

# **INSPECTION REPORT**

**GEORGE ABBOT SCHOOL**

Guildford

LEA area: Surrey

Unique reference number: 125265

Headteacher: Mr D C Moloney

Reporting inspector: Dr V Johnston  
8402

Dates of inspection: 9 – 13 December 2002

Inspection number: 249626

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

© Crown copyright 2003

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that all extracts quoted are reproduced verbatim without adaptation and on condition that the source and date thereof are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the School Inspections Act 1996, the school must provide a copy of this report and/or its summary free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 – 18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Woodruff Avenue Burpham Guildford
Postcode:	GU1 1XX
Telephone number:	01483 888000
Fax number:	01483 888001
Appropriate authority:	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs V Johnson
Date of previous inspection:	April 1997

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities (sixth form)	Aspect responsibilities (sixth form)
8402	Vivien Johnston	Registered inspector		How high are standards? How well are students taught?
9271	Selwyn Ward	Lay inspector		How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to students? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
23487	Patricia Kitley	Team inspector	English	
27719	Paul Metcalf	Team inspector	Mathematics	How well is the school led and managed?
29742	Patricia Fyans	Team inspector	Chemistry Physics	
3242	Mike Newman	Team inspector	Biology Psychology	
2501	Raye Allison-Smith	Team inspector	Art and design	
15075	Bryan Stephens	Team inspector	French Spanish	
22042	John Challands	Team inspector	Sociology	How well does the school care for its students?
22491	Lorraine Small	Team inspector	Design and technology	
1352	John Carnaghan	Team inspector	Economics Geography	
32231	Adrian Lyons	Team inspector	Government and politics	
22423	Jon Lovgreen	Team inspector	Critical thinking	

The inspection contractor was:

e-Qualitas Ltd, Langshaw, Pastens Road, Limpsfield Chart, Oxted, Surrey RH8 0RE

Any concerns or complaints about the inspection or the report should be raised with the inspection contractor. Complaints that are not satisfactorily resolved by the contractor should be raised with OFSTED by writing to:

The Complaints Manager  
Inspection Quality Division  
The Office for Standards in Education  
Alexandra House, 33 Kingsway, London WC2B 6SE

## REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
<b>PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT</b>	<b>6</b>
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Pupils' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
<b>ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM</b>	
<b>PART B: COMMENTARY</b>	
<b>WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>PART D: THE SIXTH FORM</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?</b>	<b>24</b>
The school's results and pupils' achievements	
Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development	
<b>HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO STUDENTS?</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?</b>	<b>28</b>
Assessment	
Advice, support and guidance	
<b>HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS AND STUDENTS?</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?</b>	<b>29</b>
Leadership and management	
Resources	
<b>PART E: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM</b>	<b>31</b>

## **PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT**

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

George Abbot School is a large 11 to 18 comprehensive community school with 1,924 boys and girls, including 415 sixth form students. It is much larger than most other schools, and is over-subscribed. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is lower than nationally. Seventy pupils speak English as an additional language; they do so fluently and do not need any extra help. The pupils come from the suburbs of Guildford. Their background is socially and economically advantaged, as is indicated by the proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals being well below the average for schools nationally.

Pupils' attainment on entry in Year 7 is well above average overall, although it covers the full range from high to low attainment. The proportion of pupils identified as having special educational needs is below the national average, as is the proportion with a statement of special need. The pupils' needs are generally related to learning difficulties. The school has a unit for fifteen visually impaired pupils, who are mainly taught in mainstream classes.

The school has gained a number of awards. It is a training school and a specialist Arts College, and has Investors in People status.

### **HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS**

The overall effectiveness of the school is excellent. Standards are well above average. Pupils' achievement is very good in Years 7 to 11 and excellent in the sixth form. The teaching is also very good in Years 7 to 11 and excellent in the sixth form. The leadership and management of the school are excellent, as is the value for money it provides.

#### **What the school does well**

- Pupils' achievement is very good and the standards they attain are well above average, as are results in tests and examinations.
- Teachers' subject expertise and high expectations of pupils lead to teaching and learning being very good in Years 7 to 11, and excellent in the sixth form.
- The school has a very strong ethos which encourages everyone to do as well as possible, in their personal development as well as academically.
- Pupils' response to what the school provides is excellent; they are keen to learn and to take part in all aspects of school life.
- A high level of attention is paid to providing for the welfare and care of all pupils.
- The school is led and managed highly effectively, and staff share the headteacher's drive to make the school even better.

#### **What could be improved**

- No significant areas for improvement were identified by the inspection.

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

### **HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION**

The school's improvement since April 1997, when it was last inspected, is very good. Although the school still does not meet the statutory requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship, all the other weaknesses identified by the last inspection have become strengths and the areas identified as successful have been further improved. Results in national tests and examinations have risen, particularly at GCSE. The school has made significant improvements in several subjects, including information and communication technology. It has developed a very strong system for the professional development of its staff, including gaining Investors in People status and becoming a training school. It has gained specialist Arts College status, reflecting the excellence of its work in art and design. The school is now very good at identifying priorities for further development. All these priority areas were judged satisfactory or better during the inspection, but they are below the standard the school sets for itself. Its potential for maintaining the high quality of the education it provides and for further improvement is very good.

## STANDARDS

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

\* means that national data is not available.

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

**Key**

well above average      A

above average          B

average                  C

below average          D

well below average      E

The school's results in the national tests in English, mathematics and science at the end of Year 9 have been well above the national average each year since 1998. The results have risen in line with the national trend of improvement. The results were well above those of similar schools (those with a similar proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals). Pupils did particularly well in mathematics.

GCSE results have also been consistently well above average. Here, the trend of improvement is faster than that nationally. Results at five or more grades A\* to G were very high in 2002, in the top five per cent of schools nationally. Results in almost all the GCSE subjects were significantly above the national figures, except in geography and food technology where they were about the same as nationally. Relative to their performance in other subjects, pupils did especially well in classical studies, French and German. As in the Year 9 tests, boys and girls did equally well overall. The 2002 GCSE results were well above those of schools in which the pupils had gained similar results in the Year 9 tests two years earlier.

A-level and A/S-level results have also been consistently well above the national average. Female students did much better than male students in 2001, though not in all previous years. Overall, the school's 2002 results were at a similar level to those of 2001. Students have done consistently very well in mathematics, art and design, graphics, economics, critical thinking, English and Spanish. Results have been weakest in geography.

The school's published targets for GCSE results were exceeded considerably in 2002. This was expected because these targets were set from predictions based on pupils' previous attainment. The results were closer to the high, aspirational targets the school sets internally.

Overall, the standard of work seen during the inspection was well above the national average in Years 9 and 11, and in AS- and A-level work. Pupils achieve very well in Years 7 to 11 and excellently in the sixth form. Pupils of all ages have completed much written work in all subjects, carefully and thoroughly. In lessons, pupils were articulate and confident, and very good at expressing their points of view.

## PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Pupils enjoy school, and their enthusiasm for learning makes a strong contribution to their success academically.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Excellent. Pupils are self-disciplined, polite and considerate of others, in lessons and around the school. The incidence of exclusions is low.
Personal development and relationships	Excellent. Pupils are trustworthy, and develop excellent skills in relating to others. Whilst highly aware of their own culture they are very aware of other ways of life and of thinking, and are both sensitive to and appreciative of them.
Attendance	Very good. Pupils' regular attendance contributes to their very good learning. The rate of unauthorised absence is low.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	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.*

Teaching and learning were satisfactory or better in all the lessons observed during the inspection, and good or better in more than four-fifths of the lessons in all year groups. They were very good or excellent in over half the lessons for pupils in Years 7 to 11, and in three-fifths of the lessons for sixth form students. These figures are much higher than in most schools inspected.

Key strengths are teachers' subject expertise and their high expectations of pupils' and students' learning, including in English and mathematics. The wide variety of teaching methods includes imaginative and creative approaches which motivate the pupils and keep them actively involved in lesson activities. Pupils are very good at learning from these practical experiences. The support given to those with special educational needs is very good, including to the pupils with visual impairment. Higher attainers are also challenged by demanding work. Pupils work hard in lessons, and also put a lot of effort into their independent study including their homework. The teaching of literacy and numeracy skills is excellent, with the help pupils are given to improve the quality of their written work making a significant contribution to their success in examinations. An occasional weakness in teaching is that the work set is insufficiently demanding.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Excellent. National Curriculum requirements are covered in full, together with religious education. The curriculum is extended by an unusually wide variety of other subjects, educational visits and extra-curricular activities.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Very good. Teaching staff are well informed about these pupils' difficulties, and work is closely matched to their needs. They make very good progress in lessons, particularly when they are supported by learning assistants and when withdrawn for help with their reading.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Excellent. Pupils are regularly encouraged to reflect on their own and others' experiences. They learn the importance and complexity of moral issues and the value of trust, loyalty, honesty and fairness. The unusually wide range of opportunities for social and cultural development also contribute to the school having a very strong ethos that promotes pupils' personal development.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Excellent. Advice and guidance are excellent. Staff know pupils extremely well. Procedures for monitoring the development of pupils are very secure. All pupils receive high-quality individual support, which is a critical factor in their progress.

## HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Excellent. The headteacher has a clear vision for the future of the school which is shared by the governing body, senior management team and staff. The school's aims, to "promote excellence, personal achievement and the realisation of each student's potential", are fully met.
How well the governors fulfill their responsibilities	Excellent. The governing body is extremely well informed and effective in ensuring that the school does as well as possible. However, the statutory requirement for a daily act of collective worship is not fully met.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Excellent. The school places a high value on self-evaluation, and takes care to follow up any issues that it identifies.
	Excellent. The school makes best strategic use of its resources, and specific grants are used



The strategic use of resources	well for their designated purposes. The principles of best value have been fully adopted. The school consults widely, sets itself high challenges, compares how well it is doing and seeks to be competitive in all it does.
--------------------------------	--

## PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Their children like school</li> <li>• The teaching is good, expectations are high, and their children make good progress.</li> <li>• Behaviour is good, and their children are helped to become mature and responsible.</li> <li>• The school is approachable if they have questions or a problem.</li> <li>• The school is well led and managed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The information on their children's progress.</li> </ul>

The inspection team agrees with all the positive views expressed by parents. The team found that the school had recognized that some parents are not entirely happy with the information they are given on their children's progress, and it was trying out a new system (a progress monitoring day) that it hopes will be better. Nevertheless, the inspection found that the information given to parents has been good.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form of this large 11 to 18 comprehensive school has 415 students, most of whom have stayed on from Year 11. A few students have visual impairment and a few are from minority ethnic backgrounds. The sixth form has expanded considerably over recent years, and is very popular locally. It offers an exceptionally wide range of courses leading to A-level qualifications, and a small number of GNVQ courses. Entry requirements are comparatively high as students are generally expected to have gained A or B grades at GCSE, although some enter the sixth form with lower results. Overall, students' attainment is above average at the start of their sixth form courses.

## HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is excellent. It is very cost-effective. A-level results and the standards students attain are well above average overall. This represents excellent achievement. The sixth form has maintained the strengths identified by the last inspection and successfully introduced many other initiatives, and so its improvement since the last inspection is very good. The curriculum caters for students' needs through an unusually wide range of courses and additional opportunities. The quality of teaching and learning and of the leadership and management of the sixth form are excellent.

### Strengths

- Overall, results at A-level are well above average, and students' achievement is excellent.
- Excellent teaching and learning result from teachers' subject expertise and their high expectations of students' learning and attainment.
- The sixth form curriculum offers an unusually wide range of academic subjects, with many additional experiences including those provided by the graduation certificate programme.
- Staff and students share an ethos in which learning and personal development are valued and encouraged.
- Students are given excellent support and guidance, from initial advice on the sixth form courses to preparing them for their future education and careers.
- The sixth form is led and managed excellently.

### What could be improved

- No significant issues for improvement were identified by the inspection.

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

## THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

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

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	<b>Good.</b> A-level results and the standards of work students attain are well above national averages as a result of good teaching and learning, supportive relationships and students' positive attitudes. Achievement is good.
Chemistry	<b>Good.</b> Students are achieving well as a result of good teaching, and standards are above average. Teachers have strong subject knowledge and enthusiasm. The Year 12 students are having some difficulty with the theoretical approach of the early part of the course.
Biology	<b>Satisfactory.</b> Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, and good in some lessons. A-level results have generally been broadly average, though they fell in 2002. Standards are in line with course expectations.
Physics	<b>Very good.</b> Results and the standards students attain are rising, as a result of very good teaching using an exciting new syllabus. Students are very enthusiastic learners, their achievement is very good and their attainment in lessons is above course expectations.

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Design and technology	<b>Very good.</b> Standards are well above course expectations. Very good teaching and very good individual support with learning help students who start the course at an average level of attainment to achieve very well. A-level results in graphics have been particularly high.
Economics	<b>Very good.</b> Students attain consistently high standards and results are well above average. This is largely due to very good teaching and students' very positive attitudes. This enthusiastic collaboration develops students' confidence and they achieve very well. Students benefit from very good support and clear targets set by their teachers.
Art and design	<b>Excellent.</b> The visual arts are extremely popular subjects. Standards are very high and students' achievement outstanding. Teaching and learning are of the highest order. The passion and expertise of all teachers leads to exceptionally high quality, creative and exciting work.
Geography	<b>Satisfactory.</b> A-level results were well below average in 2001. The standards now attained are below course expectations but the students' achievement is satisfactory. Teaching is satisfactory and generally well planned but does too little to develop students' analytical skills.
Government and politics	<b>Very good.</b> Students achieve very well due to very effective teaching which leads to a deep interest and broad understanding of the course. The curriculum is enhanced by an excellent range of visits. Students do very well at A-level, and standards are well above course expectations.
Sociology	<b>Very good.</b> Very good teaching leads to an enthusiastic response from students, who develop an in-depth understanding of all aspects of the course. Standards are above course expectations and students' achievement is very good.
Psychology	<b>Very good.</b> Results in this popular subject are well above average. Teachers use a wide range of methods that help students to learn very well. The standard of their work is well above course expectations.
Critical thinking	<b>Good.</b> A/S-level results are well above average. Teaching and students' achievement are good. The introduction of the course has been an imaginative and appropriate development. The strong focus on examination requirements is effective, but the course needs more time to broaden students' experience and appreciation of the skills involved in critical thinking.
English	<b>Excellent.</b> A-level results in this very popular subject were well above the national average in 2001. Teaching and learning are excellent because of teachers' subject knowledge, their very good understanding of students' learning needs and the students' enthusiasm for the subject. Achievement is excellent.
French	<b>Very good.</b> Teachers' subject knowledge and linguistic skills are very good. Students' attainment in listening, speaking, reading and writing is well above average, and they achieve very well because of the effectiveness of the teaching.
Spanish	<b>Excellent.</b> The teacher's subject knowledge and linguistic skills are excellent, as are teaching and learning. Standards are well above GCSE and A-level course expectations. Students' achievement is exceptional as they do not start studying Spanish until Year 12.

Other work seen in the sixth form reflected the strengths noted in the subjects focused on during the inspection. The teachers had high levels of subject expertise and expected much of their students, who worked hard and learned a lot in the lessons observed. A strong working partnership between students and their teachers was evident. Excellent relationships and good humour were balanced with rigorous academic exploration in most lessons. Many teachers were particularly adept at using questioning to follow intriguing lines of thought. Theory and specialist vocabulary were correctly but unfussily integrated into class discussion, enabling their use to become second nature to the students. The result of the excellent teaching is that students learn the value of precision and clarification when expressing their ideas, and are enabled to make rapid gains in their learning.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Excellent. Outstanding quality support and guidance are maintained throughout Years 12 and 13. Procedures to ensure a smooth transition into the sixth form are very well considered, and information about the sixth form is of high quality. Students receive excellent guidance about career options and higher education. Their progress is assessed and monitored extremely carefully, and they are set clear and realistic targets which motivate them.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Excellent. The sixth form has very effective teamwork, a strongly collegiate management and careful delegation of responsibilities. There is a well-established cycle of planning, monitoring and evaluating all developments. Staff take care to ensure that sixth form courses meet all students' needs, including a few who are visually impaired. Specific grants are used effectively for their designated purposes and best value principles are applied in all financial matters.

## 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"><li>• The range of subjects suits their needs.</li><li>• They are well taught and challenged.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The advice they are given, including about their future options.</li><li>• The information they get on their progress.</li><li>• The support and help they get with any personal problems.</li><li>• The range of activities and enrichments to the taught curriculum.</li><li>• The school's responsiveness to their views, and its treatment of them as responsible young adults.</li></ul>

The positive views expressed by students were supported by the findings of the inspection. Whilst students were critical in the questionnaire about certain aspects of the provision for them, these views were strongly contradicted by the very positive comments made in the many discussions which students had with inspectors, and by inspectors' own observations.

## COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

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

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

### **WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL**

**Pupils' achievement is very good and the standards they attain are well above average, as are results in tests and examinations.**

1. The inspection sampled lessons across the curriculum, and examples of written work in English, mathematics and science were scrutinised. The results in the national tests at the end of Year 6 of the pupils who enter the school at the start of Year 7 are well above the national average. Most pupils have attained the nationally-expected Level 4, and a good many have attained Level 5. The school also has a few pupils (about one tenth of the current Year 7) whose attainment on entry is below the national expectation. Pupils' written work in English, mathematics and science and their learning in the lessons observed showed that pupils of all levels of prior attainment build very well on their knowledge and skills, and that their achievement over time is very good.
2. For example, in English a scrutiny of pupils' written work showed that they make rapid gains from their starting point of well-above-average standards on entry in Year 7, and that in Years 10 and 11 their achievement is excellent. By Year 9, the higher-attaining pupils' essays include excellent analyses of authors' work, and show a high level of originality of thought and expression. Average-attaining pupils have gained considerable ability to analyse and link ideas into a well-structured discussion of style and theme, and have learned to integrate quotations into their essays. Lower-attaining pupils have a good vocabulary and have made some effective use of information and communication technology (ICT) to present their work. Year 11 pupils of all levels of prior attainment have produced a prodigious quantity of highly organised GCSE coursework, which has built very effectively on their learning in previous years.
3. In mathematics and science, pupils have also completed much written work. In mathematics, catch-up material has been used well with lower-attaining pupils, although in Year 7 there has been some over-emphasis on consolidation of Year 6 work. By Year 9, the work is much more challenging for pupils of all levels of prior attainment, and includes appropriate extension activities for higher-attaining pupils. The Year 11 work has a good emphasis on new GCSE content such as circle theorems and on algebra. In science, pupils keep separate records of their work in physics, chemistry and biology, which helps them see the connections between the work covered in each area. By Year 9, pupils have very secure scientific knowledge and vocabulary, and their notes are full and thorough. Some over-use of worksheets in biology continues from Year 9 into GCSE coursework.
4. Lessons observed in other subjects contributed to the overall judgement that pupils' achievement in Years 7 to 11 is very good and that standards are well above average. In Latin, a Year 7 class had already learned much vocabulary and were using present tense verbs after less than a term learning the language. In history, a Year 8 class showed that they had a very good understanding of how to analyse source-based material in their work on Little Big Horn and the treatment of native Americans by European settlers. In music, a Year 9 class composed and performed to a high standard, developing their musical and ICT skills. A Year 9 drama class prepared improvisations, working towards a drama presentation to a junior school. The pupils were all able to adopt a role as either a character or a film producer, showing originality and using both physical and vocal expression very well. In a Year 10 business education lesson, pupils showed very good knowledge of market segmentation and business planning. In ICT, Year 11 pupils worked on how databases can be constructed to give answers to real life questions, quickly grasping the concept of inputs, outputs and processes and showing very good keyboarding skills as they entered their examples. In religious education, which was an area of weakness at the time of the last inspection, Year 11 pupils showed an excellent knowledge of the laws and attitudes towards marriage and divorce within different faith groups. Their high level of understanding enabled them to raise relevant questions, expand points, and substantiate answers with information drawn from their own experience and wide reading.
5. Standards are especially high in the visual arts because of pupils' excellent achievement from Year 7 onwards. By Year 11, standards are very high compared with those nationally. In art pupils draw and paint with great skill and demonstrate an excellent knowledge of artists' work. They use this to very good effect in all aspects of their work. Standards are particularly high in textiles. The work demonstrates a wealth of creative energy and high levels of imaginative problem solving. Because pupils have explored many different aspects of the subject, they can draw on a very wide range of techniques, used singly and in combination.

Surface decoration might, for example, include machine embroidery, appliqué, beadwork or drawn thread work. It might also result from experiments with the fabric to achieve different effects by tearing, burning or scorching. The quality of pupils' preparatory studies is outstanding in the range and depth of their research. Sketchbooks, and work in general, reflect the many hours pupils dedicate to study outside of lessons. Pupils enjoy their work and are extremely keen to do well. The passion that teachers have for the subject inspires pupils to strive for even higher standards. Opportunities to take part in exhibitions, see the work of sixth form students and visit exhibitions out of school all add to the overall excellent provision. GCSE results in art and design in 2002 were well above the national average, and in textiles attainment was very high. Approximately a quarter of the 88 students who were entered gained an A\* grade and half gained an A\* or A grade.

6. The pupils are prepared very well for tests and examinations, which contributes to their success. Although the Year 9 test results in English, mathematics and science were well above the national average, they were below those of other schools with an equivalent above-average starting point in Year 7. However, the pupils had made very rapid gains in other areas of the curriculum, which is unusually broad. This makes their overall achievement very good in Years 7 to 9. GCSE results were well above average overall, and very high in the proportion gaining five or more grades A\* to G. The results were well above average compared to schools in which pupils had equivalent Year 9 test results two years earlier. The results also showed that pupils of all levels of attainment had done very well, from high attainers to those with special educational needs including visual impairment.

**Teachers' subject expertise and high expectations of pupils lead to the quality of teaching and learning being very good in Years 7 to 11, and excellent in the sixth form.**

7. Lessons were sampled across the curriculum in Years 7 to 11. The picture of teachers having very good subject expertise and high expectations of pupils was consistent in all year groups and in almost all subjects. The proportion of very good and excellent teaching seen was nearly as high as in the sixth form, where fifteen subjects were inspected in depth and other subjects sampled. In Years 7 to 11, over half the lessons seen were very good or excellent, and about four-fifths were good or better. All the lessons observed were satisfactory or better. In the sixth form, about three-fifths of the lessons were very good or excellent, and nine-tenths were good or better. These proportions are much higher than in most schools inspected, and the consistency of challenging teaching is one of the school's major strengths.

8. The teaching of English illustrates many of the strengths of teaching in other subjects. The quality of planning is excellent, and teachers make considerable efforts to provide activities and materials which will bring the best out of pupils. Texts taught and issues considered are challenging and interesting. Teachers quickly and clearly explain the context and purpose of a lesson so that pupils feel informed and involved. Relationships are excellent: teachers always put pupils' needs first and are receptive to their ideas; pupils invariably show great desire to work and succeed, but feel able to seek advice or help. Much is achieved during the hour-long lessons because teachers use a wide range of methods appropriately, and pupils have an excellent understanding of the requirements and opportunities within each approach. However, teachers sometimes allow pupils to speak too quietly in class discussion. Teachers regularly set high-quality homework which is relevant, well explained, and thoroughly marked. English lessons are stimulating because teachers use their considerable subject knowledge to exemplify, extend and illuminate study.

9. The quality of teaching is higher than found by the last inspection. The school has put a lot of time and effort into this. For instance, huge strides have been made to improve the former weaknesses in teaching music. What was a weakness at the time of the last inspection is now a strength. For example, the use of a computer program has been introduced in Years 8 and 9, and has been extremely successful in generating high levels of interest and enthusiasm for composition. The work shows pupils' ability to think imaginatively, and to demonstrate very high standards of composition that reflect their understanding and awareness of different musical traditions.

10. Pupils are highly motivated by the interesting, demanding teaching. They rise to the challenge of intellectually demanding work. Many examples of pupils making rapid progress were seen. For example, in music Year 10 pupils were eager to learn about different rhythms and influences, stimulated by the teacher's skill in making theory fascinating. By the end of the lesson, the pupils were able to compose a reggae-style piece from a given melody. Year 7 pupils in a chemistry lesson made very good progress in understanding the

process of dissolving, thanks to an imaginative demonstration. By the end of the lesson, pupils were asking intelligent questions about the nature of solids and liquids. In French, Year 8 pupils made very good gains in their skills in writing in the past tense, re-using language they had met in previous lessons and expanding the sentences they initially wrote.

**The school has a very strong ethos which encourages everyone to do as well as possible in their personal development as well as academically.**

11. The school's ethos is based on its philosophy that promoting the personal development of pupils is not only a prime concern in terms of their being responsible members of the school community but also a key factor in their academic success. In their responses to the questionnaire, parents identified the school's encouragement of their children to become mature and responsible as a strength. The inspection agreed with their view, and found that the school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development excellently.

12. Opportunities for spiritual development come though in all areas of school life, including the twice-weekly assemblies, the excellent personal and social education (PSE) programme, and the curriculum. For example, pupils are encouraged to reflect on beauty and symmetry in art, the wonder and form of the world in science, and the power of literature, music and drama to give insight into human beliefs and aspirations.

13. The PSE programme makes a strong contribution to pupils' personal development and to reinforcing the school's ethos. It covers a wide range of issues, including topics to do with pupils' personal needs such as how to study successfully, making future career choices, sex and drugs education, and thinking about people's behaviour. It covers wider matters as part of citizenship education, which is also given good attention in other subjects. For example, people's rights, and their responsibilities in a democracy are explored in history, and the morality of poverty and economic imbalance/abuse are considered in geography.

14. From Year 7 onwards, pupils are encouraged to share in and contribute to all aspects of school life. Teachers are excellent models for the qualities of commitment, trust, loyalty, and fairness. Pupils quickly come to understand and appreciate the school community, their part in it, and the value of putting others before oneself. They are encouraged to express personal beliefs, develop convincing arguments, and listen to other points of view with respect. The School Council has a high profile. Pupils are encouraged to take responsibility and initiative through this, and through the huge range of extra-curricular activities available.

15. Opportunities for cultural enrichment are wide. Pupils explore their own culture through religious education, PSE, literature, drama, art and music. They have many opportunities to contribute to high-quality displays, exhibitions and performances. A feature of the creative arts initiative has been to extend the emphasis on learning about and appreciating the rationale, coherence, and fascination of other cultures. The school brings this alive with trips abroad, and active links with schools in other countries. The link with Manzezulu school in South Africa is leading to work for Year 7 pupils on African culture: from cuisine to dancing, and from literature to art. During the week of the inspection, there was an extremely successful 'Cookery throughout the World' evening presentation by pupils, who had researched and then prepared three-course meals from a range of countries.

16. The creative arts have a high profile throughout the school. The arts curriculum is very rich and an unusually wide range of opportunities is offered as part of the formal curriculum and at other times, for example in the holidays and after school. There are very close links between the school and local businesses and many exciting projects have been undertaken as a result of additional funding and sponsorship. Examples include summer schools run for gifted and talented pupils, and a sculpture garden with walk-ways and mosaic details inspired, after a visit pupils made to Barcelona, by the work of Gaudi.

17. The provision for music is much appreciated by pupils and parents. The range of and pupils' involvement in extra-curricular music performances have increased. Extra-curricular music now includes several choirs, string quartets, a jazz ensemble and a school orchestra. In addition, a number of groups combine dance, drama and singing. Concerts by school musicians are a sell-out and visits by the school orchestra to Italy have been very well received in the past. More are planned for 2003.

18. The emphasis on personal development places the academic education in a wide context that promotes and values high achievement by all. Extension work is regularly set in most subjects, to provide additional challenge to high-attaining pupils. Those identified as having special educational needs are given very good

support. Their specific needs are clearly understood by their teachers, who adapt both their teaching and the tasks they set to the needs of the pupils. This, combined with the effectiveness of the support provided by teaching assistants, results in these pupils making very good progress. A minority of pupils in Years 7 and 8 have severe reading difficulties are withdrawn from some lessons for extra support. They experience a highly-structured approach to the teaching of reading, and many also do paired reading activities with volunteer parents and sixth form students. Most make very good progress in these sessions.

19. Pupils with physical disabilities are enabled to take a full and active part in the life of the school, including practical subjects. The visually-impaired pupils are given very good support in the unit, and class teachers take care to include them in lesson activities. In the unit, pupils are taught essential skills such as touch typing, so that in lessons they can easily use their lap top computers for writing. They are also given specific help with points of difficulty that arise in their mainstream lessons, such as when a pupil cannot cope independently with the information in a textbook. This flexible help that is responsive to individual needs enables visually-impaired pupils to be successful at GCSE.

**Pupils' response to what the school provides is excellent; they are keen to learn and to take part in all aspects of school life.**

20. Because they are listened to and respected, pupils become confident, responsive, thoughtful members of the school community. Both boys and girls are sensitive to the needs of others. Whether in lessons or outside, working as a class or in groups, with friends or those they know less well, they are courteous, thoughtful and extremely co-operative.

21. Pupils of all ages identify with the strong moral values which pervade the school. Their motivation and involvement in lessons are generally very good, and pupils are keen to learn. They expect to work hard. Though occasionally pupils were restless or talkative in lessons, this was almost always a response to comparative weakness in the teaching such as a slow pace, unstimulating work or insufficient planning for the pupils' learning. Most pupils do much work at home, and take pride in its quality.

22. Outside of lessons, pupils' attitudes and behaviour are excellent. Pupils are trusted around the school, and respond very positively to the trust shown in them. They have a very responsible attitude to school life, which is particularly important given the size of the school site. Pupils are also keen to take part in the many extra-curricular activities that the school offers.

23. Relationships between pupils are excellent. This is exemplified in the contacts between Years 7 to 11 and sixth form students. For instance, in English pupils listened carefully to sixth form student advice about the nature of A-level. In paired reading, Year 7 pupils have become much more confident because of the sensitive support which they have received from sixth formers, whose weekly sessions with them have led to significant improvement in their reading skills. Pupils are very appreciative of the occasions when sixth formers support teachers in their lessons.

**A high level of attention paid to providing for the welfare and care of all pupils.**

24. Parents attending the meeting before the inspection identified the school's high level of concern for pupils' wellbeing as a major strength, and their view is endorsed by the inspection findings. The school has excellent procedures for pupils' personal support and guidance, and for dealing with any problems of behaviour or welfare, including child protection issues. Form tutors play an important role in providing for pupils' welfare and care. The school has very clear rules that are enforced consistently, and misbehaviour such as bullying is not tolerated. The system of having a different playground for each year group contributes to lunchtimes being orderly.

25. The school takes great care to ensure that individuals' needs are met. For example, pupils with physical difficulties such as visual impairment are integrated as much as possible in mainstream classes and given individualized support where they most need it. Pupils whose attitudes or behaviour give cause for concern are followed up carefully. Heads of year and form tutors are alert to individual needs. The new system of progress monitoring makes strong links between pupils' academic performance and their wellbeing.



26. Staff ensure that the right information is available about sixth form courses, and this information is of the highest quality. All pupils start to receive guidance from the beginning of Year 11, through a well-thought-out programme of meetings, consultation with parents and individual counselling. Every effort is made to ensure that pupils choose the courses that best fit their needs, aptitudes and interests, in the right school or college. Close links with the local college help to ensure that students of all abilities and aptitudes are guided in the right direction. Once GCSE results are known, further extensive counselling and guidance is provided and all students have individual interviews with relevant staff. This well-thought-through process, together with an induction programme and recommended reading materials, prepares pupils for sixth form work very successfully.

**The school is led and managed highly effectively, and staff share the headteacher's drive to make the school even better.**

27. The leadership and management of the school are excellent. There is very effective teamwork, strong collegiate management and careful delegation of responsibilities, with job descriptions matched to national standards. The headteacher has a clear vision for the future of the school and this is shared with the governing body, senior management team and staff. The school's aims to "promote excellence, personal achievement and the realisation of each student's potential" are fully met.

28. A strong feature of the way the school is run is that it reviews and evaluates its work rigorously, to identify areas that could be further improved. For example, parents, pupils and staff are consulted regularly and their views are taken seriously. The evaluation of academic performance is excellent. The senior staff carry out a rigorous analysis of examination results and hold heads of department to account for the results in their subjects. Assessment information is also analysed to find out which pupils did less well than expected, and reasons are sought so that lessons can be learned for the future. Heads of department are expected to work out a realistic plan for dealing with the causes of any weakness in results, and senior staff follow up to make sure that the plans are implemented. This has helped the school to maintain high standards in areas such as art, and to raise standards in subjects that were weak such as religious education and music. In a few areas, despite considerable support by the senior management team, the measures have not yet been successful. These are ceramics, biology and geography. Short-term staffing issues have affected the quality of teaching and learning in a few subjects, particularly GCSE business studies. The school is aware of these difficulties and is providing appropriate support and guidance to the staff. There is a shared commitment to improvement and a high capacity for further success.

29. The recent introduction of the whole-school initiative known as progress monitoring is an example of the excellent way in which the school is led and managed. The planning and implementation stages were carried out extremely thoroughly, and the signs are that the innovation is going to be a significant improvement on the previous arrangements. These had been reasonably successful but evaluation had shown that there was room for further improvement. The primary aim of the new system is to strengthen the links between students' academic and personal achievements. Form tutors have a central role in the system as they are expected to maintain an over-arching picture of students' academic work and personal achievements. This makes them better informed about how their pupils are getting on and so more able to give high-quality advice and guidance. Form tutors are also to play a more prominent role in monitoring pupils' progress. A few subjects have only recently begun to make the necessary adjustments, but most have gone much further than initially expected of them. A progress monitoring day was held during the inspection. Follow-up evaluations with pupils, carried out the next day, showed a high level of satisfaction with the day but also identified yet more ways in which the arrangements can be fine tuned.

30. The introduction of progress monitoring prompted other matters for review, for example the need for greater uniformity across subjects when assessing and recording achievement. Subject leaders agreed to adopt consistent approaches to marking and awarding marks and grades. As a result, more rigorous day-to-day monitoring of students' achievements became possible, enabling pupils and their parents to have a much clearer view of how well pupils are doing across all the subjects they are studying.

31. The school's monitoring, evaluation and development of teaching are excellent. The school has a strong commitment to initial teacher training and to teachers' continuing professional development. Its work as a training school is innovative and growing.

32. The governing body is highly effective. It enjoys a strong partnership with the headteacher and senior management team in pursuit of agreed goals and targets. The governors have an excellent knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They have been very successful in assisting developments such as the application for specialist school status for the visual arts. The issue of the school's non-compliance with the requirement for all pupils to take part in a daily act of collective worship has been reviewed carefully. Governors decided to continue with the current arrangements as the quality of the assemblies is high, and not to make additional provision that would not work as well. The governing body enjoys strong links with subject areas and every aspect of school life including the student council.

33. The school makes best strategic use of its resources, and specific grants are used for their designated purposes. Budget decisions are based on a clear educational rationale. They are regularly reviewed and responsive to need. The budget is managed very prudently. It currently has a very large surplus, mainly because money has been put aside for some major expenses which include refurbishing some of the science laboratories. The governors are closely involved in planning and monitoring expenditure, and the finance governor meets with the business manager on a regular basis. Educational priorities are supported through the school's financial planning and best value principles are applied in all financial matters so that contracts are regularly reviewed to ensure best value. The school is very successful at raising money and additional income is generated as a result of the school's specialist status and its involvement in teacher training.

### **WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED**

34. No major issues for improvement were identified by the inspection.

### **WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?**

35. No major issues for the school to improve were identified for the main school, nor for the sixth form. A few minor points were drawn to the school's attention and may be included in the Action Plan to be drawn up after the inspection. These are:

- to improve the standard of work in ceramics and in business studies in the main school (paragraph 28);
- to improve the management of biology and geography, particularly in the sixth form, so that the good practice within each department is made consistent throughout (paragraphs 28, 97, 123);
- to give more time for physics, chemistry and critical thinking in Year 12 (paragraphs 91, 102, 148);
- to seek to meet statutory requirements to provide a daily act of collective worship for all pupils (paragraphs 32, 57).

## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

### *Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection*

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	48
	Sixth form	66
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		72

### *Summary of teaching observed during the inspection*

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
<b>Years 7 – 11</b>							
Number	7	20	15	6	0	0	0
Percentage	15	42	31	12	0	0	0
<b>Sixth form</b>							
Number	11	30	18	7	0	0	0
Percentage	17	45	27	11	0	0	0

*The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching. Care should be taken when interpreting the percentages for Years 7 – 11 and the sixth form as each lesson represents more than one percentage point.*

### *Information about the school's pupils*

<b>Pupils on the school's roll</b>	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1,509	415
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	47	0

<b>Special educational needs</b>	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	23	1
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	98	3

<b>English as an additional language</b>	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	70

<b>Pupil mobility in the last school year</b>	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	20
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	42

## Attendance

### Authorised absence

	%
School data	6.0
National comparative data	7.8

### Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.3
National comparative data	1.2

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2002	154	144	298

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	128	136	143
	Girls	134	127	132
	Total	262	263	275
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	88 (89)	89 (89)	92 (90)
	National	66 (64)	67 (66)	66 (66)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	59 (59)	73 (69)	63 (60)
	National	32 (31)	45 (43)	33 (34)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	129	140	140
	Girls	133	132	121
	Total	262	272	261
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	88 (90)	91 (90)	88 (91)
	National	67 (65)	70 (68)	67 (64)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	40 (63)	64 (71)	62 (61)
	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)

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	2002	142	150	292

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	105	142	142
	Girls	126	148	149
	Total	231	290	291

Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	79 (80)	99 (97)	100 (98)
	National	50 (48)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	55.9 (55.3)
	National	39.8 (39.0)

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	26	80.8
	National		Not available

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

This table reports 2001 data as the national data for 2002 was not available.

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	85	104	189
	Average point score per candidate	19.2	23.0	21.3
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.7	17.4

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS examinations			For candidates entered for Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All	Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	85	104	189	0	0	0
	Average point score per candidate	19.2	23	21.3	-	-	-
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.9	17.4	9.8	11.4	10.6

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

***Ethnic background of pupils***

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

***Exclusions in the last school year***

No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
864	11	0
0	0	0
53	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
22	0	0
1	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
1	1	0
0	0	0
1	0	0
8	0	0
31	0	0
943	0	0

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

***Teachers and classes*****Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y11**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	110
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	18

**Education support staff: Y7 – Y11**

Total number of education support staff	25
Total aggregate hours worked per week	847

**Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11**

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	78
---	----

**Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11**

Key Stage 3	27
Key Stage 4	24

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

***Financial information***

Financial year	2001-02
----------------	---------

	£
Total income	5,521,227
Total expenditure	5,387,264
Expenditure per pupil	2,837
Balance brought forward from previous year	345,940
Balance carried forward to next year	479,903

## ***Recruitment of teachers***

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	37.54
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	39.58

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	2
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	2
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

## ***Results of the survey of parents and carers***

### **Questionnaire return rate**

Number of questionnaires sent out	1,924
Number of questionnaires returned	761

### **Percentage of responses in each category**

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	41	51	6	2	0
My child is making good progress in school.	44	50	3	0	3
Behaviour in the school is good.	31	59	5	1	4
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	23	56	16	3	2
The teaching is good.	32	62	3	0	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	22	49	21	2	6
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	48	44	5	1	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	62	35	2	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	23	56	15	1	5
The school is well led and managed.	50	45	1	0	4
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	45	49	3	0	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	37	48	5	1	9

## **PART D: THE SIXTH FORM**

### **HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?**

#### **The school's results and students' achievements**

35. The school's A-level results were reported as well above average by the last inspection in 1997, and have risen since then. The broadly rising trend represents very good improvement since the last inspection, given that the sixth form is now considerably larger than a few years ago and the overall profile of students' attainment on entry is slightly lower. In 2001, the A-level results were well above the national average. Girls did particularly well, compared to girls' results nationally. The 2002 overall figure was a little higher than that for 2001, but the national data needed to determine whether this still represented well above average performance was not available at the time of the inspection.

36. The results for some individual subjects have been consistently high for some years whereas for others they have varied. In 2001, the students' A-level results were particularly strong in art and design, graphics, economics, critical thinking, English and mathematics. The results were above average in chemistry, communication studies, drama, French and general studies. They were below average in business studies, sociology and Spanish, and well below average in geography. However, A-level Spanish was taken in only one year, instead of the usual two years, and so the results actually represent an unusually good achievement. In the other subjects, either the results were broadly average compared to national results in the subject or too few students took the examination to make a comparison with national data reliable.

37. In 2002, results remained strong in art and design, graphics, economics, English and mathematics. The results in business studies, history, physics and sociology improved greatly, and the Spanish results were also much higher. Other subjects in which the result rose considerably included French, German and government and politics. However, students did less well than previously in biology, chemistry, communication studies, general studies and geography.

38. A few students have taken GCSE courses in the sixth form. In 2001, one or two students took GCSE in biology, chemistry, science, drama, English literature, French, design and technology, history or physics. All passed at grade C or higher, with most gaining grade A or B. More students took English, mathematics or Spanish, and the results included some at grade D as well as Bs and Cs. Overall, these results were above the national average for GCSE results in the sixth form.

39. The results of 2002 and of previous years do not show a consistent pattern of either male or female students doing markedly better than the other. Those with a special educational need, including visual impairment, are enabled to gain results that represent excellent achievement given their starting points on the courses they take and the difficulties they have overcome in working at this level.

40. The standards now being attained by students are, like the examination results, well above average overall. In almost all subjects, standards currently attained reflect examination results for the subject. Nevertheless, in all subjects students are attaining satisfactorily or better, given their attainment on entry to the course – different subjects setting somewhat different minimum entry requirements. This partly explains why some subjects do less well than others in terms of examination results. For example, the recent introduction of critical thinking, which is taken by higher-attaining students instead of general studies, has contributed to a fall in general studies results.

41. In general, students' coursework is characterised by very thorough, careful, detailed written work. Projects and practical work are carried out with a much independent thought and research and show a high level of knowledge and skills. This is particularly so in the arts. In modern languages, as in other subjects requiring a high level of speaking and listening, students also do very well in their oral work. They make regular, skilful use of ICT, for wide reading and research as well as to present their coursework.

42. Overall, students' achievement in the sixth form is excellent. Many exceed the grades they are predicted to gain and only a few are unsuccessful in one or more subject. Almost all complete the two-year A-level course, and a high proportion go on to further or higher education. Students make rapid gains in their knowledge and understanding, both in subjects that are new to them such as economics, government and politics, psychology and sociology, and in the subjects that they have taken at GCSE. The few students with



special educational needs, including visual impairment, are given very good individual support and the work is adapted well to their needs. Consequently, their achievement is also excellent.

### **Students' attitudes, values and personal development**

43. Students enjoy school. They have an exceptionally positive attitude to learning and this contributes to the excellent progress they make in the sixth form. They work with commitment, concentration and enthusiasm and so they get a lot done both in lessons and in the work they do independently, at home and in study periods.

44. Excellent relationships between sixth form students, as well as with younger pupils and with the teachers and other adults in the school, contribute to the school working as a friendly, harmonious and industrious community. These relationships mean that students have a mature attitude to the life of the school and work exceedingly well together. They also help ensure that all are fully included, including those who join the school at the start of Year 12.

45. Students' personal development is also excellent. Students are responsive to spiritual issues, and have a high level of awareness of moral, social and cultural matters. For example, Year 12 students giving presentations as part of the communication skills course maturely debated the extent to which cartoons such as 'The Simpsons' might be offensive to some faiths and non-western cultures. Students take on a considerable amount of responsibility, both in terms of their own learning and across the school. For example, some help younger students by taking part in paired-reading sessions or by supporting teachers in lessons. Many of the extra-curricular clubs and other activities on offer in the main school are organised and run by enthusiastic sixth formers. Many students take on whole-school responsibilities as prefects. The students carry these responsibilities out very well, which contributes to the sense of community in the school as a whole. For example, Year 7 pupils were noticeably disappointed when the sixth former who normally helps in their chemistry lesson was not available, because he gets on with them so well. These activities help others but also contribute much to sixth form students' own personal development. They are proud to gain their graduation certificates, which recognize the many aspects of their personal development.

46. Students' attendance is very good. Students arrive at school on time and are very punctual in getting to lessons. Again, this very responsible attitude to attendance and punctuality contributes positively to the progress that students make.

### **HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?**

47. Teaching and learning in the sixth form are excellent overall. They were excellent or very good in an unusually high proportion (three-fifths) of the lessons observed during the inspection. The proportion of good or better teaching and learning was also high at nine-tenths of the lessons observed. The evidence of students' work confirmed that learning of high quality has taken place over time, and that the teaching is expert and challenging. The many students who talked to inspectors commented on the excellent teaching they have received in almost all subjects, and that the high quality of the teaching in the sixth form is one of the main reasons why so many choose to stay on after the end of their GCSE courses.

48. Teaching and learning are excellent in art and design, English and Spanish. They are very good in physics, design and technology, economics, government and politics, sociology, psychology and French. They are good in mathematics, chemistry and critical thinking, and satisfactory in biology and geography,

49. Teaching is characterised by many strengths, the key ones being teachers' high level of subject expertise, their enthusiastic approach and their high expectations of the students. Most lessons have a fast pace and so a lot of work is done in the time available. Students follow up the work in lessons by doing much independent study, both at home and using the resources of the upper school information centre. For example, in many subjects they make regular use of the Internet for extended research. Teachers are very focused on enabling their students to do well at A-level, and so regularly give very helpful, clear advice on how to meet examination requirements. They also give their students a love of learning, and a breadth of subject experience that goes well beyond the immediate needs of the examinations.

50. Teachers and students share the view that successful learning requires a high level of involvement and responsibility, and students strive to live up to their teachers' high expectations of them. Consequently, class

discussions are thoughtful, with students valuing others' contributions as well as responding to the challenging questions and propositions put forward by the teacher. Students are often asked to research and present their findings to the class, and do so very successfully. For example, Year 12 students had put much extra, voluntary effort into creating PowerPoint presentations on a topic of their choice in general studies coursework.

51. In most lessons, the work was very carefully matched to the students' needs, and teachers were quick to identify who needed help. Visually-impaired students are given additional unobtrusive support that enables them to take a full part in lessons. For example, in an ICT lesson the computer-generated presentation shown to the whole class was also displayed on an individual monitor, so that the teacher's examples could be seen during the explanation of the task. In most subjects, students are regularly set projects as part of their coursework, giving teachers very good opportunities to follow up individual needs and to set additional challenges to students of all levels of attainment.

52. The provision for developing students' skills in literacy is very good. Teachers are alert to the literacy demands of their subjects and almost all make very good use of the opportunities that arise to help students with the reading and writing aspects of their courses. For example, students in a political history lesson were helped to understand how to structure an analytical answer with the right amount of detail and a coherent argument that answered the question set. Teachers' marking of students' coursework gives guidance on how to improve the way it is written as well as the content. Students are also set many independent reading and research tasks, which extend their literacy skills. This focus on the literacy demands of A-level courses makes a significant contribution to students doing very well in their examinations.

53. The provision for numeracy development is good, although there is no written whole-school policy to provide a coherent framework for numeracy across the curriculum. Number work is developed well in several subjects. For example, in economics students calculate supply and demand costs, and in physics their work involves making use of logarithms. Art students make very good use of tessellating patterns to create fabric designs. In design and technology, students have made good use of anthropometric data to take account of arm length and reach in designing CD racks for use in cars, and have used questionnaires, tally charts and graphs when undertaking statistical projects.

54. Skills in ICT are developed very well. Students have many opportunities to use ICT in their coursework, including researching on the Internet, communicating by electronic mail, and using subject-specialist digital equipment. The school's well-equipped learning information centres give students ready access to the computers they need for independent learning, including researching and word processing their assignments. The presentations observed during the inspection showed that the students had learned the skills needed to use the software successfully.

55. All the teaching observed during the inspection was satisfactory or better, but in about a tenth of lessons the teaching was less inspiring than the norm for the school. When this happened, the work set was appropriate and the relationships between teacher and students were good, but the lesson activities were usually too controlled by the teacher. Students were given information and asked questions but not sufficiently challenged to go beyond the immediate tasks. Opportunities to engage students in discussion that would deepen their understanding were missed. This happened most in biology and geography, and to a lesser extent in mathematics, chemistry and critical thinking.

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

56. With its large sixth form, the school is able to offer a much broader choice of academic subjects than is available in many other schools. Students choose from an exceptionally wide range of options. They can select a broader range of subject combinations than in most other schools because many subjects are taught in several different option groups. This excellent provision gives students considerable flexibility over their sixth form studies, provided that they satisfy the individual course entry requirements set out by the school.

57. The curriculum has a strong academic bias as almost all the courses lead to GCE A-level. A few vocational, GNVQ courses are also on offer, and the school is investigating the addition of more GNVQs in order to adapt to the changing needs of the sixth form intake. The current range of courses is appropriate for the students, as parents and the students confirmed, and fits in well with other post-16 provision on offer

locally. The requirement for a daily act of collective worship is not met, but religious education is covered within general studies.

58. The school gives very strong emphasis to students' further development of their key skills in literacy, numeracy and, particularly, in ICT. Students have very good access to computers, and ICT is very widely used in most subjects. These core skills are recognised in the school's graduation scheme.

59. Having been very good at the time of the last inspection, the provision for students' personal development in the sixth form is now excellent. It builds on the outstanding work done in the main school. The school is totally committed to giving students the broadest possible experience, balancing academic study with an awareness of the needs of the individual in society. All achievement is valued and rewarded.

60. The sixth form graduation certificate scheme, which is awarded under the auspices of the University of Surrey, has considerable status with students and is excellent. It provides for many important aspects of students' personal development as it gives a focus for qualifications, skills, service to the community, and personal challenge. The graduation portfolio enables everyone to be recognised for their contribution and achievements, and to experience a sense of pride. The programme makes a significant contribution to the life of the sixth form and it strongly encourages students to become socially aware and active citizens.

61. Students have a regular pattern of assemblies and lectures which, together with contributions from the subjects they study, promote strong spiritual awareness. Studies of comparative religion, what faith and spirituality really signify, aesthetics and self-knowledge all stress the need for openness of mind. Students are encouraged to come to conclusions by careful consideration of issues and viewpoints rather than from bigotry, prejudice or conformity. This culminates in an annual debate on the topic 'Does God exist?' At the end of a very effective assembly on communities (whether school, home town, or European) students reflected on the broader implications behind the Churchill maxim: "There is no finer investment for any community than putting milk into babies."

62. The provision for students' moral development is excellent. Most assemblies deal with moral issues. Students are expected to consider complex and difficult issues such as euthanasia, who controls the media and the impact of this control, and the effect of politics and economics on living standards in poorer countries. In a tutor group, students taking science subjects discussed medical ethics in general and cloning in particular, with an impressive grasp of the issues involved. The same was true in an art lesson where the portrait of Myra Hindley was considered, and in English where a study of Seamus Heaney included consideration of the role of the British in Ireland. There is a particularly effective correlation between work done in critical thinking and general studies classes, assembly themes, and subject lessons. The school sets a strong moral tone on the need to take initiative and responsibility whilst being aware of the rights of others. Sixth form students are expected to be excellent role models for younger pupils in terms of their attitudes to school and all those who form its community.

63. Sixth form students are given opportunities to play an unusually significant part in school life, and so to develop socially. They are encouraged to lead or support extra-curricular activities for other pupils as part of their community service. Whether running sports sessions for sports leadership awards, helping in lessons such as art, textiles and French, serving as prefects or as paired readers, or helping with Brownies' groups, students are known to and respected by younger pupils. Students also benefit from an exceptionally rich range of additional activities. These include many music, drama and sporting activities, as well as an extensive range of trips and extended visits. The many trips and residential experiences which have taken place, both in this country and to France, Spain, Italy, Germany and Canada, have also helped to broaden students' horizons, cement relationships, and encourage self-reliance.

64. The school places strong emphasis on promoting students' cultural awareness through experience, within the curriculum and through the comprehensive range of extra-curricular activities with sporting fixtures, drama productions, and visits to theatres, concerts and galleries. An array of swing, blues and jazz bands and choirs is also available. Celebration of western culture is balanced by exploration and appreciation of the diversity of other cultures. Students are encouraged not just to contrast cultures but to see the wholeness and philosophy which underpin a culture. Students have visited Italy to play in concerts and to study classical civilisation, and Barcelona to look at art. Some have undertaken work experience in Canada. The link with the Manzezulu school in South Africa is a unique venture. Teacher and letter exchanges, visits by former George Abbot

students, and general comparisons between the two schools have resulted in fundraising and collections to support the South African school, and a growing understanding and appreciation of its cultural heritage.

## **HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?**

### **Assessment**

65. The procedures for assessing students' attainment, academic progress and performance are excellent. Teachers' assessments are accurate and their communications in writing and in verbal feedback give students a reliable and very clear picture of how well they are doing and where improvements can be made. Teachers are extremely well informed about the examination requirements and marking criteria, and they share this information with students. As a result, students know what is expected of them, are very focused on their studies in lessons and are able to make full and effective use of the time they spend on coursework done outside lessons. This excellent preparation enables them to become very accomplished, confident and independent learners.

66. Assessment data, together with other performance information available to senior managers and subject leaders, are of the highest order. Results are analysed rigorously and the information is used in a variety of ways and for different purposes. Senior managers and faculty heads use the assessment findings to monitor subject performance, the achievement of different groups of students, and the department's progress towards fulfilling agreed targets. Most subject teachers make systematic use of information from results of A/S-level examinations to help them plan and set realistic targets for forthcoming modules. Increasingly, tutors are making use of school data to help them set and monitor targets. Teachers' marking and their written reports give very detailed information on what has been achieved and what could be improved, but the individual targets on students' reports are too broad and the wording is not subject-specific.

### **Advice, support and guidance**

67. Excellent quality advice, support and guidance is provided throughout Years 12 and 13, building on the work started in Year 11. Before joining the sixth form, students benefit from excellent guidance and advice. This comes through individual support and through extremely well presented handbooks that make course content and expectations very clear.

68. Tutors know students very well and extremely positive relationships between students and staff ensure that help is available whenever needed. Most subjects provide an induction period in which students are helped to learn how to study successfully at A/S-level. To complement the academic challenges, the senior team have been keen to acknowledge students' wider, personal accomplishments by encouraging them to become more personally active and responsible members of the school community. In this respect the graduation certificate, now in its second year, has been an outstanding success.

69. Once students have started their courses their progress is very closely monitored using a range of relevant data on prior attainment linked to present achievements in each subject. Students are required to discuss their progress regularly with tutors and subject staff. Parents are also consulted regularly, and every attempt is made to accommodate any changes that are needed. Support for students whose results fall below expectations is thorough and sensitive. Clear targets for improvement are negotiated between students and all subject staff.

70. Similarly, careers education and advice on higher education options are of a very high standard. Many students spoke particularly warmly of the guidance which has helped them in selecting the most appropriate university courses. Starting in the spring term of Year 12 and continuing until the end of Year 13, students are given extensive advice and guidance on possible career paths and entrance to higher education. This involves feature lectures on all aspects of higher education and careers, visiting speakers from universities on a range of subjects, and individual interviews with tutors and with careers staff. Visits to universities are also organized and there is an information day at the school for students and parents.

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

71. Parents expressed very positive views about the sixth form, both in the meeting prior to the inspection and in their responses to the questionnaire. They are well consulted by the school, and feel that their children are getting a very good education.

72. In their responses to the questionnaire completed before the inspection, students expressed several negative views about their experience in the sixth form. However, these views were not endorsed by the many students with whom formal and informal discussions were held during the inspection. The inspectors found that students feel that the school provides very well for their needs, and that they are very happy with the education they are receiving. For example, the students are very keen on the graduation programme and the value it places on breadth in their education and experience.

73. The very high rate of recruitment from Year 11 into sixth form courses, and the high retention rate during A-level courses also indicate that the school is good at working in partnership with students and meeting their needs.

## **HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?**

### **Leadership and management**

74. The leadership of the sixth form is excellent, as is its management. The management of the sixth form is characterised by a strongly collegiate approach, very effective teamwork and careful delegation of responsibilities. The sixth form staff have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities within a shared commitment to maintaining high academic standards and providing a broad, rich curriculum that meets the full range of student needs. For example, the requirements of the few students with special educational needs, including visual impairment, are taken very seriously and these students are given every help to be successful.

75. Subject management is also effective, with excellent leadership in English, Spanish and art, but some weaknesses in the management of geography and biology. The senior management team has taken appropriate steps to resolve these weaknesses, giving support and guidance to the heads of department. Senior managers have also taken over some responsibilities, such as monitoring the quality of teaching in geography, to minimize the impact of these weaknesses on the quality of education received by the students.

76. The governing body is highly successful in carrying out its responsibilities in relation to the sixth form. Governors have a very clear understanding of its effectiveness. They are very successful in shaping and supporting the sixth form and ensuring that it complements the post-16 provision offered elsewhere. The governors' curriculum committee and governing body are kept well informed of sixth form policy and procedures. However, the statutory requirement for a daily act of collective worship is not met.

77. The monitoring, evaluation and taking action to effect improvements are excellent. For instance, the senior managers identified that students were not doing well enough in their examinations in physics. Significant changes were made, including to the course taught, and within a short space of time the provision in physics has become a strength. The cycle of planning, monitoring and evaluation of all school developments is well-established. The sixth form development plan is suitably linked to the whole-school development plan, and annual sixth form reviews provide a full and frank analysis of the year's activities. Very good use is made of analyses of examination results to identify areas of strength and weakness, at senior management level, by heads of faculty and most heads of department. Training is provided for tutors and subject leaders to help them to interpret and analyse the available data. The sixth form staff are highly committed to further improvement and have a strong capacity for success in this.

### **Resources**

78. The sixth form makes best strategic use of its financial resources to support its educational priorities. Specific grants are used effectively for their designated purposes, and extra sources of income are sought for particular projects. The sixth form is very cost-effective as it costs less to run than it receives in income. This is done without detriment to the sixth form provision, and is in part the result of economies of scale. For example, some subjects run with comparatively large numbers in the classes, and gain very good results. The school also supports minority subjects running with only a few students, in order to preserve the breadth of its curricular provision and to meet individual needs. Budget decisions such as these have a clear rationale and are regularly reviewed. Governors are closely involved in planning and monitoring expenditure.

79. The best value principles, of comparing to see how well the school or aspects of it are doing, challenging

to make sure that the best is being attained, consulting to make sure that all parties are happy with the sixth form provision, and being competitive and cost-effective, are applied in all matters. The school consults particularly widely, including students and their parents as well as staff, and is very responsive to suggestions for improvement. It keeps a close eye on how well it is doing in comparison with other local schools and with the national picture, and does its best to focus its resources accordingly. The strong desire to set high standards in all it does means that the school is the first to challenge itself on how well it is doing. Overall, the excellent implementation of the best value principles in relation to the sixth form as well as to the main school is a key factor in the school's effectiveness.

80. The school has very good accommodation for the sixth form and resources for learning. The upper school learning resource centre contains a very good range of up-to-date materials and ICT facilities which students make good use of for independent research and assignments. However, the science laboratories are in need of the major up-grade that is planned for them, and for which money has been set aside in the school budget. Staffing is very good overall. The school has highly qualified, specialist staff who are generally well experienced in meeting the needs of the post-16 curriculum. The staff are deployed very effectively. The school has a very good system of induction for all new staff and also an excellent system for performance management. In-service training and staff development both make an important contribution to the improvement of management and teaching skills among sixth form teachers.

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

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

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

### ***GCE AS level courses***

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	3	33	62	0	15	0.3	1.5
Chemistry	1	0	43	0	5	0	0.8
Other sciences	1	100	78	0	27	3.0	2.3
Sociology	2	50	63	0	7	1.0	1.2

### ***GCE A level and AVCE courses***

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	52	92	87	60	43	6.8	5.8
Chemistry	38	89	90	50	43	6.6	5.9
Biology	39	82	88	33	34	5.0	5.3
Physics	41	83	88	39	40	5.4	5.7
Other sciences	5	100	90	20	30	4.4	5.2
Full design and technology	20	95	91	10	30	4.8	5.4
Business studies	39	87	92	33	32	4.8	5.5
Economics	10	80	89	70	36	6.8	5.5
Sports/PE studies	19	95	92	21	25	4.7	5.1
Art and design	62	98	96	63	46	7.8	6.6
Music	3	100	93	0	35	4.7	5.7
Drama	20	100	99	50	38	6.9	6.6
Classical studies	8	100	95	50	49	6.3	6.5
Geography	15	80	92	20	38	4.1	5.7
History	17	94	88	41	35	5.4	5.5
Religious studies	3	100	92	0	38	3.3	5.8
Sociology	21	81	86	24	35	4.1	5.3
Other social studies	30	93	87	50	34	6.4	5.3
English literature	54	100	95	67	37	7.7	5.9
Communication studies	35	97	93	37	31	6.1	5.5
French	11	91	89	55	38	6.7	5.6
German	10	100	91	40	40	5.6	5.8
Spanish	8	75	89	13	39	3.5	5.7



General studies	111	89	85	36	30	5.5	4.9
-----------------	-----	----	----	----	----	-----	-----

## SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

### MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

The focus of the inspection was on mathematics, chemistry, biology and physics. The school does not provide other courses in the area of mathematics and sciences.

#### Mathematics

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

##### Strengths

- Results at A-level, and the standards students attain at the end of Year 13.
- The quality of teaching and learning, especially teachers' subject knowledge and awareness of examination requirements.
- The positive and productive relationships between students and teachers.

##### Areas for improvement

- Taking account of the spread of attainment within the class and giving students more opportunities for active involvement in the learning activities.
- Schemes of work that reflect recent curriculum changes and provide for the use of ICT within mathematics.

81. A-level results in mathematics were well above the national average in 2001, and have been consistently so over the last three years. The school's results for 2002 are similar to those for 2001. Students do as well in mathematics as in their other subjects, and significantly better than predicted from their GCSE results. In 2001, girls did better than boys, whereas in previous years boys did better than girls. A few students were entered for GCSE re-sit examinations and A-level further mathematics in 2002, and were successful.

82. Standards of attainment at the end of Year 13 are also well above course expectations and students' achievement is good. Students know how to solve algebraic equations and find general terms of arithmetic and geometric series. In statistics, they make good use of discrete and continuous random variables, and in mechanics they use vectors and have a good understanding of Newton's laws of motion. Decision mathematics in Year 13 introduces students to sorting methods including quick sort and bubble sort algorithms. Higher-attaining students following the further mathematics course have a good knowledge of complex numbers, and are able to identify and solve second-order differential equations.

83. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers have a very good awareness of examination requirements and very good subject knowledge, which is shown for example in their use of technical vocabulary. Lesson planning is comprehensive, and teachers make good use of questioning to check students' understanding and decide when to move the lesson on. Teachers enjoy positive and productive relationships with their students and this allows students to develop confidence and competence in their work. Homework is regularly set and marking is full and supportive with useful comments and exemplar solutions offered. However, teachers often take too little account of the spread of attainment in the class and so do not adapt the work sufficiently to meet individual needs. As reported by the last inspection, teachers' talk dominates lessons, leading to some missed opportunities to involve students fully in the learning activities.

84. Students' attitudes and behaviour are very good. In the majority of lessons seen, students showed high levels of involvement, commitment and determination. They have high expectations of themselves and their own performance.

85. The curriculum provides a wide range of A-level opportunities, with modules in pure mathematics, mechanics, statistics and decision mathematics. The provision for literacy in the sixth form is good, the department encourages students to present their work well. The provision for ICT is satisfactory although some opportunities for using computers to support the teaching of mathematics and enrich the curriculum are missed.

86. Mathematics is well led and managed. Staff have a good awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of the department but make too little use of results data for monitoring. Staff have responded well to recent curriculum changes. There is a good team spirit among the departmental staff and a clear sense of purpose and direction for mathematics in the sixth form. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. The very good results at the end of Year 13 have been maintained and students continue to work hard and sustain their concentration.

## Chemistry

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

### Strengths

- Standards are above average, and students are doing well in chemistry.
- Teachers have a good knowledge and understanding of the subject, and high expectations of students' learning.
- Students are interested in the subject, and are enjoying the challenge of A-level work.

### Areas for improvement

- Making chemistry less theoretical in Year 12, to broaden its appeal and make an easier transition from GCSE work.
- The time allocated for chemistry in Year 12, and the quality of the laboratories.

87. A-level results were above the national average in 2001. Analysis showed that in relation to their level of attainment at the start of the course, the higher attainers did better than lower attainers. The percentage of A and B grades fell in 2002, due in part to problems with the examination and in part to the lack of completion of A/S-level work in 2001. Staff worked successfully to make the best of the situation prevailing at the start of the year, and the percentage of pass grades rose in 2002.

88. The standard of work of the current students is above average and students' achievement is good. Year 13 students are doing better than the predictions based on their GCSE performance. In a lesson seen in which the students were revising for an examination in January, students discussed their work using technical language appropriately. The highest attainers asked some very searching questions about the choice of indicators for acid-base titrations. Others also demonstrated a good level of understanding through the discussions they had with each other and the teacher. Students were keen to understand the link between answers and the examination mark scheme.

89. In Year 12, students listened with interest to a lesson on trends in Halogen chemistry. They were able to apply their prior knowledge to explain the trends identified by the teacher. Their written work showed that higher attainers write well, for example to explain bonding and molecular shape. However, they have done little extended writing. Students of all levels of attainment successfully tackled calculations on formula masses and could interpret data from the mass spectrometer. Higher-attaining students made good use of the monitoring sheet provided, but it was used only as a content-checking device by others.

90. Teaching is good overall and as a result students learn well. Teachers have a good knowledge and understanding of their subject, which enables them to plan challenging lessons that make students think hard. In the best lessons, teachers used their excellent understanding and enthusiasm to engage students of different prior attainment in appropriate levels of discussion. They had high expectations to which the students responded well. In a Year 13 revision lesson, too much detail was included and so the aim of the lesson was not as clear to the students as it could have been. Students listen well and show intellectual curiosity, but in some lessons were not given enough opportunity for active involvement. Students find chemistry challenging especially in Year 12, where the initial parts of the course are very theoretical. They enjoy the challenge, but find the change in demand from GCSE very marked. They are very positive about their sixth form course, especially the students who have joined from other schools. Students appreciate the support of staff and their availability to give extra help so that they understand both their work and how to improve their performance. The learning resource centre provides a valuable, well-used support for their learning.

91. The subject is well led and managed. There is now a good scheme of work. Teachers are beginning to link it to their own materials, but need to find more opportunities for developing key skills and cross-curricular themes. Teachers share good practice through peer group observation and are able to discuss matters frequently since they do not have to cover for absent colleagues. Students' progress is well monitored and targets are set each half term. Although in the main resources are very good, particularly the support of the technical team, accommodation needs improving since the overhead services block the board from view and space in some laboratories restricts movement. Year 12 classes are allocated only four hours of taught time, which is too little to allow much practical work to be done.

92. The subject was not reported on by the last inspection, but the evidence indicates that its improvement is good.

## Biology

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

### Strengths

- Some teaching is good or very good, and here the students learn well and produce work of a good standard.
- Students' skills in literacy, ICT and numeracy are usually promoted well.

### Areas for improvement

- Some teachers' skills in promoting active learning, so that students achieve better.
- The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the subject.

93. A-level results were average in 2001. Results have fluctuated from year to year, but have been broadly average although below those in the other subjects taken by the same students. There is no clear evidence of different performance between boys and girls. In 2002, results fell, with a high proportion failing the course and most doing less well than expected from their GCSE results on entry to the course.

94. The standards seen in lessons and samples of work are broadly in line with course expectations and students' achievement is satisfactory overall. Where teaching was good, there were examples of work of a high standard. For example, Year 13 course work investigations showed good links with scientific knowledge and that students had strong skills in analysis and evaluation. Essays of good standard on drugs and neurotransmitters had been used as models for the rest of the class. However, other students' work consists mostly of unstructured notes and contains uncorrected errors, for example in an interpretation of optimum temperatures which did not match the data.

95. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Some lessons observed were good or very good, but in others there were weaknesses although they were satisfactory in that the basic lesson objectives were met. In the good and very good lessons, the emphasis on independent work led to good learning. Examples included Year 12 work on dentition and Year 13 work on hormonal and neurological control. Where the teaching was less strong, it was pedestrian and did not give students the opportunity to show what they could do. For example, a Year 12 experiment on enzyme immobilisation achieved its basic aim, but did not develop students' understanding of why they were following the procedures and how these related to scientific and technological thought. Overall, students' laboratory skills meet expectations for this stage in the course, but the development of their higher-level thinking, independence and research skills vary too much, dependent on the quality of teaching.

96. The course makes some contribution to students' wider education, for example on biotechnology and drug abuse. Literacy skills are promoted well in some lessons or research homeworks, but opportunities are missed where teachers are over-directive of the learning activities. ICT makes a good contribution to course work and numeracy skills are developed well within some investigations. Some teachers provide well for students of different levels of attainment, with examples of detailed marking and clear guidance which have led to improvement in the quality of students' work. The teachers who promote independent learning make good provision for the gifted and talented and higher-attaining students in general. Students are generally positive about the subject, although most reported difficulties of transition at the start of the course.

97. The subject is unsatisfactorily led and managed. It lacks the sort of leadership that can pull staff together, eliminate inconsistency and spread the very good practice within the department, with a focus on raising standards and learning from the mistakes of the last school year, such as the fall in examination results. The school is aware of this weakness and is taking appropriate steps to tackle it. The curriculum is satisfactory. The scheme of work covers A-level requirements, but with an over-emphasis on planning for the content to be covered and too little consideration of the students' learning. Assessment is satisfactory overall, with some examples of very good course work assessment. Resources are good, although some microscopes are less than adequate. Accommodation is good, given the size of the classes.

98. There was no mention of biology in the last report and results have fluctuated since then. However, the evidence indicates that overall improvement since the time of the last inspection is satisfactory.

## Physics

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

### Strengths

- Standards are well above average and students are achieving very well.
- Teachers have a very good knowledge and understanding of physics, and great enthusiasm for the subject.
- Students are very positive towards the subject.
- The new scheme of work is exciting and relevant.

### Areas for improvement

- The time allocation in Year 12.

99. The A-level results in 2001 were average. The majority of students did better than expected from their GCSE grades. In 2002, results were higher, with almost all gaining a pass grade. The percentage gaining an A or B grade also rose. Few girls take A-level physics, but those choosing the subject perform well. The popularity of the subject has increased steadily since 2000.

100. The standard of work currently attained by students is well above course expectations, and their achievement is very good. This is due to the effectiveness with which the subject is now led and managed, and the new approaches to teaching an exciting and stimulating scheme of work devised by the Institute of Physics. In the lessons seen, Year 13 students were doing very well as a result of very good, and sometimes excellent teaching, which demanded much of them. In one lesson, students worked co-operatively to identify the physics relevant to solving design problems using a range of resources. They then used the synopsis each team had drawn up to help them solve the problems identified. Students were highly motivated, and so were still working with enthusiasm during the last hour of a three-hour period. Students in Year 12 have tackled a wide variety of problems, including designing and building an electronic sensor. They are developing research skills and use ICT to present their work when appropriate. They are good at applying concepts to problem solving, and higher-attaining students write very well, explaining their understanding of concepts.

101. Students are learning very well because of very good teaching. Teachers have very good knowledge and understanding of their subject, enabling them to plan stimulating lessons with a range of activities to challenge students at an appropriate level. A Year 12 lesson on analogue and digital signals made very good use of a demonstration to show how viewing intervals affected a visual signal, explaining points raised by students in earlier lessons. Teachers' enthusiasm for their subject makes learning fun and students respond well to the lively interactions in class.

102. Students are very positive about physics. They appreciate the very good relationships with staff and other students. They enjoy the challenge of the subject, but would like five taught lessons instead of four, so that they could do more practical work. They find teachers very supportive of their learning needs and get direct help to improve during lessons. This supplements the half-termly written targets, which are at present not very helpful but are being improved. The learning resource centre makes a very good provision to support students' learning, although students choose to use the Internet rather than books for their research activities.

103. The subject is led and managed with a very clear sense of direction. This has a good impact on the teaching and learning of physics. The new scheme of work is stimulating, and the work of staff and students is monitored carefully to ensure that standards are maintained at a high level. Assessment data is used well to monitor and track performance, but is not yet linked to curriculum planning because the course is very new. Recent initiatives that are broadening and enriching the curriculum include some interesting links with the University of Surrey and some unusual investigations such as the physics of roller coaster rides as a field study. The subject was not reported on by the last inspection, but the evidence indicates that its improvement has been very good recently.

## ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

The inspection focused in design and technology, which covers graphics and product design. No other courses in engineering, design and manufacturing are provided by the school.

### Design and technology

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

#### Strengths

- Students' attainment in design and technology is well above average, and results in graphics are exceptionally good.
- Very good teacher knowledge in the subject leads to very good individual support for all students.
- Relationships between teachers and students are very good, creating very good conditions for learning.
- The subject is very well managed.

#### Areas for improvement

- The opportunities for students in computer aided design and computer aided manufacturing techniques.

104. In 2001, A-level results in graphics were exceptionally good, and well above the national average. Graphics results remained at a high level in 2002. Although the A-level product design result was below the national average in 2001, the 2002 results improved a great deal, with a marked increase in the number of A and B grades. Students currently doing the A-level courses started with above-average attainment, as shown by their GCSE results in Year 11. The A/S-level results in 2002 and the standard of work seen during the inspection both show that the students are attaining standards that are well above course expectations and that their achievement is very good. The improvement in results reflects the department's recent work to raise standards.

105. In both the graphics and the product design course, Year 13 students have developed a very high level of skill in graphics. The presentation of final coursework is of a very high standard in both courses. In product design, students use the design process well to show each stage of their development work. They consider both standard production processes as well as the mass production possibilities and basic skills. Students' ability to follow the design process enables them to work independently, using their teacher as a guide and mentor. However, Year 13 students have made relatively limited use of ICT to demonstrate a range of industrial procedures within the context of their own work.

106. Students' numeracy skills are very good, as illustrated by their handling and processing of numerical data and when applying accurate measurements and estimations to both design and manufacturing. In product design, students used anthropometric data well to ensure the products they designed took into consideration a range of standard body measurements. An example of this was seen in the work of some students when designing a car CD rack. The students experimented with the reach of a standard person to find the best and safest location for the rack inside the car. Others tested the size and position of a person when designing a relaxing chair to ensure the correct body size and best back support was achieved. They work to scale accurately when developing prototypes. Students' literacy skills are also developed very well as they learn to write confidently in a variety of styles and to select the most appropriate way of presenting their information. The general standard of literacy is very high.

107. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. In both subjects, teachers have very good knowledge of the subject and this enables them to support students well on an individual basis. The lessons observed were very well structured, with a good mix of teaching the whole group and working with students individually. Teachers plan very well for students to extend their knowledge and skills. This was usually done by the teacher demonstrating the work, followed by further opportunities for experimentation by students. This was seen in a Year 12 lesson where students were incorporating the work of other artists whose work they studied. They experimented with form, colour and texture to capture the style and techniques used by other artists but at the same time the teacher guided them to produce work which represented their own ideas and designs. Modelling techniques are used well to experiment, test and improve each aspect of development at each stage. The good relationships between students and their teachers create a positive impact on learning. Students took their work seriously and were keen to do well. As a result they discussed their work in depth with their teachers, and readily accepted and discussed the help and guidance they were given. Students felt they received a good level of help and support from their teachers. In the coursework seen during the inspection, the majority of students had used ICT well to process and present data from the market research work they did. They also used ICT well to increase the quality and presentation of their work.

108. The subject is very well led and managed, with a strong and successful focus on raising standards. Schemes of work are well planned, and students' coursework is closely linked to the examination mark scheme. As a result, all the important aspects of the examination courses are covered very well. Systems to monitor the achievement of students and to set subject specific targets for improvement are very good. Teachers provided regular opportunities for students to discuss their work. The design and technology courses are now well established and the overall improvement since the last inspection is good.

## BUSINESS

The inspection focused on economics. A-level results in business studies were below the national average in 2001. They improved a great deal in 2002, when about three-quarters gained A or B grades.

### Economics

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

#### Strengths

- Students do very well at A/S- and A-level, and their achievement during the course is very good.
- Teachers have very good knowledge of the subject and of examination requirements, enabling them to give the students well-focused support.
- Relationships between students and teachers are very good, and students are very pleased with what the course offers.

#### Areas for improvement

- No significant areas for improvement were identified.

109. A-level results were well above the national average in 2001. They have improved consistently since the last inspection. The results of the 2002 A-level and A/S-level examinations were higher again. Overall, in the light of the students' prior attainment and taking into account that they had not taken economics prior to joining the sixth form, recent results and current standards of work represent very good achievement.

110. The work of students in Year 12 is above course expectations. They are already successfully applying their knowledge of factors affecting supply and demand in a market economy in areas such as the national health service. Higher-attaining students in a Year 12 class were able to draw supply and demand graphs and use these to explain what would happen if, for example, steel production rose while demand stayed the same. The standards attained by the students in Year 13 are well above course expectations. For example, students showed good factual knowledge of major factors arising from cyclical changes in economic development. They gave clear and thoughtful responses when questioned by their teacher, confirming the strength of their previous learning.

111. Teaching is very good, and students learn very well as a result. The teachers are enthusiastic and very confident in their knowledge of the subject and the syllabus. This leads to well-focused questioning of students

and a consistently strong level of challenge in lessons. Lessons are thoroughly planned to meet learning objectives and include structured and varied learning activities to allow for good learning outcomes. Good informal assessment from the teacher and peer groups gives students a clear understanding of their strengths and weaknesses. Students are recommended pertinent web-sites to extend their understanding and assist their research. Independent learning is strongly promoted throughout the course. Students' cheerful and positive attitudes and their relationships with staff are very good and make a significant contribution to their learning. They report that they enjoy the subject and the high quality of teaching and support they receive.

112. The department is very well led and managed, and its improvement since the last inspection is very good. The quality of teaching and learning and steadily rising results are a direct result of a commitment to using effective methods to develop students' interest and enthusiasm. Detailed understanding of the demands of the examination syllabuses can be seen in the constructive advice provided in the assessment of students' work. Students benefit from regular progress meetings with teachers, to review their work and set the next targets. Good use is made of journal and broadsheet articles and recordings of television reports as well as standard text books and useful Internet websites. Monitoring of teaching is effective. Support for students is enhanced by good library and ICT resources to promote further and independent learning.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)**

ICT was sampled. In 2002, over half the students taking A-level gained a grade A or B. In the lesson seen, on evaluating six documents they had designed, Year 12 students' attainment was above average. Their work showed a very good range of skills in presenting information, and they were very analytical in their approach to evaluating the documents. The teaching was very good, with strengths in subject expertise, the sequencing of the work, and individual feedback that helped students to learn very well.

## **HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL**

Physical education was sampled. Sports studies was taken at A-level in 2001, successfully by almost all the students. Data was not available to enable comparisons with the national results to be made. The results rose in 2002. In the lesson observed, Year 13 students' attainment was above average and their learning was good. Students used subject specific terminology very well in discussing the principles of training. Strong features of the teaching were excellent subject knowledge and very effective questioning. A course booklet produced by the department was providing students with very good guidelines for their work in the subject.

## **HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE**

No subject was focused on, but the inspection sampled health and social care. A few students took the GNVQ course in health and social care in 2002, all successfully. The teaching and learning were good in the lesson seen. Students gave presentations to the rest of their group, who listened closely to each others' input. Students benefited from thoughtful, detailed feedback from their teacher, whose secure knowledge of the examination marking criteria was used effectively to pose questions and ask for clarification.

## **VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA**

The inspection focused on art and design. In addition, music and theatre studies were sampled. A few students passed A-level music in 2001, but a valid comparison with national results cannot be made because the number of students was too low. Teaching and learning were very good in the Year 13 music lesson observed. The lesson was carefully planned and well paced, with expert teaching that enabled students to build very well on their prior knowledge and skills in recognizing features of instrumentation.

A-level results in theatre studies were above the national average in 2001, and in 2002 showed further significant improvement as a high proportion of students gained an A or B grade. In the Year 13 theatre

studies lesson seen, very good and enthusiastic teaching resulted in lively responses from students explaining the social, cultural and historical background to early eighteenth-century drama. Students demonstrated well above average levels of skill in their awareness of literature and their ability to propose, justify and exemplify opinions. They were lively, diligent and enthusiastic.

## Art and design

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

### Strengths

- Excellent teaching that combines a wide range of skills and expertise across a range of disciplines.
- The high quality learning – students’ intellectual, creative and higher-order thinking skills.
- The breadth of the curriculum, including many visits to galleries both locally and abroad.
- The quality of work reviews and excellent guidance given to students.
- The quality and depth of research, and the exceptional standard of many students’ work.
- The excellent leadership and management of the different subjects.

### Areas for improvement

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

113. The school offers four A/S-level and A-level courses in art and design. They are fine art, printmaking, textiles and photography. In 2001, the combined results at A-level were well above the national average. Girls generally did better than boys, as is the case nationally, but both did very well as over half of those entered gained grades A or B. In 2002, the combined results were better than in 2001, and particularly high in art/painting, photography and textiles. Photography was a new course whereas the results in textiles have been consistently very high for a number of years. Photography proved popular with boys and they did very well indeed. Art subjects are very popular – in 2001, there were over 60 entries. The retention of students is very good: few leave school without completing the course. Many continue their studies in arts-related courses and progress into higher education. A few each year are accepted directly onto degree-level courses, which is unusual and indicates the exceptional quality of these students’ work.

114. Students can choose to work in a range of art disciplines, including print, textiles, painting, drawing and photography. Standards of work by students currently in Years 12 and 13 are well above course expectations and some students’ attainment is exceptionally high. The arts courses recruit a large number of students each year. Most have already done particularly well in the GCSE art and design subject of their choice. A few who have lower results in their other subjects can take an intermediate vocational course for one year. The faculty caters well for these students and they achieve very well relative to their starting points.

115. The work of current students is well above the standards expected, for all the courses. Standards in art and textiles are exceptionally high. Students’ achievement is excellent in all the subjects. Students are confident communicators. They demonstrate a deep understanding of the work of past and practising artists and designers. The subject requires high levels of independent learning skills, and students thrive on the challenges and the expectations teachers have of them. The higher-attaining students are able to make subtle connections between their own and others’ work. Their work shows considerable depth of knowledge and an understanding of how artists and designers work and where they get their inspiration from. Much is gained through their research, wider reading and visits to exhibitions, both in this county and abroad. Written assignments, life drawing and high-quality studio work make significant demands on students’ intellectual development and higher-order thinking skills. Photography, painting and drawing are very high quality. Creative problem solving in textiles and art is of the highest order and some of it approaches degree standard.

116. Between them, staff offer excellent subject knowledge and a very rich curriculum. From their very wide experience, they make reference to fine art as well as to the commercial and industrial aspects of the subjects and this gives students an exceptional, all-round, experience that prepares them well for the next stages of their study or work. Not surprisingly, and following degree courses, many plan to go on to work in design studios, in the fashion industry, theatre and the arts in general.



117. Teaching is excellent. The raw energy, passion and enthusiasm that teachers have for the subject stimulates and encourages students to overcome uncertainties or barriers to learning. The marking and assessment of work together with high quality tutoring gives students a clear idea of how they are progressing and where improvements are necessary. As a result the learning is of the highest order. Students demonstrate exceptional skills, not only in their finished work but also in their preparatory work. Here, their creative experimentation and skills in problem solving provide an excellent basis for further study and refinement. Combinations of materials and media are used thoughtfully, with students making very sophisticated analytical judgements about colour, composition, scale and function or purpose. Students have excellent attitudes and work extremely hard in lessons and in their own time. They receive high quality advice and guidance from teachers as they work and more formally when they review their work at the end of an assignment.

118. The leadership and management of the subject are excellent. High standards have been maintained over recent years. A new, very successful, photography course has been introduced and the use of computers increased. Each year there is an exhibition of students' work. The sheer quality and range of work is outstanding and has a powerful impact on younger students. The subjects make a significant contribution to the spiritual and cultural life of the school and help to ensure that the visual arts remain at the heart, and reflect the specialist status, of the school. The improvement in the subject over recent years is excellent as a successful area of the curriculum has been greatly developed.

## HUMANITIES

The inspection focused on geography, government and politics, sociology and psychology. In addition, classical civilization, Latin, political history and religious studies were sampled.

Results in classical civilization were average in 2001, whereas in 2002 almost all the students gained A or B grades. In the lesson seen students demonstrated a very good understanding of the Odyssey. The story and the characters were well explained, when they answered questions and engaged in a role-play. The teaching and learning were very good. Students' attitudes were excellent and the relationships very positive.

One Year 13 Latin lesson was seen. Students' attainment was well above average, and their learning was very good. The lesson was demanding and the students responded by being very committed and enthusiastic. The teacher was highly knowledgeable about Ovid's Metamorphes, and conducted the lesson at a brisk pace.

In political history, A-level results were average in 2001. Results rose a great deal in 2002 – the proportion of students who gained grades A or B doubled. In the lesson observed, Year 12 students were given very good help in learning how to use their knowledge when writing a historical essay. Skilful teaching elicited thoughtful, perceptive comments from the students.

The number taking religious education was too low for a valid comparison to be made with the national average in 2001. The results rose in 2002, with all gaining either A or B grades. The teaching and learning in the lesson seen were good. Most students contributed well to the discussion, which was led particularly effectively by the teacher.

## Geography

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

### Strengths

- Teachers' subject knowledge is good.
- ICT is used well in learning activities such as researching information.
- Students enjoy the subject.

### Areas for improvement

- A-level results, which have fallen in the last two years.
- Teachers' promotion of students' skills in analysis within geography.
- The way the subject is led and managed at sixth form level.

119. A-level results were well below the national average in 2001, after having been broadly average in previous years. The results fell further in 2002. The results of boys and girls are generally similar. There is evidence that students start the geography course with a lower level of attainment than in most other subjects, which in part accounts for the results having been below the school average.

120. Current standards in Year 12 are below course expectations. Year 12 students demonstrated sound knowledge of factors influencing human migration, and have used good ICT skills to research this topic through visiting appropriate Internet sites. The attainment of students in Year 13 is also below course expectations. The students demonstrated some knowledge of soil types when they investigated soil samples and could apply this when noting down their characteristics. They have satisfactory knowledge of the subject but they have difficulty in developing and sustaining their arguments orally and in their written work. Nevertheless, the students' achievement is satisfactory overall when their attainment at the start of the course is taken into account.

121. Overall, teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers have good subject knowledge and plan lessons carefully. ICT is generally well used, as when Year 12 students were given a range of useful web-sites to facilitate their research into changes in the Australian immigration policy over the last century. This successfully engaged their interest and they worked very productively. Lessons have good pace and teachers use an interesting range of resources to provide variety and stimulation in lessons. Field work is very valuable in deepening students' geographical understanding. However, teachers do not stimulate discussion sufficiently. As a result, some lessons are too heavily teacher-centred and so students do not question and analyse what they are told sufficiently. Lessons have insufficient emphasis on the requirements of the A/S and A-level examinations and so students' activities lack a real focus. Marking is generally satisfactory but occasionally does not give students sufficient guidance on how to improve.

122. Students enjoy geography and value the teaching and support they receive. They behave well, and work very well in small groups and pairs, supporting each others' learning. However, the subject is less popular with students than it used to be.

123. The leadership and management of geography are weak. The department lacks direction and a common focus in its sixth form work. Staff who teach in the sixth form plan schemes of work jointly, which helps to spread good practice, and the senior management team have given good support through their monitoring of teaching. Assessment of students' work is satisfactory, and assessment information is starting to be used to help in setting targets for students. Resources are generally good, and the library provision is good and well used, effectively promoting independent learning and wider reading. Since the last inspection the fall in standards means that the improvement in this subject has been unsatisfactory.

## Government and politics

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

### Strengths

- Academically rigorous subject teaching is leading to students achieving very well and to examination success.
- Students' knowledge of current political issues.
- The range of learning opportunities provided, including visits and the guided use of ICT.
- Students' attitudes to the subject.

### Areas for improvement

- Enabling students to become analytical in their own enquiry early on in the course.

124. This subject was not reported on by the last inspection. It has grown in popularity over the last few years. For the last three years, the A-level results in government and politics have been better than those for the school as a whole. In 2001, all the students gained grade D or higher, and half gained grade A or B. A comparison with national figures could not be made as these were not available. In 2002, most students exceeded their predicted grades, and the results were dominated by A and B grades. The subject outperformed school averages for both A-level passes and grades A to B.

125. Standards are well above course expectations, and students' achievement is very good. Students begin Year 12 with very little knowledge of the subject. During the first term of the course, they move quickly from this base to a point where they have a strong awareness of current political events and issues, due to clear and well-structured teaching which requires them to engage in independent research. For example, in the Year 12 lesson observed, the students discussed the week's dominant news story of the tribulations of a Downing Street based QC, and remembered the prime minister's response to the leader of the opposition in the previous day's question time in the House of Commons.

126. By Year 13, students' independently-researched work is knowledgeable and thorough. For example, a guide to the last US presidential election was comprehensive and interesting, with key facts illustrated by good real-world examples. A research project on the way the main parties elect their leader included evaluation at a high standard to support its conclusion. By Year 13, students display very good research skills in their work and read a variety of newspapers enabling them to suggest a range of political news stories.

127. Students respond very well to the subject. They have a high regard for their teachers, whom they see as very approachable. Students greatly enjoy the many opportunities for debate although they find the amount of note taking is daunting at times. Students benefit from the curricular opportunities offered such as visits to conferences where they hear high-profile politicians such as Tony Benn and Ian Duncan Smith.

128. Teaching and learning are very good. The teachers' subject expertise is a key strength. Teaching is academically rigorous, enabling students to attain high grades. Students benefit from the wide range of teaching styles deployed. Written work shows that students have engaged in wide, independent reading. They are encouraged to develop a strong body of thorough notes, and this is complemented by the many opportunities for debate and discussion. Some students find exercises such as "jigsawing" particularly helpful. Teachers guide students to making very good use of ICT in their studies. The Internet has been an invaluable resource in the study of American politics. For example, students subscribe to the New York Times email service, which gives them up-to-the-minute views and information. However, Year 12 students' analytical skills have not been focused sufficiently on during the first term, through activities requiring them to select and evaluate information. Students have benefited from excellent subject-related work experience, such as working for a US lobbying firm or a proposed placement in Conservative Party Central Office. They also benefit from a very good range of visits that bring the subject alive. The local member of parliament is helpful in facilitating an annual visit to the House of Commons and in the past visits have been arranged to BBC Question Time.

129. The marking and assessment of students' work is very good. A feedback proforma has been developed which students find very useful. Assessment objectives are made clear to the students, which helps them develop very good examination skills and so leads to very good results. Students get a lot of help and support to achieve their best.

130. The subject is led and managed well. Careful thought has been given to matching the strengths and experience of teachers to the areas of the course to be covered. The budget for the subject has been used effectively, with clear thought given for maximising the impact of limited resources within the department by very good use of the library and Internet.

## Sociology

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

### Strengths

- Students achieve very well because of the effectiveness of the teaching and their own hard work and enthusiasm for the subject.
- Students are good at applying their sociological knowledge to an understanding of contemporary issues.
- The students are challenged by demanding teaching, based on very good subject expertise.

### Areas for improvement

- The opportunities for students to take responsibility for their own learning.

131. A-level results in sociology were below the national average in 2001, both for the proportion of students achieving a pass and the proportion achieving grades A or B. The results for 2002 show a significant

improvement, with 60% of students gaining grade A or B and all passing. The trend for the last three years is upward. Students are very positive about the subject, which is a popular one.

132. Standards of attainment are above average in relation to course expectations. Standards vary from year to year because of differences in the profile of students' attainment at the start of the course. Students' achievement is very good. The work of the students now in Year 13 is better than predicted from their GCSE attainment at the start of the course. They have a sound understanding of the theoretical foundations of the subject and are beginning to apply the knowledge, understanding and skills learnt in different aspects of the course to analyse many contemporary issues very well. The students also have a good understanding of sociological methodology and a range of research methods. They are able to understand and use subject specific terminology in discussion and in their essay writing. Their preparation and planning for course work on the family showed a good understanding of the nature and extent of the changes that have occurred in the family over the last twenty years and the implication of this for society as a whole. Students also have a secure understanding of the importance and relevance of making connections between different areas of sociology, and of how to interpret and evaluate evidence in reaching their conclusions. All students are competent in collecting and using data.

133. The work of Year 12 students also represents above average attainment for the stage of the course they have reached. They have made a very good start to the course. They already have a good understanding of subject specific terminology and of the different methods of sociological enquiry. Many students are already able to apply different sociological theories to the study of issues such as the family and industrialization.

134. The teaching of sociology is very good, as is students' learning. Lessons are very thoroughly planned and what students are expected to learn is made clear at the start. A high level of teacher expertise in the subject means that concepts, theories and principles are explained very clearly. This often leads to excellent, and sometimes inspirational, question and answer sessions with students of all levels of attainment. They are continually but sensitively challenged to explore their own knowledge and understanding in depth, and to apply their ideas to contemporary social issues. A wide range of teaching strategies is used very effectively. As a result of this very good teaching students are enthusiastic and enjoy their learning. They are keen to read around the subject and to use a range of texts and other resources. However, some opportunities to encourage students to take more responsibility for their own learning and to use ICT are missed.

135. The subject is led and managed very well. Programmes of study are clear and fulfill syllabus requirements. Resources are used imaginatively, often giving a clear contemporary flavour. There is a very good emphasis on applying knowledge and understanding to real and understandable social issues and concerns that students can relate to. In line with school policy, the department uses a very effective system for monitoring and reviewing the progress of individual students. For most students, this ensures that they make very good progress. Sociology was not reported on by the last inspection, but the indications are that this is an improving and very effective department.

## Psychology

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

### Strengths

- The standards attained are above course expectations, and students achieve very well.
- Teaching and learning are very good, with a wide range of methods being used and a strong emphasis on independent work.
- The curriculum and teaching resources are very good.
- The subject is managed very well.
- Psychology is a popular subject, and very well regarded by students.

### Areas for improvement

- No areas for development were identified by the inspection.

136. Results at A-level were well above average in 2001 (50% gained grade A or B, compared with 34% nationally). There has been a trend of improvement over the four years for which national data is available, the

latter two being well above average. The students did significantly better in psychology than in their other subjects. Girls have tended to do better than boys, reflecting the national trend for girls to choose psychology and do well in their results.

137. The standards seen in lessons and samples of work parallel the results. The current Year 12 students started the course with average GCSE results and have now reached or exceeded A/S expectations. Their course work on visual memory showed very good gains in their understanding of research methods and very good skills in presenting data, analysis and evaluation. Standards are well above course expectations. For example, students in Year 13 have written very good quality critical essays on topics such as schizophrenia and prejudice, comparing the views of different psychological theories and schools of thought. Their skills in discussion are very good, as was seen in a Year 12 lesson on Piaget, in which students were able to summarise and evaluate aspects of cognitive development in the sensori-motor stage. Overall, students' achievement in psychology is very good. Examples were seen of Year 13 students having produced essays and other course work that are of a standard two grades higher than that expected from their GCSE grades at the start of the A-level course.

138. Teaching and learning are very good. The teachers are charismatic and entertaining but also plan the subject very well and know how students learn. This was seen in two Year 12 lessons on Piaget in which there was very good use of differentiated teaching materials. Year 13 pupils learned well in a lesson on abnormality, where very good teaching facilitated revision through effective use of different methods including concept mapping. The style of teaching, involving frequent use of case studies and role-play, promotes active learning from which all benefit. Students of all levels of prior attainment are given good support through detailed marking and clear guidance on how to improve. The emphasis on independent learning makes a particularly good contribution to the learning of the gifted and talented, and higher-attaining students in general.

139. The course makes a very good contribution to students' wider education. Literacy skills are strongly promoted through a range of learning activities. These include extended writing, active information research, extracting meaning from texts and summarizing them, presenting arguments and the results of their own research. ICT makes a strong contribution to students' course work, and their numeracy skills are further developed within a research methods module. The course raises ethical and aesthetic issues such as the ethics of experimentation and the cultural and social dimensions of abnormality. Thus it also makes a very good contribution to citizenship.

140. As would be expected from the quality of teaching, students' attitudes towards psychology are very positive. Even at the start of the course, they are very keen. They express pleasure at the active teaching approach, which they feel helps their understanding. They are particularly appreciative of the opportunities for independent work and feel that the transition to A-level is smooth, helped by the consistency of teaching.

141. The subject is very well led and managed. The curriculum is under constant evaluation to fine-tune it, and assessment is used to choose courses that match students' needs from the many available within psychology. The schemes of work, still in development, are very good, as is assessment. Clear guidance is given such that students are aware of their progress and what they need to do to improve further. Resources are good. Their greatest strength is in teacher-produced materials, but they also include textbooks, library texts, well-used videos and posters. Staff team work and consistency are a strength. Accommodation is good but rooms are a little small given the popularity of the subject.

142. There was no mention of psychology in the last report, but the improvement in results and very good new teaching materials indicate that improvement has been very good over recent years.

## **Critical thinking**

Overall, the quality of provision in critical thinking is **good**.

### **Strengths**

- Examination results are well above the national average.
- The course provides an unusual and valuable addition to the sixth form curriculum.
- The quality of teaching is good.

- The scheme of work is both demanding and interesting.

#### Areas for improvement

- The pace in lessons, which is too fast for some students to overcome misunderstandings or uncertainties.
- The time allocated to critical thinking, to give students more opportunity to explore issues in depth.

143. The school is one of the few nationally to have offered students a critical thinking course leading to an A/S-level qualification. This is offered, largely but not exclusively, to higher-attaining students as an alternative to general studies. Critical thinking is very popular. Numbers have grown over the three years the course has been offered, and 77 Year 12 students are now being taught. All students completed the course.

144. In 2001, the first year the A/S examination was taken, results were well above the national average. The proportion of students gaining the higher grades A and B was twice the national average. Overall, students' achievement was very good. In 2002, the results remained well above the national average, a drop in A grades being compensated for by all students gaining grade E or higher.

145. Standards of work of the current Year 12 students, only a few weeks into the course, are above course expectations despite the fact that the school has broadened the ability range of students allowed to take the subject. Their achievement is good. All students have a good basic understanding of the principles of critical thinking, although many are more skilled at analysing ideas and techniques in what they read than in constructing their own arguments in a specified form. When faced with a line of argument, students are adept at identifying conclusions and the weaknesses in the evidence leading to them. The students show a logical and precise approach in discussion, although the lower-attaining students are still having some difficulty in seeing links within arguments, and in appreciating the need for clarification of key terms in a text.

146. Students quickly learn to evaluate ideas crisply and to judge the fairness or logic behind them. For example, a group studying a text about the decline of libraries and the resultant intellectual impoverishment of many people noted the value judgements implicit in the author's denigration of 'escapist fiction'. There is good learning of the need to come to precise or agreed definitions. For instance, students sifting factual evidence about an incident during a soccer match realised the importance of determining the validity of terms such as 'restricted view', 'corroboration' and 'vested interests'. However, some students needed more exact guidance from the teacher as to how to apply the principles they were learning to the tasks in hand. Without it, they could only note superficial features and so tended to drift to discussing the issues within an argument, rather than studying the reliability and coherence of it.

147. Students' good achievement stems from teaching which is always at least good. Teachers' very good subject knowledge, and awareness of what students need to do and to demonstrate to succeed, gives them a clear direction. They learn to understand theory, apply it to texts or situations, and to use others' ideas to stimulate their own. One class quickly began to use appropriate technical words such as 'analogy', 'flaw', and 'assumption' as they analysed an argument. Lessons are well organised with a variety of tightly-timed tasks, and so students learn to work at pace and with focus. However, this also means that some issues are not explored fully enough, and that alternative examples of presentation, for instance by radio, television and newspapers, are under-represented. It also means that students have too few opportunities for class discussion, or to work through uncertainties and misunderstandings. Written tasks, including homework, are quickly marked to educate students about examination criteria and how they are performing.

148. Attitudes to work are very good. Students work on a variety of tasks with energy and diligence. They are positive about the course, but regret the fact that it has to follow the examination syllabus so closely, with little opportunity for imagination or extension. Critical thinking is an intellectually-demanding course which has no GCSE equivalent. It requires a whole new set of principles, approaches and terminology from students if the examination requirements are to be met well. The current model of between 25 and 30 lessons is insufficient to allow for a broad and deep study of the subject, or for the wider range of teaching styles which would further benefit students. Nevertheless, the present arrangements for the course are managed well, and it is very well organised.

## ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The inspection focused on English, French and Spanish. In addition, communication studies and German were sampled. Communication studies results were above the national average in 2001, but in 2002 a significant number of students did not achieve the results expected of them given their attainment at GCSE. In the lessons seen standards in Year 12 were above course expectations and teaching and learning were good. Students were very mature, perceptive and articulate. They were able to use their knowledge of theory to analyse texts confidently. Good questioning enabled students to understand the key points and give accurate and thoughtful answers.

Results in German were similar to the national average in 2001. In 2002 fewer students took the examination, and most attained A or B grades. One Year 12 lesson was sampled. Students responded well to the interesting activities the teacher had planned. Most in the class demonstrated standards that were broadly in line with national expectations. A few had good pronunciation.

### English

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

#### Strengths

- A-level results have been consistently well above the national average.
- Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and set challenging work, leading to excellent learning.
- Students are enthusiastic about learning and work very hard.
- The department has excellent leadership and a strong, collaborative work ethos.

#### Areas for improvement

- None

149. English is a very popular subject. A/S and A2 courses are offered in English literature, and GCSE English is offered as a one term re-sit course, mainly for students who wish to improve their grades. Results in A/S- and A-level English literature were well above national averages in 2001, and were at a similar level in 2002. Results have risen in recent years at a rate that is well above the national trend of improvement. This represents excellent improvement since the last inspection. All students taking the A-level examination gained grade E or better in 2001 and 2002. There was a significant rise in the number of students gaining the higher grades, with two-thirds achieving grades A and B. Boys' results were lower than girls' in 1999 and 2000, but they are now similar. Students have done much better than was predicted from their performance in their GCSE examinations.

150. Standards of work seen in lessons confirm that most of the students now in Years 12 and 13 are on target to exceed the grade expected on the basis of their GCSE results. Standards are well above average, and students' achievement is excellent. Students read with insight and use text effectively to support their points of view. They make rapid gains in the use of critical vocabulary. By Year 13, their writing is fluent, well informed, analytical and makes links between texts and across genres. This was clearly illustrated in work on 'Antony and Cleopatra' when students kept a sharp focus on the views of well-known critics as they discussed Shakespeare's use of North's translation of Plutarch as source material for the play.

151. Students are enthusiastic, think hard and have high levels of application. Their written work is very well organised, with a large volume of research notes, summaries and reviews of texts that show their ability to work independently. They make very good progress in developing their wider reading skills. For example, they develop a very good understanding of the way in which literary texts, such as Austen's 'Pride and Prejudice', Chopin's 'The Awakening' and Friel's 'Translations', reflect the social values and political beliefs of their time. They maintain very good concentration and remain focused in challenging lessons. Students receive very good support outside lessons, and value the amount of time given willingly by their teachers.

152. In the six lessons seen, teaching and learning were always good or better. They were very good in most lessons, which had many outstanding features. Overall, teaching and teachers' subject knowledge are excellent. Teachers have a very good understanding of their students' learning needs and the requirements of

the examinations, and so students are well prepared for A-level. Very good planning takes account of the attainment and needs of different groups of students. Students with specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia receive effective individual support. Lower-attaining students are supported by the structured approach to teaching specific critical skills, while higher-attaining students are challenged by a demanding range of texts and opportunities for independent research. A particularly strong feature is the way in which teachers conduct demanding question and answer sessions. Very detailed marking gives clear guidance on how to improve. High expectations, lots of challenge and work well planned to pass on expertise result in teaching and learning being excellent.

153. The curriculum is well resourced within the department, and the upper school information centre provides further very good resources. For example, students have ready access to the Internet for research and staff place course-related material on the school's Intranet. The induction programme at the start of Year 12 is very good. Courses are further enriched by a wide range of trips to the theatre and talks from visiting speakers. The leadership and management of the faculty are excellent. There is a shared commitment to the critical use of self assessment to continue improving the already high standards. The collaborative work ethos in the faculty is a strong feature of the excellent provision.

## French

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

### Strengths

- Students have done well at A-level, and results are above the national average.
- Teachers' subject knowledge and linguistic skills are very good.
- Generally students' attainment in listening, speaking, reading and writing is well above average.
- The monitoring of students' progress and attainment is very good.

### Areas for improvement

- No significant areas were identified.

154. Results at A/S- and A-level in 2001 were above the national average. Almost all students gained a pass grade and a good number gained grade A or B. The 2002 results were higher overall than those for 2001.

155. Year 12 students have good listening skills. For example, in a Year 12 lesson the students understood all instructions and most explanations given in French at normal speed. Students pronounce known language very well and have a secure knowledge of everyday vocabulary and phrases. Many are able to speak fairly fluently but some are more hesitant. Some students still have some gaps in basic grammar and still make some simple spelling mistakes, although the accuracy of their written work is improving. By Year 13, many students have an impressive knowledge of general and specialist vocabulary relating to environmental and scientific themes and some are able to discuss and debate fluently and confidently in groups and pairs. They have very good listening and reading skills. Their knowledge of grammar ranges from excellent to satisfactory. The standard of students' course work progresses very well from Year 12 to Year 13. The range, quantity and quality of written work are impressive and show very good coverage of syllabus requirements. Overall, standards are well above average and students' achievement is very good.

156. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers plan the lessons very well. What students are expected to learn is clarified at the start of each lesson and reviewed at the end. French is used throughout, which contributes to students' very good listening and speaking skills. Teachers' subject knowledge and linguistic skills are key strengths. Teachers work very well together and adopt a common approach to the presentation and practice of language. This makes a significant contribution to the rate of students' learning. Lessons are very varied and students are given numerous opportunities to speak in groups and pairs and evaluate each others' work. Lessons are very challenging and conducted at a very brisk pace, resulting in students working with enjoyment, commitment and enthusiasm. Good use is made of ICT and the upper school information centre for researching topics and for providing up-to-date teaching materials. There is a very good system for monitoring and supporting students. Relationships are very good and students value the support and guidance they receive. The marking of students' work is very effective and teachers identify specific targets to help students improve.



157. The subject's improvement since the last inspection is very good. It is very well managed, with very good monitoring of the quality of teaching and students' attainment. Having a French assistant makes a valuable contribution to students' language development. The school organises an exchange with a French school, which also develops students' cultural awareness and linguistic skills.

## Spanish

Overall the quality of provision in Spanish is **excellent**.

### Strengths

- Students' achievement is excellent, as they do unusually well to gain good GCSE results in one year and A-level in a second year.
- Excellent teaching, particularly in promoting subject knowledge and linguistic skills, enables the students to make rapid progress.
- Relationships and students' attitudes are excellent.
- The subject is led and managed excellently.

### Areas for improvement

- No significant areas for improvement were identified.

158. Students start Spanish from scratch in the sixth form and take GCSE in one year, at the end of Year 12. In 2002, all 17 students who were entered gained a grade A\* to C and nearly three-quarters gained grades A\* to B. This is very high in comparison with national results, and represents exceptional achievement over the year's course. Students go on to take A/S and A-level the next year, completing all six modules. In 2001, the majority gained a pass grade and several obtained the higher grades (A or B). In 2002, results followed a similar pattern. These results represent exceptional achievement, given that the students have studied Spanish for only two school years.

159. Standards attained by students in Years 12 and 13 are well above average. Year 12 students already talk with confidence, accuracy and fluency on several GCSE topics, and they understand lessons conducted entirely in Spanish. Their pronunciation and intonation are very good. Their written work contains a wide range of material which provides good coverage of GCSE topics. Year 13 students have very good listening and speaking skills. For example, all the students in a lesson observed during the inspection contributed to a debate on issues relating to healthy living and drug abuse. The Year 13 students' written course work is of a high standard, and includes essays on a wide range of topics.

160. The quality of teaching and learning is excellent. The teaching is informed by excellent subject knowledge and linguistic skills. All lessons are conducted entirely in Spanish and students also use Spanish for all classroom communication. Lessons are very well prepared and the lesson aims are very clear. Excellent use is made of a wide range of different teaching methods which involve students actively in speaking in groups and in pairs. Pupils are also involved in evaluating the work of other students, with the result that they are more aware of the requirements of the examination syllabus and also of the need to check their own work carefully to ensure that it contains a variety of vocabulary, accurate use of grammar and good use of different tenses. The varied activities, contemporary themes and interesting materials motivate students to do extremely well. Students are frequently praised for their efforts and errors are corrected constructively. Homework is used very effectively to consolidate and extend learning. Students are frequently encouraged to use the Internet to undertake research and they also make use of audio and video recordings in their own time to develop their speaking and listening skills. Relationships between students and with their teacher are excellent. Students are serious, attentive and willing. They ask questions for clarification and seek help if they do not understand.

161. The leadership of the subject is excellent and its improvement since the last inspection is very good. Modern languages staff work very closely together to ensure that common approaches to teaching, assessment and monitoring of teaching and standards are adopted. This contributes to the effectiveness of the management of Spanish. The resources for Spanish within the department are very good, and the upper school information resource centre also contains a suitable range of dictionaries and reference works as well as some literary texts. It is occasionally used by students for independent research. The opportunity to work with a Spanish

assistant contributes much to students' language and cultural development. The school organises some work experience in Madrid, but there are at present no e-mail links or exchanges to broaden students' experience in Spanish.