essentially passive style of learning. Greater time provision – currently it is only four hours per week – would reduce pressure on teachers and could encourage a greater diversity of teaching and learning styles, to the benefit of students.

60. Students confirm that the teachers are approachable and helpful, and support their work carefully. Additionally, the teachers' willingness to offer advice out of lessons is appreciated by the students, although the facility is seldom used.
61. Both Year 12 and Year 13 students accumulate extensive, comprehensive and well-organised files of notes across all relevant modules. These include regular homework exercises which are checked and marked by their teachers; however, target-setting appears to be limited towards global goals – to aim for a grade B for example – rather than transparent, meaningful and measurable objectives for student development. Students' files tend to be dominated by notes and repetitive exercises rather than records of their active exploration of mathematics. The use of ICT to help analyse, illustrate or check mathematical ideas and outcomes is almost entirely missing from the students' folders. Similarly, research and independent study do not feature, so that study skills are relatively undeveloped through the mathematics curriculum.
62. The day-to-day management of mathematics is satisfactory – teachers are thoroughly familiar with examination syllabuses and the knowledge and skills that these require of students, and they work together effectively to ensure coverage; however, a number of recommendations from the previous report and from the school's internal faculty review (Spring 2000) have yet to be implemented. There is no formal monitoring of teaching across the department. Target-setting remains underdeveloped and assessment procedures have not undergone formal evaluation. There has been no departmental development of the use of ICT to support teaching and learning, and the professional development needs of the head of department - considered necessary in Spring 2000 - do not appear to have received explicit attention. Improvement since the last inspection is therefore unsatisfactory.
63. An additional need at the present time is to consider ways to promote recruitment to A Level mathematics. During a period when the take-up of sixth form courses has increased considerably, the take-up of mathematics has declined. There is a need to identify the underlying reasons for this decline in popularity, and to take steps to reverse this unfortunate trend.

Biology

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

Strengths

- The very good teaching is based on the teachers' good subject knowledge and their high expectations of the students. This is leading to high standards.
- Good individual support is based on the strong relationships between students and teaching staff.
- Staff provide a wide and varied range of additional activities that considerably enrich the students' experiences.
- The department is well led and managed.

Areas for improvement

- The students should be encouraged to give fuller oral answers linked to improving their examination technique.
- The revision methods adopted by students are limited.
- The students are not sufficiently involved in evaluating their work and what they must do to improve.

64. In the 2001 A Level examination, results were above the national average. Twenty-six students took the examination and all except one passed with just over one-fifth obtaining the higher grades of A and B. Results have been consistently at this high level in recent years and were broadly similar in 2002 even with a higher number of examination entries. The majority of students make good progress. They at least obtain, and often exceed, the grades predicted by their previous levels of attainment. In spite of this, the students' results were lower on average than results in their other subjects.

65. The standard of work seen in the folders of the current Years 12 and 13 students is above average. The quantity and depth of work completed by the students is very good. They show good understanding and have organisational skills that enable them easily to refer back to the work covered. Year 13 students were seen coming to grips with the relationship of dominant and recessive alleles in genetics and gaining an improving ability to predict the inherited character that would be seen as well as the genetic make up of the individuals. They were also undertaking their coursework, showing a clear understanding of the criteria, with average and above average skills in the hypothesis and carrying out of the investigation. They use a good range of ICT skills within their coursework. Year 12 students were seen preparing for a bioethics conference when they were using their deductive skills, making informed decisions and using the correct technical vocabulary.
66. Teaching is very good overall and this is resulting in the current students making good progress. The very good subject knowledge of the teachers, evident in their answers to students' questions, enables the students to understand difficult concepts. Strengths are the good challenge that is given to the students with the use of question and answers to extend their understanding; however, short and one word answers are often accepted and so opportunities to develop responses linked to the examination requirements are missed, and at times the teachers tend to fill in the answer. The teachers have excellent relationships with the students who respond very well to the mostly challenging teaching. The needs of individual students are met as seen in a coursework lesson, with deadlines being given appropriate to the students' workload and direction to them on which areas to reconsider. The teachers also give freely of their time in organising a range of enhancement opportunities.
67. Students use a wide range of learning skills, for example highlighting, sub-titling and annotating examination questions effectively. They keep a record of their own progress but do not record developmental points as targets to improve their work. They cover a large quantity of work and organise it well but the revision skills of the students vary. Sharing the best practice across the department and encouraging the students to develop ways to suit themselves would raise their attainment.
68. The leadership of the department is very good. A variety of methods have been devised to assist the students on an individual and general level. There is a commitment to building on what has already been achieved and to improving standards. Since the last inspection attainment has risen and the number of students taking the subject has risen significantly. This represents very good progress and the department has a very good base from which to improve further.

Physics

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

Strengths

- Teaching is good, and this is providing the students with a good understanding of the nature of the subject and the historical development of fundamental ideas.
- Effective use is made of a wide range of approaches to learning, including ICT, and this ensures that the students remain engaged and interested in lessons.
- Relationships are good and this underpins the students' desire to achieve well.

Areas for improvement

- Students who are in danger of underachieving are not always identified as early as possible and strategies are not implemented to eliminate the impact on standards.
- The greater emphasis placed on developing the pupils' investigative skills in Years 7 to 11 needs to be carried forward successfully into sixth form work.

69. Results at A Level are satisfactory. They have been at or below the national average for the last five years. The students' performance in physics compared with their performance in the other subjects that they study has varied over this time, being sometimes a little above, sometimes a

little below; however, in 2001 this relative performance was significantly below. The results of most students at A Level represent at least satisfactory progress from their results at GCSE; however, a small number of students do not always achieve this. This was the case in 2002. There is a need to ensure that pupils who are in danger of underachieving are identified early and strategies implemented to maintain the necessary progress. In lessons the students are working more consistently at the levels expected from their prior performance at GCSE.

70. Teaching is good. The teachers have a good understanding of the subject as well as a good knowledge of the syllabus requirements. This ensures that work is pitched at an appropriate level. It also results in the students developing a good appreciation of the nature of the subject and the historical development of key, fundamental concepts. A wide range of activities, including presentations, research and practical work, are used so that all students have opportunities over time to use the approaches that best suit their personal learning needs. Many of these activities also use techniques, such as 'concept maps', that are specifically designed to ensure that learning is effective. The teachers are enthusiastic about the subject and, when coupled with particularly effective use of ICT, their presentations can be of a very high quality. Consequently, the students are stimulated and engaged and their learning in lessons is secure.
71. The teachers provide effective individual support for the students and this enables them to overcome any misunderstandings in either key principles or mathematical calculations. The students are competent mathematically, but tend to work methodically rather than with flair. Many find that solving problems in physics also enables them to understand their mathematics better. Many students find physics challenging, but feel well supported. They appreciate that they need to understand key principles before they can move on successfully. They work well independently and take responsibility for their own achievements. They also have the confidence to seek support when necessary, having made an effort to understand for themselves first. The students have developed secure practical skills, although some are rather reluctant to carry out practical work and others have not developed a naturally investigative approach. Some good developments are taking place in the extension of the students' investigative skills in Years 7 to 11 and this should be taken through into sixth form courses.
72. Leadership is good. There has been much evaluation and review over recent years, particularly focusing on the security of learning and on examination results. The provision for the subject has improved satisfactorily since the last inspection; learning is well focused and structured. Students learn well in lessons; they enjoy the subject and respond well. This has not yet converted into consistently high performance in the examinations, however. The department is now correctly considering the introduction of a new syllabus that might enable some students to demonstrate their knowledge, understanding and skills more effectively.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

73. No subjects were inspected in this area and no lessons observed. A few students study design and technology at AS and A Level, although numbers are small. Results were above average at A Level in 2001 and were broadly similar in 2002 from a much smaller entry.

BUSINESS

74. No subjects in this area were inspected in detail, but some AVCE business studies was observed. A Level results were well below average in 2001 but the proportion of A and B grades improved considerably in 2002. Standards are continuing to improve as was seen in a very good Year 12 lesson in which the very well-prepared teacher took the students rapidly through examples of how businesses can be affected by market characteristics.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

75. No subjects were inspected in detail in this area, although some ICT lessons were observed. Students have been following an A Level computing course but with poor results. Only two of the five students entered in 2002 passed, neither gaining a grade A or B. The school has now changed courses. Some lessons in ICT key skills were also observed. The students have quite varied skills and needs, which current arrangements are not fully satisfying. While one lesson was successful there were too many students for the resources available for their very positive approach and the good teaching to result in the progress for all that this merited.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

76. Physical education was inspected in detail and students in Year 12 on the leisure and recreation advanced vocational course were also observed. All five students passed this course in 2002, although none achieved the highest grades.

Physical education

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

Strengths

- Teaching and learning are very good and as a result the students achieve very well, often gaining grades above the level that their GCSE results predict.
- Teachers are knowledgeable, committed and enthusiastic and they teach interesting and well-planned lessons.
- The students' attitudes to the subject are very positive and as consequence they work hard in and out of lessons.
- The department provides a stimulating and extensive range of extra-curricular clubs, teams and activities which cater for students of all abilities.

Areas for improvement

- More use should be made of ICT to assist teaching.
- There is currently no classroom dedicated and appropriately resourced for theory lessons.

77. Attainment in 2001 for the eleven students who took the Sports Studies A Level was in line with the national average, with three students achieving grade A or B and, as in previous years, all gaining at least a pass grade. Similar results were achieved in 2002. Achievement in the subject is good with many students gaining grades above that which their GCSE results predict. The standard of work observed from current students is good. The students demonstrate an excellent understanding of the theoretical aspects of the course, for example in relation to skill acquisition, aerobic fitness and the history of organised sport. When questioned in class they answer authoritatively and show a keen interest in the subject and the lesson activities, although some students' understanding of key points goes unchecked by teachers.
78. Nonetheless, teaching in the subject is very good overall. The teachers are knowledgeable, very well prepared and have developed excellent working relationships with students. They promote a pleasant and purposeful environment for learning. In a very good Year 13 lesson on aerobic capacity and fitness levels, the teacher skilfully combined a practical activity with theory to aid understanding. The difficult topic of skill acquisition was explained clearly in a good Year 12 lesson where learning was reinforced with the innovative use of visual aids. The very well-prepared teacher in a good Year 12 lesson on the electrocardiogram guided students through the topic with a series of well-constructed, progressive handouts. The history of organised sport was imaginatively handled, with an enthusiastic presentation by the teacher in a very good Year 13 lesson which used a combination of an enjoyable video, handouts and group activities to good effect. The assessment of individual performance was extensively recorded and documented using a video camera in a very good Year 12 lesson where the teacher had planned several appropriate drills and game situations, making good use of other students and support staff.

79. The students' attitudes to the subject are positive. As a consequence, the students learn well and gain the relevant knowledge and understanding of the topics covered in lessons; however, teaching and learning can be supported further by having a dedicated classroom for theory lessons and more extensive use of ICT in lessons. The department is very well led and managed. The school has recently gained Sports College status, and the appointment of a new head of department and the recent appointment of female members of staff to teach physical education have provided a stimulus for all to raise the status and standards of the department within the school and the community. Students clearly share this commitment. Individual students have achieved success in a wide range of sports at county, national and international level and there are many opportunities for all students to participate in clubs, teams and activities at lunch time and after school. Furthermore, the department has recognised the need to strengthen the procedures for identifying and supporting gifted and talented students and to extend the curriculum provision further. One plan is to introduce the Community Sports Leadership Award and national coaching awards, to ensure that all students reach their full potential whatever their level of ability. Finally, it is pleasing to report that physical education is offered to all students as a timetabled part of the sixth form curriculum.
80. There has been good progress since the last inspection.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

81. No subjects were inspected in detail in this area, although one lesson of intermediate GNVQ health and social care was observed. All five students who followed this course in 2002 passed and three gained a merit. The lesson observed was well taught with a good review of what had been learnt previously. A good variety of methods were adopted by the teacher to which the students responded with interest, particularly in preparing role-play performances to be videoed.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

82. Art and media studies were inspected in detail. Students also study music at AS and A Level but in very small numbers. Three students sat and passed A Level music in 2002, although only one achieved a grade A or B.

Art

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

Strengths

- The knowledge, enthusiasm and commitment of teachers lead to effective learning.
- The head of department sets high standards, monitors the work of the department efficiently and has set a high profile for the work of students.
- The curriculum has a very good balance between two and three-dimensional studies that enables students to research and develop their work across a wide range of media, including computer animation.

Areas for improvement

- The accommodation is unsatisfactory. Storage is inadequate and there is no designated area for a sixth form studio, which would enable students to continue their work in their free time. Existing spot lighting is unserviceable and there is little control over available light.
- Computer resources are unsatisfactory. Much of the digital artwork is done on the students' own computers or the teacher's laptop. The excellent software, won by students in art competitions, cannot be used on the department's computers.

83. The numbers taking A Level examinations in recent years have been too small to enable valid comparisons to be made with national averages, but results have been very high, with 63% of students gaining the higher grades A and B in 2002. This was a significantly better result than those achieved by most other subjects in the school. The trend has been upward over the past three years. The very small numbers of boys taking the examinations in recent years have done very well, but it is not possible to comment significantly on the difference between boys' and girls' performance. The number of students taking the A Level examination in Year 13 has increased and there is a further increase in students taking the AS Level examination in Year 12. The department adds value to the standard of the students' work in the sixth form. The department is well placed to improve standards in future years.
84. In work seen during the inspection, standards are above average in both Years 12 and 13. This is a result of the very good and sometimes excellent teaching of a well-planned and balanced curriculum. The students show a high level of commitment and enthusiasm for their work and are treated as independent learners, able to advance their work into areas that interest and challenge them. By the end of Year 13 students show a wide range of well-developed skills in their work; their sketchbooks indicate extensive personal research along both technical and creative lines. Higher-attaining students use professional standard digital software to create and edit animation clips that reveal abilities beyond the taught elements of their courses. One student is tutoring a small group of Year 11 pupils in the use of the animation software. The very high standard of work on display shows evidence of the influence of a wide range of professional artists from the local, national and international fields of art and design. The very good teaching of observational drawing, developed from the acclaimed 'power drawing' approach, results in a high standard of both life and still life drawing. Most students are confident in drawing, although a few need the skills built from exercises to enable them to observe more carefully and work more freely; they reveal weaknesses in the development of form through tonal variations. Year 12 students taking the newly introduced AS Level examination in art and design (textiles), are confident in using sewing machines to develop patterns from observational drawings of shell forms. They experiment with different materials, including paper, to hand sew, or machine folds and textures into their work. Their chiaroscuro experiments show the very good teaching of techniques and creative processes.
85. The teachers are artists in their own right and use their excellent knowledge and understanding of the subject confidently to set high standards and expectations across the school. As a result the achievements of students in lessons are very good. The environment for learning is rich and stimulating and is effectively supported by the very good relationships that characterise lessons. Lessons are timed and managed well, enabling students to benefit from quality individual tutoring time and to engage in critical discussion of their work and the work of the artists that they study. A strength of teaching is the confidence that teachers have in the students' ability and willingness to explore techniques, processes and styles along their own individual lines. This accounts for the very diverse range of interesting and creative work on display. Their work has developed from the very good grounding in art in Years 7 to 11. The students are expected to work in their free time and at home to build up their examination portfolios. They are keen to accept this discipline and are often seen out of school hours working to improve their technical and creative output. The lack of a separate sixth form studio area places some restriction around this activity. The positive attitudes, enthusiasm, commitment and hard work put in by the students ensure that such restriction is minimised.
86. The department benefits from strong, clear and well-informed leadership. There is a very clear and shared sense of direction, which stems from the very good management and monitoring of the work of the department. The head of department undertook a term of 'action research' into the curriculum in 2002, leading to a more clearly defined and better-targeted curriculum for all students to follow. Although the standard of digital art is high amongst the small group of students who are working on animation or digital manipulation of photographs, there are insufficient computers to enable digital art to take its deserved place in the curriculum. The accommodation is unsatisfactory and there is insufficient control over the available light to provide the optimum conditions for observational drawing. The lack of a designated studio area for sixth form students restricts the use that they can make of the department outside their lesson times. Storage space

is very limited and is under considerable pressure as students gather their large-scale work together for examination and exhibition.

87. The department has made a very good improvement from the previous inspection. Standards of teaching and learning have improved and the progress made by students is more rapid. There have been significant improvements in the curriculum, particularly noticeable in three-dimensional work and computer-aided art and design. Students also show a greater critical awareness and understanding of the work of professional artists and craft workers over time.

Media studies

Overall, the quality of provision in media studies is **good**.

Strengths

- Recent results at A Level are above average.
- Most students make good progress in their learning.
- The students are enthusiastic about the subject and work well with one another.

Area for improvement

- Staff need to ensure that the students have an improved grasp of key concepts and that this is exemplified in written and practical work.

88. Results at A Level have improved in recent years and, although comparisons of the most recent set of results with earlier figures are difficult to make owing to changes in the national system of assessments, students do better than average when compared with national figures. In the most recent examination at A Level, a large majority of candidates achieved at least a grade C. Given that there is no GCSE media studies examination, these figures represent very good achievement. Recent results at AS Level have been less pleasing, with results being skewed to the lower half of the range of grades available. Overall in the sixth form, however, the trend is one of improvement in outcomes for students of media studies.
89. Standards observed during the inspection are in line with national averages. The students' understanding of key concepts such as industry and representation is satisfactory, with use of technical vocabulary and the capacity to make reference to a range of media texts in discussion. Written coursework is well organised and of a good standard, showing an understanding of key terms, with structured analysis and perceptive comments on topics studied. Students mostly have good ICT skills; however, basic skills of note-making and spelling vary considerably. Some students write succinctly and with evident insight but others have difficulty in being selective and in organising their notes effectively.
90. The students' practical work is of a good standard overall, showing considerable care and attention to detail in production. For example, short video extracts which had been produced by students showed understanding of codes of representation, use of visual grammar in film production and the appropriate use of sound (dialogue, effects, music) to construct meaning for the viewer. Other products covered print media (magazines) and the production of still images. The students reflected on their productions, showing insight into processes and issues arising in the production of coursework. Many of the products showed initiative in researching audience perceptions – for example by use of questionnaire – and the determination to overcome obstacles to achievement.
91. The quality of teaching is at least satisfactory and sometimes good. Teachers are committed to the subject and show good subject knowledge. They engender a positive atmosphere for learning, with lessons which encourage the students to engage. The students are given very clear explanations of what is expected of them at the beginnings of lessons and this clarity of objective-setting is a significant factor in securing effective learning. Detailed reference to prior learning helps to make clear a context for learning. The use of videotaped extracts was particularly well handled in one lesson observed where the students were challenged to identify stereotyped representations. Procedures for the assessment of learning are secure.
92. The students make at least satisfactory and on occasion good progress in their learning in lessons. Given the starting point on entry into the course, with students being able to draw only upon the small media studies component in their GCSE English course, progress overall is good.
93. The subject is well led. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory. Resources for learning are modest at present but those which are available are well exploited. The school has recently invested in improved facilities for producing and manipulating images digitally, although these facilities are not yet available.

HUMANITIES

94. Geography and religious studies were inspected in detail from this area. Students also study history, law, psychology and sociology at AS and A Level. A Level results were well above average in history in 2001, but fell in 2002. The number of students studying sociology to A Level has been too small to make valid comparisons with national figures, although all seven students taking the subject in either 2001 or 2002 passed, and of these four gained an A or B grade. Students study law and psychology by video-conferencing, neither course having been running long enough for students to take A Level examinations. A very good video-conferencing law lesson was observed. The relationship between the students and their teacher enabled a good discussion to develop about the defences that are possible in the case of murder where there is an admission of guilt. The students had prepared well for the session and participated readily. They report that they find this method of learning enjoyable and they are predicted to gain high grades.

Geography

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

Strengths

- Standards are well above average: a consequence of very good leadership.
- Teaching and learning are very good; very good subject knowledge and application ensure that the students work very well independently and analyse information very well.
- Assessment and the tracking of the students' progress are very good, contributing to high standards.
- Staff are very enthusiastic about the subject, showing a very strong commitment.
- The students work hard and enjoy their studies; relationships and attitudes are very positive.

Areas for improvement

- Greater access to computers is needed for investigative elements of geographical work.
- An increase in the time spent on fieldwork is needed to improve learning.
- There is not enough regular observation of teaching to share and extend good practice.

95. Over the last four years there has been a consistently large number of students taking A Level courses. Enrolment has further increased in 2002. It is rare for a student not to complete a course. Results at A Level in 2001 were excellent but fell slightly in 2002. This slight fall is a consequence of more open enrolment of students studying geography. 2001 results in the AS Level were well above average and most students chose to continue their studies to A Level. The 2002 AS results are similar to the 2001 results. Students do better in geography on average than they do in their other subjects and achieve well in terms of their transition from GCSE work. There are no significant differences in the standards attained by male and female students.
96. Standards of work seen in both Years 12 and 13 are currently well above average and this represents a very good level of achievement. Teaching and learning are both consistently very good. Male and female students alike display very positive attitudes and conduct, work equally hard and relate very well to peers and to their teachers. This ensures that learning can proceed at a very good pace. The students are highly motivated to succeed. They rise well to the challenge of the work. This was demonstrated well in discussions and in their written work; on many occasions they had taken great care in researching topics outside lessons. Students prepare well for the two-day Bristol fieldwork trip; however, despite this programme, the time devoted is barely sufficient to support students' study. There is good growth in geographical maturity both in oral work and writing especially in Year 13. Most students join in discussions with enthusiasm and interest, as seen when Year 13 students discussed the criteria and content of a model essay on natural and man-made hazards. The teachers have the ability to generate confidence in their students. They have very good knowledge and make learning interesting. This was demonstrated well in a Year 12 lesson as teacher and students designed a questionnaire for their coursework. The students learn how to categorise collected information and how to set up an unbiased and

representative sample. Very good questioning is a strong element in all lessons. The teachers successfully challenge students, which makes them analyse data and link different aspects of knowledge. This was exemplified in the construction of a model answer to an examination question on hazards. As a result of this method of teaching, the students are able to develop a very good structure for answering examination questions. This enables the students to analyse well and as a consequence they are starting to become good independent learners. Video clips are successfully used to improve learning and when this is linked to very good questioning the students learn well, for example in a Year 12 lesson on the development of modern day Cairo. The teachers prepare work very thoroughly. They produce a very good range of resources so that they can stretch the most able. Teachers and students use geographical terms correctly; however, no great emphasis is placed on this aspect of the work. Similarly, books and files showed numeracy successfully supporting work such as the study of population pyramids. Students use computers for Internet research and to present their work; most of this is done outside lessons at home.

97. Work in the subject is very well led with very clear direction; there is a capacity to sustain these high standards and a determination to do even better. One of the strengths of the department is the way that the teachers work together, giving clear continuity and progression from GCSE to Year 13. Monitoring of teaching takes place as part of the cycle of performance management; however, regular and consistent observation of teaching is needed in order to share the very good practice within the department. Assessment and the tracking of students' progress are very good and help to drive up standards.
98. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good; standards have improved. Assessment systems are very good and students are very well tracked and kept on target. Consequently, the students are achieving well in terms of their transition from GCSE work. There has been an improvement in fieldwork; however, insufficient time is devoted to this aspect of geography. Staff are very enthusiastic about the subject; they show a very good commitment to maintaining and raising standards.

Religious education

Overall, the quality of provision in religious education is **good**.

Strengths

- Teaching has many qualities that enable the students to achieve well.
- The school offers a wide range of opportunities to enrich the curriculum.
- A new and popular course has been established.

Areas for improvement

- Teaching lacks drive at times in the large groups.
- Marking does not always provide clear guidance for the students to follow to raise standards.
- Weaker students need assistance to organise their work to aid their revision.

99. Religious education was introduced as a sixth form subject in September 2001 with the first students taking the AS Level examination in 2002. There is no national data against which a comparison can be made but the results show that the students achieved or exceeded the level predicted by their GCSE examinations.
100. The standard of work of the current Year 13 students is average and students are reaching levels consistent with expectations based on their Year 12 results. The standard of the current Year 12 students is also average. A high number of students take the course following on from a short GCSE course, and their achievement is good.
101. Year 12 students have a good understanding of the complexity of ethical issues and are able to give their own understanding of a variety of issues, relating their understanding to the legal position. They show good deductive skills as seen both when preparing for the bioethics

conference and when presented with a series of personal objects. Year 13 students were seen coming to grips with the philosophical aspects of truth and used their understanding of the social life at the time of the Old Testament to interpret biblical teaching on ethical issues. They use technical terms correctly, with answers given to a suitable depth. The enhancement opportunities provided through attendance at lectures and conferences aid the students' understanding and depth of knowledge on a range of topics. The students appreciate these as a way of developing their understanding and assisting the transition from the demands of the GCSE course to the rigours of sixth form study.

102. Teaching is good overall. This is resulting in current students making good progress. The very good subject knowledge of the teachers, evident in their answers to students' questions, enables the students to understand difficult concepts. Strengths in the best lessons are the good challenge that is given to the students with careful use of questions and answers to extend their understanding. The students respond very well to the challenging teaching. They show interest in the subject, work hard and help one another. The students greatly appreciate the time that teachers give freely outside lessons to help them. They are encouraged to research a topic before asking for help and so develop their independent learning skills. Weaker aspects of teaching are seen in lessons that are dominated by the teacher, as seen in a lesson when the teacher was talking for the vast majority of the time with brief student interjection and when the teacher gave his ideas before encouraging the students to share theirs. In this way the teacher missed opportunities to develop the students' deductive and thinking skills. The teachers do not always provide students with guidance in marking written work and so they are not always aware of what is needed to raise their work to the next level. The quantity and depth of work completed by the students is relevant to the course but they do not always organise it in a way that aids revision. This aspect of organisation and study skills slows the progress of some students.
103. The leadership of the department is good. At the time of the last inspection there was no religious education examination course. The course has been established and the number of students opting for the subject is rising. This represents very good progress. There is a commitment to building on what has already been achieved to improve the quality of the course offered and to raise standards. The department has a very good base from which to fulfil these goals.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

104. Students study English, French and German from this area. English was inspected in detail but no lessons were sampled in either French or German, where numbers are small. Valid comparisons of these subjects with national data are not possible for this reason. All of the six students who have taken A Level in either language since 2001 have passed, although none achieved the higher grades.

English

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

Strengths

- Standards are above average.
- The teachers have excellent subject knowledge.
- There is much very good teaching, which is marked by challenge and high expectations.
- Excellent relationships exist between teachers and students, who also have very good attitudes to their learning.

Areas for improvement

- The school needs to increase opportunities for staff to observe each other teaching so that expertise can be shared.

105. Standards in English Literature are well above average and have been so for the past three years. A Level results in 2001 were well above average. The proportion of students achieving A and B grades was also well above average. 2002 results are broadly similar and half the students achieved grades A and B. Both boys and girls perform better than boys and girls nationally, although girls achieve better than boys. Student results in 2001 were broadly in line with the average of results in their other subjects.
106. Teaching, overall, is very good and helps the students to enjoy and understand the texts and to make consistent progress. The teachers have deep knowledge of set texts and literary criticism and this, coupled with excellent understanding of the examination requirements, ensures that students learn key terms and their links with set texts. Teachers make objectives very clear and this gives a focus to the students' learning. Whilst teachers direct learning toward the demands of the examinations they do so in a way that ensures that learning becomes a shared and enjoyable experience. In a very good Year 12 lesson, the students discussed different ways of reading *King Lear*. A skilful use of small group work, individual support and teacher exposition helped the students to understand interpretations such as structuralist, feminist and Aristotelian. This teaching was both challenging and intellectually rigorous and is a very good example of how students are helped to make progress from the demands of GCSE to those of AS Level and beyond.
107. The quality of discussion in lessons is good and is enhanced by the teachers' excellent use of probing questions which extend and deepen understanding. A group of Year 13 students had been asked to prepare short presentations on their analysis of a section of *The Catcher in the Rye*. Their feedback showed high standards of analysis, understanding and personal response. Contributions and questions from fellow students demonstrated high levels of collaboration and support, and understanding was deepened by the teacher's use of probing questions. This example of shared learning within a rigorous academic ethos was reflected in all lessons observed, emphasising the excellent relationships between teachers and students.
108. The standard of students' writing is above average and, guided by effective assessment and very good teaching, progress is rapid and sustained. The marking of work is very good and informs students about their progress, strengths and areas for development and further reading. By the end of the first term at AS Level, students produce well-structured responses showing a thorough understanding of plot, character and theme with some elements of perceptive individual response. A high-attaining student's essay on *King Lear* showed high academic content informed by confident personal judgements. Throughout the courses the students maintain improvement with examples of writing of the highest quality, showing sophistication, coherence and the ability to develop a persuasive line of argument. The students' bibliographies show an appropriate range of references. This reflects the knowledgeable and wide-ranging input from teachers who also guide students well in the development of their independent learning.
109. As a result of very good teaching marked by challenge and high expectations the students have very good attitudes to learning. They are motivated, enjoy the subject and have very good relationships with their teachers. Year 12 and 13 students expressed very warmly their affirmation of their teachers' knowledge, understanding and commitment to their learning and examination success. At the same time they recognise that their teachers expect a great deal from them and this further motivates them to succeed.
110. Leadership and management are good. A committed and effective team is quietly and professionally led by a very experienced head of department. This leadership has contributed to improvement in standards since the last inspection and good overall improvement in the subject. Relationships across the team are good and teachers discuss texts and developments in syllabus requirements on a regular basis. Recent staffing additions have added experience and variety to the approaches followed by the team. An area for consideration is to ensure that observation of each other's teaching takes place to extend the expertise of a successful team.