

INSPECTION REPORT

SAFFRON WALDEN COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL

Saffron Walden

LEA area: Essex

Unique reference number: 115324

Headmaster: Mr D J Boatman

Reporting inspector: Brian Evans
1049

Dates of inspection: 3 - 7 March 2003

Inspection number: 249602

Full 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: Foundation

Age range of pupils: 11 to 18 years

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Audley End Road
Saffron Walden

Postcode: CB11 4UH

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Appropriate authority: The governing body

Name of chair of governors: Mr Mark Hayes

Date of previous inspection: 21 April 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
1049	Brian Evans	Registered inspector	Educational inclusion English as an additional language	What sort of school is it? How high are standards? a) The school's results and achievements How well are students taught? How well is the school led and managed? What should the school do to improve further?
11041	Marvyn Moore	Lay inspector		How high are standards? b) Students' attitudes, values and personal development How well does the school care for its students? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
30576	Peter Bannon	Team inspector	Mathematics Mathematics (sixth form)	
23550	Marie Blewitt	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages German (sixth form)	
24711	Heather Butensky	Team inspector	Special educational needs	
19414	Janet Flisher	Team inspector	Drama and Theatre studies (sixth form) English	
32211	Brendan Geohegan	Team inspector	Information and communication technology Information and communication technology (sixth form)	
32334	Martyn Groucutt	Team inspector	Politics (sixth form)	
24026	Celia Holland	Team inspector	Music	
14490	Susan Jackson	Team inspector	History History (sixth form)	

19043	David Lewis	Team inspector	Geology (sixth form)	
12121	Jack Mallinson	Team inspector	English	
20913	Nicholas McKemey	Team inspector	Art and design Art and design (sixth form) Design and technology (sixth form)	
12179	Laurence Moscrop	Team inspector	Religious education	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to students?
19015	Gordon Peacock	Team inspector	Chemistry (sixth form)	
20420	Stuart Rawcliffe	Team inspector	Biology (sixth form) Science	
31192	John Stewart	Team inspector	Citizenship Physical education	
3390	Kenneth Thomas	Team inspector	Psychology (sixth form)	
27066	Jane Wheeldon	Team inspector	Design and technology	
10666	Patricia Wheeler	Team inspector	Economics (sixth form) Geography Geography (sixth form)	

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Saffron Walden County High School is a specialist technology college and is accredited by the Department for Education and Skills as a training school. It is much bigger than most secondary schools, with 1950 students on roll, 1552 of whom are in Years 7 to 11. In most year groups there are more boys than girls, although the balance varies from year to year. There are few students from ethnic minority groups. A low proportion of students speak English as an additional language and none are at an early stage of acquiring English. The main languages other than English spoken by students are Bengali, Spanish, Cantonese and Finnish. Recent intakes at Year 7 have been of above average ability, but for GCSE examinations in 2002 and previous years they were broadly average. The numbers of students in Years 7 to 11 who have special educational needs and who have Statements of Special Educational Needs are below average. Their disabilities are largely related to dyslexia or emotional and behavioural needs, but a few have other needs. The number of students eligible for free school meals is below the national average. The school is located in a semi-rural area of north-west Essex and has a farm unit on site. Students come from a range of socio-economic backgrounds but overall these are above average.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a very good school with many excellent features. Leadership and management are very good; the headmaster and senior managers skilfully balance their very high expectations of the quality of education with the need to provide for the welfare of those who learn within the school. Teaching and learning are of a high quality. Students of all attainment levels and aptitudes are successfully challenged. The school supports students with difficulties effectively and with great care. Relationships in the school community are exemplary. The school is very effective and gives very good value for money.

What the school does well

- Outstanding leadership by the headmaster promotes the highest standards of performance and behaviour.
- Students make much higher than expected progress in their studies because teaching and learning are very good.
- A high level of student participation in extra-curricular activities contributes to the outstanding provision for social and moral development in all years.
- The very good relationships and a strong sense of community and common purpose make a significant contribution to the high standards achieved.
- Sixth form standards are very high and its curriculum provision, including a broad range of advanced level GCE and vocational courses, is a major strength of the school.

What could be improved

- There are no areas of weakness significant enough to be raised here. As there are no areas for improvement there is no requirement for specific issues to be covered by a governors' action plan.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in April 1997. It responded well and since then has made good progress in building on the many strengths identified in the last report. Advanced level, GCSE and Year 9 national test results were above average in 1997 and since then standards have risen in all three areas by more than the national trend. The major contributory factor to students' high achievement is the improved quality of teaching and learning attributable to the school's successful *Teaching Excellence* programme. Until the dip in results in English in 2002 due to significant changes in staffing in the subject, attainment showed year-on-year improvement in standards. Progress over time for average and below average attainers in all subjects has been very good. Target-setting, based on effective assessment and monitoring procedures, supports students' high achievement. Major improvements have been made in a variety of other areas, including students' personal

development, their awareness of a wider range of cultures, and in facilities such as the new sports hall and on health and safety. Statutory requirements for daily acts of collective worship are not met but there are many opportunities for raising spiritual awareness.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by students at the end of Year 11 in 2000-2002 and sixth form students at the end of Year 13 in 2001 based on average point scores in GCSE and A-level/AS-level examinations.

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	2000	2001	2002	2002
GCSE examinations	A	A	A	A
A-levels/AS-levels	A	A	N/A	

Key	
well above average	A
above average	B
average	C
below average	D
well below average	E

The percentages of students who achieved five or more GCSE A* to C and five or more GCSE A* to G grades were well above average in 2002. GCSE results have improved over the last four years at a higher rate than the national trend. The school has exceeded its challenging GCSE targets in these years and looks set to meet those for 2003, which are higher. Both boys and girls achieve very well although, overall, girls achieve significantly better than boys in English.

Standards in national tests taken by Year 9 students in English, mathematics and science have improved at a faster rate than that seen nationally. In 2002, English results fell from the high levels attained in 2001 but the current standards in Year 9 are well above average and largely match the 2001 results. Mathematics and science test results show a steady improvement over the past four years. Inspection evidence and the school's well-structured approach to monitoring students' achievements confirm that students of all attainment levels, including those with special educational needs, make very good progress over time in all three core subjects. Students make good gains in the basic skills of numeracy, literacy and information and communication technology (ICT). Data analysis by the school and local education authority indicates that students make at least above average progress when compared to schools with similar Year 6 intakes. Sixth form students achieve very well. This judgement is further explained in the sixth form summary annex to the report.

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Students are eager learners. A high proportion of students participate in the wide range of extra-curricular activities available.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. Students understand and accept the school's expectations. There are no permanent exclusions recorded for 2001-02 and temporary exclusions are based on individual incidents.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Relationships in the school community are excellent.
Attendance	Above average. Good attendance procedures are consistently applied.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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.

A high proportion of lessons are taught very well and learning is at least very good in all year groups. Teaching is very good in mathematics and English and good in science. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and explain very clearly so students gain a good depth of knowledge. Their expectations are very high so lessons flow at a brisk pace and students work hard and concentrate well. Basic literacy and numeracy skills are taught well in all subjects. Teachers introduce good opportunities for students to apply their ICT skills in their programmes of study. The school meets the needs of individuals at all levels of attainment very well, including those who have special educational needs and those who are gifted and talented. The overall quality of teaching and learning in the sixth form is excellent.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Very good. The school is working effectively on establishing continuity in the learning experience of students transferring from its partner primary schools. The curriculum is broad and includes a wide range of GCSE and advanced GCE and vocational subjects.
Provision for students with special educational needs	Very good. Individual Education Plans are detailed and are implemented well. Students make very good progress.
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good. There is excellent provision for students' social and moral development and good provision for spiritual and cultural development. Although the school does not meet statutory requirements for daily corporate worship, assemblies provide very good opportunities for personal development.
How well the school cares for its students	There are excellent procedures for child protection and ensuring students' welfare. Students are well known to teachers and their academic and personal needs are met well. The pastoral system is organised well. There are good arrangements for communicating with parents.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headmaster and other key staff	Very good. The headmaster provides outstanding leadership. He is supported very well by his deputies and assistant heads and by all staff with key responsibilities. Curriculum and pastoral leaders manage their areas of responsibility very effectively. The sixth form is very well led and managed.

How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Good. Governors are well aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and are clear about their role. They primarily set strategy and hold managers to account for what the school achieves. The requirement for religious education in the sixth form is not met.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Very good. Monitoring and evaluation of its performance review systems in all years are very good and lead to effective remedial action.
The strategic use of resources	Excellent. The school supports its priorities most effectively and the small proportion of funds carried forward is well justified. The principles of best value are applied in an exemplary way. The school constantly evaluates its practice and its cost-effectiveness. Staffing is good and generally matches the demands of the curriculum. Learning resources and accommodation are good.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<p>A higher than average number of questionnaires (906) was returned by parents. They showed strong support for the school.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children are making good progress. • The school expects their children to work hard and achieve their best. • The teaching is good. • The school is helping their children to become mature and responsible. • Their children like school. • They feel comfortable about approaching the school with a question or a problem. • The school is well led and managed. • The school provides an interesting range of activities outside school. 	<p>Comments by parents on the questionnaires and at the parents' meeting were largely individual. There was one area of concern.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homework.

The inspection team agreed with the positive points made by parents. Inspectors also examined the quality of homework set. They found that, while there was some variation between subjects, the overall amount and relevance of homework set for students was at least satisfactory and very good in a number of subjects.

ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM

SAFFRON WALDEN COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form is much larger than the average, with 398 students on roll. All students are taught at the school. An increasing number of students join in the sixth form in Year 12 from other schools in the area. Overall, attainment levels on entry are above average. Nearly all students are White British. Four students are identified as having special educational needs, none of whom has a Statement. The school provides a very wide range of two-year courses leading to advanced GCE and vocational qualifications.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

This is an outstanding sixth form. Standards are high, and are very high or excellent in most subjects, and have improved since the last inspection. Teaching and learning are excellent and students achieve highly. Strong, reflective leadership by the group of sixth form senior managers is a major contributory factor to the success of the sixth form. Course retention rates are very high. This is a very cost-effective sixth form, which gives excellent value for money.

Strengths

- Excellent leadership and management of the sixth form provision ensure that even such a large sixth form runs smoothly and is monitored very well.
- Standards are high across all subjects.
- Support and guidance for students are of a high quality, enabling them to flourish both academically and personally.
- Teaching is excellent so students learn and achieve very well.
- Opportunities for enrichment and continuing spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are outstanding.

What could be improved

- There are no areas of weakness significant enough to be raised here. As there are no areas for improvement there is no requirement for specific issues to be covered by a governors' action plan.

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
Biology	Good. Standards are above average and students make good progress. Teaching and learning are good. The subject is well managed.
Chemistry	Good. Standards are well above average and students make very good progress. Teaching and learning are good and students respond well. Leadership and management are strong.
Geology	Excellent. Outstanding teaching and an excellent curriculum inspire students to achieve very well in relation to their prior attainment. Management of the subject is excellent. Use of targets is already very good but could be developed still further.

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	Very good. Results and current standards are well above the national average. Teaching is very good, overall. A majority of lessons are excellent. Students have very good and often excellent attitudes to the subject. The curriculum is wide-ranging and also offers further mathematics. Leadership and management are outstanding.
Design and technology	Very good. Standards are well above average and students make very good progress. Teaching is very good and students have very positive attitudes to learning. Leadership and management are very good.
Economics	Very good. A level standards are well above average. Teaching and learning are very good. Support for students is excellent. The subject is very well led and managed.
Information and communication technology	Good. Standards are above average and students achieve well. Teaching and learning are good and students are given good individual support. The subject is very well led and managed.
Art and design	Very good. Standards are above average and students make very good progress. Teaching and learning are very good. ICT contributes well to students' high standards. The department is very well led and managed.
Drama and Theatre studies	Very good. Very good teaching and learning promote consistently well above average standards. Students display excellent attitudes towards the subject. The curriculum is enriched by a very wide range of extra-curricular visits and productions. Leadership and management are very good.
Geography	Excellent. Standards are well above average. Teaching and learning are very good. Leadership and management are excellent.
Government and Politics	Excellent. Standards are very high and students demonstrate a high degree of understanding. Teaching and learning are excellent. Subject leadership is very good.
History	Very good. Standards are above average. Very good teaching promotes independent learning and students achieve very well. The subject is led effectively and is managed well.
Psychology	Very good. Standards are well above average. Very good teaching promotes very good learning. Students make very good progress. Subject leadership is very good.
English literature	Very good. Standards are well above average and represent very good achievement. Very good teaching enables students to become independent and discriminating learners. The subject makes a very good contribution to students' personal development and is well led and managed.
German	Very good. Students achieve very well. Teaching and learning are very good. Current standards, overall, are well above average. Leadership and management of the subject are excellent.

Other subjects sampled were:

- AVCE business, health and social care, leisure and tourism. The quality of leadership and subject expertise is very good in the advanced vocational courses. Assessment procedures are thorough and focus effectively on improving students' knowledge, skills and understanding.
- A-level French, philosophy, physical education, music and general studies.

Teaching ranged from excellent to good in the lessons that were seen.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Very well. Assessment procedures and the way assessment is used to monitor and support students are exemplary. Personal support is very good for students, highlighting particular strengths and weaknesses.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Very effective, reflective leadership. Financial arrangements are very good. Organisation and analysis of results are strengths and lead to improvement in standards. Equality of opportunity is very well promoted, and everyone is consulted. Monitoring of teaching is very good. The management of enrichment activities and supported study provision are major strengths.

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"> • Students interviewed expressed great satisfaction with the sixth form as a whole. • They appreciated the high standards and support of teachers and fellow students. • They felt they were taught well and challenged to do their best and said that teachers were accessible to help. • The large majority of questionnaires said that students enjoy being in the sixth form and would advise other students to join. 	<p>Students interviewed did not raise significant areas for improvement. On questionnaires a significant minority felt that they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • were not kept well informed about progress; • were not given helpful and constructive advice on what they should do in the sixth form; • were not well advised by the school and careers advisers on what to do afterwards.

The inspection team agreed with the positive comments students made. However, they found that the reservations on questionnaires were not representative of what is happening in the sixth form. Students are kept well informed and receive good advice about what to do after Years 12 and 13. Students receive good advice in Year 11 before entering the sixth form.

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

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

1. Overall, standards of work seen were well above average in all years. Students achieve very well and make very good progress. High standards in all years are the result of a very effective focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning allied to strong purposeful management in the school's aspiration to being a school of exceptional quality.
2. Tests results at the end of Year 9 in 2001 were high, with well over 60 per cent of students reaching Level 6 and above. The 2002 results were similar, although English results dropped mainly because of staffing changes which have now been resolved. The upward trend in students' average point scores has been above that seen nationally. Mathematics results are the best, with an average point score of 42 points in 2002 and 42 per cent reaching Level 7 or above. Compared to those of similar schools, mathematics and science results were well above average in 2002 and English results were average. Boys and girls exceed the national average in all three subjects. Overall, boys performed better than girls against their gender averages in 2002, although, in English, girls achieved higher than boys.
3. In work seen, standards in Year 9 are:
 - well above average in mathematics, science, art, geography, French, German and music;
 - and above average in citizenship, English, drama, design and technology, history, ICT, physical education and religious education.Students achieve very well overall and especially in mathematics, geography, French, German and music.
4. GCSE results in 2002 were well above average and the average point score per student has steadily improved from 48 points in 1999 to 54 points in 2002. This improvement has been above the national trend. In 2002, 77 per cent of students attained five or more A* to C GCSE grades. In mathematics, science, art, design and technology, music, French, German, geography and history, well over one in four GCSE candidates achieved an A* or A grade, which is well above the national average. The local education authority's value-added analysis of the 2000 Year 9 cohort, which was entered for the GCSE examinations in 2002, shows students' average point scores to be better than expected in 16 out of the 19 subjects offered. Unusually, compared to previous years' results, English and drama performed only in line with expectations and standards in religious education were below expectations. High standards in expressive arts and technology are very visible in the circulation areas of the school. For example, the wide central corridor is used by drama students of all ages for preparing their set pieces and students stay in role as other students pass through them on their way to lessons.
5. In work seen, standards in Year 11 are:
 - above average in English and well above average in all other subjects except in the GCSE religious education option group where they are just below average.Similarly, progress is uniformly very good for students of all levels of attainment.
6. Students arrive at school with above average literacy skills. Inspection evidence shows that all teachers emphasise the importance of basic literacy skills in their planning through the display of key words and insisting on accurate use of specialist vocabulary. Students build well on the reading and writing skills learned in primary schools. In English there is a need for greater emphasis on speaking skills. Listening skills are very good. Students' numeracy skills are very good. Mental calculations are made accurately and quickly. They measure, calculate and analyse data confidently. High quality ICT resources support students' learning well. Most students generate spreadsheets and use the Internet to research information, download text and edit their work.

7. There are very few students who have English as an additional language. The school's analysis shows that all students from ethnic minority groups who were entered for GCSE examinations in 2002 achieved five or more A* to C grades. Students who are talented, for example, in physical education, drama and music, are provided with opportunities to excel.
8. Gifted students achieve well and arrangements such as *fast track* language groups enable them to fulfil their potential. Specific criteria are used by departments to identify students. Parents are well informed by letter when students are placed on the register and then by a regular subsequent newsletter. Staff have received good in-service training, which is demonstrated in a number of curriculum areas. For example, in the mathematics department students are encouraged to enter mathematics challenges each year and Year 8 students record DVDs about mathematical concepts. Gifted and talented students are mentored well by members of staff.
9. The school's commitment to meeting the needs of all students with special educational needs is very good. Special needs staff work closely with subject teachers. They are well supported by learning assistants. As a result, students across the spectrum of educational needs make very good progress.

Sixth form

10. Standards of work seen were well above average overall. Students make very good progress and achieve very well overall.
11. In 2001, students attained an average total point score of 21.4 points. Both girls and boys achieved scores well above the national average. Results overall are rising year on year. The percentage of A/B grades in advanced level was well above the national average. In 2002, the average point scores per students were very high in mathematics, drama and economics and well above average in geography, history, German, physical education and design and technology. In other subjects they were above average except in physics where they were average. Standards achieved in vocational advanced courses are equally impressive and include an above average proportions of A and B grades.
12. Major contributory factors that lead to these high achievement patterns include the high proportion of very good and excellent teaching and the strong leadership given by the very effective sixth form management team. Retention rates are high. Value-added data show that students achieve higher grades than expected and make very good progress towards reaching their individual goals.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

13. Students have very good attitudes to the school and enjoy their work and their achievements. Staff are very supportive and, as a result, students make very good progress. Students have a very good understanding of the impact of their actions on others. Relationships between students and staff are excellent; students display enthusiasm in lessons, have good relationships with each other and enjoy the company of visitors. Students interviewed during the inspection week confirmed their positive views of school staff and felt they were very well supported by them.
14. The school well supports students with special educational needs. The special educational needs co-ordinator, together with learning support assistants, offers a high level of help and encouragement. Students respond well to this positive support and form good relationships with the teacher and mentors.
15. During the inspection week students demonstrated very good behaviour both in and out of the classrooms, at lunchtime and at break. Students respect school property, other people's property and their own property. The school has no graffiti and very little litter. The behaviour policy is well understood by students and is consistently applied by staff. Students in Years 7 to

9 are keen to earn merit marks and certificates for good behaviour and work. Lesson observations show that students' behaviour is never less than very good and sometimes excellent.

16. Personal development and relationships with students are very good. Students have very well developed interpersonal skills and display confidence and independent learning in lessons. For example, in a good Year 7 science lesson, students worked well together to discuss the concept of a *fair test* and worked in a mature and sensible way to discuss and predict the square metre area of an object. In a very good personal, health and social education lesson, students debated in a mature way the dangers of smoking and worked well in a group in a role-play situation.
17. Students are given excellent opportunity to display personal responsibility and initiative. The school has both Class and Student Councils where students debate and discuss matters of school interest and communicate their ideas to senior staff. The Councils have been successful in promoting football tournaments, school social events and a recycling initiative. The Student Council has its own website. Students are proud of their school and are keen to achieve the three R's that the school promotes: *Relationships, Responsibility and Respect*.
18. Years 8, 9 and 10 students are trained as counsellors and students from each year act as receptionists and helpers at events which the school promotes. All students are given the opportunity to participate in the many charitable events which the school promotes. The school raises large amounts of monies for national and local charities. Many students are pleased to work and take responsibility for running the school farm. A very large number of extra-curricular activities take place at lunchtime and after school, which are very well supported by students.
19. Attendance at 93.4 per cent is good and above the national average. This is largely because of the school's pro-active approach to the monitoring and promoting of attendance. During 2001-02 there were two permanent exclusions and the proper procedures for these have been scrupulously observed by staff.

Sixth form

20. Students display excellent attitudes to the school. They provide excellent role models for younger students and provide help and encouragement to Years 7 to 9 by acting as prefects and mentors and by setting a good example. Behaviour in the sixth form is never less than very good and mostly excellent. Assignments and course work are completed promptly and students have excellent rapport with their tutors, who take time and trouble to offer them guidance, help and encouragement. The school is rightly proud of its very successful sixth form.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

21. Teaching and learning are very good overall. Teaching in Years 7 to 11, apart from one unsuccessful lesson, was at least satisfactory, including 81 per cent that was at least good; 36 per cent was very good and 17 per cent excellent. Very good or excellent teaching was fairly evenly distributed across all subjects. This high quality of teaching and learning springs mainly from the implementation of a successful *Teaching Excellence* programme over the past few years. Its overarching strategy has been to give teachers secure whole-school support systems, including staff development, to work within. For example, students recognise that all teachers have high expectations of them and they respond by having positive attitudes to their learning. This is particularly crucial in a school of nearly 2000 students.
22. Teaching is very good in English, mathematics, art, citizenship, geography, ICT, French, German, music and physical education. It is good in science, design and technology and history. In religious education, teaching is satisfactory. Teaching has improved significantly since the last inspection.

23. Most teachers are excellent role models and set high expectations for their students within a relaxed but effective learning environment. They ensure that all students are involved in lessons. For example, in one Year 7 lesson students were encouraged to believe they were taking part in the village Gamelan in tropical Java with tasks undertaken in the Indonesian musical style. Students of a wide ability range were all given suitable tasks, from supporting prompts given unobtrusively to those who needed them through to difficult co-ordination tasks allotted to the higher attainers. The very good performance of the Gamelan at the end of the lesson was greeted with broad smiles and much pleasure from all.
24. Teachers have very good and often excellent knowledge about their subjects. They explain their subject matter clearly and respond skilfully to students' questions. Lessons are planned well and build on students' prior knowledge and basic numeracy and literacy skills. New technology is integrated well into programmes of study. Most lessons move at a brisk pace and students respond well by making very good gains in knowledge and understanding.
25. Students contribute a great deal to the success of many lessons, as they arrive ready to work and concentrate very hard. They are attentive and interested and are eager learners.
26. Teachers meet the needs of students with special educational needs very well. Withdrawal groups address students' needs effectively. Students are given clear steps required towards achieving their learning objectives. For example, a boy with Aspergers Syndrome acquired the necessary skills to make a nightlight by developing his painting skills and by learning to use the drilling machine. In a Year 8 French lesson, all students, including those with special educational needs, persevered in pronouncing and understanding difficult expressions. All members of staff have copies of Individual Education Plans and use them effectively to support individual students in working towards their targets. Work in lessons is well matched to the needs of students with special educational needs.

Sixth form

27. Teaching and learning are excellent overall. Teaching was at least satisfactory in all the courses inspected. It was at least good in 97 per cent of lessons, very good or better in 78 per cent and excellent in 27 per cent. Excellent teaching was observed in 12 subjects including more than one lesson in mathematics, geology and economics. The superb relationships between teachers and students and the maturity which most students display contribute hugely to the high standards achieved by the majority of students. The ethos in the sixth form is such that students plan their time efficiently and focus well on the tasks set for them.
28. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge, which inspires confidence in students. For example, in design and technology the individual guidance and reviews students receive help them concentrate on areas they need to improve. In history, the careful and consistent emphasis on an extensive range of subject-specific terms builds a strong awareness of the importance of language in the subject.
29. Students' work is carefully and sensitively monitored both at subject teacher level and by senior sixth form managers. For example, excellent formative assessment was observed in a number of advanced vocational courses. The overall approach by teachers in helping students to know how to study independently and encourage learning as a two-way process between teacher and student is generally effective in most subjects. Students know what they need to do to improve their work and are aware that effective study skills play an important part in successful learning.

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

30. Overall, the quality and range of learning opportunities offered to students in Years 7 to 11 are very good. National strategies for improving provision, including literacy and numeracy, in Years 7

to 9 are effective. Continuity in learning for students transferring from primary schools

into Year 7 is a major strength. Its success has led to the school participating in a national project which focuses on avoiding repetition and lack of challenge in the early years of secondary schools.

31. Students in Years 7 to 9 study the full National Curriculum as well as citizenship, drama, personal, health and social education (PHSE) and religious education. The student groupings provide a common curriculum and ensure that all students are provided for appropriately, whatever their attainment, ethnicity or gender.
32. In Years 10 and 11, all students study English language and literature, mathematics, modern foreign languages, science, a design and technology option, physical education and PSHE. The school is meeting the challenge of greater flexibility in the upper school curriculum to meet the needs of all students. As a result, measures implemented include the appointment of a gifted and talented co-ordinator and regular review of the school's provision for the small number of disaffected students.
33. The provision of extra-curricular activities, visits and residential courses is outstanding. There are a large number of very well-supported sports clubs and teams, run both at lunchtime and after school. Additional Latin and 'fast track' language classes are attended by students before school. The music department organises a range of additional opportunities for both instrumentalists and singers. There are regular fieldwork opportunities for students in a number of subjects. All of these opportunities extend and enhance students' experiences and their learning.
34. The PHSE programme is timetabled in Year 7. In other year groups, all the statutory elements of PHSE are integrated into subject programmes and are supplemented by special events. For example, during the inspection, Year 8 students took part in an afternoon programme on drugs awareness presented by a very effective professional troupe. The PSHE programme for all year groups is led imaginatively and rigorously monitored and evaluated. A Year 9 religious education lesson on the theme of charity included a brisk sequence of cameos which included the full range of active learning activities. There were well-structured paired discussions, decision-making in groups, probing questions by the teacher pitched to individual students' knowledge and understanding, and well-presented individual written work. The lesson ended with students highlighting their practical support for specific charities.
35. The school farm unit based on site is a distinctive feature in the school and is very popular with younger students. It contributes massively to the positive ethos of the school and on one morning during the inspection new lambs were born and were paid a visit from a large number of enthusiastic adults and students. However, the unit is not imaginatively integrated into the curriculum or students' timetabled learning experiences and opportunities to do so are not regularly assessed.
36. Links with other schools are excellent and are mutually beneficial to partner institutions. As well as the curriculum links noted above the school is working in partnership with a neighbouring secondary school. It also takes a leading role in developing the application of new technology in the curriculum as a member of a large group of schools across the south-east region.
37. The school makes very good provision for ensuring equality of access and opportunity for all students in every aspect of its life and work. Provision for students with special educational needs is very good. Targets set out in Individual Education Plans are known and responded to well by subject teachers.
38. The provision for careers education and advice in Years 10 and 11 by external agencies is unsatisfactory. Through no fault of the school just over half of the students get no careers interview and advice as there is a severe shortage of Connexions advisers. Their time allocation in the school has dropped considerably and in some weeks an adviser is available less than two

- days a week. The present temporary adviser gives additional time for anyone who wants advice one lunch time a week. He is also present at parents' evenings for Year 9 and 11 students. In Years 8, 9 and 10 the timetable is collapsed for a half day for careers work. The school also arranged for the Impact Theatre Company to visit to cover careers options with Year 9.
39. The school has very good provision for work experience for all Year 10 students. Placements are often organised by students themselves in places such as Edinburgh and the City of London. Good links with Trident and work done by tutors enable all students to work for two weeks. A briefing session for parents and lunchtime job shops enable students to make a good choice for work experience. Students keep a diary during their two weeks, which is used for English coursework.
 40. Overall, the provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. Provision for spiritual development is good. Various themes during assembly times encourage students to reflect on topics like Lent and Easter. Taped music during these periods adds to this dimension. Other opportunities for reflection occur in subject areas. In religious education students study the rites of passage in world religions and are encouraged to reflect on the meanings behind them. In citizenship students are encouraged to reflect on the inequalities that exist between rich and poor countries. There is a strong element of reflection in music and drama. In the former, students are led to appreciate its emotional meaning and in the latter to reflect about expressive impulse and character. There are also opportunities for awe and wonder in design and technology where students are encouraged to consider the complexities of mechanisms. Registration times are used by some tutors to develop this provision, such as in one where the students were giving thoughtful consideration to supporting children in Tanzania. Not all registration times, however, are used to this good effect and this, along with more opportunities to reflect across a wider range of subjects, is an area for further development. Provision in general, however, has improved since the last inspection. The provision for the wider sense of the spiritual is good in that students are given clear opportunities, such as in physical education, to improve their self-esteem.
 41. Provision for moral development is excellent. There are clear expectations of the students to behave well and having a clear sense of right and wrong. A wide range of codes reinforces this on the formal level. These include an expectations code, community code, bullying code, school rules and behaviour policy. The staff themselves set very good examples. The personal, social, and health education lessons, along with contributions from citizenship, cover a wide range of moral issues. Topics include crime and punishment, prejudice and drugs. Other subject departments also make a significant contribution to this. In English students are encouraged to participate in debates on topics like war and to be able to argue a position on agreement or otherwise. In history students are invited to consider the effects of progress on other communities and societies. In all subject areas behaviour expectations are high and the students respond positively to this. Personal guidance for students is available at many levels and a display board clearly indicates where this guidance can be found.
 42. Provision for social development is excellent. Positive relationships are encouraged through a very wide range of extra-curricular activities, which take place at lunch-times, after school and on special days out and visits. These include sporting activities, music and drama activities and exchange visits. Many of these activities enable students to take responsibility and develop their skills of independence. Participation in the community is also very strong. Students develop an understanding of citizenship through a well-developed programme of study. Topics of this study include issues on inequality, conflict, homelessness and relationships. Various school policies make a strong input to the social provision. These include policies on race, health education, sex education, and equal opportunities. Many subject departments encourage collaborative work and this enables students to become aware of what is needed to work effectively in a team. This is particularly the case in physical education. Other subjects such as drama cover social topics. These include work on domestic issues and the family.
 43. Provision for cultural development is good. Students have some opportunities to appreciate their own cultural traditions. In English, for example, students go on theatre visits and there are authors who visit the school. Geography has fieldwork visits. In science students visit places

such as the Science Museum and in history students look at music in the Elizabethan period. From a wider perspective the school enables students to participate in larger cultural events and activities such as concerts and drama productions. There is also a good multicultural dimension to the provision. Residential trips to Paris are an example of this and there are exchange visits to Romania. The school also has contacts with Germany, Africa and Spain and there are sporting contacts with Canada and Holland. Study in religious education includes world religions and there are units of work on Japanese and Chinese calligraphy in art. Progress on this dimension of the provision since the last inspection has been good but there is room for further development with a stronger emphasis on the multicultural aspect of the UK itself, for example in celebrating Black History week.

Sixth form

44. The sixth form curriculum is very good and meets the needs of students across a broad spectrum. There is a wide range of advanced GCE and vocational courses for students to pursue. The courses match well the aspirations of the students and every effort is made to enable all students to follow the courses which suit them best. The Year 12 course is supplemented by a key skills programme which, although not popular with many students, nevertheless makes a valuable contribution to their learning in other subjects. The provision of a study area supervised by a qualified librarian is a particularly strong feature because students are given expert support in research and independent learning skills. The sixth form is further enhanced by senior managers' skill and great enthusiasm in encouraging students to participate in a varied programme of enrichment activities. The statutory requirement for religious education is not met.
45. The quality of careers advice for sixth form students is good. A booking system for time with the Connexions adviser works on a three week cycle and the time available for students is improving. All students following vocational courses get very good opportunities to shadow workers in business over a two week period and are also required to do two weeks' work experience. Other students are encouraged to take part in work experience and the majority take that opportunity. All students in Year 12 have a useful Rotary Club interview. Connexions are available at Year 12 and 13 Parents' Evenings and have an input into sixth form induction. They also operate a good drop-in session once a week.
46. Provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. The general ethos promotes a strong sense of self-knowledge and worth. The staff work hard on relationships and there are high expectations in terms of conduct and responsibility. The students are sensitive as well as enthusiastic and they are careful to give each other support. The many visiting speakers contribute to this provision. These include speakers on European politics, appreciating music, Christianity in a secular society, voluntary work abroad, cultural activities in Britain and Anglo-American relationships. Cultural and exchange visits by the students themselves broaden their perspectives on life and, in general studies, students through the model United Nations general assembly programme, get a flavour of debating and decision making. Important contributions to the provision are also made through the assembly programme. Topics and activities include the four main categories and so there are presentations on South African issues, charity work in Romania, presentations by the headmaster and music events. The events also included a memorial event for a former student. The students are strongly active in the community. Activities include work shadowing, public events such as Motown Magic, drama events and work within the local community.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

47. The school has excellent procedures for promoting students' health, welfare and safety. All staff at the school care for their students and offer a high level of support to them. The school's pastoral system is very effective and, because form tutors remain with their own tutor group throughout their time at school, students are well known to them and relate to them well. Students receive excellent support from both teaching and support staff, who promote their

academic and personal development very well. Form tutors, heads of year and subject heads meet regularly to discuss the progress and attainment of individual students and, as a result, they thrive in the strong pastoral and learning environment.

48. Child protection procedures at the school are excellent. The Child Protection Officer and her deputy have received up-to-date training and have arranged *cascade training* for all other members of staff. Concise and detailed records are kept of students on the *At Risk Register*

and *Looked After* students. Liaison arrangements with the school nurse, school counsellor and education welfare officer are very good. Cases referred to the external agencies are monitored and followed up well.

49. The school has excellent arrangements for first aid. A large number of first aiders have been appointed, all of whom have up-to-date qualifications. In addition, the school benefits from the services of a full time qualified nurse, who is available at all times to give students advice and treatment. The school has a dedicated first aid room and excellent records are kept of accidents and the administration of medicines.

50. The school has appointed a part-time professional counselor, who works well with the pastoral team to identify students with emotional difficulties which may inhibit their learning. In addition, the school has a youth worker, who similarly works well with the students. Their work is much appreciated.

51. The school bursar has overall responsibility for health and safety and has arranged for regular health and safety audits to be carried out. In addition each department carries out risk assessment and excellent COSHH (Control of Hazardous Substances) procedures are in place. Fire drills are carried out regularly.

52. The school has very good procedures for monitoring and promoting good behaviour and the elimination of oppressive behaviour. Behaviour, in and out of the classroom, is very good. The school's behaviour policy and reward and sanction system is effective; fully understood by students and well applied by staff. Students are well aware that the school expects high standards of behaviour and they respond accordingly. During the inspection week, students were polite to the inspection team and displayed pride in their work and in their school. Students spoken to thought that incidents of bullying were rare but when they occurred were dealt with immediately and appropriately by staff.

53. The school has very good procedures for the monitoring and promoting of attendance. Teachers use the BROMCOM electronic system of registration and students' attendance is monitored at each lesson. A member of staff contacts parents on the first day of absence; as a result, attendance in the school is good and above the national average. The governing body has a policy of not authorising requests for holiday absence and, as a result, the school's figures for unauthorised absences are broadly in line with the national averages rather than below.

54. The special needs department is very effective. The special education needs co-ordinator carefully co-ordinates the work of all support staff to ensure that the needs of this group of students are well met. All staff within the special needs department offer a high level of care and support to students, who make very good progress as a result. Individual Education Plans are carefully compiled by teachers and learning support assistants; and parents are invited to annual reviews and contribute to target settings for the following year. There is a literacy and numeracy progress unit club, which takes place before school each morning. These clubs are attended by up to 40 students, who demonstrate their commitment and enthusiasm.

Assessment

55. Procedures for assessing students' attainment and progress are very good overall. This is good improvement since the previous inspection. Subjects receive data on students' performance in

the National Curriculum tests at the end of primary school and the school tests students' verbal, non-verbal and quantitative potential on entry using standardised cognitive ability tests. They combine all of these to determine one minimum all round target grade for examination performance. Most curriculum areas use this information very effectively to predict challenging targets in their subject. In art, English, modern foreign languages, geography, special educational needs and vocational courses in ICT, assessment systems are very good. In mathematics they are excellent, with the measurement of levels fine-tuned to a high degree of accuracy. However, in history, there is no formal target setting and in ICT not all students have their attainment assessed in Years 10 and 11.

56. All areas follow the school's marking policy of standardised grades for attainment which map explicitly to performance against National Curriculum levels. Students are also graded for effort. The best subjects ensure that their assessments are moderated with levelled tests. In English, art, geography, mathematics and food technology, assessment is used extremely well to set short-term targets and guide curricular planning. In English, an excellent mentoring system is in place. In mathematics, students also benefit from the way work is targeted in fine detail for each attainment set, with students moved early between these sets as performance changes. Homework is used effectively across all curriculum areas.
57. All students benefit from the half-termly tutorials to discuss progress against their attainment targets. The form tutor plays a pivotal role in this. Students are also involved in self-assessment and almost all students know their current performance levels very well. However, whilst reports are objective in giving information about National Curriculum levels, there is a lack of detail about what students can do and what they need to do to improve.
58. National Curriculum results and standardised tests are used in the identification of need on entry to the school. The *Jaffa Cake Club*, which is held for up to 40 Year 6 primary students to attend for literacy improvement, allows further good identification and assessment processes for the incoming Year 7. In Years 7 to 11, special needs staff use the full range of assessment data available when assessing, reviewing and monitoring progress of students with special educational needs. Testing is undertaken annually to monitor spelling and reading levels and to review targets. Students with Statements of Special Educational Needs make very good progress towards targets set.

Sixth form

Assessment

59. Overall, assessment in the sixth form is excellent. Procedures for assessing students' attainment and progress are extremely accurate. Challenging and realistic targets are set on a subject basis, using a nationally accepted system based on all round GCSE performance. The needs of individuals are diagnosed exceptionally well because teachers know them from main school and because of the use of cover sheets for assignments. Students communicate their own assessment of strengths and weaknesses and this assists teachers in providing support. All subjects conduct regular reviews with students, usually in lesson time. The level of support provided is always at least very good. Almost immediate feedback to assignments in art, mathematics, government and politics and vocational subjects sets prompt short-term targets. Feedback to students in geography, history, modern foreign languages, design and technology and drama is very good indeed. Only in science is the use of assessment to inform curricular planning less than very good. The use of a clearly defined system of assessment across all subjects explicitly related to GCE AS and A-level grades allows form tutors to monitor progress with extreme accuracy.

Advice, support and guidance

60. The quality of advice and support for students in the sixth form is excellent. Students in Year 11 are well prepared for sixth form life by a well-organised induction programme. Although sixth formers receive good advice if they wish to pursue further education, because of staffing difficulties within the Connexions Service, careers advice is limited and only approximately 50 per cent of sixth formers are offered the opportunity of careers interviews. As a result, the majority of students who responded to the student questionnaire intimated they did not feel they received adequate careers advice. Attendance of sixth form students is well monitored and in the period from September prior to the inspection, the attendance rate was 92 per cent.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

61. Parents have good views about the school and this is demonstrated by the fact that the school is oversubscribed. A large proportion of parents (46 per cent) responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire. The overwhelming majority of parents believe their children like school and make good progress because teaching is good and they feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem. Parents also indicate that they think the school is well led and managed and enables their children to become mature and responsible. A minority of parents think the school does not work closely with them and that they are not kept well informed about how their children are getting on.
62. The inspection findings confirm the positive views of parents. Overall, inspectors judge that there is a sound system for communicating and reporting to parents, although the school should consult with parents further in the light of the questionnaire returns. The school gives an annual written report and two progress checks to parents at differing points during the academic year. Although the reports contain clear information regarding the grades students have achieved and an explanation of the grades, annual reports do not give any narrative information on a subject-by-subject basis of what students have learned and studied and there is no space in the report for student or parent comments.
63. The school arranges a parents' evening every year where parents can meet subject teachers to discuss their children's progress, and if parents require further information they are able to see heads of year by prior appointment. The school arranges informative *Year Ahead Evenings*, which include presentations of the courses available for GCSE and A level. There is a sixth form open evening for parents and students before they complete their GCSEs and wish to discuss options for A levels. In addition, in Year 9, parents of students with learning or behaviour difficulties are invited in school to discuss possible study options and the particular support which the school is able to offer.
64. The school arranges a special evening for the parents of Year 10 students prior to offering them work experience to explain the concept of work experience and how students are expected to behave. Induction procedures into Year 7 are detailed and work very well. Parents are invited to tour the school and see it at work before places are offered. The school has piloted a virtual reality computer program for feeder primary schools where students are given useful information prior to their admission into Year 7. The school has very good links with all its primary schools. Information is shared well and, as a result, students make a very smooth transition into Year 7. The school has similarly very good links with further and higher education establishments.
65. Written information provided by the school for parents is good. The school provides a Year 9 handbooks giving good academic information about the courses of study available to students. In addition, the school has provided a second Parents' Handbook, which is well presented and gives parents good information about the opportunities that are available for their children in school. A separate Handbook is provided for the sixth form.
66. Student Organisers provide a means of communication between parents and the school. These books are signed by parents and checked regularly by form tutors to ensure that parents are aware of the progress that their children are making or difficulties they may have. Regular newsletters are produced providing information on school activities, staff information and achievement of students.
67. The Parent-Teacher Association involves a small number of parents but they give regular support to the school in the many events that the school arranges including drama, music and educational evenings. The school gives good help and information to parents of students with special education needs. Parents have very positive views of the sixth form. Students felt that they are treated as adults, that the sixth form collegiate offers them excellent care support and advice, and that the sixth form was very successful and they were proud to be members of it.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

68. Outstanding leadership by the headmaster promotes the highest standards of performance and behaviour. He is very well supported by the senior management group, which includes the bursar. The leadership group are successfully focused on achieving the overall aim of creating a school of exceptional quality.
69. When the headmaster joined the school seventeen years ago, only 27 per cent of its students obtained 5 or more A* to C grades in GCSE. The figure is now 77 per cent. The school is heavily oversubscribed in Year 7 and an increasing number of students now apply to enter the sixth form.
70. The achievement of very high standards in all aspects of school life is due to a combination of qualities. The first of these is the vision of the headmaster. This has permeated all aspects of school life, but notably in perceiving what the school might become in terms of academic excellence for its students, and in nourishing all the talents that they possess. He has responded to the aspiration of parents, and, in developing the sixth form, perceived that the location of the school could attract many more students than before.
71. Buildings that had been cramped and unkempt, with many leaking roofs and few specialist facilities, have been enlarged and improved, giving far greater opportunities for music, drama, sport, and technology. An astute business sense enabled the headmaster to make the most of the school's existing assets, leading principally to the provision of a new sports hall and all-weather pitches. The grounds, flower beds, teaching areas and corridors are now well kept and attractive. It is a place that students can feel proud of, with much more the feel of a college than of a school.
72. A school which had catered well for the high attainers has changed into one which recognises the potential of all its students. Systems introduced set challenging targets and these are constantly monitored. As a result, average and lower attainers are now achieving better than might have been predicted, a major reason for the school's overall success in examinations.
73. Staff share the headmaster's vision. They are given opportunities to get involved in making decisions and be responsible for the school's growing success. Rapid promotion was available for those with competence and flair, so the school began to attract the most able teachers. The school was quick to make the most of new opportunities arising from handling its own budget and bidding into specialist funds. The headmaster and governors seek out new initiatives that give teachers a wider experience or increased contacts outside the school. Saffron Walden became a training school and gained Technology College status together with a wide range of accreditation including the Investors in People. Currently, the school is part of a national pilot scheme to review National Curriculum Programmes of Study. This is enthusiastically led by the curriculum deputy. There are very good links with the local community and with schools abroad, which have been of immense mutual benefit.
74. The school's systems for reaching decisions, devolving responsibility and ensuring good communication are very good. The senior management group is deliberately small for so large a school but very effective in ensuring that decisions are carried out. Roles are well understood. The previously numerous teaching departments have been reorganised into ten curriculum areas, giving their respective co-ordinators a true stake in decisions which affect the whole school and its development. They are served by *Collegiates* of two or three senior staff in their curriculum area. This in turn leads to a wider sharing of responsibility and sense of involvement in the success of the school.
75. Every two years each curriculum area is reviewed by two senior managers, another curriculum co-ordinator, a member of the pastoral team and a professional from outside the school. The resulting review offers helpful insights into the running of the area, and includes an agenda for further action. It is a useful device by which co-ordinators can learn what other areas are doing, although in some cases the judgements are a little bland.
76. In almost all departments the quality of leadership and management is very high. In many curriculum areas every teacher, even those who are newly qualified, will have some aspect which

they can take responsibility for, thus acquiring valuable experience. In the same way heads of year delegate very effectively to form tutors, ensuring a high standard of pastoral care.

77. All teachers are subject to appraisal. This is carried out every year and leads to the setting of targets. These are set deliberately high. There is no room for complacency. Everybody is expected to question what they do and achieve more next time. All are given opportunities for training or widening of experience. Progress is closely monitored and evaluated.
78. Priorities for further development are very well chosen, and effectively carried through. There is a detailed development plan for the current year and for the next four years. Targets for examination performance in Year 9 national tests, GCSE and sixth form examinations are clearly identified, based on students' previous performance and the expectation that each year will improve on the last. A well-devised cycle of consultation ensures that everyone knows what is proposed, what has been decided, and how it will be evaluated.
79. The special educational needs co-ordinator provides very good leadership and management. Clear systems and procedures are maintained for the identification and assessment of students. Schemes of work have been set up for work with students both on a withdrawal basis and in the classroom. The allocation of support assistants is sufficient to meet needs. In-service training for special educational needs is good and has raised the awareness of all staff. The teaching area is reasonably stocked and resourced. ICT is well resourced in the department and includes a number of PCs. Learning resources are well matched to the needs of the students.
80. The governing body brings a wide range of experience and expertise to the school. The governors support the headmaster and staff well in extending the range of projects and initiatives which are proving beneficial to students' learning. Governors fulfil most of their statutory responsibilities, although the school does not meet the requirements for a daily act of collective worship. Its procedures for financial management and control are very good.
81. The school has an annual budget of over seven million pounds. The school bursar and finance officers are very efficient, use management information systems effectively and advise governors on the correct use of specific funds such as those for students with special educational needs. Termly audit reports show good financial control. Governors apply the key principles of best value effectively for the benefit of staff and students and these are confirmed by the rising standards in the school. The carry forward balance to allow for contingency spending is small in relation to the overall budget.
82. The school's overall staffing provision is good. The school has well qualified and enthusiastic teaching staff in most areas of the school. They are keen to make the best use of new technology and all use laptop computers in their practice. There is a very good match of expertise to the demands of the curriculum apart from in religious education. There have also recently been some staffing stability problems in the science department. The school has good links with Cambridge University Faculty of Education and participates in the initial teacher training of teachers. The school is a DfES designated training school. Many teachers progress through the initial teacher training program and subsequently become newly qualified teachers at the school. During their important first year in the profession newly qualified teachers receive very good support, including a reduced teaching commitment and they have a mentor to support them.
83. The quality of accommodation is good. The majority of teaching rooms are large and airy. Teachers make good use of displays of students' work, helpful hints and key words to support their learning. The physical education facilities are excellent; the school has a newly built sports hall with very well-equipped multi-gym and dance studio, and outside all weather surfaces. The library is a great asset to the school; it has been transformed into a colourful vibrant learning space with good computer provision. However, there is still insufficient space for all resources. Art and design and modern foreign languages facilities are very good. In all subjects students have good access to computer facilities. Generally, rooms are grouped to make organization of resources more effective. Special educational needs provide a good teaching room plus a discrete office for interviewing students and parents. Despite the overall positive picture there are some shortcomings. Music has a new teaching block, but because the subject has been so

successful there are still insufficient specialist rooms for group work; students cannot hear their own work above the sound of others. Lack of specialist accommodation in science and geography reduces opportunities for practical activities and teachers spend valuable time moving resources around the school. The technology block provides good, spacious accommodation but safe storage of large work is a problem. The food technology rooms are unsatisfactory; whilst the room sizes are good, there are too few working surfaces for groups of twenty students and these are in a poor condition.

84. Overall, resources are good. There is a good range of books in the school library and in the sixth form study centre, both of which are attractive spaces. Subjects use their resources well and benefit from very good ICT facilities and a student-computer ratio which is well above the national average. Some departments, such as history, have dedicated computer suites. There is a good range of resources, including video facilities, tape recorders, overhead projectors, and laptops, in the classrooms. However, there are weaknesses in science where some equipment is ageing, and in music where the provision of instruments has not kept pace with the popularity of the subject. The annual budget for the library is below national expectations.
85. The school has maintained the strong drive to improve standards and the learning environment which was noted in the last inspection report. It continues to provide very good pastoral care and guidance for all its students. The school gives very good value for money and provides a very effective education.

Sixth form

86. The quality of leadership and management of the sixth form is excellent. The school's aims and the values that underpin the work of the sixth form are relevant to the needs of the students. They are embedded well in all aspects of the school's work. There is a very good relationship between the sixth form and the main school. The sixth form leadership displays the same concern for the individual and his or her achievements and the same strengths in organisation and analysis as are evident in the school as a whole. For example, the same effective review procedures apply as in the 11-16 curriculum. A complementary strength, and one which gives this sixth form a very distinctive character, is the leadership by senior managers in developing the wider interests of students through enrichment activities.
87. The leadership and management provided by subject leaders are very effective. Subject leaders are constantly striving for improvement and their organisation is very strong. Most A-level subjects are well led, and none are less than good. Effective monitoring systems ensure that 16-19 professional development is provided to teachers to encourage them to extend students' learning, although there is still a variation between the best and the least strong teaching.
88. Educational priorities are very well supported through excellent procedures for financial planning, administration and control. The school's exceptionally clear rationale for spending decisions is firmly rooted in school development planning as a whole, and in that for the sixth form in particular. All sixth form funding is strictly allocated for its purpose to ensure the highest possible quality provision and achievement post-16. It is cost-effective and does not draw resources from the main school. Course provision is determined by the students' choices, balanced by the stringent annual costing of individual courses to ensure that all are financially viable. The principles of best value are strictly applied in relation to all expenditure in accordance with practice in the school as a whole with a particular emphasis on the close analysis of students' performance in external examinations in comparison with that in other schools.
89. Resources for learning are good. The stock of books, materials and equipment is good or better in most subject areas. Business education, computing, drama, English, French, and physical education are particularly well equipped. Resources are at least adequate in all subject areas that were a focus for the inspection. The resources of the sixth form study area have been greatly augmented as the sixth form has increased in size.

90. There is a very good match of teachers to the curricular needs of the students in the sixth form. The effect of this is that the teaching is based on very strong knowledge and understanding in almost all subjects. Teachers are largely experienced in the examination courses, and the size of the sixth form means that new staff can be supported by others who are teaching the same course. The school has enough accommodation for students although with the increasing size of the sixth form it is becoming very tight. Access to ICT is good and benefits students' learning.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

91. Standards are high across the school and therefore there are no areas of weakness significant enough to be a requirement for specific issues to be covered by a governors' action plan in the main school or in the sixth form. However, there are a number of minor issues in the main report for consideration by governors, headmaster and staff in further improving the quality of education. These include, for example,
- (1) the relative performance of boys and girls in English and science;
(Paragraphs 92, 123)
 - (2) greater involvement by external advisers in careers guidance;
(Paragraph 37)
 - (3) further improvements in accommodation.
(Paragraph 83)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	176
	Sixth form	71
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		59

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 7 – 11							
Number	30	63	49	33	1	0	0
Percentage	17	36	28	18	< 1	0	0
Sixth form							
Number	19	36	14	2	0	0	0
Percentage	27	51	19	3	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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1552	398
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	62	N/A

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	17	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	175	4

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	74

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	15
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	50

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	5.7
National comparative data	7.8

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.8
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	153	167	320

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	112	138	136
	Girls	146	148	141
	Total	258	286	277
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	81 (89)	89 (87)	87 (86)
	National	66 (64)	67 (66)	66 (66)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	44 (63)	68 (70)	57 (61)
	National	32 (31)	45 (43)	33 (34)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	131	145	136
	Girls	153	160	146
	Total	284	305	282
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	89 (89)	95 (94)	88 (91)
	National	67 (65)	70 (68)	67 (64)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	52 (53)	71 (68)	53 (63)
	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	155	143	298

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	109	153	154
	Girls	120	140	140
	Total	229	293	294
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	77 (75)	98 (97)	99 (98)
	National	50 (48)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

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

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	44	46	90

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Male	Female	All
School	Number of candidates			
	Average point score per candidate	23.3	19.6	21.4
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.7	17.4

International Baccalaureate		Number	% success rate
Number entered for the International Baccalaureate Diploma and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all they studied	School	0	n/a
	National		81.0

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	1836	52	0
White – Irish	0	0	0
White – any other White background	43	1	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	0	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Indian	1	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	3	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	5	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	0	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	1	0	0
Black or Black British – African	1	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	0	0	0
Chinese	2	0	0
Any other ethnic group	3	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	55	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Financial information

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	117.69
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.5

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	44
Total aggregate hours worked per week	1085

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	75
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	26.05
Key Stage 4	23.59

Financial year	2001-02
	£
Total income	6,362,000
Total expenditure	6,181,000
Expenditure per pupil	3,361
Balance brought forward from previous year	30,000
Balance carried forward to next year	211,000

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	42.3
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	43.4

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

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1950
Number of questionnaires returned	906

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	38	52	8	1	1
My child is making good progress in school.	46	48	4	1	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	27	61	6	1	6
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	20	58	16	4	1
The teaching is good.	33	61	2	1	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	35	53	10	1	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	50	44	4	1	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	64	34	2	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	27	55	14	2	3
The school is well led and managed.	53	42	2	1	2
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	43	49	4	1	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	50	41	4	0	4

PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

ENGLISH

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

Strengths

- Overall progress and attainment in public examinations.
- Commitment of all teachers to the support of students and the raising of standards.
- Leadership of the department.
- Extra-curricular activities.

Areas for improvement

- Boys in Years 10 and 11 are not reaching the same high standards as girls.
- Drafting and presentation would be improved by greater use of ICT.
- Students should be given more opportunities to speak and discuss.

92. Standards on entry have until recently been at the national average. By the end of Year 9 students have made good progress, reaching standards above the national average. Results in GCSE show marked differences between the attainment of boys and girls. Boys make satisfactory progress in Years 10 and 11, and achieve results above the national average, whereas girls make very good progress, with results that are consistently well above the national average. Standards by the end of Year 9 are slightly lower than those for mathematics and science, particularly when judged by those achieving the highest grades. GCSE results for boys and girls combined, in both language and literature, are in line with those for mathematics and science. The English department is adding value throughout the years of the main school. It is a department which aims to give everybody the same opportunities, and has been particularly successful in improving results for low attaining students.
93. Inspection evidence confirms the results outlined above. By the end of Year 9, most students can write accurately and in the final drafts present their work attractively. A greater use of word-processing would improve standards of accuracy, composition and presentation still further. Students respond well to a range of genres, which includes formal letter-writing, analysis of advertisements, criticism of poetry and novels, the preparation of speeches, and study of *Macbeth*. Standards are at their highest in the writing of short stories, many of which contain sensitive descriptions of everyday life, imaginative plotting and vivid use of language. In their study of *Macbeth* students come to see how Lady Macbeth manipulates her husband, and how the language creates the dark and brooding atmosphere of the play. Students are making good progress in their first three years.
94. Standards in Years 10 and 11 are above the national average. Students learn to recognise devices found in the media, and use confidently the appropriate technical terms such as *denotation*, *semantic field* and *lexis*. They prove they could make excellent use of modern technology in making presentations to the whole class. They broaden their understanding of the cultural background of the novels they study. The device of writing imaginary letters from characters in *A View from the Bridge* gives insights into the situation of immigrants. In much the same way study of the life of Nelson Mandela, or the class system described in novels by Dickens and Charlotte Bronte provides students with awareness of life in other societies. They respond well to the romantic poetry of the Pre-Raphaelites, and find they can compose their own poems in similar style. They continue to write lively short stories, but could usefully spend more time on this. Accuracy is generally good, but some students still make spelling mistakes and have trouble with apostrophes.
95. Standards of reading are generally high. This is achieved by providing regular and frequent opportunities for silent reading at the start of every lesson in the younger years, and then requiring students to record detailed accounts of each book. There are awards for those who read most,

and these are taken as valued accolades. The library is a most attractive place, which does much to encourage the love of books. Every student in the first three years will spend one lesson there in every fortnight. There are also shared reading schemes by which students in the sixth form help weaker readers in Year 7.

96. Standards of speaking are at only average levels, and more time should be devoted to this. Students do not articulate as clearly as they should. Others in the class are not required to listen attentively to what they say, or comment on it. More organised discussion in small groups would make students more active learners. When they are asked to address the whole class students rely on reading from a script, rather than speak from notes or from the heart.
97. Teaching is very good throughout the school. This is marked most strongly by teachers' commitment. They take great trouble with preparation and with imaginative ways of presenting their material. Teachers have good subject knowledge, and put it over with an enthusiasm which can visibly inspire the students. In the one lesson observed using information technology the teacher was highly competent and used his skill effectively. They mark diligently, providing targets on how to improve, and where necessary give extra support out of lessons.
98. As a result of teaching which is often very good or excellent, the students make good progress and achieve well. The fact that boys achieve less well than girls, particularly in Years 10 and 11, is a weakness which the department is currently investigating. But, overall, most students are well motivated. They know what to do, and how to set about it. They know their own weaknesses and how to improve in ways specified by the teacher. It might help to improve general fluency, accuracy and vitality of writing if they were to write at greater length.
99. There has been good improvement since the last inspection. This has been achieved despite the recent loss of several experienced and highly competent teachers who have left the school for promotion. The current head of department has been in post for less than a year, but has already built a strong and committed team of mostly young teachers. Together they have set about improving an already strong department. Working in pairs they observe each other teach and evaluate the outcome. Induction of new staff is thorough and highly regarded. A rigorous system of appraisal ensures that every one knows what is needed for even better results. Teachers can rely on excellent dissemination of data about students, enabling them to identify underachievers. There is an excellent handbook, with comprehensive and updated schemes of work, and all the information that a teacher could require.
100. Marking is much more thorough than before, and the comments in books are more helpful. Presentation of finished work is neater, and most students' writing is more accurate. The whole department have been involved in links with primary schools which go far beyond the sort of liaison most frequently found. In the summer term the department's teachers teach Year 6 in the Primary sector, starting students there on a project which will finish when those same students join Year 7. Consequently, teachers and students know more about what to expect, and how to plan the induction year. The department provides a very good range of activities out of lessons. These include visits to theatres, poetry conferences, lectures, competitions, poetry evenings, and hosting visits from writers and theatre companies.
101. Examination results have remained at the same high level since the last inspection with three quarters of the year group obtaining high grades in GCSE. But an undoubted improvement has been the decision to enter far more students for the literature paper, where the results are slightly better than those for language, though still with a slightly smaller number of entries. The department engenders much enthusiasm, with no sign of the disaffection noted before.

Literacy across the curriculum

102. Strategies for teaching literacy throughout the school are good. These strategies have been in place since 2000 when all staff received training. The literacy co-ordinator has been in charge for two years. She leads an active Literacy Action Group composed of the librarian and

representatives from all curriculum areas, who meet regularly. There are also productive meetings with the curriculum area co-ordinators, one of which was observed. This focused on the skills of research and the use of the library. It proved to be a useful meeting in which the co-ordinators could share ideas and find out what other areas were doing.

103. The literacy co-ordinator ensures that new staff who arrived after the initial training get to know what is required by including literacy in the induction programme, and by placing notices in the staff bulletin. In this way, and by approaching as many staff as possible face-to-face, she is active and enthusiastic, and largely successful.
104. All departments are aware of the literacy policy. It figures in most schemes of work. Key words commonly used in each subject are displayed on classroom walls. In Science they are displayed in the form of anagrams, to make students ponder what they could be. A recently introduced book for Year 7 gives them guidance on commonly needed skills such as how to spell, punctuate and write letters. The book contains a list of words for students to refer to or learn, but this list is general, and contains few of the specialist words used in the study of science, technology, mathematics, etc.
105. The development of strategies for effective reading in all subjects is now a focus and students read extensively in all English lessons and in registration periods in Years 7, 8 and 9. The library is active in promoting reading, making it attractive for students to spend time there, and organising frequent events that encourage reading and research.
106. Speaking has received less attention than it deserves. However, some departments give plenty of opportunity for students to explain what they are doing and listen to other students talk. In drama students plan their work in groups and continually discuss what they are doing, identifying their particular strengths and weaknesses. In physical education and dance they describe and evaluate their work, and use specialist vocabulary confidently. Some departments require students to give presentations, but this is more common in the sixth form. It would help the students' confidence and give them a skill useful in later life if all subjects required them to address an audience without reading a prepared screed.

Drama

107. Drama is taught as a separate subject and forms part of the expressive arts curriculum area. It is a popular subject in Years 10 and 11 and around 150 students take the subject each year as one of their GCSE options. The GCSE results over the last few years are generally close to or slightly above average. These standards are confirmed by inspection evidence. Work in Year 10 and 11 students' files and in lessons demonstrates high levels of commitment. They show good critical and analytical skills in their evaluations of productions they have seen and in the very full records they keep of the process of devising and producing. All students reflect on and assess their own work thoughtfully and the highest-attaining students do so with insight and clarity. In a very good Year 10 lesson focusing on homelessness, students employed a range of techniques to produce some powerful pieces of reportage. They remained absorbed in the roles they had created, exploring the character's physicality and vocal range, and responding sensitively to each other.
108. In Years 7 to 9 attainment is broadly what would be expected, although in some lessons girls reach higher standards because a few boys see drama as an opportunity for play and lack concentration. Provision is good for all students and enables all to experience success. Talented students are stretched by performing to the class and taking part in extra-curricular productions. Lower-attaining students with special educational needs are well supported and included in most lessons. Most students are developing an understanding of some drama techniques and conventions. In two Year 7 lessons students used hot-seating to explore the topic of bullying and in a Year 8 lesson students used freeze frames, melting and captioning in their exploration of the role of water in our lives.
109. The quality of teaching overall is good with some very good features. Teachers' enthusiasm and energy engages students. Well-planned lessons with clear objectives leading students through

logical steps enable them to recognise the progress that they make. Good classroom management and very good use of assessment with student involvement help students to concentrate and to identify strengths and areas for improvement in their own and others' work.

110. The department is very well led and managed and development has continued even during the absence of the head of department. This is because of the strong teamwork and the commitment of and support by others for the acting head of department. Although results have not improved since the previous inspection, the numbers taking the subject in Years 10 and 11 have increased and the extra-curricular programme has grown, both in quantity and in reputation. A very good drama handbook for Years 7 and 8 has recently been developed and this effectively supports the good teaching by providing students with a framework for reflection and assessing their work. This is a successful department, which contributes much to the school and plays a distinctive and effective part in developing the school ethos.

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths

- Results over many years and current standards are well above the national average.
- Achievement is consistently very good.
- Teaching, overall, is very good.
- The attitudes and enthusiasm of students are very good.
- Leadership and management are outstanding.
- Assessment is excellent. This is highly significant in promoting and achieving high expectations of students' attainment.

Areas for improvement

- A few teachers need to improve their teaching skills so as not to rely too heavily on students' very good attitudes and the department's excellent systems.

111. Results for Year 9 students in the 2002 National Curriculum tests showed that they were still well above the national average, as they have been for many years. Impressively, three students were awarded exceptional performance and 90 per cent were in line with or above the national average. Students also gain much better results than students in similar schools. Students in mathematics attain better results than in English and science. There is no significant difference in the performance of boys and girls. This represents very good achievement from standards on entry.
112. In 2002, GCSE results were well above the national average, maintaining the trend of recent years. This represents continuing very good achievement from the end of Year 9. There are a number of particularly impressive features within these results. At the top end of performance, almost twice the national average attained the highest grade in mathematics, with approximately 20 per cent of students also gaining GCSE statistics, all with high grades. A significant number of students also gained passes in an advanced supplementary module called 'decision mathematics'. Demonstrating inclusion for lower-attaining students, the A* to G pass rate was 100 per cent from a very high entry level compared with schools nationally.
113. Standards seen currently confirm the school's results. There is a much larger proportion of students working at high levels than seen nationally. In a very good lesson on shape and space, the very highest-attaining students proved the conditions necessary for triangles to be the same shape, and showed high levels of initiative in calculating unknown sides in worded problems and strong estimating and numeracy skills. Students in an above-average-ability class were very impressively working close to the highest levels. They also responded to the teachers' high expectations, by working out the regions on a grid where certain conditions applied. Students in slightly lower than average class still achieve much better than might be expected. Students in one such class plotted straight-line equations accurately having seen a good large screen demonstration. Largely because of their own desire to learn, and previous knowledge, rather than further interaction with the teacher, the majority continued to make good progress in applying this to help them plot the graph of another equation. Students with special educational needs make

very good progress. They understand the purpose of pie charts and use them to interpret information as well as to construct their own. The policy of having small numbers in bottom classes, allows teachers, ably assisted by learning support assistants, to focus clearly on individual learning needs and prepare meaningful activities. In general, students in mathematics are given excellent opportunities to develop numeracy skills and very good opportunities to develop information and communication technology skills and literacy skills. They use these skills very effectively to enhance learning in mathematics. Standards of numeracy across all subject areas are well above average.

114. Students in Year 11 are working at standards well above the national average. The most able students are studying a GCE advanced supplementary course. The majority demonstrated a good grasp of how to optimise conditions in real-life problems given certain constraints represented algebraically and graphically. Students in the second highest class, whilst working at the more customary level of GCSE mathematics, demonstrated high levels of ability, with girls particularly confident. Excellent teaching, however, ensured that boys also make substantial progress with work on very difficult algebra at levels well above what could reasonably be expected. Students in the school's middle-attaining groups are well on course for grades in the higher ranges of GCSE pass and many students from lower ability groups are on course for a grade C. This is continuing very good achievement from the end of Year 9. Students with special educational needs are all targeted for GCSE examinations and progress equally as well as other students because of very good teaching, helped by small numbers in these classes.
115. Teaching, overall, is very good and often excellent. All teachers have strong subject knowledge. The very best teaching is characterised by excellent timing of activities, sharpness of questioning, imaginative use of resources, high levels of challenge, because assessment systems are so accurate, and tremendously high expectations on the part of teachers and students. In a middle-ability class in Year 7, the imagination of students was captured immediately by the use of two boys acting as mirror images of each other with arm movements to develop work on reflectional symmetry. The use of brightly coloured card for demonstration and cut-outs, computer demonstration to find matching halves of shapes and the idea of turning exercise books round, making diagonal lines horizontal, to help count squares promoted exceptional learning to achieve standards well above that expected. Students in a lower group in Year 10 worked exceptionally well to learn about how we can measure the influence one feature, such as the extent to which it is raining, affects the number of people who will be outdoors. The teacher's rapid-fire and clearly targeted questioning skills and outstanding use of time and pace, together with the ability to relate work to real-life, had these students very interested throughout and achieving well above their realistic potential.
116. However, a significant proportion of teaching is uninspiring. Whilst these lessons are at least effective in ensuring good progress, much of this is because students enter classrooms with good attitudes to school and work generally. Students are polite, want to learn, they are eager to participate and present work well. Weaker teachers are successful in ensuring at least good learning because the level of challenge ensured by schemes of work, setting arrangements and an exceptionally well-developed system of assessment and target setting ensure what are regularly very positive and often excellent attitudes to mathematics. In a significant minority of lessons, teachers waste time asking for students to put their hands up and occasionally become annoyed when students do not continually put their hands up or call out. The lack of real pace and attention to detail, including using resources imaginatively, or relating schoolwork to other situations is counteracted by the students' high aspirations. A significant number of teachers need to build on these more effectively. Able students benefit from the opportunity to take part in mathematics' challenges, and some students in Year 8 have produced digital video disks of mathematical concepts using themselves as actors. A weekly puzzle club is very popular and inspiring, mainly for younger students.
117. Leadership and management are outstanding. The subject area co-ordinator makes improvement in standards the overarching priority and all developments are ultimately channelled into achieving this. Guidance for teachers, giving them real responsibility, with clear direction, has promoted high expectations for students amongst teachers. Targets for attainment at whole class level and

at the level of individuals, together with detailed schemes of work including built-in assessment systems, underpin the subject's success. The subject area co-ordinator's determination in persuading senior management of the need to abandon mixed ability classes in Year 7, as well as his own extremely skilful deployment of staff to maximise examination success at important grade boundaries, has contributed significantly to the very good achievement. The subject area is very well staffed with specialist teachers, but some are part-time and there has been considerable turnover recently. The technician who works every morning within the subject area plays an important role in ensuring that all types of resources are available when needed. There is also clear advice on resources and time allowances for topics, thus enabling teachers to focus clearly on the standards required. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good.

Effectiveness of numeracy teaching strategies

118. Standards of numeracy across the curriculum are well above average because of the very good teaching of numeracy where opportunities occur in the areas of mathematics, geography, science, art, design and technology, information and communication technology and special educational needs.
119. In mathematics, a wide range of starter activities to lessons is regularly used very effectively with all students. In geography, Year 7 students interpreted data meaningfully from a population pyramid to decide the ages of the people who moved to Harlow. In food technology, Year 9 students weighed and measured accurately. In science, Year 11 students in physics collected data accurately about pressure and volume of gases and related this to the Boyle's Law formula before using it successfully to solve problems. In art, students use ideas of proportion extremely well.
120. There is a whole-school policy for numeracy, which includes advice about using graphs and tables to represent data, the use of formulae and methods of calculating. This follows whole school training on the use of numeracy in all subjects. Whilst there is very good practice in many subjects, there is a need for tracking, in particular to ensure that all subject areas take opportunities to reinforce numeracy skills and appreciate where good use of numeracy can enhance learning within the subject.

SCIENCE

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

Strengths

- Standards are high and students achieve very well.
- Students are eager learners.
- Leadership and management of the subject are very good.
- Well qualified, mutually supportive and committed teachers who care about students.
- The department is well supported by very good technical staff.

Areas for improvement

- Standards of investigatory work especially in Years 10 and 11.
- Strategies to help able girls attain higher grades.

121. Students in Year 9 entered for national tests in 2002 were of average ability on entry to the school. The school results were well above average when compared to national standards for all schools, schools of a similar type and Essex schools. School data shows that the vast majority of students achieved or exceeded their predicted levels (with boys' and girls' attainment being very similar), indicating that progress to Year 9 is very good.
122. The work seen for students up to Year 9 showed a well structured and logical approach to learning. Students showed a good standard of English. Typically, students showed above

average levels of presentation and scientific content. This is helped by marking which gives positive support and explains to students how they can improve. Appropriate practical work is included and sets a good foundation for GCSE investigatory work. Students in Year 7 showed good understanding across the science attainment targets; for example, in understanding forces, pressure, the pH scale and neutralisation and details of pollination.

123. Overall, progress in Years 10 and 11 is very good. The A* to C GCSE results for all students are above those attained nationally. Students' attainment is better in science than in English but not as good as in mathematics. Boys and girls each achieve above the national average results and, whilst girls achieve more A* to C GCSE grades than boys, it is boys who achieve the majority of A* and A grades.
124. Students studying GNVQ in Years 10 and 11 work on specially developed and appropriate course materials. This work is well marked and annotated by teachers letting students know how to improve. Students with special educational needs make good progress, producing work of a very similar standard to others in their group, and showed a good understanding of thermal conductivity. High attainers in Year 11 discuss Hooke's law and the concept of elastic limit. They showed good understanding of waves. A gifted student discussed drawing lines of best fit in detail, describing alternative methods of producing the line.
125. Teaching is good in Years 7 to 11. For example, in a Year 9 lesson about metals, students were questioned about previous work briefly, refreshing memories and understanding. The teacher had good subject knowledge and asked questions and worked with student responses in order to direct the progress of the lesson. The lesson flowed logically. There was helpful discussion of the principles of practical work and during the practical the teacher ensured health and safety matters were foremost. Students carried out practical work carefully and cleared away quickly showing good training in laboratory practice. Towards the end of the lesson learning was reviewed and the lesson finished on time. Their relationship with students was firm yet friendly and student management was good. A range of interesting teaching techniques was seen in a Year 10 lesson. Students carried out brain-storms, completed sentences, used cards and counters to model atomic structure and participated in a whole class co-operative activity to model sub-atomic particles in atoms. In a GNVQ lesson for students in Year 11, some students were searching the Internet for details about enzymes whilst others were carrying out an enzyme practical. All students were actively involved, using materials appropriate for their learning, and the support teacher was well informed and very effective. ICT was integrated into the lesson and learning was reviewed at the end. Teaching was effective because planning was good and the teacher had a secure understanding of the principles of GNVQ science.
126. The leadership of the science department is very good. Well-constructed schemes of work which identify opportunities to incorporate literacy, numeracy, ICT and spiritual, moral, social and cultural learning, help to provide good coverage of the science curriculum. There has been a deliberate effort to monitor and improve the quality of marking and assessment of students' work. This has helped teachers to assess work in a formative way and students to be aware of areas to target for improvement. There is some inconsistency in applying this policy across the department. A useful data-base on student attainment is being developed. This is being used to monitor progress with subsequent action to help raise standards. Communication in this large department is good and area bulletins, briefing meetings and minutes of meetings keep people informed and operating as a mutually supportive team. There is a financial monitoring programme developing linked to equipment and materials provision. The senior technician is heavily involved with this, further consolidating teamwork in the department. Management of resources is good, but there is a need for more storage provision for equipment, and chemical storage should be reviewed. Whilst available accommodation is good, there are insufficient laboratories for the number of classes. Teachers do not all have their own teaching rooms. This does not help ownership or the development of useful room-based teaching aids, and threatens standards. Curriculum time is below the national average in Year 11, which is a contributory factor in the lower quality of investigatory work of students who are affected.

127. Progress since the last inspection overall has been good and significant developments have taken place that were not identified as issues. The attainment of students remains above the national average in all years. Some middle and lower-attaining students still underachieve in investigative science and higher-attaining students achieve appropriately. However a significant number of students in Years 10 and 11 now follow GNVQ science and are achieving well in this. This will improve standards for these students. Students continue to show achievement balanced across the science attainment targets. Overall, students still show good progress over time and in lessons. There remain some lessons in which progress is less satisfactory due to lack of student drive, less effective teaching and less effective management. The vast majority of students still show very positive attitudes to their work. The department still has teachers with secure scientific knowledge but there has been a series of recent staffing problems that have impacted on management and standards. Some teachers, teaching outside their initial qualification area, feel a lack of confidence. The department has continued to increase the use of ICT in teaching and learning. Some refurbishment of laboratories has taken place, improving these areas.

ART AND DESIGN

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

Strengths

- Team collaborative leadership and management of learning.
- Expectations by students and staff of the amount and quality of achievement.
- Excellent relationships between all in the subject.
- Rigour in all learning tasks.
- Display, which is consistently stimulating and celebrates achievement.
- Art and design history and contextual studies are expertly embedded in students' learning.
- Students apply their ICT skills effectively.

Areas for improvement

- Accuracy of assessment for GCSE.

128. Examination results and the range of curriculum content and quality of planning have been transformed into major strengths since the last inspection. By Year 9 most students achieve at, and in some cases beyond, the upper level of National Curriculum expectation at Level 5, with a substantial proportion at Level 6, and the most able are achieving or working towards Level 7. A significant number of examples of work, particularly sketchbooks, are at Level 8 and beyond. In 2002 the proportion of GCSE A*-C grades was 84% - very substantially above the national average. Value-added scores were in line with average Essex results for art and design and performance was close to the average for all subjects in the school. Boys' performance is much closer to girls' than the national norm. A history of harsh marking by all teachers in Years 10 and 11 has created a slight but critical mismatch between recorded and actual standards, which are higher than examination results reveal. Talented students of all ages are achieving at a level appropriate for a year or more above their chronological age. In one instance a 16-year-old girl's sketchbook was of an A-level standard. Students' work, including homework, is remarkable for completeness, resolution and often the delicacy of treatment.

129. The quality of teaching and learning is very high. Most lessons in Years 7 to 9 were very good and the rest were excellent. In Years 10 and 11, all lessons were either very good or excellent. High expectations in the teaching are mirrored in the students' consistently positive attitude and an adult level of dialogue in all classes. Every teacher exhibits profound subject knowledge and a high level of teaching skill. There is unusual rigour in the learning, exemplified by comic book design projects which contain a very thorough typography and illustration design exercise.

130. Incorporating outstanding stimulus materials, the curriculum is of exceptionally high quality in all years. The schemes of work are based on themes shared by the expressive arts faculty such as *Water* and *The Celts*. The development of basic and increasingly sophisticated knowledge, skills

and understanding is ensured by a progressive, integrated, rigorous and layered programme of study which embeds ICT and art and design contextual and critical study into a rich variety of processes and media. It includes ceramics which often goes beyond art materials to feature such things as boot polish, sugar and typing correction fluid. Basic skills in visual language are reinforced at every opportunity; a teacher remarked in one Year 10 lesson 'there are two of you not using the whole range of tone'. The three-dimensional content is covered by ceramics but is being extended into other media from a rich base of assemblage/collage work. Display in the art areas and around the school is very stimulating and consistently celebrates achievement. The take-up for enrichment art club activities is very high and rewarding for the students involved.

131. The subject leader has a clear educational vision and works in a highly collaborative way with a resourceful and effective team. Resources are deployed with skill and the subject is funded well. The subject is a real team effort. Assessment, curriculum planning and resource management are meticulously monitored and managed. The success with which art and design has embedded ICT into the curriculum gives an excellent base to innovate with digital and lens based media.

CITIZENSHIP

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

Strengths

- Teaching is predominantly excellent.
- Students' attitudes and behaviour are excellent.
- Planning is very good and includes a wide range of learning opportunities.

Areas for improvement

- Procedures to monitor the progress of students are still developing.

132. Citizenship is taught throughout the school through a variety of subjects. It is planned through personal and social education in Year 7, drama in Year 8, religious education in Year 9 and humanities in Years 10 and 11. Within each subject the planning is clearly focused on developing students' knowledge, skills and understanding about becoming an informed citizen. They are given good opportunity to develop enquiry skills and have imaginative opportunities to consider other people's experience. Outside lessons there are very good active citizenship activities which enable students to participate in charity events, community service and recycling initiatives. Other subjects also contribute to citizenship. For example, in English in Year 8 students have good opportunity to empathise with other people and to reflect on war, killing and patriotism when studying the play *A game of soldiers*. In history in Year 9 they are asked to give their views on Remembrance Day and the Poppy Appeal. The activity prepared enables them to consider the importance of remembrance in relation to progress when discussing the building of an airport in northern France where there are war graves.
133. In the small number of lessons seen, standards achieved by students were above average overall. Students in Year 9 express opinions about the worthiness of charities and have good knowledge of the range of work that they do. Students in Year 7 drama respond well when considering bullying in role play activities and reflect on the feelings of the bullied person. Responses by students in Year 10 during a *Trading Game* activity show that they have good knowledge of world economic inequality and appreciate the differences between developed and underdeveloped countries.
134. Teaching is excellent in the majority of lessons and, as a result, students learn skills and gain good knowledge which enables them to consider fundamental human rights. In Years 7 to 9 teaching is always very good and often excellent. For example, teaching in Year 9 is excellent when students learn to prioritise when choosing charities to support. Through very good questioning teachers demonstrate very precise knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of

individual students. Marking in books is thorough and productive and homework is set directing students to research on the Internet.

135. In Year 10 an excellent lesson for half of the year group involved the students in playing the *Trading Game* in order to consider how the world economy operates and how unequal resources are in different countries. Students display excellent attitudes and behaviour in all lessons and participate very well when debating issues.
136. Citizenship is very well led and managed and schemes of work are fully in place in order to support teachers and enable students to have positive and varied opportunities to learn in lessons and outside in other activities. Assessment procedures are completed but are not, as yet, fully operational.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- GCSE standards are very high.
- Students' study skills are very good.
- Marking and assessment are very good and help students to understand what they need to do to improve their standards.
- Leadership and management are very good.

Areas for improvement

- Increase the range of design opportunities in textiles for students in Years 7 to 9.
- Ensure that food rooms have sufficient good quality work surfaces.

137. GCSE standards have improved significantly since the last inspection and are now well above the national average. By the age of 16, students' knowledge of tools, equipment and techniques is very good, as are their making skills. Their study skills are also well developed; students often spend a great deal of personal time gathering the research required. They take great pride in the products they make. These students use computers effectively in all areas, particularly for research and to present their work extremely well. They have good access to a variety of software including computer aided drawing and food modelling packages. Other resources are used well.
138. By Year 9, standards are above those expected nationally, especially in resistant materials and electronics. Students achieve well in all years. They have a good knowledge and understanding of mechanisms, tools and processes. These students readily identify the key components that make their mechanisms work and know how they will change the way the product moves. Their drawing skills improve steadily and students use formal drawings effectively to communicate their ideas. Standards in food and textiles are not as high, partly because the curriculum time available in Years 7 to 9 is less than that for other aspects of design and technology.
139. Students tend to make gender stereotypical choices for their options to GCSE, in part because of the content offered in textiles.
140. Overall the quality of teaching is good, ranging from satisfactory to excellent. Teachers' subject knowledge is very good. Lesson planning varies in format and content. The best lessons have clear learning objectives and key questions to be addressed. The most effective teaching is in Year 8. Here teachers focus on students' personal knowledge and interests. They use everyday products to demonstrate and help students understand how mechanisms work in different ways. Questioning invites explanation and hypothesis; all students are very eager to contribute. Students of all ages answer questions well; their grasp of technical vocabulary is good and literacy and numeracy initiatives have helped students to improve their writing of reports and product evaluations, and their skills in measuring materials and weighing ingredients.

141. Drawing skills are taught well in resistant materials and, as a result, students make good progress from the age of 11 to 16. However, these good skills and techniques are not always used in food and textiles. Marking and assessment of students' work is very good. There is very good teaching of students with special educational needs, especially those in Years 10 and 11. These students make very good progress, their work is adventurous and they are keen to explain how it is made and works. Students' attitudes to work are good and often very good. In the best lessons they express ideas freely and confidently; they work effectively, individually and in groups. Their behaviour in all design and technology lessons is good. Students are consistently helpful towards each other, particularly when working in mixed ability teams. Their social development is very good; they give praise freely to each other, especially to those students who have special educational needs. There are few specific weakness in teaching that affect the overall pattern of students' good learning, although in satisfactory lessons there is too much instruction and too few opportunities for student discussion or decision-making. For example, when making a pencil box the materials are all pre-cut and students are restricted to trimming and assembling, and choosing the type of finish on the sliding lid.
142. Leadership and management are very good. Priorities for development are carefully identified and recorded. Schemes of work are thorough and identify tools and equipment to be used progressively at the school. The department has made a great many changes since the last inspection, particularly in monitoring and assessment. All work is marked and students' progress is regularly tracked. Students are tested on their knowledge and understanding after each unit of work and this has had a very positive effect on GCSE results, especially in graphics and food. Older students are successfully involved in competitions such as Young Engineer of Great Britain. Much work is done with feeder schools and there are good contacts with local industry.
143. The school has addressed all the issues raised in the last inspection. Currently, the food technology facilities are unsatisfactory because the too few working surfaces and mobile storage units are in a poor condition. One room is used for both food and textiles. The floor covering in this room is inappropriate and only half a group can carry out practical activities at any one time.

GEOGRAPHY

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

Strengths

- Standards at GCSE are well above national averages.
- Teaching and learning are very good.
- Achievement is very good in terms of prior attainment.
- Leadership and management of the department are excellent and provide a clear educational direction for the subject.
- The planned use of ICT and enquiry work, including fieldwork, supports learning.

Areas for improvement

- Some lower-attaining students are not sufficiently supported in lessons.
- Accommodation is insufficient to provide for the needs of geography.

144. In 2002 GCSE results were well above the national average. These results confirm a rising trend over the past five years. Both boys and girls have shown improving results and both are well above national averages. Over this period the gap between boys and girls has been at around 13 per cent and this is almost double the gap nationally. However, both genders are achieving very well in relation to past attainment. Students do better in geography than in their other subjects at GCSE.

145. Standards of work at the end of Year 9 are well above the national average. Most students have a very good knowledge and a good understanding of the patterns, processes and topics they have studied. Students acquire a range of geographical skills. For example, they locate places on maps and in atlases, draw sketch maps and diagrams and understand the meaning of symbols used in Ordnance Survey maps. Fieldwork and investigation skills are taught very well and all students learn to collect and process data using a range of graphs. A Year 8 class were observed collecting primary data on infiltration. Students are competent users of ICT. Enquiry and research skills are very well developed and students can undertake research tasks, finding information from a variety of sources, including the Internet, as was seen from projects undertaken in Years 8 and 9 on Antarctica and Kenya. Students have a very good knowledge of local geography, used as a resource in the learning of geography, and fieldwork studies of the River Rib are part of the schemes of work.
146. Students make very good progress in geography in the first three years at the school and are attaining well above national expectations by the end of Year 9. Students with special educational needs make similar rates of progress to those of their peers because of appropriate challenge and well-focused support from learning support assistants and materials developed by teachers to meet the needs of students of all abilities. There is very good liaison between class teachers and LSAs. However, some lower-attaining students, although not on the special educational needs register, are not receiving additional support in all lessons. For some of these students the pace of learning is too fast and they cannot keep up. However, overall, achievement in relation to prior attainment in geography is very good.
147. At the age of 16 attainment is well above national averages. Enquiry and fieldwork skills are very well developed. The Year 11 fieldwork study of Walton-on-the-Naze, where students were required to produce a management plan for the protection of the cliffs taking into consideration the views of local people, is of a very high standard. The majority of students have a very good knowledge and understanding of both physical and human geography. For example, they have a very good knowledge and understanding of erosion and coastal defences. They can describe and explain physical processes using appropriate sketch maps and diagrams and using a wide range of specialised geographical vocabulary. Students have an excellent attitude to the study of geography, and achievement in terms of prior attainment is very good. Lower-attaining students and those with special educational needs are well supported in their studies; they are appropriately challenged and make very good progress. Geography is an increasingly popular subject with students and over two-thirds of the cohort elect to continue their studies to GCSE.
148. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning in the department is very good. It is excellent on the GCSE course. Specialist subject knowledge, detailed planning and preparation ensure that students learn effectively. Tasks are planned and structured to meet the needs of all students, including those who are gifted and talented. Very good relationships and unobtrusive class management lead to a very good learning environment. Lessons proceed at a challenging pace and teachers have high expectations of their students, as was seen in a Year 9 lesson where students were learning about the structure and features of a depression as part of the unit on weather and climate. Teachers use every opportunity to reinforce geographical skills and to develop the key skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT.
149. Geography is a strong department. Leadership and management are excellent. There is regular monitoring and evaluation of teaching and of the geography curriculum, with effective action taken to improve standards. Schemes of work are clear and detailed and assessment procedures are very good. Reports to parents, though, are not sufficiently informative. Accommodation is insufficient to meet the needs of the department. There are eight teachers teaching geography and only three specialist geography rooms. This results in geography being taught in a number of different areas around the school and puts pressure on teachers who have to manage resources accordingly. It also sends a negative message about the importance of the subject within the school. There has been good improvement since the last inspection and the issues raised then have been addressed.

HISTORY

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

Strengths

- The high levels of attainment at GCSE.
- The good quality of teaching, which is based on high expectations of student achievement.
- The quality of critical and higher order thinking skills which are engendered in students, especially through skilful questioning on the part of teachers.

Areas for improvement

- Assessment policies and procedures, including target setting.
- The wider provision of extension tasks to stretch the highest attainers and improved levels of support to make the curriculum more accessible to lower attainers.

150. In 2002, GCSE results were significantly above the national average for all maintained schools. Seventy-seven per cent of students achieved grades A* to C, and 43 per cent gained grades A* or A. These results compared well to the 2001 results of 69 per cent A* to C grades and 29 per cent A* or A grades. In 2002, girls performed better than boys, although this is not consistently so from year to year.
151. Inspection evidence shows that at the end of Year 9 standards are above average, and students are achieving very well in terms of their ability and attainment levels on entry. Overall, students show knowledge and understanding of the major historical events and personalities they are studying. They appreciate that history is based on evidence and most have a good understanding of the meaning of bias and prejudice. All, including those with special educational needs, can extract information from a variety of written and pictorial sources. The majority of students have good oral, listening and writing skills. Higher-attaining students write at length in response to the increasingly sophisticated questions presented by their teachers. In general, students show a good sense of chronology and can use historical terms appropriately.
152. At the end of Year 11, overall attainment is well above the nationally expected level. Students' historical knowledge and understanding have deepened. They are more assured when organising and using historical facts in writing and discussion, and when analysing historical data. Higher-attaining students are able to construct well-substantiated arguments and to challenge different historical interpretations. Lower-attaining students can draw simple conclusions when examining evidence and are able to use sources to support their narratives. All students are responsive to the directions of their teachers and the majority are ready to take responsibility in pursuing independent lines of historical enquiry.
153. Students join the school with average levels of attainment, but few skills in history. Overall, they make very good progress in the subject due to the highly focused teaching of basic historical skills. Although teachers pay particular attention to the learning of students with special educational needs through regular reviews, increased levels of support would enable weaker students to access and interpret information more readily, so improving their rate of progress. In the same way, the increased provision of extension tasks would serve to stretch the skills of the most able students.
154. Overall, the quality of teaching is good. Lessons, based on appropriate student tasks, lead to clear gains in learning. Knowledge and understanding are systematically consolidated. Lessons are well paced and structured, although greater emphasis could be placed on sharing objectives with students at the outset and on the effective use of plenary sessions to confirm progress. Teachers are confident in their possession of subject knowledge, and exposition is clear. By challenging students appropriately, especially through skilful questioning, teachers encourage full and meaningful participation in class, together with the development of higher order thinking skills. Much is done to help students to articulate their knowledge and to share different ideas and viewpoints. Secure relationships contribute to very good behavioural standards and positive attitudes to the subject. Students respect their teachers and listen attentively in lessons. A positive praise culture is used to advantage.
155. The new head of department, appointed in April 2002, is firmly committed to raising standards. Levels of co-operation are good as teachers work collaboratively and share good practice openly. Lessons successfully incorporate a diversity of learning strategies, styles and activities that promote high expectations of achievement. Good quality resources, including teacher-produced coursework booklets, are used to stimulate interest and help understanding. However, there is scope to improve the range of materials to meet the needs of lower attainers. Appropriate schemes of work are in place.
156. Homework is used to reinforce learning in lessons, but certain opportunities are lost to enhance students' attainment and the quality of literacy through some lack of consistency and rigour in marking practice. The consistent application of self-assessment reviews and improved target setting would help students to gain a clearer view of their own standards and the action required to improve their performance. In the same way, students require unambiguous information about

assessment criteria, including National Curriculum levels. The department stands to benefit from the planned up-grade of computerised record keeping across the school, in terms of the presentation, accessibility and use of assessment data.

157. There are satisfactory displays in the teaching rooms, which aim to celebrate students' achievement. Visits are organised annually for Years 7 and 10 to enrich the curriculum. However, there is scope for this programme to be extended and for enrichment activities to contribute further to students' learning in history. Good practice in the use of ICT in history was observed in Year 7, and is planned for other year groups. Extended provision could be expected to stimulate learning, especially for lower attainers. Students have access to a good range of history books in the school library. The department contributes to moral and social education, as well as the teaching of citizenship. In this respect, a very good lesson was observed which dealt with the idea of remembrance after World War One, and involved students in developing arguments on behalf of different interest groups over the planned construction of an airport in the area of the Somme battlefields.
158. The high standards of attainment at GCSE, good levels of progress and the good quality of teaching and learning recorded at the last inspection have been maintained. However, there are still weaknesses in marking practices, self-assessment procedures and target setting.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Overall, the quality of provision in information and communication technology is **good**.

Strengths

- Very good leadership and management of ICT by the ICT manager.
- Good use of the schools' computers to provide students with learning resources.
- Computers available for students above the number usually found nationally.
- Very good teaching and the shared commitment and enthusiasm of the teachers in the department and across the school to improve standards in ICT.
- Very good work with external organisations in the development of ICT.

Areas for improvement

- Assessment systems do not inform students of their progress and identify individual learning needs as they work with ICT across the curriculum.
- Teaching practice does not always take prior learning into account.

159. Test results for a GNVQ in ICT for 2001 were not available as this was a new course. In 2002 the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) results were well above the NVQ/GCSE results seen nationally. This was a small pilot group but there are significantly more students following the course this year. The school offered this course as an option for some students. The school also offers an IT Technicians course and a computer networking course. These can be studied as part of the option arrangements or they can be studied in one of the many extra-curricular computer use blocks available throughout the week. These courses lead to formal certification that is recognised in an industrial context. Some current Year 10 students were able to choose vocational courses in ICT and students not choosing these courses develop their ICT capability across the curriculum in Years 10 and 11. Attainment in these students is broadly average and their progress is satisfactory when their attainment at the start of Year 10 is considered. However, students following the vocational course make good progress.
160. In 2001, Teachers' Assessments of students' attainment in Year 9 showed the number of students obtaining Level 5 and above to be well above the national average. In 2002 there was an increase in the number of students obtaining Level 5 and above. When full ICT capability is considered these assessments are judged to be too high. As a consequence, the targets set for attainment in ICT within the school and by external bodies are also too high. Attainment of these students is judged to be nearer to average and, when their average attainment upon entry to the school is considered, they have made satisfactory progress.

161. Standards of work seen during the inspection for students in Years 7 to 9 are broadly above average. This shows that standards are rising in ICT and represents good progress when students' broadly average attainment in ICT upon entry to the school is considered. In a well-planned music lesson, students confidently used keyboards and computers to create a high quality professional sounding drum sequence. In a very good English lesson students confidently worked with the computers to develop their ability to draft and redraft text. Students highlighted text and created boxes and arrows to explain changes that they had made to show their consideration of key points, including metaphors, personification and adjectives. A very good art lesson included the computer manipulation of patterns in the design of a *water bottle* label and in a very good mathematics lesson students used ICT to learn about transformations. In physical education students used video extremely well in the analysis of their performance. Many departments develop students' ICT capability through using the Internet and presentation software to support learning. Students also have the opportunity to use computer aided design and manufacture equipment, handle data, create graphs and control moving objects with computers. There are insufficient opportunities to progressively develop students' ability to model situations using the computer.
162. In Years 10 and 11, experiences of using ICT vary between courses and levels being studied. Computers are well used to support learning in the ICT courses and there is a wide range of opportunities in the other subjects of the curriculum. Students extend and use experiences from Years 7 to 9 and in addition to these they use computerised sewing machines in textiles technology and model situations using spreadsheets in food technology. Good use is also made of computers in the technology department to design electronic circuits. Students also generate circuit boards masks and program integrated circuits to carry out functions required by design and make projects. More opportunities are required for students to speak about their ICT experiences and to review and evaluate fully their use of ICT through extended writing activities. Some students attend a summer school and use computers to edit sound and video in relation to a challenge given to them by the organizers, who work closely with the school in developing ICT experiences. Attitudes and behaviour seen during the inspection in ICT lessons were very good on the whole but the behaviour of a small number of Year 10 boys slowed the pace of learning in one ICT lesson. Students are generally keen to use the computers in school and this supports the effective development of students' skills and understanding of the ways ICT can support learning.
163. Teaching and learning are very good in ICT based lessons. Teaching was good or better in 75 per cent of ICT lessons, with others at least satisfactory. In an excellent Year 11 NVQ ICT lesson the teacher had Internet based resources available that students generally work through at their own pace. The teacher knew his students, recognised their learning styles and realised the limitations of online resources for the development of his students. The teacher carried out a detailed interactive session with his students, presenting his demonstration using a digital projector that showed his computers screen. He organised his support teacher to write down on the white board sequences of instructions to carry out the task he had demonstrated. This information also included key technical language for the session. This information was looked at electronically and printed so that all students could have the information to support independent work in the future. Students gave their full attention and were successful in creating macros. Students with special educational needs are known, they have Individual Educational Plans and they make good progress. A well-organised programme of work has been developed for students this year in Years 7 to 9 to ensure that students have experiences in line with the national ICT strategy. In the process of teaching and learning all teachers have laptops available to them and some use interactive whiteboards or projectors. Many students attend throughout the week to work on specialist networking or technician courses. Homework can also be done during this time or it can be done using the computers in the library.
164. Leadership and management of the ICT department are very good. This is a very large school with significant developmental, co-ordination and departmental responsibilities. Effective time management means that much is done and some of this is through effective meetings with co-ordinators of ICT from each department. High quality documentation has been prepared by the

ICT manager and it is used to support the effective teaching of ICT. The ICT manager also supports staff in the development of their practice through providing in service training, creates high quality learning resources and has identified the management systems necessary to effectively manage teaching and learning. New technology is well used in the management of students' performance in GNVQ and AVCE courses but there is more to do. Assessment systems are not fully developed to effectively monitor the development of ICT capability across the curriculum. Also, reports to parents do not communicate how students use ICT in their learning or how well they are doing. The ICT manager manages the ICT resources very well

and is very well supported by the network manager and technicians. The network manager keeps an inventory of all ICT resources. The number of computers in the school for students is above the number seen nationally.

165. There has been significant development within the department since the previous inspection. New courses have been introduced and more are planned. Hardware has changed in format, which required significant skill development for many teachers. The curriculum for students in Years 7 to 9 has been enhanced and is supported by a number of departments to ensure programmes of study for ICT are followed. This will go some way towards addressing the variation in experiences identified in the previous report and significant improvements are in place for this year that include information from the national ICT strategy. Although some lesson observation takes place the very good teaching practice in some ICT lessons needs to be further shared. The school has been supported very well by the 'South East England Virtual Education Action Zone' in a number of projects including the use of laptop computers for teachers in teaching and learning. This has resulted in all teachers using laptop computers and the majority of teachers are now fully trained under the New Opportunities Fund initiative. The ICT manager knows his department and has appropriate development plans in place and there is a collective commitment within the department to the successful development of ICT for the benefit of all students. This commitment provides significant capacity for ongoing development. This represents a very good improvement since the previous inspection.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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

Strengths

- Leadership and management are excellent.
- Teaching and learning are very good and result in well above average standards.
- Two languages are studied by all students in Years 7 to 9.
- The use of information and communication technology as a teaching and learning tool.

Areas for improvement

- To continue to devise strategies for students to practise the languages in context and to use them spontaneously in lessons.
- To re-establish penfriend links, to add to the cultural dimension.

Standards

166. In 2002, by the end of Year 9, the proportion of students gaining Level 5 and above in the standardised Teacher Assessments was well above the national standards, with a high proportion reaching Level 6 and some Level 7.
167. In work seen, students in Years 7 to 9 are making very good progress and standards are well above average. Very successful and purposeful use of students' oral skills was seen at the end of a Year 9 French lesson. There was a dialogue between student and teacher, as a leisure activity was suggested using idioms and powerful body language. During the lesson students had to work out for themselves, with help, three ways of making an invitation. *Tu – veux?* This was

French learning made fun, full of activities. In a Year 9 middle ability class, there was laughter as tongue twisting vocabulary on *die Umwelt* was practised as a whole class and individually. In reading and listening, students are taught to pick out the key words and phrases needed for an answer. Written work is often consolidation and practice of new grammar, but there is much evidence of more detailed pieces of writing for a variety of audiences. There was some innovative and creative display work; for example, *la météo, die Umwelt*, work on animals and brochures highlighting the local area. Pie charts and graphs using computers summarised the findings of a survey, demonstrating numeracy skills. A lower set Year 8 German class demonstrated their skills using technology, culminating in powerful Powerpoint presentations. At the end, students had opportunities to evaluate and to comment on the presentations. This made students think about the content of the lesson on food and drink.

168. At GCSE in 2002 in both French and German, the proportion of students gaining A* - C grades was well above the national average, with a very high proportion of A* and A grades. Results in both languages show a rising trend over a number of years. Performance in languages is better than in most other subjects. The results are commendable, particularly the increasing numbers of the A* and A grades in both French and German and in view of the fact that all students are entered for the examination. A significant number are entered for both languages. In work seen in Years 10 and 11, standards are very good and very good progress continues to be made. A Year 10 higher ability set was able to give lengthy detailed answers in the past tense, using the verb *gefallen*. Without teacher prompting, many added the little extras, for example, ideas and opinions, which are vital in securing extra important marks. Students in this lesson addressed the teacher in German quite naturally, which is rarely found in classrooms. This is as a result of the teacher using German throughout the lesson. Year 11 was mainly revision. It was a pleasure to be part of a *fast track* French lesson at 8 a.m. This could have been a lesson in a French school. The students spoke French fluently and confidently, again as a result of the teacher using the foreign language throughout. In both languages, students demonstrated good listening and reading skills. The best written work is excellent and examples of coursework were exemplary. This is as a result of the very good literacy skills being taught at all levels, to enable students of all abilities to reach their potential.
169. Teaching is very good in Years 7 to 11. Particular strengths include good planning and the sequencing of a variety of activities. This has the effect of building up learning and confidence, step by step. Lesson content, resources and methodology enable all to work according to ability. The best progress is made where expectations and challenges are high. At the start of a Year 11 lower set German lesson, the teacher's skills motivated a number of reluctant boys to achieve well and by the end there was a feeling of satisfaction after all had made an effort to test out their knowledge. A Year 11 French lesson involved a carousel of activities where groups moved around. This required very careful planning and good classroom management and was highly effective. The excellent lessons were breathtaking from start to finish. In a Year 9 German lesson the teacher was as slick as a magician in the use of the overhead projector. Everyone wondered *What next?* in a game using transparencies. Students with special educational needs are very well supported and the support assistant was fully involved in the creative Year 8 German lesson using ICT. Individual plans and reviews were all evidence of the very good support for these students. The best progress as regards understanding and speaking was made in the lessons where teachers spoke the foreign language throughout. On occasions, opportunities were missed to develop and practise the languages. In a few lessons pace tended to be slow, which can lead to loss of interest. Homework is regularly set and marking is thorough, so that all students know how to improve. There are regular assessments and target setting. Students know the level or grade they are at and how to progress further. The assessments inform the report to parents.
170. This is a large, talented, dynamic team, with all teachers offering at least two languages. The two foreign language assistants are a bonus. The study booklets, guides for all years and modules for information technology are the result of many hours of individual teacher time and teamwork. The long-standing German exchange adds significant value to the cultural dimension. Languages were celebrated at a well attended Eisteddfod Evening, which further raises the profile of languages in the school.

171. The curriculum area co-ordinator is a driving force behind this successful team. Leadership and management are excellent. Three collegiate members have specific responsibilities. Courses are planned to suit all needs, with carefully chosen resources. The very good use made of assessment data is instrumental in the raising of standards. Good links have been established with primary schools to help them teach French. Very good use is made of time allocated. The school is privileged to be able to offer two languages from Year 7. The fast track system allows the higher ability students to study two languages and Latin enriches the curriculum for the gifted and talented. The latter are very enthusiastic about languages.
172. Very good progress has been made since the last inspection, resulting in the consistent rise in standards. The key focus for development is on teaching and learning, to raise standards even further. ICT is now an integral part of the schemes of work and modules have been skilfully developed to make this an exciting feature of language learning. The area would further benefit from extending the suite and by adding interactive whiteboards.

MUSIC

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

Strengths

- Standards are very good in Years 7 to 9 and they are outstanding in Years 10 and 11.
- Teaching is very good overall and students of all levels of ability achieve very well.
- Students enjoy their music lessons and they work hard to succeed. Numbers in the option groups are well above national average group sizes and numbers having instrumental lessons are double the national norm.
- Standards in, and provision for, extra-curricular activities are outstanding.
- Leadership and management are very good.
- A new music block has been added since the last inspection

Areas for improvement

- The two rooms in the old music block need to be re-furnished as specialist music rooms with the necessary classroom instruments in each. This would ensure best use of time and space in all lessons.
- Students in Years 8 and 9 do not have the opportunity to use ICT because resources are not sufficient for this very active department.

173. Standards on entry to the school are at least in line with national levels, with some good instrumentalists achieving above national levels. Previous musical experience varies widely, though, and is limited for a significant proportion. Singing is only in line with national levels. At the end of Year 11, recent GCSE examination results have been outstanding, with over 90 per cent of students achieving Grade C and above for the past two years. Of these, approximately 50 per cent have achieved A* and A grades. Work heard in the inspection suggests similarly high standards are maintained. Performing is a particular strength with many performing beyond the level expected for the examination. Students play equally successfully in classical, jazz and rock styles. They perform accurately and with very good musical understanding. Composing standards are also very good and students use music technology very well to create and realise their ideas. Structures are well developed and melody, harmony and rhythm are particularly well understood. Chosen styles are successfully maintained. Students can also create compositions as a response to a particular stimulus and do this within a limited set time. They listen very carefully and can distinguish musical details. Most use musical terminology very well to describe them. Progress and achievement across Years 10 and 11 are very good, and outstanding for those who are identified as gifted and talented.
174. By the end of Year 9 standards are very good. Most are working above national levels, with a significant proportion well above. Students also achieve the highest levels. Students play a variety of instruments in various musical styles and most can maintain their parts accurately in paired performances of a ground bass. They can improvise and maintain a blues style well. Not all use correct finger technique on keyboards. Their compositions demonstrate good

understanding of the musical elements and simple structures, and students in Year 9 are developing skills in music technology. Singing remains an area for development. Students recognise different musical styles and they use musical terminology correctly to describe them. Listening and evaluating skills are good. Progress and achievement across the key stage are very good for students of all levels of ability.

175. Teaching is very good overall. It is never less than good and several outstanding lessons were observed. Lessons are very well planned and organised with a variety of tasks which sustain students' interest in the topic. Tasks are timed, which helps to maintain a good pace in lessons and encourages students to work hard. Explanations are very clear and supported by musical demonstrations and particularly good work sheets. These help students to develop independent learning skills and are varied to provide help for students of various levels of attainment. Questioning is well used throughout lessons to consolidate and extend knowledge and teachers take care to include everyone. Most respond enthusiastically and their answers and performances are valued, which helps to develop confidence. Classroom management is very good and students appreciate the lively teaching styles. They co-operate very well and support each other in their group and paired music making. Behaviour is very good and students enjoy their lessons. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and skills and use them well to help students of all levels of ability. Expectations are high and students respond very well. In the very best lessons, relationships, the learning environment and shared pleasure in the meaning of music are particularly good. There is a shared sense of trust between students and teachers, which gives everyone the confidence to do their best. Students of all levels of ability achieve their given tasks very well in these lessons, gaining great pleasure and satisfaction from meeting the challenges presented.
176. Leadership and management of the subject are very good and two support assistants help with the organisation of the curriculum and instrumental lessons. The new curriculum leader has a very clear sense of direction for the department and regular meetings are now held for both curriculum and instrumental teachers. Planning was a cause of concern in the last report. New schemes of work are being introduced and they cover a good variety of music from different times and places. The course seeks to develop a wider understanding of the emotional impact of music and its place within the Expressive Arts. New assessment procedures have also been introduced. They are thorough and informative and make good use of technology. Students are fully aware of how to improve their work but reports do not inform parents of national curriculum levels.
177. Student participation in extra-curricular activities is outstanding and teachers work hard giving freely of both their time and expertise. There are clubs in a wide range of musical styles: choir, samba band, chamber choir, concert band, orchestra, lower school band, jazz band, brass ensemble, clarinet group, guitar ensemble, and various rock bands. Standards are very high and many students play in county groups. Standards of singing in the extra-curriculum are very good. Students have opportunities to perform in school concerts and local events and music groups regularly travel abroad. The recent performance of 'My Fair Lady' was particularly successful. This rich programme contributed to the school's award of Artsmark Gold and, over a year, approximately one quarter of the school take part in these events. Instrumental tuition is provided by twenty two peripatetic teachers for over 200 hours per week. Lessons are offered in all orchestral instruments, keyboards, guitar and voice. Standards of attainment in the instrumental lessons are very good overall and often outstanding. Styles of teaching vary more widely in this area but some very good and excellent lessons were seen. Monitoring of the work of instrumental teaching has developed since it was criticised in the last inspection but more time is needed to pursue this.
178. Accommodation has developed since the last inspection with the new block opening in 2000. The new classroom in this block is well-equipped with music technology. Rooms in the old block are not set-up for specialised music teaching and both classrooms need re-furbishment and more instruments to support the curriculum teaching; particularly, keyboards and tuned percussion instruments. Electric circuits are inadequate in both rooms and the trailing wires referred to in the last inspection remain an unresolved health and safety issue. More equipment for music

technology is needed and should be installed in one of these rooms so that students in Years 7 and 8 can use ICT in their work. Using music technology would help to ease the curriculum demands for even more space in this very active department; there are still some occasions when there are insufficient spaces for group work to take place undisturbed as reported by the previous inspection.

179. Since the last inspection, well above average standards have been maintained and progress is now very good for all. Some unsatisfactory progress was criticised in the last report. Teaching has improved on the good standard of the previous report and numbers opting for examination courses are rising. There have been improvements in accommodation. Further improvements are still needed along with more investment in resources but improvement has been very good overall.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- Teaching is predominantly very good and ensures that students learn very effectively.
- Leadership and management are good.
- Standards at GCSE are very high.
- Students' attitudes and behaviour are very good.
- Provision and take up of extra-curricular activities are excellent.
- Accommodation is excellent.

Areas for improvement

- The scheme of work is not fully developed for Years 10 and 11.
- Standards of attainment in Years 7 to 9 are not reflected in teachers' assessments.
- Students are given insufficient opportunity to evaluate their own performance and that of others.

180. Standards achieved by students in the GCSE and dance examinations in 2002 were very high, with the percentage of students achieving A* to C grades significantly above national averages. The proportion of students gaining A* to B grades is also very high. In practical and theory lessons seen the standards achieved are very good, especially in trampolining. In core lessons seen during the inspection in Years 10 and 11 standards are, generally, in line with those expected at this age. Achievement is very good in GCSE classes and good in core activities. Talented students achieve very well and attain high standards in a variety of sports. A small number of higher-attaining boys in Year 10 hockey have very good skills and can lead practices to improve short corner options.
181. Assessments made by teachers judge standards to be below the national average in Years 7 to 9. However, observations during the inspection show that standards are at least in line with those expected at this age. Students enter the school with good skills in some activities but the general level of attainment is below the expectation for students of this age. They make good progress in Years 7 to 9 and standards are at least in line with national expectations in the vast majority of lessons. In some lessons standards are good or very good overall. For example, in Year 9 trampolining, the girls perform routines which are of very good quality. A minority of higher-attaining girls perform at an excellent standard and include difficult actions such as somersaults and turntables in their routines. Standards are also good in Year 7 netball and Year 8 gymnastics in the top set. Students with special educational needs make good progress throughout the school.
182. Teaching and learning are very good overall. In GCSE practical and theory lessons, teaching is consistently very good, ensuring that students make very good progress. They learn how to analyse performance very effectively and are made very aware of the strategies to use in order to achieve good success in the examination. GCSE coursework folders have substantial amounts of work, much of which displays very good knowledge, standards of literacy and good use of specific vocabulary. Students analyse graphs and use varied ICT applications to prepare personal training plans. Teaching is always at least satisfactory in core lessons in Years 10 and 11 and is very good overall. Students are taught very well in hockey with very good use of small group practices in restricted areas to ensure that students learn very effectively how to create passing angles. Students are given very good opportunities to learn independently and to lead activities. In Years 7 to 9 teaching is always good and out of nine lessons observed it was very good in six lessons and excellent in Year 9 trampolining. Teachers are mainly experienced and have very good skills which ensure that students learn very well in the majority of lessons throughout the school. Teachers have good knowledge and ensure that students acquire new skills which are technically correct. Lessons are well planned with clear objectives and progressions which build on previous learning. In good lessons the objectives are shared with students so that they know what they are going to learn. Relationships are very good and teachers manage students well so that attitudes and behaviour are very good, and occasionally excellent, in the vast majority of lessons.

Teachers use demonstrations effectively to ensure that students are aware of the high expectations for performance. In some lessons teachers make excellent use of a digital camera to enable students to watch their performance in order to evaluate their progress and improve their performance. However, the opportunity for students to evaluate their own performance and that of others is insufficient and the use of new technology is not well developed.

183. Students' attitudes and behaviour are very good overall throughout the school. In sixteen out of eighteen lessons seen attitudes and behaviour were at least very good and in five lessons were excellent. Students are keen and stay on task showing very good physical effort. Relationships are very good and students work very effectively together in pairs and small groups. In theory lessons in GCSE students show very good respect for the opinions of other students. Excellent peer support was given to a student with severe special educational needs in a Year 7 netball lesson. Students really want to improve and, as a result, display excellent attitudes and behaviour in trampolining lessons.
184. Leadership and management of the department are good. The school has received the Sportsmark Gold Award in recognition of the quality of provision. The Head of Department is well respected by colleagues and leads by example. There is a good action plan which identifies strategies to improve the department. Schemes of work for Years 7 to 9 are in place but those for Years 10 and 11 are not and teachers use the GCSE syllabus as a planning tool in core activities. Staffing is now very good, with eight specialist teachers, many of whom are very experienced, especially in teaching examination classes. Teaching is not monitored systematically as the teacher who previously had that responsibility has now left. Students' progress is monitored through assessment procedures which are in place and in line with school procedures. However, teachers' assessments of the standards achieved by the end of Year 9 are too low. Students are not involved in any self-assessment and are not clear about their own progress. Accommodation has improved significantly in the past two years and is now excellent. Extra-curricular activities are excellent, with teachers fully committed to provide opportunities for students to excel. Individuals and teams are very successful in local, regional and national competitions. Students' cultural development is well supported by skiing and other sporting tours abroad to Europe and Canada.
185. Since the last inspection teaching has improved and the range of curriculum activities has increased; accommodation is significantly better and GCSE standards are higher.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- The lessons have strong content drawn from world religions in Years 7 to 9 and in the GCSE option group.
- The students respond positively to their work.
- There has been an increase in the number of students in the GCSE option.

Areas for improvement

- In the compulsory course in Years 10 and 11, which also encompasses moral, social and citizenship issues, the explicitly religious education content drawn from world religions is less clearly covered than would be expected.
- A review of the religious education component is needed in the compulsory course in Years 10 and 11 to ensure full coverage of the statutory requirements indicated in the locally agreed syllabus.

186. At the end of Year 11 the standard of attainment in the GCSE option group is just below national averages. Of the 28 students entered for the examination in Year 2002 about half of the students gained the higher grades of A* to C. One hundred per cent of the students gained the grades of

A* to G. The results are broadly similar to the results in Years 2001 and 2000. For the students in the current GCSE option group, the standard of attainment in the work seen is broadly average and sometimes above average. The students have a sound working knowledge of Christianity and Judaism and they understand many of the ways in which these religions respond to a range of philosophical and moral issues such as religion and science and religion and human relationships. At times, some students find it difficult to recall some work done previously but overall the students show a good range of study and learning skills. These include developed and extended writing as well as note taking and research skills. The students are also competent in reflecting on other viewpoints and opinions and in expressing their own. The number of students in the option group has gone up in recent years. The attainment of the students in the compulsory religious education group is below what is expected by the agreed syllabus. A limited amount of study of religions has been done as a significant part of the course also includes moral and social issues and citizenship. Students can discuss these issues competently. The amount of written work is limited.

187. At the end of Year 9, the standard of attainment broadly is above the standards indicated in the locally agreed syllabus. The students have a good knowledge of Christianity and other world religions and they understand how these religions work themselves out in the lives of their followers, both on the personal level and in the community. The students can use a significant amount of religious language with confidence and they understand many of the concepts which are common to a number of world faiths. These concepts include things like symbolism, commitment, discipleship and ritual. At times, the students' knowledge and understanding are stronger in relation to the outward manifestation of religions, such as in rites of passage, than they are in relation to the basic underlying belief systems that lie beyond them, for example in the rite of baptism and its related concept of atonement. The students can see and appreciate things from other points of view but an understanding of how their study might have relevance to their own lives and experience could be stronger. The students have a wide range of skills. These include fluent verbal responses to the many questions posed by the teachers and they also include written skills, such as extended writing. The students are capable of processing information from texts and presenting it in other forms.
188. The achievement of the students in Years 7 to 9 and in the GCSE option group is good. The achievement of students with special educational needs is also good, as is the progress of the more able and the gifted and talented students. The provision of structured differentiation work and extension tasks on a more consistent basis would further help these groups. The achievement of the students in the compulsory religious education course in Years 10 and 11 is unsatisfactory due to the limited amount of time they spend in studying about the explicit aspects of world religions.
189. The teaching in Years 7 to 9 and in the GCSE option is good. Lessons are well prepared and the teachers use a wide range of activities to help the students in their learning. These include the use of texts, videos on the life of Jesus, discussions, research work and the making of diaries. This variety of work keeps the students interested in their learning and so their behaviour and attitude are consistently good. The students concentrate on their work and they are able to maintain this concentration. The students respect each other and the teachers. They also respect other viewpoints and opinions. Some learning is done using information technology, particularly research work and project work. All lessons have a significant religious content, drawn from the locally agreed syllabus in Years 7 to 9 and from the examination syllabus in Years 10 and 11. In general, the teaching and learning are set at a sufficiently demanding level for the majority of students, although at times provision for the less able and the more able students could be better tailored to their particular needs. A faster pace in most lessons would enable more learning to be done in the time available. The teaching in the compulsory religious education classes shares the characteristics of the other teaching except that the religious content is very limited and so the learning is largely restricted to a range of moral, social and citizenship issues. The assessment of the students' learning in these groups is very limited. The assessment of the learning in the other religious education groups is good. Overall, the teaching contributes well to the standards of literacy and to the students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

190. The leadership and management are good. Statutory requirements are being met in Years 7 to 9 and in the GCSE option group. The explicitly religious content indicated in the locally agreed syllabus is not being covered as would be expected in the compulsory religious education in Years 10 and 11. Statutory requirements are not being met in the sixth form. Progress since the last inspection has been mixed. The staffing situation has improved, although a significant number of lessons are taught by teachers drawn from other humanities subjects. The issue of limited written activity in the compulsory religious education in Years 10 and 11 remains, along with the issue of assessment. The written work in Years 7 to 9 has improved, as has students' knowledge of world religions. The accommodation and resources are good.

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

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

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2001, which is the last year for which national comparisons are available.

GCE A level

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	33	100	87	61	43	7.7	5.8
Biology	23	91	88	30	34	5.1	5.2
Chemistry	13	100	90	62	43	6.8	5.9
Physics	14	93	88	50	40	6.9	5.7
Design and technology	11	100	91	55	30	6.9	5.4
Economics	11	100	89	73	36	8.0	5.5
Physical Education	5	100	92	60	25	7.2	5.1
Art and design	15	100	96	40	46	6.7	6.6
Drama	9	100	99	78	38	8.2	6.6
Music	8	100	93	25	35	6.0	5.7
Geography	21	100	92	24	38	5.6	5.7
History	18	83	88	39	35	5.6	5.5
Government and Politics	10	60	n/a	100	n/a	7.8	n/a
Psychology	15	100	87	14	34	5.3	5.3
English Literature	31	100	95	48	37	7.0	5.9
French	5	100	89	80	38	7.6	5.9
German	4	100	91	50	40	7.8	5.8
General studies	32	97	n/a	62	n/a	4.9	n/a

National figures for some small A-level subjects are grouped. This means that comparisons for subjects such as law, psychology, design and technology, media studies and drama are compared to a group of subjects at national level.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

Mathematics, biology, chemistry and geology were inspected in depth.

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- Results over many years and current standards are well above the national average.
- Achievement is consistently very good.
- Teaching is very good. It is excellent in a majority of lessons.
- The curriculum is very good. There is a wide range of options, including provision for slightly weaker students and further mathematics for the gifted students.
- The attitudes of students are very good.
- Leadership and management are outstanding. This ensures schemes of work and assessment systems are excellent, thus promoting high expectations.

Areas for improvement

- The department has no significant areas for improvement.

191. The GCE examination results in 2002 were well above the national average at both A level and AS level. There were almost twice as many higher grades at A or B in A level as seen nationally. The three further mathematics students all attained higher grades. These results continue the trend of well above average results over recent years and reflect very good achievement from GCSE. In common with national figures, there are more male than female students. The subject recruits and retains students broadly in line with national trends.

192. The standards of work of current students are also well above average. In Year 13, six students of mechanics are all working at the highest grades A or B, with most at the top grade. They are brilliantly led by the teacher's questioning, to understand how the ideas relating to gravity they are already familiar with on earth can be extended to apply to the wider concept of the universe. They think deeply about the assumptions made regarding motion and forces on earth to arrive at Newton's Law of Gravitation. They then combine their new knowledge in mechanics, with high levels of algebraic skills to solve problems. The same students, despite a slightly slow start, made rapid progress to substantially improve their knowledge of circular motion. The teacher's use of scenarios, such as the *wall of death* and use of her own body, when standing on a chair, whilst lying back against a wall in the classroom, to illustrate forces, were highly significant features in promoting excellent learning. Six different students showed a real depth of understanding of complicated statistical techniques to test accurately whether the probability of scoring penalties in football followed a particular pattern. The students also demonstrated the knowledge of how tiredness over time, the goalkeeper's likelihood of improving in saving penalties from the same player, as well as physical factors such as wind or rain would affect the conditions necessary for such a distribution to apply. Learning was strongly reinforced by computer demonstration using a spreadsheet, with students following this up on their own. The very strong subject knowledge of teachers was significant in maintaining pace in these excellent, very well prepared lessons to enable students to achieve extremely highly.

193. Students in Year 12 are overall slightly less confident than their Year 13 counterparts. However, students learned about matching processes in a lesson on decision mathematics. The context of finding partners for the *May Ball*, using names of students in the class, helped promote excellent levels of understanding and enthusiasm. Two further mathematics students in Year 12 showed high levels of attainment when learning about how to expand algebraic expressions containing two terms to high powers. They showed impressive willingness to try different strategies, encouraged

by the teacher. However, sharper questioning and more direction would have helped the students improve their ability to be more efficient in the process of exploring techniques.

194. Teaching is very good, overall. It is always good or better and a majority of lessons are excellent. Teachers have very strong subject knowledge, which allows terrific pace in moving forward. In the very best lessons, there was imaginative use of contexts and a wide range of activities, such as whole-class discussion, individual problem solving and oral question and answer. All work in the best lessons was extremely challenging, with time used to the full.
195. The excellent assessment systems of target setting accurately, ongoing assessment by high quality questioning in the classroom, use of past papers and levelling assignments with both teacher and student comments promote high levels of confidence and enthusiasm consistently. Students have very good and often excellent attitudes to methods. Schemes of work provide exceptionally clear guidance on resources, timings for topics, revision processes and the incorporation of assessment. Information given to students encourages and allows them to read on to prepare for future topics.
196. The curriculum is wide-ranging, with provision for students to study to a very deep level in statistics or mechanics as well as algebra, or for students to follow a more mixed course including decision-making techniques in mathematics. Further mathematics is actively encouraged and taken up successfully by gifted students. The time allowance is sufficient and is supplemented by an unsupervised session for which work is set and more importantly by the twice-weekly *surgeries* that are popular with all levels of students.
197. Leadership and management are outstanding. The subject has a high profile because of the very good results and quality of teaching. The high quality of the schemes of work and the assessment systems has contributed significantly to this. There has been good improvement since the previous inspection.

Biology

Overall, the quality of provision in biology is **good**. Able students are taught by able teachers to produce results close to the national average.

Strengths

- Well qualified and committed teachers.
- Good schemes of work
- Good assessment and monitoring of students.
- Hard working, keen and able students.
- Good results.

Areas for improvement

- Review the balance between practical and theoretical work.
- Investigate means of helping all students to achieve target grades.
- Monitor and take action to improve visual impact of teaching resources – screens, overhead projectors, transparencies and work-sheets.

198. Results in 2001 and 2002 in biology have been above the 2001 national average and showed that high attainers achieved well and performed better than their GCSE results would have predicted. National comparisons are not available for A-level results in 2002. A number of students, although achieving satisfactorily, did not reach their target grades in their examinations. AS-level results for 2002 show the majority of students achieve or exceed their minimum target grade, leaving a small number who underperform. Nearly a third of students achieve A or B grades. Overall, value-added progress was good.
199. In work seen, Year 13 produced files of very good quality showing in-depth coverage of advanced level material, some showing meticulous care in producing work of a high quality and revision

cards to aid learning. Students have been encouraged to develop Power Point presentations for aspects of the course. These were of a good standard. Coursework is also of a good standard, incorporating good background science, accuracy in practical techniques and appropriate use of statistics to analyse results. During lessons students demonstrated good understanding of population dynamics and could correctly use the terms 'immigration', 'emigration', 'birth rate' and 'death rate' when applied to population curves. Students were able to explain the impact of social, cultural, economic and environmental factors on population change. Students in Year 12 also produce very good quality files, with a format similar to those from Year 13. In lessons students demonstrated good recall of cell division from GCSE work and could explain the significance and the role of meiosis and mitosis in the life of an organism.

200. Teaching and learning are good. Where teaching showed strengths, as in a lesson about populations, the lessons started with good use of questions and answers to establish current understanding of population terminology. An overhead projector was used effectively to show population growth graphs and students were asked to explain factors that would be likely to cause the observed patterns. Population data from Internet sources are used in research. Students work well in small groups to determine population changes and relate these to phases of demographic transition graphs. Students explain their thinking to the rest of the group and are supported by probing and logical questions by the teacher to extend learning. Teachers regularly check students' learning. In a lesson on cell division, the teacher made good use of simple memory techniques to enable students to remember the sequence and significant aspects of the phases of mitosis. Activities moved along at a pace sufficient to maintain momentum and interest and to allow completion of the introductory learning of mitosis in the time allocated. In less effective teaching, there is a tendency for over-long presentations by the teacher and insufficient use of stimulus, source or support materials to help students learn. The quality of visually presented materials varies. Some teachers use new technology effectively; others make use of poor quality overhead transparencies and screens. The recently refurbished laboratories are good and enhance students' learning. However, there are insufficient laboratories for the number of students studying science and this affects the quality of teaching and learning in some lessons because access is not always available to appropriate learning resources.
201. Regular homework is well marked, with good feed back informing students on how to improve their work. Homework, GCSE grades and minimum target grades are carefully recorded in a data-base. This allows interim monitoring of students' progress and action to help support students who are falling behind. Coursework is well marked with good feed-back to students to explain the reasoning behind marks awarded. Students have a course tutor for their course who oversees their work and helps solve problems. Student attitudes to their work, each other and their teachers are very good. Students typically show good understanding of their work, present it well and are keen to learn.
202. The department is well managed. The last report identified teaching as satisfactory or better in the sixth form; teaching has improved to be good or better in all lessons seen. Assessment data is being collected, reviewed and used to monitor progress. A range of styles of teaching have been developed and now the department is beginning to make use of ICT for teaching purposes. Good use is made of past examination papers during lessons and for homework. Practical work is evident in field-work and coursework set for examination assessment and forms a part of the teaching and learning programme, but the balance between theory and relevant practical work should be considered. There is currently an imbalance, with practical work forming a lower proportion of the course activity. Strategies have been tried to increase students' independent learning skills. The learning environment has been improved by display materials aiming to create a positive image of biology in action but there is opportunity to develop this area. Well-developed schemes of work are in place. There is opportunity to further enhance the curriculum in addition to fieldwork, revision sessions and possible voluntary lecture visits.

Chemistry

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

Strengths

- A wide range of teaching approaches is employed leading to good learning outcomes.
- Strong leadership and management create a good framework for development.

Areas for improvement

- Students are not using ICT applications because too few opportunities are being created for them.
- More activities with support at different levels should be promoted to ensure more effective learning outcomes for all students.

203. A-level and AS-level results are well above average and have been consistently improving over time. Students make very good progress. Inspection evidence confirms that the high standards are being maintained. Students are secure in their knowledge and understanding of mechanisms of organic reactions, differences in chemical behaviour of organic substances such as alkanes and alkenes, enthalpy changes in displacement reactions, and redox reactions. They demonstrate good practical skills in much of this work and specifically in measuring heat changes, making standard solutions and using titration techniques, and explaining the different reactions of cyclohexane and cyclohexene. Higher-attaining students are well motivated to enhance their knowledge and understanding through extended study using other sources.
204. Teaching is good, and a wide range of approaches is used to motivate students to respond to the high expectations and challenges presented. Relations between teachers and students are good and students respect others' points of view. There is a good balance between teacher-led and student participation, promoting active learning. There is good support for those students who need it, for those with weaker mathematical skills and for those who have lack of confidence or who are underachieving. Learning is good, with every opportunity for the higher-attaining students to stretch their understanding. The use of *mini white boards* to motivate a quick response is impressive, and the use of presentations on the board or in simple displays enables real progress to be made in understanding mechanisms of organic reactions. There are good opportunities for independent learning.
205. The leadership and management are strong and use the team's expertise to support student learning most effectively by pairing teachers. The level of resources is good, including ICT resources, and every student has a textbook. There is adequate storage of chemicals that meets health and safety requirements, with the consideration needed for ducting the main chemical store. There is no outside store for chemicals. Library resources, specifically in the sixth form area, complement this provision well. Little opportunity to use ICT applications is taken, specifically in datalogging, and this should be a priority for development. More formal support at different levels would lead to more effective learning outcomes.
206. There is improvement since the last inspection, with standards continuing to rise, and teaching and learning at better levels.

Geology

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

Strengths

- The quality of teaching, which inspires students to work hard so that nearly all of them exceed their examination targets.
- The organisation and content of the curriculum, which allows students' skills to develop in parallel with their subject knowledge.
- The outstanding relationships in teaching groups, which enable learning to take place in an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect.

Areas for improvement

- The approach to target setting and monitoring of students' progress towards their targets currently places insufficient emphasis on short-term targets and what students can do to meet them fully.

207. On entry to the sixth form, students' attainment is broadly as expected. About half of those taking geology are also studying geography and a few study a range of science subjects.

Numbers have increased since the introduction of curriculum 2000, and geology is now popular at advanced level in Year 13. National comparisons are not available for 2002, but most students have gained the highest grades, A and B, in their AS and A-level examinations over the last two years. All the current A-level students are predicted to achieve grades A, B or C in 2003. Virtually all students have exceeded their predicted grades. Achievement is therefore very good.

208. Retention rates are very high, and students rate the subject as outstanding. It is not surprising, therefore, that the standards of work seen in lessons and in students' folders are also above average. Students quickly assimilate the standards needed in sixth form work in terms of academic scholarship, and communication and personal skills. In one outstanding lesson, for example, an excellent practical activity helped all students to understand the concepts of syncline and anticline, how erosion and deposition lead to an unconformity and how these features can be represented in a geological map or cross section.
209. The quality of teaching is outstanding. The teacher is a real enthusiast for his subject and communicates his enthusiasm with flair, so that his students are drawn into the lesson, take difficult concepts, such as phase diagrams, in their stride and make rapid gains in understanding. He is exceptionally skilled in questioning students at their own level so that all of them are fully involved.
210. Assessment is very good, and firmly based on national standards. All students know their targets, which have been defined on the basis of their GCSE grades. However, use of short term targets is currently underdeveloped and the department does not do enough to help students to raise their aspirations, and then strive towards them, as each unit or topic develops.
211. Management of the department is excellent. The head of department, who does nearly all the teaching, has an excellent understanding of how young people learn best and runs his department to support those needs. The curriculum is excellent because it meets all the examination requirements and is based on activities which develop students' academic and personal skills together so that they can always support one another. There are excellent fieldwork courses, and the head of department has embraced the introduction of new AS and A-level courses with enthusiasm; numbers of students choosing the subject are increasing, and the subject is set to maintain the good improvement noted since the last inspection.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

Design and technology was inspected in depth.

Design and technology

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

Strengths

- Teaching, especially teachers' knowledge and passion for the subject.
- Assessment, which is formative, continuous and accurate.
- Students' positive attitudes and approach to learning.
- Attainment by students of all abilities.
- Quality of technical drawing and design solutions.

Areas for improvement

- Gender balance on sixth form courses.
- Product design, textiles and graphics opportunities.

212. Since the last inspection, the standards achieved by the students have remained well above average. Over the past two years students' point scores have been over two points higher than the national average and nearly a point higher than the school average. In 2002 the proportion of

A and B grades was 64 per cent, over half of the candidates gained an A grade and all gained an A-level pass.

213. The quality of teaching was very good in every lesson and carefully tailored to the needs of the students. Teaching is meticulously planned, high paced, challenging, supportive and enthusiastic. The main sixth form teacher has a passion for the subject and superb subject knowledge. This is passed on to the students at every opportunity. The supporting teacher also demonstrated a sound grasp of the syllabus and related curriculum and learning issues.
214. Students possess a self-evaluative approach and positive work ethic. They respond extremely well to the course and choose challenging and individual project themes, which are usually linked to personal interests, for example the model aircraft starter mechanism and the land sail board design. They take pride in their achievement. The quality of technical drawing is particularly high.
215. The progress made by the students is based on assiduous and continual monitoring, mentoring and coaching, with a continual flow of informed and highly accurate formative assessment. The course leader has an excellent grasp of how to maximise the potential of the students.
216. The product design curriculum offered is well suited to the students and the approach is relevant to the qualifications the students require for progression to higher education. The only female student has placed this at the heart of her career path into the design industry. The course gives the students an excellent grounding in design methodology and skills whilst developing knowledge and understanding of industrial processes and their impact on society. However, the current provision offers limited opportunity to study design and technology in the sixth form, and areas of study should include more electronics, textiles and graphics elements and improve uptake by girls.
217. Leadership and management are very good. The sixth form provision is meticulously planned, accurately assessed and effectively managed. Resources are appropriate and well used, including computer aided manufacture and design. However, access to a full range of finishing processes is limited and has affected the choice of materials some students have made for their designs. The health and safety issues indicated in the previous inspection have been addressed and industrial interest in students on the course continues.

BUSINESS

Economics was inspected in depth.

Economics

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

Strengths

- Standards at A level are well above the national average.
- Teaching and learning are very good. Teaching is well planned, reflects the strength of subject knowledge and challenges students appropriately.
- Students achieve very well in relation to their prior attainment.
- ICT is used as a resource to provide on-line, up-to-date information and support materials for students.
- Relationships are excellent and students feel very well supported in their study of economics.

Areas for improvement

- The department has no significant areas for improvement.

218. Results in A-level economics in 2002 were well above the 2001 national average both in terms of the percentage of higher A and B grades achieved by the students and in terms of average points

scored. Results have been consistently well above the national average for the past three years, with an unbroken one hundred per cent pass rate. AS-level results last year were in line with national averages, although standards had fallen from the previous year when they

were well above. This reflects the fact that a number of those students were sampling the course for one year, including four from Year 13 who have now left the school. However, those students attaining the higher grades have continued their studies into Year 13.

219. Observations of lessons and a scrutiny of students' work confirm that standards remain well above average and achievement is very good. Year 12 students have a very good knowledge and understanding of economic theory in relation to the market economy. They understand the key goals of government policy and how economic theory can be applied in the management of the economy, as was seen in a lesson on monetary policy. Year 13 students have a very good knowledge and understanding of the economics of development and of the global economy. They use a range of economic vocabulary showing a clear understanding of economic concepts and they can apply what they have learned to case studies, actual organisations and the real economy. All have developed the higher order skills of evaluation and analysis to write essays using appropriate economic, market or mathematical models to illustrate. They can discuss, for example, the impact of globalisation on the prosperity of developing countries. Year 13 students show highly developed debating skills and contribute confidently to oral discussion. They have very good research skills and use a wide variety of sources, including the Internet, economic journals, newspapers and texts, to add to their knowledge. There is clear progression in both thinking and learning.
220. Teaching and learning are very good with some excellent features. Effective lesson planning provides very good opportunities for learning. Very good subject expertise is used to motivate and inform students. Expectations are high and challenging tasks are set, as was seen in a Year 13 lesson where students were required to use their knowledge of theoretical concepts to explain the cause and effects of exchange rate fluctuations. Students are challenged to debate topical economic issues. Excellent teacher-produced resources support learning. ICT is used as a resource to provide on-line, up-to-date information and support materials for students. Students' work is assessed on a regular basis with detailed comments designed to indicate how students might make progress. Students feel very well supported and receive regular feedback on how well they are doing. Relationships are excellent.
221. The very good teaching and learning and the very good achievement made by students are due to the fact that the department is well managed by an experienced teacher assisted by a very experienced specialist. Leadership of the department is excellent and shows clear educational direction. Monitoring and evaluation of the subject's performance is very good and is improving standards. Economics was not identified in the last inspection but standards have remained well above average since that time.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Information and communication technology was inspected in depth.

Information and communication technology

Overall, the quality of provision in information and communication technology is **good**.

Strengths

- Good use of information about students.
- Very good tutorial support.
- Computers available for students above the number seen nationally.
- Students are enthusiastic and work well.

- Flexibility of teaching staff to meet the individual needs of students.
- Teachers work well as a team to ensure continuity of experiences for students.

Areas for improvement

- Students are accepted onto AVCE courses without the necessary prior learning.

222. Students in the sixth form can choose to study for an AVCE in ICT. This was a new course first examined in 2002 and 96 per cent of students passed the course. Other sixth form students can follow a key skills ICT programme and study for Level 2 or Level 3 qualifications. In Years 10 and 11 ICT experiences do not ensure a sound basis for all to study for the Level 3 ICT key skills qualification and some students require additional support on the AVCE course. Some students can incorporate an industry standard networking qualification in their studies.
223. The work of students seen during the inspection in lessons, in their portfolios and in conversations confirms that standards are overall above average. This means that achievement is good when prior attainment is considered. All students showed great interest and enthusiasm as they used the computers to develop their systems independently. They used on-line ICT systems, internal ICT systems and text support before involving the teacher where appropriate. Students are good at supporting each other and their discussion often increases the pace of learning.
224. Overall teaching and learning are good in ICT lessons. Teaching was at least satisfactory and four-fifths was good or better. A well organised programme of work provides opportunities for students to make good progress. Group work usually includes good questioning of the students and this provides a check on the level of understanding of the students. Focused practical sessions are conducted to move the class, small groups or individuals forward as required. A very good lesson developing a database enabled students to demonstrate their learning and understanding of foreign key, Input mask, security, auto-numbers and relationships. The course content was available on the school's ICT systems, which are developing into an intranet. Students were both confident and competent in its use. Teachers organise and give good one-to-one tutorials to students at appropriate times during the lessons and often use their own lunch and non-teaching time for this high quality support.
225. Attendance and retention rates are good for the courses followed. However, some students are allowed to follow the course without the full entry requirements. Plans are in place to develop experiences and certification in Years 10 and 11 which will provide a sound basis for study in the sixth form.
226. High quality computer resources support the learning well. Students have good access to the resources both in and out of lessons. ICT was seen used in the study of statistics in mathematics, for word processing, for much independent learning using the Internet, to email work, for presentation work and for coursework in general. One IT room with a smaller class of students was seen to allow other students, who were 'free', to enter and use the resources independently for business studies coursework. Overall in the school there are about five students to each modern computer and this is significantly better than the national average.
227. The subject is very well led and managed. The course selected is appropriate and resources are well organised. Progress is well monitored and teachers work well as a team to ensure continuity of experiences for students.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

Art and design and theatre studies were inspected in depth and music was sampled.

Art and Design

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

Strengths

- Collaborative leadership and management of learning.
- Expectations by students and staff of the amount and quality of achievement.
- Excellent relationships between all in the subject.
- Teaching appropriate for sixth form students.

- Induction into projects underpins independent learning.
 - Application of ICT has a very good impact on art and design standards.
- Areas for improvement
- Accuracy of assessment for AVCE/A level.

228. Standards have improved significantly since the last inspection. In 2002, over a third of students achieved an A or B grade and all entries attained A-E grades in their A-level examinations. Point scores are one point ahead of school and national averages. Over-harsh marking is having a marginal but significant effect on official results and is not in line with the standards seen.
229. Teaching is mostly very good, with a third excellent. The effects of apt, subtle and sophisticated teaching, and of continuous, rigorous and formative assessment are seen in high standards of work. There is little variation in quality across the teaching team. Excellent curriculum planning and use of stimulus material and inductive starting points enable independent learning especially for AVCE students.
230. All A-level and AVCE students have substantial quantities of cohesively developed, individually managed work of distinctive character. The A-level work is particularly mature.
231. Students work in a sustained and mature manner. They use their base rooms continuously on and off timetable and in an orderly fashion. They are eager to discuss their projects and seek advice. Many take advantage of the elective sessions available for extra study. All show determination to succeed on the course and most A-level and half the AVCE students plan careers in the creative industries.
232. The two sixth form courses are complementary and offer an excellent provision for students from a wide range of ability and vocational direction. The range of media is as broad as the students wish to take it. One A-level student is receiving a regular supply of car parts for her sculptures. The students have a dedicated studio-based Apple Mac suite, which is in constant use.
233. The teaching team has a clear vision for art and design that meets the students' learning needs. Teachers collaborate effectively to deploy appropriate resources. Assessment, curriculum planning and resource management are meticulously monitored and managed.
234. ICT gives an excellent base to innovate with digital and lens based media. This will take the subject into contemporary and future developments with animation, moving image and time-related art.

Drama and theatre studies

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

Strengths

- Very good teaching promotes well above average standards of attainment and achievement.
- The curriculum offers a very rich experience for all students.
- The subject makes an excellent contribution to students' personal development.
- There are excellent extra-curricular opportunities to visit the theatre, to perform and to direct.
- Leadership and management of the department are very good.

Areas for improvement

- The endings of some lessons are disrupted because the studio is used as a dining room.

235. Standards in GCE A-level examinations are consistently well above average, an improvement on the previous inspection when standards were judged to be average. In 2001, results were well above average, with seven of the nine candidates gaining grades A or B. In 2002, entries rose to 27 and results were even better than in the previous year, with 22 students gaining grades A or B.

These results placed them in the top 25 per cent of schools taking the subject nationally. All students achieve very well. There are no significant differences between boys and girls.

236. These high standards are confirmed by the work seen during the inspection both in lessons and in the work in students' files. Students develop very good critical and analytical skills, which they use in their written work commenting on the wide range of productions they have seen and in lessons evaluating their own and others' practical work. Their knowledge and understanding of texts, theorists and practitioners, the history of drama, the current theatrical scene and dramatic techniques and conventions are impressive. Some excellent structured records of their devised pieces for Theatre in Education performances in local primary schools were awarded full marks. Students generally have very good standards of literacy and their written work is fluent and well-expressed with very good use of the language specific to the subject. Their practical work is equally impressive. Students have very good vocal and movement skills and collaborate very effectively when rehearsing or improvising. During rehearsals, they move smoothly in and out of character and respond sensitively to each other as actors. They make thoughtful and insightful contributions to the directorial process. Students' current work on the thirty minute distillations of full-length plays demonstrates their very good performance skills. They have chosen some very challenging and powerful texts and some excellent developmental work on these was observed. In one adaptation of Sarah Kane's unrelenting and disturbing play '4.48 Psychosis', very good ensemble playing explored the different aspects of the central character, which were presented with conviction and authority.
237. The quality of teaching is consistently very good with some excellent features. Teachers display excellent knowledge and understanding of the subject and enthuse students through their own passion for drama. They extend students' experience by encouraging an in-depth exploration of themes and issues, broadening students' knowledge and understanding by making a wide range of references to other texts and the contexts in which they were written and produced. Teachers promote high standards of attainment and achievement through their high expectations, the way in which they encourage experimentation and exploration, and through an excellent use of assessment. There is a constant dialogue between teacher and students and between the students themselves about how practical work can be improved, and teachers make copious notes during or after all practical sessions which build up into a thorough record of each student's progress. The marking of written work is thorough and helpful, focused always on how to improve. These procedures are further enhanced by the mentoring system whereby each student has regular meetings with one of their teachers, who tracks, monitors and discusses their work with them. Students value these procedures and the way they are involved in and aware of their own progress.
238. The curriculum is enhanced by very good extra-curricular opportunities. Students are able to see good quality theatre and to work with professionals who visit the school. Residential experiences in London and Stratford at the beginning of Year 12 and Year 13 contribute greatly to students' knowledge of the current theatre scene, which enhances their study of modern directors and practitioners. The department puts on four productions each year, which are often sold out and which are highly regarded by parents and the local community. The subject also makes an excellent contribution to students' personal development. There are many opportunities to consider how drama both reflects and enhances life, to think about and discuss important moral and social issues and to develop the creative and imaginative impulse. Interdependence is an integral element of drama and students learn the nature of responsibility arising from being part of a group either in rehearsal or production.
239. The department is very well led and managed and good improvement has been made, particularly in the standards that students achieve, since the previous inspection. It is a testament to the close-knit and supportive nature of the team that, in the absence of the head of department, the developments taking place have continued to operate and move forward very effectively. The *Teaching Excellence* initiative enables teachers to observe others within the expressive arts area and to share good practice. There are three spaces for drama, each with its strengths and weaknesses, but some lessons in one space are severely disrupted at the end of the morning

session by preparations for its other use as a dining room. Despite this concern, the department offers a very good experience to its students and is well placed to effect further improvement.

HUMANITIES

Geography, history, psychology, and government and politics were studied in depth.

Geography

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

Strengths

- Standards are well above average.
- Very good teaching underpins the very good achievement that students are making in their study of geography.
- Leadership and management of the department are excellent and provide a clear direction for the subject.
- Relationships are very good and students feel well supported in their studies.
- Students have excellent attitudes towards the study of geography and the numbers studying in the sixth form are growing.

Areas for improvement

- The department has no significant areas for improvement.

240. Results in A-level geography in 2002 were well above national averages in terms of both the higher A and B grades and average point scores. All 28 students who sat the examination attained a pass grade. This showed a considerable improvement over the previous three years when standards were broadly in line with national averages. Of the 44 students who followed the AS-level course last year, all except three attained a pass grade and over one quarter achieved the highest, A grade. Retention rates are good with over 30 students currently in Year 13. Standards have been maintained since the last inspection.
241. Observation of lessons and a scrutiny of samples of students' work confirm that standards are well above average and achievement is very good. In Year 12, students demonstrate a very good knowledge and understanding of physical geography. Essays are well structured and all students can clearly explain physical processes using appropriate diagrams and sketch maps to illustrate. Research skills are very well developed, as was seen from a number of excellent projects on tropical rainforests using ICT to present them. There is clear progression in thinking and learning. Year 13 students have an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the topics they are studying. For example, they can analyse the processes and patterns of change over time to economic activity within cities and the surrounding areas. Fieldwork assignments are now of a high standard. Students can collect relevant data and use appropriate techniques to analyse it, including, for instance, Spearman's rank correlation coefficient. Analysis, evaluations and conclusions are more thorough and show evidence of mature judgements and a progression in thinking.
242. Teaching is very good and students learn well as a result. Very good subject knowledge and expertise is used to motivate and inform students. Lessons are well planned, with clear learning objectives shared with students. Very good working relationships create a relaxed yet powerful learning environment. Students are given many opportunities to present their work orally. High expectations challenge students, for example to consider variables in decision making, as was seen in a Year 12 lesson on hazards. Students are expected to carry out their enquiry and research independently using a variety of sources including ICT. Teachers assess students' work regularly and they feel well supported in their studies.
243. Leadership and management of the department are excellent and provide a clear direction for the subject. The subject's performance is monitored and evaluated effectively. There is a good quality residential fieldwork experience provided by the department. Standards are improving and there is a growing interest in studying geography in the sixth form. Students have excellent

attitudes towards the study of the subject. There has been good improvement since the last inspection.

Government and Politics

Overall, the quality of provision in government and politics is **excellent**.

Strengths

- The high level of mutual respect between teachers and students, which encourages an extremely positive approach to the subject by the students.
- The thorough, detailed and up-to-the-minute knowledge of the subject shown by the two teachers concerned, which results in the subject being contemporary and relevant to the political realities of today.
- The development of highly effective skills in self-directed study and research skills, which enables students to produce written and analytical work of a high standard.

Areas for improvement

- There are no immediate areas for development that could be identified during the inspection.

244. The subject was first introduced in the school in 1995. Since the time of the first examination only one student has failed to pass the A-level exam and results over the past few years show that a majority of the students obtain the highest grades. Overall results are excellent. At the time of the last inspection of the school the Government and Politics department did not have its own subject report and so it is not possible to make any comment on progress since that time. Teachers show a detailed knowledge and understanding of the subject and reflect excellent teaching practices. A large majority of students who take the AS-level course proceed to A2, and a majority who proceed to Higher Education follow courses that contain at least an element of political science. The subject is taken by roughly equal numbers of male and female students and there are no discernible differences in the grades they obtain.
245. Standards of work are very high. Students keep their work in folders which are very well presented, reflecting the care and attention that they pay to their work. They demonstrate a high degree of understanding of the subject, and are able to relate their studies to the world and the society in which they live. Of special merit is the importance placed on the development of self-study and research skills. There was no evidence of dictated notes; students make their own notes both during lessons and from their individual studies, and these are of a high quality. Research skills are developed through effective use of the Internet and the ability to analyse data of various types. This is reinforced through very good study support documents prepared by the teachers, containing the key points of the topic, together with up-to-the-minute bibliographies and useful web-sites for undertaking further study. Within the classroom this results in lessons in which all students are fully involved, and participation in discussion that reflects their thorough grasp of the work they cover. Elsewhere in the school this is supported by the very good facilities for sixth form private study, which include excellent access to computers. Examples of very effective learning were seen in a Year 12 lesson on the power of the British Prime Minister, in which a very illuminating discussion on the continuing role of the Monarchy reflected considerable insight, even though this was the first formal lesson on the topic. Similarly, in Year 13, students, after discussing the role and relevance of the U.S. Supreme Court and the nature of Presidential appointment to its panel of judges, had to compile a *Person Specification* for a judge whom President Bush might seek to appoint. Both of these examples reflected a political sophistication that belied the age and experience of those taking part in the discussions. This level of sophistication is also encouraged through the reading of specialist periodicals to which a number of students subscribe, which further reflects their interest and commitment to the subject.
246. The work and progress of the students is monitored throughout the duration of the courses. A final grade prediction is known to the students from the outset, based on their GCSE results and then developed as the course progresses. Progress is monitored in line with school policy, and grades are awarded for both effort and achievement. For both elements the majority of students get the highest grades. The students are unanimous in their view that their teachers know them and their work in great detail, and, in addition to the very detailed and supportive marking of work, the teachers will always give freely of their own time to support and develop the work of the

students. Such is the nature of the relationship between teachers and students, the students say that, although relationships are always of a constructive and supportive nature, when it is necessary to give “hard messages” this is done with honesty. Students appreciate this approach, which they say leaves them knowing exactly where they stand in terms of their academic development and the progress they are making.

247. Students are engrossed in their lessons and in the subject as a whole and show a real enthusiasm for what is being learned, and it is also clear that the teachers are also extremely committed. The work of the department creates a living study of the contemporary world, and the skills of the social scientist in bringing objectivity and analysis to its interpretation are developed from the outset. By the conclusion of the course the students will be able to demonstrate in an effective way the skills associated with social science.

248. Teaching and learning are excellent. The teachers use their up-to-date subject knowledge to very good effect, and students clearly appreciate this. Lessons are well planned and move along at a very crisp pace in which all are expected to participate. The objectives of the lessons are made clear at the outset and there is ample opportunity to review at the end. Care is taken to ensure that this is the case and that the discussions, which form such a central tenet of the teaching techniques, bring out thoughtful contributions. Students are given very positive encouragement through this approach and they say they never feel they are “put down” if they are not totally accurate, or correct in their assertions, but rather they are congratulated and further encouraged, while the ‘correct’ answer might be elicited from further developing the discussion. It is from this that students make their own notes, although supported as appropriate by prepared material, which adds a level of objectivity and information where this might otherwise have been lacking or have proved difficult to acquire because of a lack of prior knowledge; these are of good quality. This lack of dictation, or other form of collective note making during lessons, allows more time for the focus of the lesson to be developed, while at the same time promoting a very important skill in independent learning. Both teachers use the Internet and the media to good effect for gaining up to the minute information, or examples to support the work being undertaken. They also have prepared an index of useful web-sites to encourage independent research in a way which provides sufficient guidance to stop students becoming sidetracked by the immense volume of material that is now on the world-wide web.

249. The government and politics department varies from many others in the school by its very nature. It exists only to teach the AS and A2 subject groups and the two teachers involved (who share the teaching in an equal way), although having a very detailed knowledge of the subject, also teach in other departments in the main part of the school and have other responsibilities. Both are very experienced, having been at the school for many years, certainly pre-dating the introduction of the subject into the sixth form curriculum in 1995, and share an office within the school. The government and politics department therefore has a rather more informal structure than some others. However, in terms of the maintenance of school policies and the structures

that are in place to maximise the achievement of students all of the necessary aspects are in place. Overall, the department demonstrates teaching and learning of the highest calibre, which results in students making excellent progress and obtaining first class outcomes.

History

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

Strengths

- The high standards of attainment at A level.
- The very good quality of teaching, which is based on excellent subject expertise.
- The understanding teachers possess of the way students learn, which is reflected in the successful development of independent learners.

Areas for improvement

- There are no areas for improvement other than those identified in the department's development plan.

250. In 2001, results at A level were above the national average and 39 per cent of students gained A or B grades. In 2002, attainment levels rose markedly as 64 per cent of students gained A or B grades and all students gained an A-E grade at A level. Results at A/S level were also positive. 57 per cent of students gained A-C grades at A/S level in 2001, and this proportion rose to 86 per cent at A-C in 2002. There are as yet no national comparisons for 2002.
251. In the work seen standards are well above national expectations. Students are achieving well and making very good progress in terms of prior attainment. Students in Year 12 are able to draw on previous understanding gained from the GCSE courses and to develop the confidence required to reach sound historical judgements independently. With active guidance from their teachers, they are learning to think creatively and to consider different analytical approaches and historical interpretations. Written work demonstrates the growing ability of all sixth form students to challenge the assumptions implied in a question, and to select and use knowledge relevantly and effectively. Adopting a critical approach, students can produce convincing arguments and reach coherent conclusions. They are able to consider historical issues from different perspectives and to use the interpretations of different historians to support their arguments.
252. It is clear that the prodigious enthusiasm for history shown by the teachers, and the emphasis placed on student involvement in lessons, has a positive impact on the students. They are focused and responsive, whether collaborating in small groups to share different perspectives and ideas - sometimes using Power Point presentations - or articulating their views in class discussions. Overall, students show very good progress in the development of their understanding and historical skills. They become confident, independent learners and as such are well prepared for university education.
253. Teaching in the sixth form is never less than very good, and can be outstanding. Teachers' excellent subject expertise allows them to confront students energetically with issues surrounding evidence and the significance of historical controversies. Giving high priority to the intellectual development of their students, they aim to provide multiple opportunities for discussion and debate. Using skilful questioning techniques, teachers heighten the appreciation of different factors in historical causation, as was seen in an exemplary Year 12 lesson, where groups of students assessed the relative importance of political, social and economic factors in explaining the rise of Mussolini. Such lessons are lively and characterized by high levels of interaction and participation. The good relationship between staff and students contributes to an atmosphere that is both constructive and secure. Teachers demonstrate very good understanding of the way students learn. Lessons are designed to extend historical enquiry and to develop conceptual understanding. Teachers maintain a rapid pace of delivery in class, make well-considered interventions, and work to ensure that each student acquires the self-assurance required for success. Overall, lessons are well structured and identify what students must, should and could know. It is clear from discussions with students that they recognise that they are being very well taught and find their lessons both stimulating and intellectually challenging.
254. The department is led effectively at sixth form level. Teachers work hard to raise standards of attainment and share good practice openly. Their commitment is mirrored in the assessment of written work. Diagnostic feedback provides students with clear indicators for the improvement of their work. Marking is both regular and thorough. Students have very good access to a range of resources, including ICT.
255. The department has made good progress since the last inspection and this is reflected in the quality of teaching and learning and the maintenance of above average standards. The department has a good capacity to continue this improvement.

Psychology

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

Strengths

- Very good teaching promotes very good learning.
- Effective procedures for assessing students' work underpin well above average standards by the end of Year 13.
- Students' very positive attitudes to the subject.
- Subject leadership and management.

Areas for improvement

- Standards of attainment of some male students in Year 12.
- The extension of independent learning opportunities.

256. The 2001 A-level results in psychology were broadly in line with the national average. Although the proportion of students gaining the higher A or B grades was below average, the proportion gaining grades in the A to E range was above. These results were generally consistent with predictions based on students' standards of attainment on entry to the course. A-level results have been consistently above or well above national averages since the last inspection. Over the five-year period from 1998, only one student has failed to gain a grade in the A to E range and in most years the proportion of students gaining the highest grades has been above average. In 2002, the results were particularly strong, with 75 per of students achieving A or B grades and all obtaining grades in the A to D range. The 2002 AS-level results were also above those obtained in 2001, when the results were above average. These results represent very good achievement from entry to the course in Year 12. The take-up of psychology is lower by male than female students, but their results overall are similar.
257. Inspection evidence shows standards to be well above course expectations. Year 13 students are achieving very well and the overall quality of their oral and written work is very good. Students' files show clear progression in the development of their knowledge and understanding of the theoretical foundations of the subject. Their coursework shows a very good understanding of the principles of quantitative research and the use of statistical techniques. Year 12 students are making very good progress and establishing a sound knowledge base for the study of the subject. For example, they have a good understanding of the obedience studies of Milgram and are able to explain the strengths and limitations of these studies. Students in both years demonstrate a good understanding of the ethical issues related to research investigations and make very good use of a wide technical vocabulary.
258. Students show a high level of enthusiasm for the subject. They are willing to grasp new ideas and concepts. Students are keen to express their views and show respect for the opinions of others. In discussion they express their points of view thoughtfully and without rancour. The subject makes a positive contribution to students' personal development. The overall quality of students' work is very good. Files are generally very well organised and provide a valuable learning resource. However, the written work of some male students in Year 12, although mostly above average, does not match the well above average standards demonstrated in their oral work.
259. Overall, the quality of teaching is very good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and use this effectively to challenge and extend students' learning. The skilful use of questioning helps to clarify students' understanding of psychological terms and concepts. As a result, they make clear gains in understanding. In one Year 12 lesson on social influence and the ethics of social research, for example, the way in which the teacher skilfully probed beyond the initial response encouraged students to extend and reformulate their answers. As a consequence, students' confidence grew and their contributions increased, as did their knowledge and understanding of the issues. Lesson planning is very good and helps to ensure that students are presented with increasing demands in lessons. This makes a significant contribution to students' learning.

Lesson planning includes the provision of opportunities for independent learning and teachers are keen to extend these in order to cater for a wider range of students' interests and enthusiasms.

260. Subject leadership is very good and provides a clear direction for work in the subject. Contributory factors to the continuing rise in standards and the increasing rise in student numbers are very good support and guidance, and very good assessment procedures that are used effectively to provide students with clear information on the progress they are making. Students' progress against predictions is carefully monitored and additional support is provided when necessary. Very good relationships underpin a strong commitment to success and continued improvement in the subject. The subject is well placed to continue this improvement

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English literature and German were inspected in depth.

English

261. The focus of the inspection was on English literature, but English language was also sampled. The first group of students taking the course is now in Year 13. Work observed in lessons and in students' files indicates that standards are above average. Students are confident in their use of technical terminology and are developing very good analytical and evaluative skills. Two lessons were observed. In both, teaching was good, with teachers demonstrating very good subject knowledge and planning learning to take students through a logical progression. As a result, in one lesson, students quickly grasped the key features of writing for film and, in the other, students displayed a very good command of the essential features of children's reading books.

English literature

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

Strengths

- Very good teaching results in very good learning and achievement.
- Very good support and assessment procedures means that students are fully aware of the progress they are making.
- The curriculum is designed to extend students' knowledge and understanding of a wide range of texts.
- The subject makes a very good contribution to students' personal development.
- The subject is very well led and managed.

Areas for improvement

- Some marking of students' work is not sufficiently diagnostic and so does not help students to improve their work.

262. Standards achieved in GCE AS and A-level examinations are high. They have been consistently above or well above average for the last five years and have improved since the previous inspection. In 2001 and 2002 all students passed the examination with half gaining Grades A and B. There are no significant differences between girls' and boys'. Although students enter the sixth form having achieved well in GCSE examinations, their A-level results demonstrate that they maintain and build on previous learning and continue to make very good progress; in 2002 students achieved on average almost one grade higher than those predicted by their GCSE results.

263. Inspection evidence confirms these high standards. Students' attainment is well above average, both in debate and in their written work. Discussions are lively and students express and explain their ideas and opinions making impressive links to a wide range of other texts and historical events. For instance, a group of Year 12 students showed an excellent knowledge and understanding of the events which underpin how David Mamet's play 'Glengarry Glen Ross'

explores and comments on the USA of the 1980s. When making more formal presentations to the class, students do so with confidence and flair. In one Year 13 lesson, a group of students used Powerpoint to show the connections between African folklore and their set text, 'Beloved' by Toni Morrison. They demonstrated very good research and analytical skills and excellent communication skills to make a coherent and interesting presentation. In their written work, students display a very good command of technical language. They write fluently, present a cogent argument and demonstrate a clear understanding of the social, historical and cultural contexts of their texts. The highest-attaining students produce work of outstanding quality. They show excellent insight into the ways in which writers' choices of form and language shape meaning. They make reference to critical interpretations and present their own views with flair and balance, referring to a very wide range of texts to support their argument.

264. These high standards are promoted both by students' intrinsic enjoyment of literature and by very good teaching. Teachers display excellent subject knowledge and their enthusiasm for literature is infectious. They encourage lively debate and ensure that lessons are challenging and rich experiences. There is a real sense of teachers and students working together as equals, sharing and enjoying their work. Teachers create an atmosphere in which students feel secure to explore, offer hypotheses and take risks and this contributes to their growth as critical and discriminating readers. They are encouraged to examine the opinions of critics but always to remember that their own views are valid. All assessment information is shared with students. They are given the course assessment objectives, mark schemes, copies of schemes of work, which include homework assignments, and in some cases even individual lesson plans. Students value this, and confirm that it helps them to know exactly where they are going and how to get there. It supports them in preparing well for lessons and in catching up if they are absent. Students are fully engaged in the course. This is further helped by very good assessment procedures. All students are allocated one of their English teachers as a mentor, with whom they meet on a regular basis to discuss their attainment and progress. The only area for further improvement is the consistency of marking. Most is very thorough and creates a dialogue with the student, identifying the strengths and setting targets for improvement. Some marking, however, is less helpful to the student, with a reliance on ticks and a brief comment on achievement with little guidance on how to move on.
265. Students enjoy their English and are committed to achieving high standards. They spend a great deal of time on individual research and appreciate the rigorously intellectual nature of the course. Discussions are lively and all contribute. They listen to each other and test their developing opinions against other views.
266. Leadership and management are delegated to a sixth form co-ordinator who is responsible for all aspects of the curriculum, assessment and monitoring of the quality of the provision. Good improvement in standards has been made since the previous inspection and there is now a stronger team comprising a good mix of experienced and more recently qualified teachers. New staff are well integrated and supported. Teachers canvass the opinions of their students through informal forums at the end of the AS-level course in Year 12 and take note of what they learn from these in the regular curriculum review. The 'Teaching Excellence' initiative provides them with time to observe each other and to share good practice in an effort to maintain continuous improvement. The department serves its students very well and makes a very good contribution to their development as well rounded individuals.

Languages

267. In the sixth form, French and German are studied to AS and A2 levels. Spanish is taught to GNVQ level. German was the focus of this inspection, but one Year 12 French lesson on *la boulimie* was observed, which was judged to be very good, with many excellent features.

German

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

Strengths

- Excellent leadership and management, which influence the very good outcomes.
- The quality of marking and guidance given to students on how to improve.
- Choice and use of resources.

Areas for improvement

- To set up study/work experience in Germany, to enrich the language study.

268. All students in the 2002 A-level examination achieved a pass grade, with a significant number of A and B grades. Overall, students' performance was in line with expectations based on prior attainment. With the introduction of AS level, an increasing number of students continue to study German in the sixth form.
269. In work seen, standards in German are above average and students make very good progress in lessons. In a Year 13 lesson, students used the passive voice adeptly and there were opportunities to practise in context. Difficult grammar was reinforced via pair work and competitions. This made grammar learning fun and at times the enthusiasm to finish first with 100 per cent accuracy became highly competitive. In another year 13 lesson, students were able to discuss religion, church attendance and beliefs. They came fully prepared for the lesson and, as a result, spoke with conviction and confidence. 'Ad hoc' questions from peers and the teacher extended the ideas even further. The German language assistant contributed significantly to the cultural element and had been fully involved in the lesson planning. She gave her views and described some of the religious festivals in Germany, making comparisons with this country. Year 12 students spoke convincingly and maturely about food and additives, using topic specific language. In a difficult listening task, they were able to use the language skilfully in answers and manipulated the language well. Attitudes to learning are very positive. There is a thirst for learning. Students use the study area very well and use the Internet for research. Thanks to the thoughtful and thorough planning by the teachers, the transition from GCSE level has been smooth. Prior to Year 12 there is an induction process and an induction booklet sets the tone for the start of term. Literacy strategies have an impact on written work and help in the preparation of oral presentations. All work is marked in detail, enabling the students to benefit from the comments and advice. Files and books are evidence of the quality work that is being completed.
270. Teaching and learning are strengths. The three lessons seen were all very good. German was used throughout by the teachers, so that the students were immersed in the language. The teaching was challenging, resulting in very good response. There was full participation. The teachers know the students well and group to advantage. They have studied learning styles, which they skilfully adapt, using strategies to meet individual needs. Lessons are very well planned and sequenced, using a varied methodology. Pacing is brisk, but teachers ensure all have adequate time to complete tasks. Very good questioning techniques help build up understanding. Teachers are explicit, enabling very good progress to be made. The teachers share ideas and work exceptionally well as a team. The Key Stage 5 Co-ordinator for Languages leads a supportive team and leadership and management of the subject are excellent. Schemes of work are up to date and detailed. Resources are well chosen and include many authentic materials. Very good use is made of assessments and prior attainment data. Students value the regular reviews, which keep them on target and monitor progress. The examinations are different since the last inspection, but the increase in A and B grades is an indication of the good progress being made. Students would further benefit from study or work experience in Germany, to enrich language learning and provide further opportunities to study the culture.