

INSPECTION REPORT

WYCOMBE HIGH SCHOOL

Marlow Road, High Wycombe

LEA area: Buckinghamshire

Unique reference number: 110513

Headteacher: Ms Jane Wainwright

Registered inspector: David Potter
1027

Dates of inspection: 27th – 31st January 2003

Inspection number: 249637

Inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Grammar (selective)

School category: Voluntary controlled

Age range of students: 11 to 19

Gender of students: Female

School address: Marlow Road
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Appropriate authority: The Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Michael Dollin

Date of previous inspection: 24th February 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
1027	David Potter	Registered Inspector		What sort of school is this? How high are standards? Leadership and management
11418	Donya Urwin	Lay Inspector		Attitudes, values and personal development; Care: advice, support and guidance; Partnership with parents and students
19096	Brian Bartlett	Team Inspector	Citizenship	Curricular and other opportunities; Care: assessment
4738	David Berrisford	Team Inspector	Science	Leadership and management: resources
32268	Clare Steel	Team Inspector		Special educational needs; Teaching and learning
2172	David Saunders	Team Inspector	Modern Foreign Langs., German (sixth form)	
2447	Faysal Mikdadi	Team Inspector	English (also sixth form); Drama	English as an additional language
4727	Jeff Hale	Team Inspector	History (also sixth form)	
19135	Derek Ebbage	Team Inspector	Mathematics (also sixth form)	
15277	Chris Vidler	Team Inspector	Business Studies, Sociology (both in the sixth form)	
27585	Ken Hounslow	Team Inspector	Biology, Chemistry (both in the sixth form)	
10288	John Richards	Team Inspector	Art (also sixth form)	
1950	Brian Ley	Team Inspector	Music (also sixth form)	
31385	Neil Gillespie	Team Inspector	Information and communication technology (ICT) (also sixth form)	
3555	Carol Emery	Team inspector	Design & technology	
24339	Joyce Mackley	Team inspector	Religious education	

21975	Ann King	Team inspector	Classical civilisation; French (both in the sixth form)	
17732	David Martin	Team inspector	Geography (also sixth form)	
23030	Caroline Runyard	Team inspector	Physical education (also sixth form)	

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

The school was inspected by 19 inspectors, led by David Potter. This is a summary of the inspection report, which is available from the school.

Number of full-time students	1425	larger than average
Students with English as an additional language	9.0%	above the national average (7.8%); bilingual students, none at early stage of learning English
Students entitled to free school meals	2.7%	well below the national average (15.3%)
Students with special educational needs (SEN)	4.2%	well below the national average (19.5%)

Just under half of those attending this large, popular girls' grammar school come from the town of High Wycombe and the remainder from surrounding villages and small towns. Students come from over 50 primary schools, and many travel long distances to school. The area served by the school is generally advantaged but contains some small areas of deprivation. The school population has grown significantly in recent years. Student mobility is low. About 200 students join Year 7 each year. Almost all students stay for two years in the sixth form and are joined by about 20 students per year from other schools: the sixth form, with over 400 students, is therefore well above average in size. Students' attainment on entry is well above average; local patterns of selection mean that the school takes in students of a somewhat wider range of ability than most grammar schools, including a relatively high proportion of students with learning difficulties for a school of this type, most of them with dyslexia.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a good school with many excellent features. Standards are well above average throughout the school. Current improvement is very rapid after a period of turbulence because of very good, clear-sighted leadership, and because of the teaching, which is good overall with a high proportion that is very good and excellent. Cultural and sporting performances are exceptional. Students' learning skills and their attitudes to learning are excellent. There is scope for further improvement in standards and teaching, especially for younger students: school leaders have the capacity to bring about that improvement. The school provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- Results in all tests and examinations are consistently well above national averages.
- Results have improved faster than the national average at GCSE and A/AS-level; many subjects and students achieve outstanding results in these examinations.
- Performance in music, art, dance, drama and sport is exceptional.
- Students' attitudes to the school and their work are excellent: this is a school in which hard work and success are respected.
- Teaching is good overall and very good in the sixth form; there is a lot of inspiring teaching.
- Provision for students' personal development and welfare is very good indeed: the school cares deeply for its students and helps them develop into balanced young adults.
- Leadership is of high quality: the headteacher and other school leaders have developed in the staff a shared commitment to improvement and the capacity to succeed.
- Resource management is now excellent: the new team has a clear view of how all the school's resources will be used to raise standards and improve quality.
- The school is improving rapidly.

What could be improved

- Students aged 11 – 14 make progress more slowly than older students.
- Although provision has improved sharply of late, the teaching and the curriculum do not fully meet the needs of all students.
- Good quality student performance data are now being made available to departments, but are not yet fully used to help guide teaching and curriculum.
- The use of information and communication technology (ICT) is inconsistent and generally inadequate across subjects.
- There is insufficient time for the teaching of mathematics to students aged 11 - 14 and for religious education (RE) to those aged 14 - 16.
- The school does not comply with the requirement to provide RE for all in the sixth form, nor that to provide a daily act of collective worship across the school.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Improvement since the last inspection in February 1997 has been satisfactory overall and very good in recent months. Results have generally improved faster than the national trend. Attendance and behaviour remain very good. Teaching has improved, with a sharp increase in the proportion that is very good and excellent. Action has been taken in respect of most of the weaknesses shown in the 1997 report. There are now sufficient computers, and the curriculum in ICT complies with requirements. The curriculum and teaching in personal, social and health education (PSHE) are much improved. The use of ICT is, however, still under-developed across the subjects. The school does not comply with the requirement to teach RE to all in the sixth form, and the curriculum for those aged 14 to 16 does not contain enough RE to comply with the locally-agreed syllabus.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	Compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	2000	2001	2002	2002
GCSE	A*	A*	A*	D
AS/A-levels	A	A	*	

Key

Very high	A*
Well above average	A
Above average	B
Average	C
Below average	D
Well below average	E
Very low	E*

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

Results at GCSE and in the national tests for students aged 14 have for many years been very high (in the top five per cent of schools nationally), but have recently been slightly below the averages of similar schools. Students' progress from age 14 to 16 is rapid, but somewhat slower from 11 – 14. The school's results in the tests for 14-year-olds have risen in line with the national trend; GCSE results have risen faster than the national increase. The school has exceeded its target for the average points per student at GCSE, but has fallen short of its target for the proportion achieving five or more higher (A* to C) grades. The proportion achieving the very highest grades has however increased. Results at A level (and latterly also at AS level) have consistently been above the national average, with distinguished performances by many individuals and in several subjects; results in 2002 showed a further sharp increase and were well above the provisional national average. Students aged 14 to 19 achieve very well; those aged 11 to 14 achieve well, but there is scope for improvement. There is evidence that students with dyslexia achieve less well than they should.

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Excellent. The school ethos is respectful, open and challenging, and students respond with enthusiasm. They are proud to attend the school.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good: on the very few occasions when some students show unsettled behaviour teachers bring it under control. The school is an orderly community in which students can learn unimpeded by others.
Personal development and relationships	Excellent. The school provides a substantial range of opportunities for individual initiative and responsibility, enthusiastically accepted and appreciated by students. Co-operation is a routine part of school life.
Attendance	Attendance is very good - above the national average with no unauthorised absence (truancy). Punctuality to lessons is good.

Students' attitudes and values, especially their excellent motivation and their enthusiasm to take responsibility and show leadership, are great strengths of the school and greatly benefit learning and achievement. The school has no significant weaknesses in this area.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of students:	Years 7 - 9	Years 10 and 11	Years 12 and 13
Lessons seen overall	Good	Good	Very good

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

Teaching is good overall, and nearly half of it is very good or excellent; only two per cent is less than satisfactory. These are good proportions and an improvement since the last inspection, particularly in the proportion of very good and excellent teaching, achieved despite the very high recent staff turnover. Teaching makes a major contribution to the high standards students achieve by helping them, especially the older ones, become very skilled learners with very good attitudes to their work. Teaching and learning are at least good in all subjects and for all age groups; the proportion of very good and excellent teaching increases up the school to nearly 60 per cent in the sixth form, where a lot of teaching is inspiring and scholarly. The teaching younger students receive is a little more mixed in quality: although it is good overall, a significant proportion is satisfactory but unstimulating.

Teachers know their subjects well, have high expectations of students, and generally move lessons on at a good pace. In the best lessons, teachers shared their passion for the subject and used their assessment of students' work to tailor tasks precisely to the needs of groups and individuals. The use of assessment to inform planning, and to ensure students understand their own learning and how to improve, is good for older students; although satisfactory, it could be improved for younger students. The teaching of literacy and numeracy is good across the school. Teaching is consistently very good in English. It is good overall in mathematics, but ranges from excellent to satisfactory; in science, it is very good for older students but displays the inconsistencies described above for younger students.

The learning of students with SEN is satisfactory overall and good in the sixth form.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum.	Satisfactory in the main school and very good in the sixth form. The curriculum is broad, and provides well for literacy and numeracy. There is insufficient time for the teaching of mathematics for 11 – 14 year olds and RE for those aged 14 – 19. Arrangements for teaching ICT across the curriculum are unsatisfactory. While PSHE has improved, citizenship is at an early stage of development. Extra-curricular provision is excellent.
Provision for students with special educational needs (SEN)	Satisfactory overall and improving: students with SEN have access to the full curriculum and achieve and learn well. Provision for those with mobility, sensory, emotional or behavioural difficulties is good; it is unsatisfactory for those with dyslexia because their needs are not fully met across the subjects.
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good overall, and excellent for moral and social development, resulting in the very high quality of students' attitudes and of relationships within the school. Spiritual and cultural development are good but not consistent the curriculum. Excellent provision is made for aesthetic development, but cultural diversity is not sufficiently well celebrated.
How well the school cares for its students	The care and welfare of students are excellent. Good procedures for gathering assessment information have been developed, but these data are not yet used sufficiently to identify and provide for the learning needs of different groups of students.

Links with parents have gone through a difficult period; they are now satisfactory and improving. The curriculum review upon which the school has embarked is timely; although it has great strengths, some lack of balance in the curriculum, especially for the youngest students, is contributing to the under-achievement at age 14. Information and communication technology is well taught in dedicated ICT lessons, but is not systematically developed or reinforced across the other subjects.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good: the analysis of strengths and the planning and priority-setting for improvement undertaken by the most senior staff is excellent and sets a very clear direction for the school. Middle managers lead their sections of the school well, and are very committed to the programme for change and improvement set out in the school improvement plan (SIP). Their skills of data analysis and planning vary.
How well the appropriate authority fulfils its responsibilities	The governing body has newly-established procedures and systems to exercise oversight of the school but has not yet implemented these fully to ensure that they hold the school properly to account for its improvement. Financial governance and management are excellent.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Systems for monitoring students' performance and teaching are newly established and of good quality; they are not yet consistently used across all subjects, and their use to help match teaching methods and curriculum to the needs of all students is at an early stage.
The strategic use of resources	Excellent systems, based on the principles of best value, have been established to ensure that all the school's resources are deployed to achieve the aims of the SIP.

Many of these aspects are great strengths; the others are becoming so rapidly. The school is being very well led out of the recent period of turbulence and is improving very rapidly as a result. Resources for learning are generally good. Accommodation is satisfactory overall, but small, scattered classrooms limit teaching methods in some subjects. Although the turnover of staff has been very large, teaching quality is high; the school has recruited some very good teachers recently and is nearly fully staffed.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• their children are attaining well and making good progress;• students are encouraged and expected to work hard and achieve their best;• most feel that the teaching is good;• the school helps their children develop into mature, rounded and tolerant young adults;• that the school is approachable and generally responds to their concerns;• that it is a rapidly-improving and increasingly well-led school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• the stability of the teaching force and the consistency of teaching quality;• the continuation of recent improvements in behaviour and in the school's communications with parents;• the consistency with which homework is set in accordance with the school policy and timetable.

Inspectors are in full agreement with parents' positive views of the school, and believe that the actions taken by school leaders in respect of teaching, the curriculum, behaviour and communication are all leading to rapid, secure improvement. Homework seen during the inspection was good - sufficient in quantity and set in accordance with the timetable. School leaders are aware of parents' concerns about overload, and are planning further improvements as part of the curriculum review.

ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form was inspected by a team of 17 inspectors, led by David Potter. The summary report focuses on subjects and aspects of the sixth form. The full report is available from the school.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form of this large, popular grammar school has just over 400 students. Almost all of the students from Year 11 in Wycombe High School enter the sixth form and are joined by about 20 students per year from other schools. Since results at GCSE are well above average, all students embark on two-year, advanced-level courses.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

This is a very good, highly cost-effective, sixth form. Standards in examinations are well above the national average, and outstanding in several subjects. Students achieve well in relation to their results at GCSE. The success of the sixth form is the result of very good leadership, consistently very good teaching, a broad academic curriculum, the excellent attitudes of the students and the warm, professional relationships between them and their teachers. Students enjoy the atmosphere of scholarship that prevails in many lessons, and relish the many opportunities to show leadership and take responsibility.

Strengths

- Students make good progress and achieve well-above-average results at AS and A level.
- Outstanding results are achieved in several subjects and by many students.
- Students are mature, professional partners in learning; they willingly show leadership and take responsibility, for their own work and for aspects of school life.
- Teaching and learning are very good: many lessons are exciting, scholarly experiences.
- The curriculum is broad and meets the needs of the students well; it is enriched by a very wide range of extra-curricular activities which promote learning and motivation.
- The sixth form is very well led and managed and is very cost-effective.

What could be improved

- Religious education is not provided for all, as required by law.

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

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

Curriculum area	Overall judgements about provision, and comment
Mathematics	Good: the leadership of the department is excellent; together with good teaching, this ensures that well-qualified teachers enable very highly-motivated students to achieve high standards.
Chemistry	Very good: standards are well above those achieved nationally at both AS and A level, and teaching is very good.
Biology	Good: standards are above the national average and teaching is good.
Business Studies	Good: sound planning to meet the needs of the new specifications and good teaching lead to well above average examination standards.
Information and Communication Technology	Very good: examination results are consistently well above the national average, teaching is very good and there is rapid improvement.
Sports Studies	Very good with excellent features: standards are high and teaching very good.
Art & Design	Very good with excellent features: results are excellent and teaching is consistently at least very good.
Music	Excellent: results are well above average as a result of high quality teaching and leadership; performance is frequently outstanding.
Classical Civilisation	Very good: standards are very high and teaching is very good and often inspiring.
History	Very good: standards are very high and teaching is consistently very good.

Geography	Very good: as a result of very good leadership, standards are high and teaching very good.
Sociology	Very good: students respond very positively to high expectations and very good teaching, and achieve high standards as a result.
English	Very good: results and teaching are both very good and students respond extremely well.
French	Good: students achieve very high standards in their work as a result of good teaching and of their own very good attitudes to learning the subject.
German	Good: standards are above average and teaching is good.

Inspectors make comments in the range excellent, very good, good, satisfactory, unsatisfactory, poor, very poor.

In the subjects not inspected in detail, such as psychology, Spanish, government and politics and disciplines within design and technology, teaching and achievement are as good as in those listed above.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Very good personal guidance; satisfactory overall in respect of support for academic progress but subjects vary in the way in which they keep students informed of their progress and what they need to do to improve.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Very good: leadership by the headteacher, head of sixth form and other managers has created a large, popular and successful sixth form with excellent relationships. Monitoring of standards is improving as the student performance data system is completed.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The teaching they receive, which they find both helpful and challenging. The support they receive for independent study. The willingness of teachers to provide additional help and guidance. The good range of courses provided and the quality of information about those courses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The advice they receive about joining the sixth form, and about progressing into a career or higher education. The assessment of their work, which does not always keep them well informed about the progress they are making. The degree to which they are treated as young adults and listened to.

Inspectors are in full agreement with students' positive views. Teaching is of high quality; it is challenging and enables students to work independently. Relationships are excellent. Guidance provided to students is now good. Although teachers assess students' work well, they do not always feed back to them in such a way as to help them understand their progress and what they should do to improve. Plans for the development of an elected student council with a budget should help students feel a greater sense of "ownership".

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. On entry to the school, students' ability (as shown in tests they take to secure entry to the grammar school) and attainment (in the national tests taken at the end of primary school) are well above average; their literacy scores are especially high. Since results in the national tests at age 14, at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), Advanced Supplementary (AS) and Advanced (A) levels are all well above national averages, students achieve well and make good progress through the school. This is borne out by the recently-published national value-added tables, which show that Wycombe High School adds above-average value, especially from age 14 to 16; progress from 11 to 14 is somewhat slower. Results have improved steadily in recent years - in line with the national average increase in the tests at age 14, and faster than the average at GCSE and AS/A level.

2. In the national tests at age 14, the school's results are very high in relation to the national average (in the top five per cent of schools) and have remained so since the time of the last inspection. Almost all students exceed the nationally-expected standard, and the proportion achieving the highest available levels is high and rising. The school's results are lower than the national average for grammar schools, but this comparison is not secure because Buckinghamshire admits a much higher proportion of its students into grammar schools than is the case in other local authorities. The progress made by students from the tests at the end of primary school to the tests at 14 is above the national average but again below that of grammar schools as a whole.

3. The standard of younger students' work seen in the inspection was above average in all subjects, but not as far above average as that produced by those from Year 10 upwards. The issue is one of consistency: whereas the demands made of students in some subjects, such as mathematics, music and design and technology are as high for younger as for older students and they achieve very well, in several subjects, including science, greater demands should be made of younger students. When combined with a rate of improvement no faster than the national trend, this confirms that there is scope to raise standards for younger students.

4. The school enters students for an average of nine full and one short GCSE examinations. Results are again consistently in the top five per cent of all schools, and have improved faster than the national average. Students' average points score is slightly below that of grammar schools nationally, but is at least in line with other grammar schools in the area. The small recent slip in the proportion achieving five or more higher (A* - C) results represents only three or four students out of a year group of over 200; the proportion of A* and A grades, and the number of students achieving nine or more higher grades, have increased and are very high. All students achieve at least five graded (A* - G) results, a proportion above the grammar school average. In recent years, a particularly high proportion of students has achieved A/A* grades in mathematics, design and technology, geography, business studies, IT, RE and French. Results in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science are well above average. The work of those on GCSE courses seen in the inspection was of a very good standard; in most subjects, students achieve well and make rapid progress in Years 10 and 11 because the school makes consistently high demands of them.

5. The school has only just begun to track students' academic performance in ways that allow the attainment of different groups to be evaluated. Early evidence from

these data, as well as from inspection, is that the achievement of students with learning difficulties is variable: those with physical, sensory, emotional and behavioural difficulties achieve well; their needs are understood and well provided for. Some of those with specific learning difficulties (dyslexia) under-achieve because their needs are not fully recognised across the subjects. Students with special needs are entered for the full range of GCSEs, and most achieve higher grades in all subjects; their average grade is however lower than their prior attainment suggests they are capable of. The school has a large number of very able students and almost all of them achieve the highest levels and grades at 14 and 16. The proportion is, however, uneven among the subjects: in English and science, for example, there is scope for improvement in the results of these most-able students at 14.

6. The school is very inclusive in its extra-curricular activities. Students with mobility or sensory difficulties are supported well and take part in a range of activities. The achievement of gifted and talented students in sport, music, dance, art and drama is frequently outstanding, and these activities also frequently encourage less talented students to participate and make progress.

7. There is work still to do to ensure that the classrooms, by assessing and meeting the needs of all students, are as inclusive as some of these extra-curricular activities.

8. Standards in key skills are generally very good. Although students' standards of literacy and numeracy on arrival are high, the school has well-organised programmes to raise those standards still further. As a result, students present a case orally very well and listen courteously and carefully to other points of view, enabling them to learn well in discussion sessions; they present sophisticated arguments with clarity in their writing and use the technical vocabulary of each subject with accuracy and relish. Although most students are reasonably fluent users of ICT, and although provision is very good within ICT lessons, levels of co-ordination across the curriculum are inadequate and students do not get enough practice to develop and consolidate their skills. Some subjects, such as art, promote the use and development of ICT, but most do not.

Sixth form

9. Standards are very high in the sixth form; results have been consistently well above the national average with some outstanding performances by individual subjects and students. In 2001, all A-level courses returned results above the national average, most by a considerable margin; results were still better in 2002, exceeding the provisional national average by a considerable margin. Nearly two-thirds of all subject entries achieved grades A or B, a figure greatly in excess of the national average. Results have been excellent in many subjects: over the last four years, chemistry, German, history and psychology have remained continuously well above the school's own very high average. There are very few blips; physics results at AS-level in 2002 were poor and not typical of the performance of that department. The 2002 results have been the subject of intensive investigation and re-planning. Work seen in all subjects during the inspection was of a high standard, promising a continuation of the excellent results: it is above average in all subjects and well above in most.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

10. The previous inspection report described receptivity to learning as a major strength of the school. Despite a number of changes and challenges during the intervening six years, the school has sustained and developed this characteristic. Students' personal development is very good, and their attitudes to school and to their work are excellent.

11. There is an atmosphere of purposeful activity everywhere. The ethos is not only one of productivity and achievement, but also one of friendliness, helpfulness and motivation. As a result, the school not only successfully engages students, promoting their all-round development into young adults, but also ensures that they enjoy school. The students respond very well and enthusiasm for the school is very high.

12. With very few exceptions, behaviour is very good. Students respect and listen to one another, and interactions inside and outside the classroom are lively, confident and mature. Much of the teaching, and the extensive extra-curricular programme, aim to develop students' personal skills and self-esteem, with very good results; students show a high level of self-awareness, and are thoughtful and articulate. They willingly take responsibility and demonstrate personal initiative through clubs, teams, visits and productions.

13. Relationships are excellent. Courtesy and collaboration are evident throughout the school and students are quick to consider the impact of their actions on others. There was no evidence of bullying or vindictive behaviour during the inspection; when this was discussed with students, they were keen to point out the rarity of such behaviour, and were very enthusiastic about the friendliness of their school. When incidents do occur, the school has well-rehearsed response procedures and issues are resolved quickly and efficiently. In the best lessons, particularly for those aged 14 and above, students are very focused on their learning; they work with enthusiasm and commitment, always keen to respond to the high expectations set by the school.

14. The attitudes and behaviour of students with special educational needs (SEN) to the school and their work are very good. Relationships among the students themselves and between them and their teachers are especially good. Students show interest in their work and strive hard to be successful; those attending the additional support sessions usually arrive promptly and settle to work quickly. In the sessions observed the behaviour and attitudes were excellent.

15. The number of students excluded permanently is very low. The school has recently increased the level of fixed-term exclusions to reinforce required behaviour standards and to provide an opportunity for formal review with the few students who need extra help in managing their behaviour. Flexible re-admission strategies are discussed with students and parents/carers to ensure that they match individual needs and the school works hard to maintain a 'what's best for the student' focus throughout all discussion and subsequent actions.

16. Attendance is very good. It is well above the national average and there is no unauthorised absence.

Sixth Form

17. Attitudes and values in the sixth form are very good. Driven by a strong work ethic, attitudes to learning are excellent in lessons. Initiative and persistence are strong features of learning, supplemented by good study habits to ensure progress and achievement. Students set themselves challenging targets and are keen to respond to the school's high expectations.

18. Working hard, both independently and in groups, is a way of life for the majority of sixth form students, and there is a real desire to show individual commitment and responsibility in the pursuit of attainment and growth. A high level of lively interest characterises most lessons, and students appreciate the range of subjects offered and the standard of teaching provided. Students are immersed in their studies in subjects such as music, drama and history, producing stimulating, adventurous work.

19. Students enthusiastically take up the extensive opportunities to adopt leadership roles: they organise and lead drama and dance productions, help other students in lessons such as music and PSHE, organise their own affairs through the student leadership group and lead various clubs and teams. They are thoroughly involved in the life of the lower school and support younger students by acting as support tutors to younger classes, running the Year 8 Drama Festival and acting as prefects. Students support one another, relationships are excellent and an atmosphere of respect and appreciation exists throughout the sixth form.

20. Attendance in the sixth form is very good and students are punctual. There is an 'improvement required' approach where problems occur and this keeps standards high.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS TAUGHT?

21. Teaching across Years 7 to 11 is good overall, and nearly half of it is very good and excellent. Teaching was at least good in four out of five of the lessons seen; in only three per cent was it less than satisfactory. These good proportions, achieved despite a substantial recent turnover of staff, represent an improvement since the last inspection, particularly in the proportion of very good and excellent teaching. Teaching makes a major contribution to the high standards achieved, because it helps students develop very good learning skills and attitudes to work, as well as knowledge and understanding. Another significant improvement since the last inspection is in the teaching of PSHE: much of the unsatisfactory teaching seen in the last inspection was in PSHE, whereas in this inspection all lessons were judged to be at least good with a high proportion very good.

22. Teaching and learning are at least good in all subjects and for all age groups, but the proportion which is very good and excellent increases up the school: in Years 10 and 11, over half of all teaching is very good or better with a high proportion of excellent teaching. It is even better in the sixth form (see paras 31 - 36). Although it is good overall, the teaching of younger students is less consistent: a significant proportion is satisfactory but unstimulating.

23. Teaching is consistently very good in English. It is good overall in mathematics, but ranges from excellent to satisfactory; in science, it is very good for older students but, for younger students, displays the inconsistency described in the previous paragraph. The teaching of literacy and numeracy is good across the school: although students arrive with high attainment in these skills, the school delivers a good programme across all subjects.

24. Teachers know their subjects, and the requirements of the examinations, very well. They are enthusiastic and confident in their delivery and, as a result, students are taught with precision through a variety of interesting and stimulating approaches. For example, science teachers often use modelling and role-play as effective ways of introducing new concepts and, in RE and history, the use of 'dilemma situations' enables students to develop their thinking by examining different points of view. Lessons are very well prepared, sharply focused and with clear objectives that draw on students' previous knowledge and understanding, enabling them to acquire new knowledge and develop their ideas. A variety of tasks and stimulating resources motivates students and addresses their learning needs. In ICT, excellent examples of PowerPoint presentations, Excel spreadsheets and Access databases are used to enhance teachers' demonstrations and there are sets of exemplar work for the students to use to help improve their work. Physical education makes good use of video to improve knowledge of performance and stimulate questioning.

25. Expectations are very high and the teachers present a careful balance between pace and challenge, ensuring rapid gains in learning. Skilful questioning helps to maintain pace, enables teachers to engage all students, assess understanding and provoke higher-level thinking. One feature contributing to an excellent Year 8 history lesson was the teacher's use of sharp questioning to encourage students to extend their answers to include their reasoning. Relationships between teachers and students are very good and collaborative working is a real strength of the best lessons. In English, teachers offer effective one-to-one and pair/group support. This keeps the lesson moving forward at a good pace and, as a result, students are keen to work, maintain concentration and persevere.

26. The best lessons are characterised by learning that is exciting as well as demanding. Opportunities are provided for the students to take an active part in their own learning and they are encouraged to question and challenge what they are learning. In these lessons, teachers use their assessment of students' work to help them to improve their work and understand their own progress. This use of assessment is good for students in Years 10 and 11; it is less consistently good for younger students. Homework tasks set are of good quality and are used effectively to extend class work. Teachers have very high expectations regarding homework and students respond by producing work of a good quality. Presentation is generally good and homework is given in on time. Students' planners show that homework is usually set in line with the homework policy.

27. In the satisfactory lessons, most of them in Years 7 to 9, teaching is sound but uninspiring. In some of these lessons, tasks are not sharply focused and learning objectives are not clear to all students; in others, planning has not taken into account the previous knowledge, skills and understanding of different groups of students, leading to less purposeful progress. Teachers on occasions confuse pace with challenge and the rapid pace and numerous activities and changes of task actually inhibit learning and the opportunity for recapping and consolidation of knowledge.

28. In the very few unsatisfactory lessons, teachers have insufficient knowledge of the students leading to inappropriate activities and insufficient pace and challenge. Students respond by demonstrating inappropriate behaviour and too much time is focused on managing this behaviour, rather than on developing students' ideas and increasing their understanding of the subject matter.

29. The school has identified a small but significant group of students with SEN. The learning of these students is satisfactory, but the quality of teaching varies with their special need. It is at least good for those students with hearing and physical impairment, but inconsistent and often unsatisfactory for those with specific learning difficulties (dyslexia). Teachers are aware of the difficulties resulting from hearing and physical impairment and, through careful planning of tasks and use of resources, they include these students effectively. Expectations of them are high. Students are encouraged and given opportunities to contribute orally. As a result, their learning is in line with that of other students in the class. Where additional support is available, teachers ensure the support worker is aware of the lesson content and alternative resources that will minimise difficulties and ensure access. Good provision, involving part-time attendance at a local specialist centre, is made to support the very small number of students with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

30. For students with dyslexia, teaching is often unsatisfactory. Few teachers use students' individual education plans (IEPs) to ensure that the methods used will enable the students to learn effectively. However, in some English, mathematics, PE, art and geography lessons, teachers adapt the pace of the learning and level of challenge to meet the individual needs of the students, providing a range of activities and resources, using effective grouping to support students' learning and, through skilful questioning techniques, ensure that all students feel included in the lesson. Here, students learn well and make at least satisfactory progress. Learning is satisfactory in support sessions but these are insufficiently frequent to enable the support to be very effective.

Sixth Form

31. Sixth form teaching is very good overall: almost 90 per cent is at least good and nearly 60 per cent very good or excellent. While very good teaching was seen in all subjects, it was consistently very good in art, classical civilisation, chemistry, ICT, music, PE and RE.

32. Not only do teachers know their subjects intimately, they have a passion for the work which enables them to find exciting ways to deliver their lessons so as to engage and motivate students. For example, in a Year 12 chemistry lesson, through the use of modelling, the teacher was able to ensure all students had an excellent understanding of what happens to molecules when they absorb certain amounts of energy. In practical subjects, particularly art and music, students learn effectively through observation as teachers give very high quality demonstrations. In all subjects, teachers encourage students to ask questions and answer with precision so that they show that their subject knowledge is secure, and so that they extend and deepen their understanding.

33. Courses are very well planned and students are made clear about the requirements of the examination. In PE, this involves a good range of assignments that stimulate a variety of responses and allows for research opportunities to extend the learning of the more-able students. In mathematics, all students are given clear information detailing pre-requisites of the courses and the examinations: this helps them achieve their best.

34. Teachers know their students' abilities well, including those with SEN, and are immediately aware if students need support. They ensure that activities and resources allow all students to build on their prior knowledge and make good gains in their learning. In geography the teacher used a microphone effectively to support the learning of a Year 12 student with profound hearing loss. As a result of this and the teaching strategies used, including consistently repeating instructions or points made by other students, the student was able to take part confidently in the lesson and make good progress. Teachers have very good strategies for challenging students and stimulating learning, with an emphasis on the development of independent learning skills. In music, self-study materials have been developed. These are well designed to support and further enhance learning. In many subjects the more-able students are encouraged to achieve higher levels through extension and research.

35. All teachers have very high expectations and relationships within groups are excellent. Students respond positively to the enthusiastic approaches of the teachers and work very hard to meet the challenges presented. As a result the pace of lessons is very good, the level of challenge high and students produce work of a very good standard. Teachers assess students' work well and, in some subjects, help them understand their current standards and how to improve. This is however inconsistent among the subjects, and students do not always get clear feedback. Teachers make very good use of homework assignments to extend students' work.

36. Mention should be made of the use of the skills of the students to help their colleagues, either within the group or younger students. The training of the dance ensemble by a Year 13 student, the co-tutoring of PSHE groups by sixth form students and the demonstrations given to Year 12 music students by those from Year 13, are outstanding examples of this admirable process.

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

37. The curriculum for students aged 11-16 is satisfactory overall. In Years 7 to 9, students follow the full National Curriculum together with RE and PSHE. In Years 10 and 11 they study a compulsory core of English language and literature, mathematics, science, ICT, a modern foreign language, RE and PE. They also choose from a range of subjects including technology, art, drama, business studies, classical civilisation, Latin and several modern foreign languages. This ensures that the students receive a broad curriculum but also one that is tailored to their particular interests and aptitudes. Within subjects the quality of the curriculum is particularly good in the three core subjects of English, mathematics and science. In design and technology students aged 11-14 are provided with a very broad range of learning experiences that enables them to make informed choices about the aspects they study in Years 10 and 11.

38. Although the students arrive at the school with well-above-average attainment in literacy and numeracy, provision for the further development of these skills is very good and well co-ordinated across the curriculum. Students' skills of speaking in public, listening to each other and debating vigorously yet courteously, and their considerable skills of reasoning, accurate writing and precise choice of terminology are all very good indeed. Their very good numeracy promotes achievement and learning in a great range of subjects, and the curriculum for numeracy is good.

39. Despite its clear strengths there are some weaknesses in the curriculum for students aged 11-16. The considerable amount of time devoted to the teaching of variety of languages in the lower school does not result in a proportionate number of GCSE entries and take-up in the sixth form. There is insufficient time allocated to non-examination RE to meet the requirements of the locally-agreed syllabus in Years 10 and 11. The time provided for the teaching of mathematics to students aged 11-14 is also insufficient. All students aged 14-16 follow a course in PE but there is no specific time identified for those studying the course to GCSE level. Although the teaching of ICT is very good in discrete ICT lessons, not enough use is made of ICT across the curriculum. Single lessons are often too short, by the time the students have walked from one classroom to another, and a double period of seventy-six minutes is often too long. A major curriculum review had begun and the school has already identified these and other issues as priorities for improvement.

40. Students with SEN have access to the full range of curricular and extra-curricular opportunities provided. The provision for students with hearing impairment and physical impairment, and for those with emotional and behavioural difficulties, is good, with good support from the specialist teacher and support worker, who have a good understanding of the individual needs of these students. The few students demonstrating challenging behaviour have good support plans, and a support worker provides them with in-class support, enabling them to complete tasks and make progress in classes where their behaviour was causing significant concern. Part-time attendance at a local referral unit is also helping another student with behavioural difficulties.

41. Aspects of the provision for students with specific learning difficulties are unsatisfactory. Most students' Individual Education Plans (IEPs) are unsatisfactory, although those written recently are better. Targets are not specific and information regarding the nature of students' difficulties do not help teachers to plan effectively.

Reviews of IEPs do not establish if progress has been made. The newly-appointed SEN co-ordinator is aware of these shortcomings and is developing a new system that will involve all staff, parents and students. Support sessions are too infrequent to be very effective.

42. The school provides an excellent range of extra-curricular opportunities in PE, music, dance and drama. As well as providing for those students who are particularly talented, including to national standard, the activities are designed to welcome and encourage students of all abilities. This fact is well appreciated by the students themselves. In addition, a good range of other lunchtime and after school clubs and activities is offered, including debates, Christian Union and Islamic Union meetings, Young Enterprise and the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme. Most subjects enhance the curriculum by organising trips and visits. During the past academic year, study visits have been made to the United States of America and several countries in Europe.

43. The school has only just embarked upon a process of identifying the gifted and talented students and has yet to make any specific provision for this group. The current timetabling arrangements mean that most subjects have no opportunity to organise the groupings of students to address their different needs, abilities and aptitudes. Nonetheless, a large number of students are achieving excellence in academic work as well as in artistic, sporting and cultural fields. The newly-introduced performance-tracking system will enable the school to assure itself that its most-able students are achieving as well as they should.

44. The provision for PSHE, which was a key issue at the previous inspection, is much improved and is now good. There is a comprehensive programme and the majority of the teaching observed was at least good. The co-ordinator has provided workshops for tutors which have improved the quality of the provision. Sixth form students act as 'tutor assistants' in PSHE lessons; they take their responsibilities very seriously, leading the teaching of certain aspects, and the support they provide is good. The school also makes effective use of external specialists to deliver aspects of, for example, sex and drugs education. Whilst most of the scheme of work is taught in coherent blocks, there are some instances where the content of the programme is not sufficiently well linked from one week to the next.

45. Careers education is another aspect of the curriculum in which there has been good, recent improvement. It is taught to each year group in the school through modules within the PSHE programme. The co-ordinator monitors the effectiveness of the programme, including by giving questionnaires to the students; the analysis of their responses is contributing to the continuing improvement of the quality of both the provision and the teaching. As with other elements of the PSHE programme, when the careers co-ordinator and the tutors plan together before teaching the unit, the quality of the provision benefits. All students in Year 10 undertake a very well-organised week of work experience. Because almost all students continue their education into the sixth form the focus is, appropriately, upon experiencing the world of work rather than preparation for a particular vocation. The school receives six to eight periods per week of time from the local Connexions Service which ensures that all students who require it receive at least one careers interview. The careers room has a satisfactory range of resources, and is well used by students of all ages.

46. Links with the community and with specialists in meeting the needs of particular students are improving rapidly after a period in which they waned. There is now active involvement of the education welfare and educational psychology services, the community police officer and social services. Through the PSHE and careers programmes, an increasing number of external experts, employment providers and local organisations are contributing to the curriculum.

47. Relationships with primary schools and the induction provided for new students are very good, especially considering that students come from over 60 primary partners. Students are visited in their primary schools, have an induction day at the grammar school in the summer term before they arrive, are carefully introduced when they start at the school and are visited by their primary school teachers during Year 7. These arrangements are much appreciated by students, parents and primary schools. Good links have been forged with the local Pupil Referral Unit to support students becoming disaffected with mainstream education. The school makes its extensive range of sixth form courses available to students from a neighbouring school which, because of its size, cannot offer all the courses that some of their students wish to study. There are also good links with the local boys' grammar schools including joint musical and dramatic presentations, social events such as discos and the sixth form ball, and charitable activities. Increasingly, teachers are taking part in shared training, for example in respect of teaching students with specific learning difficulties. Newly-qualified teachers visit other schools and the deputy and assistant headteachers of the local secondary schools meet regularly to share practice.

48. The provision for students' moral and social development is excellent throughout the curriculum, including extra-curricular activities. In music, students have many opportunities to take responsibility and to collaborate with others through practical activities, discussions and debates. The views and opinions of all students, including those from ethnic minorities, are both encouraged by the teachers and respected by their peers. The students explore a range of moral and social issues including the sustainability of the rainforest, global warming, experimentation on humans and genetics. In PE, a very strong emphasis is placed on rules, teamwork, sportsmanship and fair play. All of the above have a direct impact upon the attitudes, behaviour and personal development of the students. Students support one another well and tolerate the beliefs and cultures of others. They work together very well, and readily support their peers.

49. The spiritual development of the students is good although opportunities to develop this aspect further are, at times, missed. The RE department is committed to ensuring that it has a profound impact on spiritual development. For example, a class of students explored the feelings of people being sent to war and empathised with the victims of such events. In geography and history, students have many opportunities to be sensitive to a range of human dilemmas. In PE they learn how to deal appropriately with the emotions associated with winning and losing. The power of music is used very effectively both within that subject and in assemblies to reinforce messages and heighten awareness.

50. The cultural development of the students is also good. Within both the curriculum and extra-curricular activities, students are provided with many opportunities to explore the art, literature, music, dance and religions of British and other cultures. However, the school is better at providing the students with knowledge and information

about other cultures than encouraging the celebration of cultural diversity. Given the proportion of students from ethnic minorities, this is an issue for development.

Sixth Form

51. Curriculum provision in the sixth form is very good. Because the range of subjects offered is very wide, and because they are able to select virtually any combination of subjects to study at AS and A levels, equality of access to the curriculum is excellent. However, the school fails to comply with statutory requirements because it does not provide RE for all in the sixth form.

52. The curriculum meets students' needs, abilities and aspirations very well. The great majority arrive at the school expecting to stay until they are 18 and to progress to university. The courses that they are offered and the quality of teaching that they receive enable them to achieve that ambition. The school provides very well for the development of students' key skills.

53. As in the main school, extra-curricular provision is very good. Not only do sixth form students have considerable opportunities to develop their individual skills and aptitudes, but they are also able to share these with other students by taking on a tutoring role. An outstanding dance session, led by a Year 13 student, was observed during the inspection. The curriculum is enhanced by a good range of trips and visits, including sixth form conferences and study courses.

54. Both the PSHE programme and careers education have improved recently and are now good. This is acknowledged by students, whose questionnaire responses showed dissatisfaction with guidance, but who now comment on improvement. Issues related to drug and health education are explored sensitively and effectively. There is good preparation for the demands of sixth form study in Year 12, and the students receive detailed support in researching and applying for higher education courses. The school acknowledges that the quality of the advice and support for the students not intending to continue in higher education should be improved. To address this the careers co-ordinator is currently introducing a programme for such students.

55. Life in the sixth form provides very well for students' personal development. Not only does the content of the curriculum routinely engage students with profound ethical and moral issues, but they are also provided with the skills and opportunities to debate such issues with vigour. There are many opportunities for sixth form students to take responsibility for their own work and for other people and issues, and to display leadership; they take up these opportunities avidly. As in the main school, the aesthetic side of cultural development is very strong but the celebration of different cultures is patchy.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

56. In the last inspection, the pastoral care available to students was described as good and in some aspects outstanding. The school's welfare systems are now excellent. The support provided for students is excellent, maintaining care for the individual at all times. All health and safety procedures, including those covering risk

assessment, are very well monitored and managed by the facilities manager and governors.

57. Systems to maintain and improve attendance are very good. Students experiencing difficulties have confidential access to a school matron who works very hard on their behalf and provides an excellent standard of care, using external agencies when appropriate. Child protection arrangements are effective and comply with statutory requirements. The school's recently-introduced behaviour management system is very effective; students acknowledge that there have been marked recent improvements in behaviour.

58. The school has developed good procedures for recording and tracking the attainment of students through their academic careers, including in the national tests at 11, 14 and 16 and the outcomes of the school's own screening systems. These data are then used to set targets, in terms of National Curriculum levels or GCSE grades, for each student to attain. At subject level, the effectiveness of these arrangements varies considerably. It is best in mathematics, ICT, English and design and technology. In most subjects it is better for students following GCSE courses than for those aged 11 to 14. Because the system is at an early stage of development, subject departments are not yet making consistently effective use of assessment data to identify patterns of achievement of, for example, gifted and talented students, those from ethnic minority backgrounds and those with SEN, particularly those with specific learning difficulties, and then to match teaching and curriculum to their different needs. This was raised as an issue at the last inspection and, while some departments and teachers are using the new performance data effectively, several have yet to develop the necessary skills.

59. Recent improvements in the identification of students with SEN, and the policy and provision for them, are very good, but many aspects are not yet consistently implemented. Detailed and accurate reports are provided to the examination boards to ensure that students with specific learning difficulties receive extra time in tests and examinations. Links with external agencies are very good: for example the teacher supporting the students with hearing impairment visits weekly, and the notes and training provided jointly by her and the SEN co-ordinator for staff contribute to the good teaching of these students. The annual review process for students with statements and reviews at the school-based levels of intervention are both unsatisfactory. Most IEPs written last year have not been reviewed. For those that have been reviewed, insufficient evidence was gathered from staff to enable students' progress towards targets to be determined and inform the new individual education plan.

Sixth Form

60. Care for students in the sixth form is excellent. Sixth formers are very proud of their school and of the way it drives them towards high standards of achievement. The head of the sixth form and his deputy know the students very well and there is a very strong ethos of support, with a well-established focus on individuals and their specific needs. This is a demanding group of young adults who challenge any inconsistency and inadequacy and the school provides a spirited response to the full range of their requirements.

61. The procedures for assessing and monitoring students' attainments are good overall and very good in many subjects. The marking of work is usually detailed and, in many subjects provides clear guidance to enable the students to improve further and to agree challenging targets. This is not consistent across all subjects. Departments use examination results carefully to improve both curriculum planning and teaching. As in the main school, the use of assessment data to track the progress of different groups of students is at an early stage. This means that, whilst the quality of assessment at the interface between teacher and student is a strength, the use of data to ascertain patterns of achievement is in need of further development.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

Main school and sixth form

62. The quality of school information for parents is satisfactory and is improving. A wide range of information is provided through the school website, publications, newsletters, consultation evenings, grade cards and annual reports. Many parents have very positive views about what the school does to help their daughters make good progress. School staff maintain a proactive and very flexible response to parents' concerns and complaints are generally taken seriously. School events and productions are delivered to a very high standard and are well attended and thoroughly enjoyed by parents.

63. Annual subject reports are provided to inform parents about current effort and potential, with detailed descriptions of students' progress towards learning targets, anticipated grades and an attainment and behaviour commentary. Links with parents are enhanced by consultation evenings at which attainment, progress and behaviour are discussed with them and with students. In all subjects, expectations and targets are explicitly included in subject reports and clear guidance is offered about future direction and action required.

64. Parents make a contribution to students' education through comments and issues highlighted in school planners and by offering practical support during school clubs and trips. Some parents are critical of aspects of the school's work, especially homework, behaviour management and the closeness of their relationship with the school. These aspects have improved rapidly recently.

65. The school has worked very hard to develop the relationship between the learning support department and parents. The involvement of parents in the current IEPs and their review is neither clear nor consistent. This and many other aspects of SEN policy and practice are being effectively addressed by the new SEN co-ordinator.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

66. The school is being very well led and is improving rapidly as a result. Of the leadership group (senior management team) of six people, four are new to the school and three arrived in the current academic year. Within a very short time this group, with the support of the governing body and the school community, has achieved five vital things; it has:

- come to a rapid and accurate assessment of the school's strengths and weaknesses and of the need for improvement, and set these out in a concise improvement plan (SIP - school improvement plan);
- established priorities and systems which are well focused on achieving those improvements, and begun the training necessary to bring the staff up to speed;
- crucially, gained the support and commitment of the staff to the need for change and its direction, and to the priorities;
- established management procedures to ensure that financial control and day-to-day running are smooth and effective;
- achieved success with the first group of changes, such as improvements in teaching quality since the LEA review in October 2002, establishing confidence in the school community.

67. This is and has for many years been an effective school with great strengths; the new leadership team accurately identified the main priority as to raise standards still further, especially for younger students and for those with learning difficulties and with particular gifts and talents. It also recognised that addressing inconsistencies in teaching and behaviour management, many of them the result of the rapid turnover of staff in the previous two years, and in the use of assessment data to track students' progress and identify over- and under-achievement, would be the most effective levers to achieve that main priority. It is tribute to the accuracy of the analysis that the headteacher received no surprises at the findings of the inspection: all are well known from her own analysis.

68. Senior staff have geared that the school's management systems to securing the required improvement by ensuring that:

- meetings of staff focus on the priorities of the SIP;
- the staff training programme focuses on how to use data to analyse performance and set targets, and on training teachers to match their teaching to the needs of different groups of students;
- the results of the programme of monitoring teaching are being evaluated to ascertain the need for further improvement;
- when appointing staff, the needs of the SIP are paramount: recent appointments include a SEN co-ordinator who is bringing about rapid improvement in the policy and provision for designated students with additional needs, and a learning support assistant; a bursar who not only has excellent financial and marketing skills, but who also understands the principles of best value and how the school's resources should be directed to fulfilling the educational priorities of the SIP; a facilities manager who ensures that the school runs well, and who has already made major budget savings to enable a higher proportion of the budget can be spent on classrooms; a data assistant to manage the school's data system; and a number of heads of department, such as in mathematics and RE, who are excellent teachers and leaders of improvement;
- the curriculum review, already begun, will not only address the imbalances set out in paragraph 39, but will also change the lesson length, the pattern of the day and aspects of the timetable, anticipating many of the findings of this inspection.

69. As a result of the plans and the actions taken, staff understand the direction the school is taking and why, see that it is beginning to work and share the commitment to succeed. Necessarily, since the process is recent, the changes are at an early stage and some inconsistencies remain: departments and year groups are generally well led, some extremely well, but assessment and the matching of teaching and curriculum to

the needs of different groups of students, and the systematic observation of teaching and the use of the results, remain as areas for development.

70. The school runs very smoothly. Even under the combined pressure of staff illness, heavy snow causing the absence or lateness of many staff (including the headteacher) and students, a faulty electrical system causing multiple fire alarms, all in the midst of an inspection, senior managers managed the school impeccably. Day-to-day running is very well managed with the help of very strong finance, premises and administrative teams. This benefits learning because it enables teachers and students to get on with the business of teaching and learning.

71. Governors fulfil most of their statutory roles: they meet regularly, have well-organised committees with sensible relationships with the full governing body and with senior members of staff, and report well. Governors know the school well and many support it by regular visiting. Recent changes such as more frequent meetings and the re-instatement of formal links between individual governors and departments and year groups are good; it is too early to see much impact, except in the case of the finance committee. Frequent meetings of this committee and work with the bursar have resulted in the writing of a good finance manual, the beginnings of a marketing plan and in clear strategies to address the small deficit in the annual budget. As a result of their work, the school is using the principles of best value well: spending is prudent, maximises income and matches priorities well. For example, the bursar is running training for heads of departments on budget management, and she and the facilities manager are planning economies such as joint working with neighbouring schools.

72. There are some areas of statutory compliance to which governors should attend, such as the provision for RE and collective worship. More important still is the need for governors to play their part in securing the continuance of the improvement by holding the school to account. They have begun to monitor the SIP, including by calling for reports from the headteacher and senior staff on outcomes of the key action plans. This practice must continue and become systematic if governors are to ensure that the problems of the past are avoided.

73. In general, the school has adequate resources of staff, finance, learning resources and accommodation. There is one area of staff vacancy remaining, but overall the turnover of recent years has been well handled and teaching quality is mostly good or better. There is very little use of non-specialist staff. The resources available to departments are generally adequate in quantity and quality. The availability of computers and other ICT resources, heavily criticised at the time of the last inspection, is much improved and now matches national average ratios; better use should be made of this equipment to reinforce students' skills and enhance their learning across the curriculum. The library is a very good resource, very well managed to support students' learning and their wider reading; the skilled librarian has good-quality, well-reasoned plans for the development of the library, based on a sensible appraisal of its current use and the demands of departments and students.

74. The excellent facilities manager has led major site improvements within the last year, such as installing an energy management system and a thousand lockers for students, and there is a clear plan for future work on accommodation, linked to the priorities of the SIP. Accommodation for subjects varies in quality: it is very good for science, all of which is taught in good quality laboratories, design and technology and RE. There are accommodation shortcomings in art and ICT which limit teaching and learning. Mathematics, modern languages and business studies are taught in rooms scattered around the school, and this makes sharing resources and ideas difficult. There are no significant health and safety issues.

75. Based on its popularity, high standards and generally good progress, good teaching, very good management and rapid improvement, the school provides good value for money. It has the scope for further improvement and thus to provide very good or excellent value; the quality of management brings the capacity to realise that potential.

Sixth form

76. The sixth form is very well led and cost-effective. The head of sixth form and his deputy are experienced managers, know the many strengths and few weaknesses of the current provision very well and, with the support of their new colleague senior managers, are planning for further improvement along the lines of the developments of the main school.

77. The impact of the very good management can be seen in:

- the very good results at A-level;
- sixth form students' excellent attitudes to work and their splendid contribution to school life;
- the very good teaching, much of which is inspiring and scholarly;
- the very high proportion of students who proceed to higher education, many at the most prestigious universities;
- the current range of courses, all at advanced level (Level 3), which is broad and pitched appropriately for the clientele. The large, cost-effective groups in most subjects allow the school to run a number of minority courses which increase opportunity, motivation and inclusiveness. The successful options system and range of choice allows the achievement of very high standards;
- the excellent care and welfare systems.

78. The challenges for the leaders of the sixth form are around assessment and tracking of students' progress:

- to make assessment of students' work and feedback to them consistent with the best of current practice;
- to use the newly-established performance tracking system to monitor students' progress through the sixth form;
- to evaluate patterns of achievement and to refine target-setting procedures.

79. The introduction of a clear academic hurdle, which has been set at a sensible level, for entry into the sixth form will ensure that high standards are maintained; it might also allow for a small expansion in the intake. The sixth form lives within its budget, is well resourced with well-qualified staff, good resources for learning, and generally appropriate accommodation.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

The school as a whole, including features specific to the main school:

1. The school should raise standards still further, especially for younger students, by using the data from the monitoring of students' performance and the quality of teaching (see *especially paras 58, 69, 78; examples in subject reports such as 144, 178, 210, 219, 261, 290*) more effectively to:
 - evaluate the progress made by all students, especially the most able and those with learning difficulties (see *especially paras. 3,5, 59, 78*);
 - plan a range of teaching methods to meet the needs of the different groups (see *especially paras. 22, 27 –30*);
 - ensure that the curriculum and timetable meet the needs of the different groups (see *especially paras. 39, 41, 43*).
2. The school should use ICT more fully and consistently across the curriculum to enhance students' work and skills, as well as to comply fully with the National Curriculum (see *especially paras. 8, 39; examples in subject reports such as paras 100, 116, 124, 136, 142,149,160, 171, 192, 198, 236*).

Sixth form:

There are no major areas for improvement; there are points of detail for consideration in the minor issues section below and in sixth form subject reports.

Minor issues

- There is insufficient time for the teaching of mathematics for students aged 11 to 14 and for RE for those aged 14 to 16 (see *paras 39, 51,102, 181*).
- The school does not comply with the requirement to provide RE in the sixth form and a daily act of collective worship, as it did not at the time of the last inspection (see *paras 39, 72*).

All of these issues have been recognised by the school and appear in its improvement plan.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	150
	Sixth form	75
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		70

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

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

Number	18	47	50	31	4	-	-
Percentage	12	32	33	20	3	-	-

Sixth form

Number	12	32	24	7	-	-	-
Percentage	15	44	31	11	-	-	-

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 the sixth form here, as each lesson represents more than one percentage point.

Information about the school's students

Students on the school's roll

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of students on the school's roll	1023	402
Number of full-time students known to be eligible for free school meals	38	0

Special educational needs

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of students with statements of special educational needs	2	1
Number of students on the school's special educational needs register	47	14

English as an additional language

	No of students
Number of students with English as an additional language	131

Student mobility in the last school year

	No of students
Students who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	17
Students who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	28

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	5.7
National comparative data	7.8

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.0
National comparative data	1.1

Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year, 2001/02.

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2002	0	207	207(209)

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	0	0	0
	Girls	205 (206)	206 (206)	203 (205)
	Total	205 (206)	206 (206)	203 (205)
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	99 (99)	100 (99)	98 (98)
	National	66 (64)	67 (66)	66 (66)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	92 (93)	97 (94)	89 (87)
	National	32 (31)	45 (43)	33 (34)
Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	0	0	0
	Girls	205 (206)	206 (206)	203 (205)
	Total	205 (206)	206 (206)	203 (205)
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	100 (100)	100 (99)	99 (100)
	National	67 (65)	70 (68)	67 (64)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	94 (92)	98 (92)	87 (89)
	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 students in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	2002	0	207	207 (232)

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of students achieving the standard specified	Boys	0	0	0
	Girls	201 (205)	207 (230)	207 (232)
	Total	201 (205)	207 (230)	207 (232)
Percentage of students achieving the standard specified	School	97 (97)	100 (99)	100 (99)
	National	51 (48)	89 (91)	97 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per student	School	63.2 (59)
	National	34.6

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

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

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	-	220 (199)	220 (199)
	Average point score per candidate	-	22.04 (21.7)	22.04 (21.7)
National	Average point score per candidate		* (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	-	220 (199)	220 (199)	-	-	-
	Average point score per candidate	-	22.04 (21.7)	22.04 (21.7)	-	-	-
National	Average point score per candidate		* (17.9)	* (17.4)			

*Figures in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year. * National comparison data for AS/A level results in 2002 are not yet available*

International Baccalaureate		Number	% success rate
Number entered for the International Baccalaureate Diploma and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all they studied	School	-	-
	National		-

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
Parent/pupil preferred not to say
Information not obtained

Exclusions in the last school year

No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
1119	12	1
5		
48		
8		
5		
14		
15		
27		
92		
3		
14		
18		
4		
7		
6		
9	4	
28		
3		

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	74.44
Number of students per qualified teacher	19.14

Financial year	2001/02
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Education support staff:

Total number of education support staff	18
Total aggregate hours worked per week	476

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	82.3
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Average teaching group size:

Key Stage 3	27.2
Key Stage 4	24.7

	£
Total income	4128936
Total expenditure	4163404
Expenditure per student	2819
Balance brought forward from previous year	374065
Balance carried forward to next year	-34468

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	47
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	52
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	1
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than a full school year (FTE)	4.95

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1405
Number of questionnaires returned	390

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	42	46	7	4	1
My child is making good progress in school.	48	46	5	1	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	22	52	15	2	8
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	18	56	17	6	3
The teaching is good.	20	67	9	1	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	21	56	19	4	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	36	50	10	2	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	59	37	2	1	1
The school works closely with parents.	12	52	26	6	4
The school is well led and managed.	17	55	11	2	14
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	34	52	8	1	5
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	35	40	11	3	11

Other issues raised by parents

The 63 parents who attended the meeting, the 390 who responded to the questionnaire, and the 69 who sent letters to the registered inspector, are generally very pleased that:

- their children attain well and make good progress;
- their children are encouraged and expected to work hard and achieve their best;
- the teaching is good;
- the school helps their children develop into mature, rounded and tolerant young adults;
- the school is approachable and generally responds to their concerns;
- it is a rapidly-improving and increasingly well-led school.

Several have concerns about:

- the stability of the teaching force and the consistency of teaching quality;
- whether recent improvements in behaviour and in the school's communications with parents will continue;

- the consistency with which homework is set in accordance with the school policy and timetable.

PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES

ENGLISH

80. Provision for English is **very good**. This is a department which is improving rapidly because of very good leadership and support, and because of the high proportion of very good and outstanding teaching.

Strengths

- Results in the national tests at age 14 and in GCSE examinations are well above national averages.
- Standards of work seen are very good.
- Teaching is very good.
- The students respond very well and often enthusiastically to their teachers.
- The leadership of the department is very good.
- Provision for literacy in English is very good and across other subjects it is at least good.
- Provision for drama is outstanding.

Areas for improvement

- The proportion of students attaining the highest level in the national tests at age 14 is low.

81. In 2002, the standards attained in the national tests at age 14 were well above both the national average and that of similar schools. Results have remained the same for some years, whereas in the other core subjects, mathematics and science, they have risen slightly. The number of students attaining the highest level is below what it should be. The department has recognised this and has started to target the most able in order to enhance their performance.

82. GCSE English language results were well above the national average in 2002. The number of students attaining the higher grades increased significantly over the previous year. Despite a slight dip, the GCSE English literature results remained well above the national average, and the number of those attaining the higher grades rose slightly on the previous year.

83. In the work seen during the inspection, standards in all five years were well above the national average. The department has done a great deal to help students attain these results. Firstly, there has been a strong focus on language teaching through the National Literacy Framework. Students are consistently given opportunities to enhance their language use. Lessons for students in Years 7 to 9 often start with a quick spelling test or a quick discussion of figures of speech and other ways of using language. Students in Years 10 and 11 are able to discuss their use of language at a sophisticated level. Secondly, the department has undertaken a detailed analysis of returned test and examination scripts in order to identify areas for improvement. One of the results of this exercise has been a much stronger focus on the teaching of close analysis within Shakespeare texts. Work relating to analysing texts and learning how to write in a variety of ways for different audiences have become strengths of the department. The analysis of the GCSE results has led to a better balance between the language and the literary text components. This is already producing considerable improvements in students' work: for example, in a Year 10 lesson in which students were required to examine a range of women's use of metaphor in their writings, they gave very sophisticated responses and supported each view with a clear reference to the text. All

students make good progress, including those with SEN. Bilingual students also do very well and are fully included in the department's successful provision.

84. Teaching is very good overall and never less than satisfactory. All lessons seen started with the teacher setting clear targets, often using clever questioning strategies that allow students to be involved. The variety of teaching styles allows all students to learn in the way they like best. In a Year 10 lesson, the teacher allowed the students to work independently on analysing a text. He set the task with sufficient flexibility to allow students to work on the text in different ways. The result was that some students analysed the short story 'Stench of Kerosene' as a character analysis, others looked at it as representing different cultural responses to events, and a third group examined the text as a series of social behaviour events. This variety generated considerable interest in an analysis that could have otherwise been dry and uninspiring. Lessons start with a warm-up exercise that sets the pace for the lesson. All students, including the gifted and talented, are directly challenged through many approaches including very good one-to-one support. Teachers' assessments are accurate and enable students to know exactly what they need to do next to improve their work. The only quality missing from ongoing assessment is fulsome individual praise. Teachers give out general praise but there is rarely praise of an individual piece of work.

85. Students respond very well to their teachers. They enjoy the challenge of the tasks set, work well in pairs and in groups, and particularly enjoy textual analysis. In one Year 9 lesson, the students were required to research a character from *Twelfth Night* and present their findings to the class. Their presentations were well constructed and their use of language outstanding. This group then went on to use ICT to create attractive and interesting presentations. The learning environment is always lively and productive, with most students enthusiastic about their learning.

86. The head of department has, with support, successfully steered the department through a period of major staff change. Teachers of English feel that they are members of an exciting and improving department. Teaching is regularly monitored, but the findings are used mainly to support staff in their day-to-day work rather than to improve long-term planning and performance. The department has begun successfully to use its analyses of test and examination results to enhance students' attainment further. Close textual analysis of literary works makes a major contribution to the students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The department does not use bilingual students' cultural and language backgrounds to celebrate British cultural diversity and the texts studied are limited to European ones although Commonwealth authors are occasionally read.

87. All of the five developed points raised in the last inspection have been successfully addressed. The most important issue relating to a minority of students who had some difficulties with spelling and basic use of language has been significantly improved. This has been done partly because of the focus on literacy in both the secondary and the primary school, and partly because the department has made language learning one of its priorities.

Literacy

88. Teachers of English have made very good progress in implementing the literacy strategy. Good analysis of students' attainment on entry helps to focus departmental planning on work aimed at improving their language skills. Across the curriculum, literacy is at least good. In most subjects, students show a high level of sophisticated discussion with the many opportunities offered to them to expand on their work. They show good speaking and listening skills. They learn the specialist vocabulary for each subject and use it accurately. Such qualities were seen in many lessons where students used sophisticated language and complex sentence structure to explain, for example, how they worked out a tessellation problem in mathematics. Opportunities for enhancing literacy skills are good in mathematics, science, art,

design and technology, geography, history, information and communication technology, music, PE and RE.

Drama

89. Provision for drama is outstanding.

90. In 2002 the GCSE results were well above the national average and an improvement on the previous year's results.

91. Teaching is very good. Drama teachers enthuse their students and get the most out of them. There are clear structures for each lesson; students arrive punctually and start immediately on several agreed warming-up exercises and immediately continue with their work. They work well independently. Teachers' expectations are high and students respond well by giving of their very best. Assessment is effective in helping students readjust their work and give better performances. There is a strong culture within the department that 'the show must go on' which in this case is literally the case for all students.

92. The huge amount of activity that takes place outside the classroom has created a strong bond between drama students and their teachers. In one outstanding lesson, students arrived late because of factors beyond their control. Those arriving late found that their peers had already started the work and they were able to join effortlessly and quickly. The result was that the task set - a performance in front of the whole group - was still done, and done with passion, warmth and genuine professionalism despite the difficulties presented.

93. Departmental leadership is outstanding. The head of department has created a very successful learning environment within which students work collaboratively with each other and with the adults around them. Relationships throughout the department are excellent.

MATHEMATICS

94. The provision in mathematics is **good**. The head of department's leadership is excellent, and a good team effort is being built which enables students to perform at very high levels.

Strengths

- Very high levels of attainment.
- Good teaching overall, with some which is very good and excellent – an improvement from the last inspection - and good marking.
- Relationships between teachers and students are very positive, leading to good learning in classes: students are very well managed.
- Students' interest in mathematics and concentration in lessons; their attitudes and behaviour are very good, with very high levels of collaborative working.
- A very highly-qualified staff, very well matched to the demands of the curriculum.
- Excellent leadership by the head of department, with plans for improvement well advanced.

Areas for improvement

- The subject does not receive enough teaching time, especially for younger students..
- The rooms allocated to the department are scattered.

- Students do not use ICT sufficiently in mathematics.
- Monitoring and evaluation of teachers' work have not yet resulted in effective action to close the gulf between the very best practice and that which is satisfactory.

95. Levels of attainment in mathematics at the end of Year 9 are very high. In 2002, all students reached the nationally-expected level, over three quarters reached Level 7, and nearly one fifth reached Level 8 - an extremely high grade. Results have remained very high over the last few years, with the best achieved in 2002. Results are in line with those of similar schools.

96. Students enter the school with attainment levels well above the national average, and make good progress to the age of 14 when they are performing at very high levels. They are usually very attentive in mathematics lessons, and follow their teachers' instructions diligently; thus, learning is good and students are very keen to make progress. Students in Year 7 examine the surface area of cuboids and other solids; they draw nets of triangular prisms and their calculations show very confident numeracy skills. In a very good lesson in Year 9, students showed a very clear understanding of place value and approximation, before using computers confidently to build formulae for solving quadratic equations. In an investigation lesson, Year 9 students work at a very high level when considering combinations of polygons. All attainment targets are covered at high levels, and students handle algebra very confidently when solving problems. They grasp new concepts quickly and apply themselves very diligently to solving problems.

97. GCSE results are very high: twice the national average proportion achieves grades A*-C with four times the national average proportion of A* grades. Mathematics results are in line with those of other subjects in the school. Students achieve satisfactory GCSE results in the light of their test results at 14, but the percentage of grades A*/A is higher than expected. The department's policy of teaching almost all students towards the higher tier of GCSE is helping to produce these commendable results.

98. Students in Year 11 recently completed mock examinations. When teachers returned the marked papers, students considered the way in which questions had been approached in the examination and quickly understood where any errors had been made. In an excellently-planned lesson, the teacher issued each student with a sheet detailing the precise marks gained on every question, the topic covered by that question, and a page reference in the revision book to which students could refer. After the second part of the lesson, in which students worked in groups to produce model answers, the students could plan their own revision programme. Confidence in algebraic manipulation and knowledge of essential formulae are at a very high level, with progressively harder examples attempted in the students' exercise books. Very high-level concepts, such as how to distinguish between formulae which represent lengths, areas, volumes, or none of these are quickly grasped by the students. Graph work is very competently completed.

99. The quality of teaching is good overall, but there is a significant variation in quality across the department from excellent to satisfactory. The mathematics teachers are hard working, caring of students' welfare and sensitive in their dealings

with students. They normally maintain very high levels of discipline, and organise lessons in which students can achieve very high standards. Teachers' understanding of the mathematical needs of students is very good. Lesson plans vary in detail and complexity, with the best showing how work will be differentiated for different groups of students. Teachers have high expectations, but occasionally these are not high enough. Occasionally, teachers should check more carefully that all students are listening to them, as some students continue to write. There is a very high expectation that homework will be completed on time, and this brings a very good response from students.

100. The use of new technologies in the teaching is under-developed. Teachers are beginning to use an inter-active white board, and use computers with their groups when they judge that learning can be enhanced, as in a lesson to find closer approximations to the solution of cubic equations, but this practice must be extended. Lessons start promptly, with students making good efforts to arrive on time; as soon as they enter the classroom, they organise themselves for work under the careful guidance of the teacher. Students' books show good presentation across all abilities, but sometimes more stress could be placed on showing all the working out. Marking is good, with some useful comments. Long-term assessment is very clearly planned.

101. Students' attitudes in mathematics are generally very positive indeed. They show excellent attitudes to study, and are mature in their approach to learning and solving problems. They almost always follow the directions from the teacher immediately, but on rare occasions a very few students do not apply themselves fully. Students are extremely polite, and listen to and value others' comments. They are very supportive of each other, and extremely high levels of collaborative working are seen.

102. The head of department is an excellent teacher and gives outstanding leadership to the philosophy, educational priorities, discipline and strategic planning of mathematics. She has made great improvements in the short time in which she has been in post, especially in curriculum planning, assessment procedures and analyses of students' performances. Monitoring and evaluation are priorities, and lesson observations have taken place in conjunction with the line manager who gives the department very strong support. The challenges for her now are:

- to share good practice so that all teachers appreciate that work which is only satisfactory is not good enough in this school. The monitoring and evaluation of teachers' work have not yet resulted in effective action to close the gulf between the very best practice and that which is satisfactory;
- to ensure that the curriculum review results in an increase in the time provided for the teaching of mathematics, especially to younger students. The current time allocation is below national norms and, although students do well in mathematics, limits the early progress they make.

Mathematics teaching rooms are scattered around the school, limiting the sharing of resources and ideas. The head of department seeks continuous personal improvement in her role and is creating a good team. There is a shared commitment to the improvement of mathematics standards in the school for the benefit of all students.

Numeracy

103. A numeracy policy is in place across the school and works well in the mathematics department, where many of the initiatives of the National Numeracy Strategy have been introduced. Students enter the school with levels of numeracy well above the average. The curriculum for younger students has been adjusted significantly to take account of new practices. Three-part lessons are planned, and a few imaginative 'starters' are used, some of which link directly to the main part of the lesson and some of which stand alone in practising numeracy skills. This practice can be extended to add greater interest to the mathematics lessons. Good use of students' individual white boards is seen in lessons.

104. The whole staff has received numeracy training and all subjects have discussed their contribution to students' numeracy. Data handling has become more standardised across departments. In English, students in Year 10 complete a survey on the number of sentences in paragraphs, from which they construct accurate line graphs, mainly using computers. They then undertake a textual analysis of the quality of writing and draw high-level conclusions. The science department draws attention to the use of numeracy in their subject and its use is identified in their schemes of work. Students work at very high levels on scientific graphs and very good use of scale is seen. Students transpose formulae with confidence and handle complex calculations that enable them to access the highest levels at GCSE. In design and technology, the students weigh and measure accurately. Year 11 students in ICT work on verification and validation; they check dates entered into the system using very complex formulae. Year 7 students in geography construct scattergrams to show the relationship between settlements and allied services. There is really good use of data and graph work. Numeracy in art and design uses spatial relationships, proportion, tessellations and structures, with a demonstration that the triangle is the strongest form of support. In Year 7 and Year 8, students studying music perform using graphic scores and rhythm grids, and teachers rehearse counting patterns. In PE, students are made aware of the importance of timing, shape for aesthetic appreciation and changes of levels and group dynamics.

SCIENCE

105. Provision in Science is **good** and is characterised by high attainment at GCSE and well above national figures for students at the age of 14.

Strengths

- GCSE results are well above average, with a high proportion of grades A* /A.
- A committed team of teachers with the capacity to raise standards still further.
- Consistently good or very good teaching, particularly in Years 10 and 11.
- Students enjoy their science lessons and play a full and active part in their learning.
- Good resources and laboratories which are well furnished with excellent display areas.
- Very good support for teaching from a team of well-qualified technicians.

Areas for improvement

- Lesson planning and teachers' expectations are inconsistent in Years 7 to 9.
- Marking of students' work is variable in quality.
- Use of assessment data to inform curriculum and lesson planning and to set targets for improvement with students are underdeveloped.

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106. Whilst attainment in the national tests at the end of Year 9 has fluctuated from year to year, the overall trend is of rising attainment since the last inspection. Results are well above the national average and in line with that of similar schools. Improvement in attainment in the 2002 tests was slightly better than that achieved nationally. In comparison with their attainment on entry to the school, performance in the Year 9 tests shows that students make sound progress in their first three years.

107. Attainment in the GCSE double award examination has also been consistently high since the last inspection and, whilst the overall percentage of students gaining A* to C grades has fallen slightly from the high of 98 per cent in 2000, the number of students gaining the very highest grades has risen steadily and, in 2002, over half of students secured A*/A grades. These results are well above national figures and compare very favourably with those of students in other grammar schools. Results in the single science award are equally high. Students are well qualified for entry into advanced science courses.

108. Students aged 11 to 14 are making good progress and achieving well. Those in Year 7 are confident when building up 'concept maps' as part of their note-taking; they draw upon prior knowledge of burning to explain the formation of oxides. They confidently prepare microscope slides to examine the growth of pollen cells. Students in Year 8 can explain solubility in terms of particles, and those in Year 9 are working on the Periodic Table and are beginning to see patterns and to deduce the properties of elements through an understanding of their atomic structure. Presentation of written work is generally good with diagrams and graphs drawn accurately. Work is, however, insufficiently differentiated to meet the needs of all of the students, and the rate of progress of very-able students is sometimes limited by the progress of other students within the teaching group. Opportunities for students to develop their skills of scientific investigation are also limited as many of the practical activities are over-directed by the teachers.

109. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is good and progress more rapid. Students in Year 10 have a thorough grasp of the thermal cracking of products obtained from the fractional distillation of crude oil; they can explain the composition of the new chemicals formed in terms of alkanes and alkenes and can model the atomic structure of these molecules. Students also demonstrate a very good understanding of the functions of different blood cells and can explain how the body fights infection. Similarly, in a lesson on the use of resistors, students were designing increasingly complex circuits using thermal resistors and NOT Gates. Course work investigations are of a high standard: students demonstrate well-developed investigational skills and an understanding of the principles of a good scientific investigation. In lessons, students adopted a mature approach to preparing model answers for their mock examination papers that had been returned.

110. Teaching is very good. It is better in Years 10 and 11 than for younger students, for whom it is more variable and sometimes only satisfactory. Teachers are very well qualified and have a very good knowledge and understanding of their subject. In the best lessons for younger students, they are using a three-part lesson plan effectively: starter activities are relevant and provide a good stimulus for the main learning activities of the lesson, and plenary sessions test the students' understanding well. In

some lessons at this level, teachers are over reliant on the course materials, resulting in limited opportunities for students to design their own investigations: the pace of the lesson is dictated by the materials and there are insufficient opportunities for a differentiated approach to meet the needs of all of the students. In these lessons, plenary sessions are limited and reduced to a few general questions that a small number of students answer.

111. Throughout the GCSE course, teaching is very good and sometimes exceptional. Learning objectives are made clear and are reinforced throughout the lesson. Time is used effectively to maintain a sense of urgency. Teachers challenge the thinking of their students and use a variety of strategies to engage them in their learning. All teachers have a thorough knowledge of the requirements of the examinations and are able to share these with their students to help them improve their work. Knowledge of students' individual abilities is used effectively to determine the level of entry to examinations.

112. Students, in the main, demonstrate a very positive approach to their work and to lessons. They undertake practical activities with care, are very willing to learn, and are prepared to ask questions as well as answer them. On occasion, younger students become restless, lapsing into chatter whilst waiting either for the teacher or for other students to complete their work.

113. Management of the science faculty and of the biology, physics and chemistry departments is good. The decision to have, where possible, specialist teachers teaching their specialism at GCSE level has proved to be successful in maintaining the very high standards achieved. The current timetable prevents the faculty from being able to group the students according to their abilities. Both students and teachers find this unhelpful; students find themselves waiting for others to catch up, and teachers have difficulty in targeting resources and expertise.

114. The science audit for Years 7 to 9 has been undertaken and areas for development identified, but action relating to these areas is not in evidence: differentiation is still mainly by outcome, with very few students starting extension materials and too few lessons having effective plenary sessions to assess students' learning. This is because leadership and management of science at this level and of the National Key Stage 3 Science Strategy are unclear: the head of science faculty has too great a spread of managerial responsibility and needs help in this area.

115. Strategies for monitoring the work across the faculty and for using data more effectively in setting targets for students are at a relatively early stage but are improving. Further work is required in the development of assessment strategies to inform curriculum and lesson planning better, to give early warning of any potential underachievement, and to help students, especially those aged 11 to 14, set targets for improvement.

116. Since the last inspection, attainment has continued to rise, but issues of differentiation and the development of science investigation skills still remain to be addressed. The use of ICT in lessons has improved, but lack of access to resources for whole-class use is limiting the further use of ICT in teaching.

117. A team of well-qualified technicians supports both teachers and students, ensuring that practical work runs smoothly and that resources are ready for the students. The faculty benefits from generally good accommodation which is well furnished and which provides excellent areas for the display of students' work and for the promotion of science.

ART & DESIGN

118. Provision in art and design is **very good**: standards are high and progress is very good, as is teaching.

Strengths

- High standards of attainment, very good achievement and progress.
- Teaching is very good, and there is some excellent teaching in the GCSE examination courses.
- High quality learning resources and displays provide an inspirational learning environment, and promote high standards.
- Very good use is made of visits to art galleries and museums.

Areas for improvement

- Procedures to track achievement and progress through the school, and to keep students informed about their progress, are under-developed.
- The computer-aided design element of ICT is insufficiently developed for younger students.
- Learning opportunities, and to some extent achievement, are constrained by poor accommodation, especially in the large classes for younger students.

119. Students of all ages achieve well in art. Teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 show that attainment in 2001 was well above the national average and that it was even higher in 2002. However, in both years, fewer students than the national average gained the highest levels and no students came into the exceptional performance category. Inspection evidence confirms the high standards and suggests that teachers' marking of the higher levels had been a little severe; at least one or two per cent of students should come into the top category. At GCSE, in 2001 and 2002, almost all students achieved a C grade or better, well above the national average proportion. Inspection evidence indicates that results in 2003 are likely to be even better, with more students gaining A*. Students' achievement is generally very good, and better than in many other subjects. There has been a steady improvement in attainment since the last inspection.

120. Through a well-structured programme of tasks in Years 7 to 9, students develop a very good understanding of the elements of art and their use. Practical work is thoughtfully integrated with the study of the work of major artists, and the aims of art movements past and present. Students produce original work in a wide range of two- and three-dimensional media. For example, using enlargement and aerial perspective techniques very skilfully, Year 7 students' drawings and paintings of imaginary compositions based on mythological stories show good understanding of the various ways in which perspective can be used to create the illusion of three-dimensions on a two-dimensional plane. Year 9 students' self portraits in the style of Lichtenstein, using simple lines, shapes and colour combinations show very good understanding of a range of graphic media to communicate feelings and emotions. By the end of Year 9, most students have developed an understanding of the art of selected major artists and are able to discuss their work and use their ideas to develop their own work. For example,

students study the work and objectives of the Cubist movement and produce very expressive painted card and paper sculptures resembling sections of well-known cubist still life paintings.

121. Students continue to make good progress as they prepare for GCSE. They follow a process of exploration and experimentation, and record their studies very effectively in exquisitely-presented sketchbooks. The finished sketchbooks of Year 11 are colourful, rich in pattern quality, and contain excellent records of students' thoughts and ideas. Students' direct observational drawings of fruits show excellent understanding of line quality, and the use of tone to convey form. Larger-scale work in folders shows very good productivity, strong commitment to the subject and well-advanced study skills. Information and Communication Technology is also used exceptionally well for developing graphic work. For example, following a visit to the Pitt Rivers museum, Year 10 students designed catalogue covers, using computer-aided design, and linked their own work to the work that they have seen. Their work shows very good understanding of the software used, and above-average knowledge of typographical layout.

122. Students have very positive attitudes: application and response are always good, behaviour is never less than satisfactory and exemplary in the best lessons. Students always present their work well, and take great pride in their achievements. Excellent working relationships with teachers and peers are formed through mutual interest in the subject and respect for the expertise of teachers. Students show great enjoyment in the subject and are very eager to be artistically creative; students with special needs learn and achieve well through practical work, problem solving, and investigating and exploring visual media.

123. Teaching and learning are always at least satisfactory and are very good overall. Teachers have very good command of the subject, and expertise in the department covers a wide range of experience in aspects of art and design, including ICT. Teachers communicate their ideas well, sharing original concepts with students, through example during well-presented demonstrations. For example, a lively presentation of printmaking techniques enabled students to make highly original prints showing good understanding of how line, pattern, texture, and colour can be combined to create patterns, resulting in striking work, well above average for Year 8. The teaching of observational drawing is particularly good: students are inspired by high-quality work, and points of excellence are carefully explained. Courses are particularly well structured to provide the sequential learning of art concepts; planning of projects and lessons is excellent. Teachers give clear objectives and are not afraid to try new exciting ideas to introduce challenge and pace to lessons. Learning is promoted and reinforced through good introductions, lively question and answer sessions and evaluative summaries in which students are asked what they have learnt. One-to-one feedback is of a high standard. Marking and evaluating work and assessment are very good overall, and especially so in Years 10 and 11, where teachers give individual written comments on how students can improve their work. Because students in Years 7 to 9 are not always told which National Curriculum level they are working at, these students do not get the same understanding of their progress as their older colleagues do. Literacy is well integrated into work in art in all years. Numeracy links are not so well promoted, and although reference is often made to proportion, scale and spatial relationships; some good opportunities are missed for developing mathematical ideas further.

124. The art and design curriculum is very good; a good range of art and design aspects is covered in both two and three dimensions. Information and Communication Technology is used extremely well in most projects in Years 10 and 11, but the computer-aided design element of the course for students aged 11 to 14 is insufficiently developed.

125. Leadership and management are very good: there is clear direction for the subject. Strengths are in planning and managing the various courses, the stimulating learning environment, the organisation of links with visiting artists, and educational trips. The use of

high-quality resources and displays provides an inspirational learning environment and promotes high standards. However, procedures for the tracking of achievement and progress should be improved, and learning opportunities, and to some extent achievement, are constrained by poor accommodation. This affects especially younger students, whose classes are larger, and gives the department little capacity to grow, which is regrettable as art makes a major and valuable contribution to students' attainment and personal development. Department improvement plans show good understanding of what is needed to maintain and improve upon the already high standards. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

CITIZENSHIP

126. Provision in citizenship is **satisfactory**: what is done is good and students achieve well, but there is scope for expansion of the subject and of the contributions of several departments.

Strengths

- Students' knowledge of current issues, and their ability to think and debate about complex ethical issues, are very good.
- In the subjects in which citizenship has a high profile, it is well organised and well taught.
- The PSHE programme, the main vehicle for delivering citizenship, is well organised and effectively led - a great improvement on the situation at the time of the last inspection.

Areas for improvement

- The time allocated to the subject through PSHE and within the other subjects of the curriculum is inadequate.
- The co-ordination of the contributions of the various subjects is at an early stage.

127. With effect from September 2002, all secondary schools have been required to include citizenship as part of the statutory curriculum for 11-16 year olds. The school has decided to deliver this subject primarily through PSHE, but there has also been an audit of the schemes of work in all other subjects to determine how they can contribute to the teaching of citizenship. The school is at an early stage in the development of this subject and certain departments, notably RE, history and geography, are making greater contributions than others. Other subjects, such as PE, contribute well, but what they do is not perceived, by students or teachers, as potentially part of citizenship.

128. Because of their ability, most students are achieving at least appropriately for their age but the school does not yet have a mechanism for accurately assessing, and therefore reporting upon, their attainment. Through their work in PSHE and other subjects, and through their general reading, students are well informed about the world they live in; they take their full part in society, encouraged by the debate, initiative and leadership opportunities, and the stress on both independence and collaboration, which pervade school life.

129. Although the school has a good PSHE programme, the inclusion of citizenship in a scheme of work that already includes careers as well as personal, social health, sex and drugs education is expecting rather too much of a subject that is allocated one

38 minute period per week. Despite the audit of individual subjects' contribution to citizenship, most departments are hazy about which aspects they should be, or indeed are, delivering. As a result, the students are not particularly aware that they are learning about citizenship.

130. In the subjects that are contributing to citizenship, the areas of strength are related to the diversity of religious and cultural diversity and the need for mutual respect and understanding, human rights and conflict resolution. Geography, history and other subjects strongly promote the theme of the world as a global community through their schemes of work. More overt attention should be given to the work of parliament, government and the electoral process and the significance of media in society.

131. That having been said, where citizenship is being taught the quality is good. Students are able to explore the nature of God in Hinduism and the codes for living and traditions of Judaism and Buddhism. There are challenging lessons about evil and suffering, the issues involved in abortion and adoption, reforming the House of Lords, the Cold War and the current Arab-Israeli conflict.

132. The co-ordinator for PSHE has also been given responsibility for developing citizenship. She is well aware of the current shortfalls in the school's provision but for citizenship to be more than satisfactory it needs to be given a much higher profile within the school and across all departments.

DESIGN & TECHNOLOGY

133. Provision in design and technology is **very good**.

Strengths

- Leadership and management of the department are very good.
- High standards are achieved at the end of Year 9 and 11.
- Teachers' subject expertise is shared with students.
- Lessons are well planned and organised, supporting effective teaching and promoting good achievement.
- Students' work is assessed well and helps them improve and achieve high standards.
- The hardworking and committed teachers and technical staff work very well as a team.
- The good relationships throughout the department, and the positive attitudes of students towards the subject, create a positive atmosphere for learning.

Areas for improvement

- The use of ICT and control technology in Years 7 to 9, and computer-aided manufacture in Years 10 and 11, are under-developed.

134. Standards of work seen during the inspection were very good with students achieving well above the national average at the end of Year 9 and Year 11. On arrival to the school, their standards of work and their experience of design and technology

vary considerably, so achievement and progress in this subject are very good, particularly for lower-attaining students and those with special educational needs. This is the result of very good teaching, very good relationships and students' positive attitudes towards the subject.

135. Teachers' assessments of standards achieved by students aged 14 are well above national averages, and the work seen during the inspection reflected those standards. In Year 7, students develop a good range of practical skills and are able to use a variety of suitable equipment. For example, in a textiles lesson, students designed and made cushions; they practised a range of cutting and joining methods and then used these skills effectively to layer an appliqué design effectively on to the cushion cover. Students develop good understanding of the functions and properties of materials, and can choose the correct material for making a given product. For example, in a Year 8 lesson, students were able to identify different types of flour and discuss their usage in different homemade and commercial products. By the end of Year 9 they can work effectively from a design brief, develop a specification and make quality products. This is evident in the well-organised and planned coursework folders. The use of ICT is limited by lack of access to the necessary hardware and software, and this restricts the development of students' skills in design and technology.

136. GCSE results are well above average, with a high proportion of students gaining A* and A grades in all material areas, especially in graphics and food. Achievement in textiles is also very good. The work seen in Years 10 and 11 during the inspection was also of a high standard. The skills, knowledge and understanding students have gained in Years 7 - 9 are further enhanced. Students have a good understanding of how to develop their designs using a range of graphical techniques. Their investigative skills develop well and are applied effectively to modify work in the developmental stages and to enhance final products. Overall, students apply their learning very well using technical language effectively to record and analyse findings in their coursework. The use of computer-aided design and manufacture is weak.

137. Learning is very good and directly related to the high quality of teaching. The very good relationships between teachers and students, and between students themselves, build confidence and respect, creating a positive learning environment within which students respond confidently to teachers' questions and generate their own questions and opportunities for extended discussion. Teachers plan lessons well and share their very good subject knowledge enthusiastically and effectively with students. This encourages students to produce work to the high standard expected by teachers. The very good planning and organisation includes the use of a range of teaching strategies to develop co-operation between students. Students work well in groups, delegating tasks according to individual strengths and thus maximising the use of time and resources to complete tasks given. Students also respond well to working independently, researching their projects and collecting information creatively. In the best lessons, teachers give clear instructions and share the objectives for learning with the students; they use probing questioning to check students' previous knowledge and deepen their understanding. This was demonstrated in a Year 11 lesson in which students studied their mock examination papers with a view to improving the depth of their answers, to gain higher grades in their final examination.

138. The marking and assessment of students' work is very good, with clear guidance given on how to improve and gain higher levels and grades. Students are

made aware of how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve and appreciate the time teachers give to reviewing their work and setting targets with them.

139. Leadership and management of the subject are very good. The head of department has a clear view of the direction for the department, and this is documented and shared effectively with teachers. Teachers understand clearly the strengths and areas for development in the department, and have developed appropriate strategies to sustain high attainment and make adjustments in other areas. Progress has therefore been good since the previous inspection. There is a strong commitment to continued improvement, supported by teaching, non-teaching staff and students in the department.

GEOGRAPHY

140. Overall the quality of the provision for geography is **very good**.

Strengths

- Standards of attainment, which are high.
- The popularity of geography as an option choice at GCSE.
- The quality of teaching, which is good for younger students and very good at GCSE.
- The shared commitment to improvement of the geography department.

Areas for improvement

- Assessment arrangements are not sufficiently systematic across Years 7 to 9.
- The use of ICT is insufficiently developed.

141. Results at GCSE over the past four years have been consistently well above the national average and geography is a very popular option. In 2002 almost all students achieved A*-C grades and nearly two-thirds achieved A* or A. Observation of lessons and scrutiny of students' work in the current Years 10 and 11 confirms that the standards these students are reaching are also well above average. The achievement of all students, including those with SEN, is good over the two years of the course. One key strength within this picture at GCSE is the quality of students' explanations and their command of case study material. One minor weakness is their lack of precision in the use of geographical terms; this is recognised by their teachers, who work hard to help students to improve. Another area of significant strength is the quality of the students' coursework. They respond enthusiastically to the opportunity to pursue their own individual enquiries.

142. The standards of work achieved by the students in the current Year 9 are well above national expectations. This represents good achievement for all students, including those with SEN. Students are developing good skills in handling data and in taking information from geographical sources such as atlases, maps and photographs. They demonstrate an increasing familiarity with appropriate geographical vocabulary. They are developing their ability to communicate their geographical understanding when answering questions such as why and how tropical rainforests are under threat. Across Years 7 to 9, students show an increasing ability to recognise, describe and then explain geographical patterns and processes. The quality of the students' work in their notebooks is very good. There are currently insufficient opportunities for students to be able to use ICT within lessons but outside lessons they make good use of the Internet for research purposes, such as the Year 9 students who, for homework, had researched population density maps for different countries around the world.

143. The quality of teaching and learning in geography is good in Years 7 to 9 and very good at GCSE. A strength of the most effective teaching is the very good relationship between teachers and students. Students are interested and hard working and respond willingly to teachers' questioning. They respond extremely well to the many opportunities they are given to choose how to go about their work. The most successful lessons challenge students. In a Year 9 lesson, students were asked to choose a number of developed and less-developed countries and to explore the natural increase in their population. Students enjoyed this and could offer convincing reasons for their choices of countries. The skilful teaching then helped them to see for

themselves the pattern that emerged and the highest attainers were able to move on to explaining that pattern. In an excellent Year 11 lesson, the teacher had divided the students into ability groups. Each group was provided with challenging but appropriate resource materials on asylum seekers, and in one case the assistance of a Year 12 student. The teacher then put the students under good time pressure and worked hard to support and channel their thinking. As a result each group was ready to report on its findings and did so competently. At GCSE, teachers show a very good awareness of the syllabus assessment requirements and this ensures that their students are very well prepared for their examinations. A weakness within the teaching is that students are not given sufficient time guidance for lower-level tasks such as graphing, so that when teachers try to move on to the higher-level thinking about what such graphs mean, some students are not ready to respond.

144. The leadership and management of geography are good. There has been good improvement since the last inspection. Students are now more aware of how well they are doing in geography, marking is consistent across the department and the subject makes a good contribution to both literacy and numeracy. There are good fieldwork opportunities in most years and the high numbers attaining A*/A grades at GCSE reflect the fact that the highest attainers are being effectively challenged. The department is now located in adjoining rooms which helps the management of resources. Whilst the assessment of students' work is well developed at GCSE, there is a clear need to develop a more systematic approach to assessing students' attainment and progress across Years 7 to 9.

HISTORY

145. Provision in history is **very good**: standards are high and teaching is very good.

Strengths

- Results in the tests at age 14 and at GCSE are well above national averages.
- Teaching is frequently very good.
- Students' behaviour and attitudes to learning are consistently very good.
- Students' oral and written work are often very good.
- Leadership is good and has the capacity to become very good.

Areas for improvement

- Insufficient use is made of student performance data to ensure that realistic and challenging targets are being set and met, including for the most-able students at GCSE.
- Insufficient use is made of ICT (also a weakness identified in the last inspection).

146. Standards are very high. Students expect to succeed and the department is committed to ensuring that they do. Many excel; there are numerous examples of students who are working at very high levels indeed. Written and oral work are frequently outstanding, with students' motivation, eagerness to learn and respect for teaching staff being particular strengths. At the end of Year 9, more than half of the students reach Level 7 - well above the expectation for students of this age. All exceed the expected level. At GCSE, history consistently achieves results which match the high average points score for the school as a whole, but not for the proportion gaining the highest grades.

147. Standards observed in lessons and in students' folders confirm that high standards are being maintained. Students have built significantly on their high entry levels within the first term. There is no 'dip' in achievement. Local history work is very good: students write extensively and fluently, incorporating sources and other evidence into their work without difficulty. Literacy skills are very well developed. In class, able students perform very well and there is clear evidence that the department offers the level of intellectual stimulation these students need. The degree of challenge in one Year 8 lesson on India and in another dealing with 'Bloody Mary', for example, was remarkable. Older students also perform well, with some very good pieces of work being completed on Nazi Germany. Students do not merely learn concepts, they explore them critically, because they are encouraged to do so. Questions on 'who was to blame' for the Cold War are as likely to be treated as opportunities to discuss historical determinism as they are to be seen simply as parts of the course to be covered. However, the current GCSE syllabus dampens down the level of writing older students produce, and the need to concentrate on the use of source material sometimes reduces the sense of adventure previously seen in the work of younger year groups. The oral skills of older students are, therefore, sometimes significantly better than their written work.

148. Teaching throughout the 11 – 16 age range is always at least good, often very good and, at times, excellent. In the majority of lessons, it is challenging, charismatic and motivating. Lesson are well prepared and planned, teachers' subject knowledge is very good and is used very well to sharpen students' responses. Teachers constantly look for opportunities to direct students' attention towards precise distinctions that will take their understanding forward. Students are expected to articulate their thoughts aloud, which they do confidently because they are used to an ethos in which all are expected to do well. Sitting back and listening is never an option. Consequently, the quality of students' oral and written work, particularly their ability to articulate what they need to say fluently, is frequently very good. *'You also need to consider whether...'* was typical of the prompts provided in one well-managed Year 10 lesson dealing with the Arab-Israeli conflict. In a Year 8 class, the teacher asked *'What is your reasoning?'* rather than merely enquiring *'Why?'* These examples are typical of the language that structured many of the teacher-student exchanges during the inspection.

149. Teachers manage their students very well, generally striking a good balance between relaxed informality, and well-paced and focused 'teaching-from-the-front'. Students regularly receive appropriate homework, know they must complete it to a high standard and benefit from an appropriately broad and balanced curriculum. There is, however, insufficient use of ICT in the department for the purpose of developing research skills. Marking is often good: at its best, it is diagnostic, detailed and precise and leaves students in no doubt over how well they are performing. There are, however, examples where marking is frequent but lacking in the detailed guidance that would show students what they must do to improve.

150. Leadership in history is good and has the capacity to be very good. The head of department is industrious and reflective, and is well informed about recent developments in her subject. Day-to-day administration is good and the excellent department handbook gives subject teachers the benefit of the head of department's clear vision and methodical organisation. Guidance relating to school and departmental policies on, for example, marking and using a range of teaching strategies, is very clear and these policies are consistently implemented. The curriculum is kept under constant review to ensure students are offered an experience in history that has breadth, depth and challenge. The department has conducted a rigorous appraisal of its performance, and that of individual classes, in the 2002 public examinations and has identified and confronted issues with admirable honesty where it believes it must improve. However, it has not fully developed the monitoring systems that would enable it to anticipate and respond rapidly to any emerging patterns in its performance, and would ensure that individual students whose performance needs to improve are quickly

identified and their subsequent progress monitored and followed up. Nor does it yet monitor with sufficient precision the quality of its own teaching.

151. Resource levels are satisfactory, except in respect of access to ICT. Accommodation, albeit tired, is adequate.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

152. Provision for ICT in the main school is **very good**. Examination results are well above the national average and teachers are knowledgeable and confident.

Strengths

- Standards achieved by 14-year olds are well above the national average.
- All students gain GCSE and Level 2 Key Skills accreditation in ICT.
- Grades achieved in the full GCSE course are very high in relation to the national average.
- Teaching is very good: pace is excellent and considerable learning takes place.
- The school provides a broad range of worthwhile opportunities in ICT, such as computer clubs, which meet the interests and aptitudes of all students.

Areas for improvement

- The accommodation within the ICT classrooms is poorly designed and some rooms are too small to hold enough computers for a large class.
- The broadband Internet connection is unreliable, leading to loss of confidence in the system by the teachers.
- The Key Stage 3 co-ordinator is new in post and has not yet had the opportunity fully to map and assess cross-curricular provision in ICT.

153. All students achieve at least the nationally-expected level in the assessments at age 14, well above the national average proportion. Results in the GCSE examinations and Key Skills tests were also well above average.

154. All students can log on confidently and load appropriate software. Excellent examples of PowerPoint presentations and Excel spreadsheets are used to enhance teachers' demonstrations. This sets the level of expectation amongst the students, allowing them to achieve standards that exceed the national average.

155. All older students follow courses leading to ICT Key Skills and GCSE accreditation. Many older students acquire advanced skills in ICT - for example, some students are creating a user interface with macros.

156. Teaching ranges from good to excellent. Teachers' knowledge is very good and enables them to use technical terms with confidence. Lessons are very well planned with a good range of activities. In most lessons students have opportunities to achieve higher levels through extension work. A high standard of behaviour is expected and achieved. In the best lessons, students work with purpose and enthusiasm and teachers are aware immediately if students need support. Teachers have established a very good relationship with students. This has enabled students to interact positively within lessons and remain highly motivated. Teachers ensure that work is completed and marked extensively and help students to make progress.

157. Opportunities for learning are enhanced by the excellent range of software and hardware available. The school relies upon the Buckinghamshire Schools Internet service, which has been having some connection problems recently. Students are encouraged to use e-mail when contacting ICT teachers and may use supervised ICT areas to continue their coursework or increase their ICT skills. Homework is used effectively to reinforce and extend what is learned in school. There are excellent examples of students' work on display around the school.

158. Parents are well informed of their children's ICT standards. Reports to parents refer to national curriculum levels where appropriate and give helpful advice on ways students may improve standards. Homework is graded and there is a clear indication of progress.

159. A good management system is in place with a head of ICT and a Key Stage 3 ICT Co-ordinator. They have an excellent working relationship with their colleagues, including the ICT technician and network manager. As a result, the school has excellent ICT facilities that are reliable and well maintained. Since the last inspection, the school has improved standards further with attainment well above expected levels by 14 and 16. The ratio of computers to students is now at the national average of 1:7 and the quality of the ICT programme is maintained at a high level with very good teaching.

160. However, the use of ICT across subjects is unsatisfactory. Levels of co-ordination across the curriculum are inadequate and students do not get enough practice to develop and consolidate their skills. The head of ICT meets regularly with nominated departmental ICT leaders to plan and develop approaches, and in-service training has been effective in raising the levels of ICT competence amongst many of the staff, but too few subjects take advantage of the potential offered by ICT to enhance students' skills and understanding.

161. Accommodation in some ICT classrooms is unsatisfactory: some classes are too large and have to be split between two rooms, and ventilation of the network room and some classrooms is poor.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

162. Overall, the quality of provision in modern languages is **good**, with room for improvement.

Strengths

- High standards are achieved in French at GCSE.
- The competence and linguistic skills of the staff are both high.
- The willingness of students to learn is very good.

Areas for improvement

- Coherence across the department.
- Standards in GCSE examinations, particularly in Spanish, and in the number of grades A* and A in all languages.

163. Standards attained in GCSE exams are, in this selective school, high by national norms, although there is room for an increase in the number of the highest grades, A* and A. French is strong, outperforming many other subjects in the school over the past three years, while Spanish results have been relatively disappointing, with German at an average level for the school. Numbers opting for the three languages vary from year to year, as does the calibre of the candidates; there is a need to establish consistently high standards across the department. The newly-established teaching team in Spanish has begun to bring about improvements, both take-up and results in the subject having risen recently.

164. Teaching and learning are good. No less-than satisfactory teaching was observed: staff are universally well-prepared with lessons which advance students' learning and present a challenge suitable to their ability. Teachers, without exception, use the target language as the main means of classroom communication, accustoming students to foreign speech at near-natural speeds. English is used, where appropriate, for instruction and complex explanation. On occasion, lessons were satisfactory but contained elements that were either pitched beyond students' knowledge, leading to bafflement, or too low, leading to less purposeful progress. Students responded very well to challenge, but became more lethargic when the lesson was too pedestrian. The 76-minute lesson, often too long for modern languages, proved no handicap in most cases, pace, challenge and variety being maintained throughout.

165. All classes in the main school are of mixed ability, within the context of this selective school, and standards attained in the classroom are similar across the three languages. In Year 7 girls arrive in the school enthusiastic to begin their language learning and rapidly move ahead of national norms in the key skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. In the best lessons seen, great care was taken to ensure that pronunciation was of a high standard. Again, in the best cases, girls were able, by Year 9, to offer more complex sentences, using more than one tense of the verb. This progress is maintained in Years 10 and 11, where classes were all likely to obtain grades A*-C at GCSE, although there is room for more attention to those girls capable of attaining A*.

166. The department is greatly aided in its work by the excellent disciplinary climate of the school. Students arrive in lessons equipped and ready for work. When suitably challenged they respond with enthusiasm and volunteer answers eagerly. Even when a class next door was producing a lot of noise, students listened attentively to the tape recorder. Work is always tidy and meticulous.

167. There are substantial opportunities for the study of modern languages throughout the school. Students, on entry to the school in Year 7, have a choice of two out of three from French, German and Spanish, plus compulsory Latin. At the end of Year 7, one of the modern languages, or Latin, is dropped. This arrangement does not represent best value in terms of staff deployment and student time. In Years 10 and 11 students have a free choice among modern languages and Latin. It is possible to continue with two languages but, bearing in mind the type of school, numbers electing to do so are disappointing. There is also an unusually high number of girls who have been permitted, under the previous option scheme, to drop languages altogether; this is no longer possible. All three languages are offered in the sixth form. The department offers an exceptionally wide range of cultural activities for students of all three languages and, in many lessons seen, there was appropriate reference to elements of the culture, history and politics of France, Germany and Spain.

168. The headteacher is the line manager for modern languages and she and the link governor take an active interest in the department's affairs. The school has recently recognised that a lack of overall management, with separate heads of department for the three languages, has not been beneficial. The newly-established head of languages has made a good start to the new role. There is no consistently-implemented scheme of marking and assessment, and the absence of a suitable set of rooms for the whole department inhibits the development of departmental

collaboration. There is also room for further links with the teachers of Latin, who, like modern linguists, can contribute much to the school's literacy programme.

MUSIC

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

Strengths

- The high standards achieved both in lessons and in extra-curricular performance.
- The quality of teaching, which is consistently good or better and which promotes the high standards attained by students aged 11 to 16.
- The leadership of the head of department, who provides a clear vision and direction for the department.
- The department's very good procedures and practice of assessment, which form a foundation for improvement at Key Stage 3 and in the GCSE course.
- The instrumental teaching programme, which is integral to the classroom provision for music, and which involves a large number of students.
- The quality of the extra-curricular activities, which contribute to the raising of musical standards for a significant number of students.

Areas for improvement

- The use of ICT (music software) in the GCSE course is under-developed.

170. At the end of Year 9, the attainment of students is well above average. Standards at age 16 are also well above those expected of students of a similar age and from similar schools. GCSE results for 2002 indicate that all students achieved A*-C grades, a figure well in excess of the national average. This is consistent with results from previous years. Standards in instrumental lessons are above those expected of students of a similar age and length of time learning. Musical standards achieved in extra-curricular activities are exceptional.

171. Students aged 11 to 14 demonstrate very good knowledge of musical styles, terms and features, which they are able to apply very effectively in practical activities. Performing skills are well developed. In Year 7, for example, students performed a Javanese Gamelan piece with great accuracy in an ensemble in which each student skilfully maintained an independent part. A variety of instruments was used, including orchestral as well as keyboards, and the students were developing a good playing technique. Another example was in a Year 9 class where a whole class ensemble played a Suffolk Morris Dance at a rapid tempo, with expression and with great accuracy. Composing skills are also developing well, noted in the early improvisations on a Japanese musical theme in a Year 8 class lesson and in the scrutiny of work where some students had composed and notated a blues piece. Standards are also well above average in Years 10 and 11, in which an increasing number of students are now studying the GCSE course. They are developing a very good knowledge and understanding of the music they study, which they apply through activities that bring together the musical activities of performing, composing, listening and appraising. A Year 10 group, for example, had very good understanding of experimental and aleatoric music, and were able to describe features such as tone row, retrograde and inversion. They performed fluently and imaginatively from a graphic score. The students play musical instruments to a very high level, as observed in some of the outstanding musical performances in extra-curricular activities. They compose in a variety of styles, consistently demonstrating a clear understanding of the medium and the genre within which they are working, for example in some of the theme and variation compositions and in a jazz style piece contained in their course folders. They do not use ICT sufficiently to develop their skills still further.

172. The quality of teaching in the department is very good. Teaching has a significant impact upon the students' learning. Strengths in the teaching are the teachers' subject knowledge, planning including the setting of clear aims and objectives, the variety of teaching strategies used to support the students' learning, and the use of time and resources. Teachers have high expectations of students, who rise to the challenge to improve. The teachers employ methods that ensure that all students, of whatever musical ability, learn effectively. All these characteristics support the quality of the students' learning, which is also very good. Students apply very good intellectual and creative effort in their work. They work hard, sustaining high levels of interest and concentration. Students enjoy music and are keen and interested in their work. Behaviour in lessons and in extra-curricular activities is very good. Students form constructive and good relationships with each other and with their teachers. They respect each other's views and show initiative, developing very effective independent learning skills.

173. Leadership and management of the department are excellent. The head of department has a clear vision for the subject, a vision that is shared by the other, committed members of the music team. There have been improvements since the last inspection. These include the raising of standards in all years, improving access and opportunity for more students to participate in music, assessment procedures, the leadership and management of the department and the provision of extra-curricular activities. The procedures for assessment are very good. The practice of assessment is very thorough and provides a solid foundation for improvement from Year 7. Another undoubted strength of the department is in the provision and organisation of the instrumental teaching programme, which involves over 300 students who are taught by 17 visiting teachers, the equivalent of over five full-time staff. The overall administration of instrumental teaching is excellent, with very good lines of communication from the head of department to the staff involved. However, there is little monitoring of the teaching to ensure that it is consistent with the nature of the curricular music programme in the school. The monitoring of the instrumental programme is an area that should be developed. The range and variety of the extra-curricular programme, which involves over half the students in the school, is very impressive: the quality is of the highest order. This is, without doubt, an outstanding music department.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

174. The provision for physical education is **very good**.

Strengths

- Very good leadership and management that has led to:
- very good teaching with much which is excellent;
- rising standards;
- the excellent quality of the extra-curricular programme and the standards reached;
- the quality of the students' evaluative skills, leading to better performance;
- the variety of activities within the curriculum.

Areas for improvement

- There is no separate time for the teaching of GCSE.
- There are no opportunities for students in Year 9 to study dance.

175. Standards reached by students in Year 9 are above average. The students achieve very well. Particular strengths are in netball, hockey and gymnastics, in which the great majority of students have a good understanding of rules and tactics. Even if their skill level is limited, they understand what they must do to improve, because they are helped to evaluate their performance. They are able to give coaching points using technical vocabulary that results in immediate improvement. In gymnastics, Year 7 girls construct complex sequences using the floor and apparatus. The quality of their moves is refined. All students know how to warm up effectively before taking part in physical activities and understand the importance of exercise for a healthy lifestyle. Students with SEN and those from all ethnic backgrounds achieve very well relative to their ability at all ages. The standards reached in dance are average: students lack the flare and creativity here that is found in gymnastics.

176. Standards reached by students in Year 11 are average, but rising rapidly. A significant minority is above average in games such as netball and hockey. This year has seen the introduction of a much broader range of activities such as volleyball, football, aerobics and trampolining; students are only just beginning to learn the new skills for these activities and are therefore not as advanced as the standards expected nationally. However they are quick to grasp new skills and are achieving well; standards are rising. GCSE has also just been introduced and is taught in ordinary PE lessons rather than as a separate examination option with additional timetabled time. Students in Year 10 who have chosen to study this course have an above-average grasp of key facts for theoretical aspects, but lack the depth of knowledge that could be expected if more time was available. Most reach above-average standards in physical activities such as trampolining and games. These students achieve very well.

177. Standards reached in the excellent range of extra-curricular activities are very high. The under-16 indoor hockey team are current national champions, and the gymnastic team regional champions. Many teams enjoy success at local, county and regional levels and individuals excel at all levels in activities such as rowing, swimming, tennis and badminton. A much greater range of activities is now provided, ensuring that students of all abilities take part in sport. There is a hive of activity in the sports centre at every available moment. Older students are enthusiastic to use the fitness suite in their spare time and enjoy helping to run teams and clubs. Dance is a particular strength among older students, who perform at an exceptional level; students often choreograph the dances with astounding maturity and understanding of teaching. There is also a celebration of dance from different cultures within the school.

178. Teaching is good and ensures good learning, with excellent features. The students' very good behaviour and enthusiasm also has a positive impact on learning. In all lessons, objectives are clearly explained so that students have a clear idea of what is expected of them. In the most effective lessons, teachers challenge students of all levels of ability with tasks that allow everyone to achieve. Teachers expect a lot of their students. For example, in a Year 7 gymnastics lesson, the choice of task allowed the students to be creative but still answer a challenging task. Their evaluations of each other's work led to improvements in ideas and in their knowledge of the technical vocabulary of gymnastics. Good use of video and digital photography helps students analyse performances and highlight technical skills. Assessment in lessons is effective: constructive criticism results in immediate improvement. Question and answer sessions are used well to probe thinking and assess students' knowledge. The teachers' infectious enthusiasm results in an atmosphere that is caring, safe and conducive to learning. They know the students well and take care to include and encourage each individual whatever their special educational need. Tasks are adjusted if necessary, ensuring good progression. There is some immature behaviour among Year 11 students that slows the rate of learning. Students are occasionally held back by tasks that do not give sufficient challenge and dance lessons do not foster creativity and exploration of movement. The GCSE course is exceptionally well planned for the amount of time available. Resources are effectively

designed to aid teaching, learning and revision. Homework links well with class work. There is some inconsistency in marking. On occasions students are given the same mark despite different quality of work.

179. New leadership of the department is very good and has already led to good improvement. Most notable features are the variety of activities within the curriculum and the increased opportunities for extra-curricular clubs, ensuring that all students have some activity that should appeal to them both in school and in future life. Close links with local clubs mean that students can play at senior level, giving added depth to the already good standards at school. Students are now able to make their own written evaluations after each module of work: this enhances their literacy skills. Assessment procedures have been updated and are effective in Years 7 to 9 and for GCSE. They are not yet effective in tracking progress in Years 10 and 11 or for students with SEN and differing ethnicity. There are no opportunities for students to follow dance in Year 9.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

180. Provision in religious education is **good** with foundations laid for continued improvement.

Strengths

- Good teaching characterised by very good subject knowledge, enthusiasm for the subject and good relationships.
- Very good subject leadership and management.
- Improved assessment processes to support student progress and raise expectations.

Areas for improvement

- Provision and attainment for all students aged 14 to 19.

181. By the age of 16, most students achieve at the level expected by the Buckinghamshire Agreed Syllabus for RE, but the more-able students achieve below their potential because there is insufficient time for RE for students not following an examination course. The very small number (only eight per cent) choosing to take the full GCSE in religious studies achieve well above the national average, with all students achieving high grades. Most students aged 11 to 14 are achieving at or beyond the level expected of more-able students by the local syllabus. Recent improvements in assessment and expectations are already beginning to have an impact by raising standards.

182. Teaching by the entirely new team is good overall, and much is very good and excellent. The best lessons use sharply-focused tasks which challenge students and help them develop a range of skills. A dilemma activity enabled students in Year 7 to think deeply and work out solutions to a real-life problem by analysing and applying Jewish religious beliefs. Students in Year 9, encouraged by effective questioning, worked out and justified some quite advanced principles for a 'just war' as part of a lesson on evil and suffering. The very good use of supported group work engaged GCSE students creatively in learning about and debating Muslim and Christian beliefs about marriage and divorce. Music, art and drama are used well both to aid reflection

and to express students' own insights. Whilst some independent learning is encouraged, as with the Islam project in Year 8, this is an aspect which needs further development. The use of new technology to support learning has improved and there are appropriate plans for further development. The use of assessment has improved. The recent introduction of a challenging baseline assessment activity, together with focused end-of-unit testing has helped raise both students' and teachers' expectations. The baseline test has been used effectively to give students feedback and targets for learning in RE. Most students have responded well to this. Finding ways of helping them understand how these targets can be achieved is now needed to build on this good beginning.

183. Students respond very positively to RE and the quality of relationships is a real strength. Students are keen to share beliefs and insights and are confident to explore complex ideas and raise questions, knowing they will be listened to and their contribution valued. The quality and detail of written work is very good and homework is completed and used effectively to extend ideas and skills developed in the classroom.

184. This is a very well-managed department with a clear focus on the development of courses and examination entries at GCSE, and on increasing the challenge of work for younger students. The recently-appointed head of department has achieved a great deal in a short time: appropriate priorities have been identified quickly and the foundations for further improvement have been already laid. The developing scheme of work is detailed and provides a firm foundation for lesson planning as well as ensuring that students build on earlier learning and develop the ability to explore deeper questions. All teachers have very good subject knowledge and are committed to high standards. Effective monitoring and evaluation have recently been introduced to support teachers' continued professional development and to enable the sharing of good teaching and learning practices. The two classrooms are well used to create an effective learning environment; the circular arrangement aiding discussion and participation.

185. Religious education makes a very good contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students by enabling them to explore with great rigour questions and issues arising from the beliefs and practices of world faiths, and by enabling them to reflect on their own beliefs and values in light of these.

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

In the inspection, 15 subjects/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 and 2002; national comparative information is not yet available for 2002.

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	48	100	(87)	73	(43)	8.08	(5.80)
Biology	69	100	(88)	64	(34)	7.39	(5.25)
Physics	9	100	(88)	56	(40)	7.39	(5.67)
Chemistry	67	97	(90)	62	(43)	7.49	(5.90)
Human Biology	23	100	*	30	*	5.30	*
Business Studies	67	95	(92)	52	(32)	6.44	(5.50)
Information Technology	20	100	*	55	*	7.20	*
Latin	1	100	*	100	*	10.00	*
Government & Politics	11	91	*	81	*	8.18	*
PE/Sport Studies	20	95	(92)	40	(25)	6.60	(3.09)
Art & Design	24	100	(96)	75	(46)	8.25	(6.57)
Music	7	100	93	100	35	8.29	5.74
French	16	100	(89)	76	(38)	9.42	(5.59)
German	12	100		58			
Graphics/Textiles	14	100		71			
Religious studies	13	92		69			
Geography	27	100	(92)	67	(38)	7.55	(5.74)
History	43	100	(88)	67	(35)	7.58	(5.45)
Psychology	54	98	(87)	57	(34)	7.15	(5.30)
Sociology	25	100	(86)	60	(35)	7.36	(5.32)
Spanish	16	100	(89)	87	(39)	8.88	(5.70)
Theatre Studies	16	100	(99)	63	(38)	7.38	(6.59)
English literature	51	100	(95)	60	(37)	7.57	(5.91)

Since national comparison data for AS/A level results in 2002 are not yet available, the data in brackets in columns 4, 6 and 8 are 2001 figures

- No national comparison data available

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

186. In this curriculum area, the school provides courses to AS/A-level in mathematics, further mathematics, biology, human biology, chemistry and physics. The AS/A-level courses in mathematics, chemistry and biology were inspected in detail, and physics and human biology were sampled. Physics A level results have been well above average for several years; almost all students pass and a high proportion achieves the top grades. Results at AS level were weak in 2001: although some students achieved good results, a very high percentage failed the examination. The one lesson sampled was very well taught; students used their skills in mathematics to evaluate their results; this group is likely to achieve good results. In the one human biology lesson seen, teaching was very good, and the students showed good understanding of inherited diseases.

Mathematics

187. Provision in mathematics is **good**; the leadership of the department is excellent; together with good teaching, this ensures that well-qualified teachers enable very highly-motivated students to achieve high standards.

Strengths

- In 2002, pass rates and the quality of grades in A-level mathematics and further mathematics were very high.
- The quality of teaching is good: teachers' knowledge and understanding of mathematics and of the demands of the curriculum are excellent.
- Teachers plan very effectively, have very high expectations of students and manage them very well.
- Students are very committed to their studies and have very mature attitudes to learning.
- The regularity of marking of students' work and the addition of many helpful comments ensure that students know what they must do to improve.
- The leadership and management of the department and of the sixth form courses are excellent.

Areas for improvement

- Several students did not gain a grade at AS-level in 2002.
- The school has previously allowed unsuitably-qualified students to start the AS level course, and those who are not being successful on it are allowed to continue with their studies.
- Information and communication technology is under-used in the teaching of mathematics.
- The department should extend its good use of data to check on students' prior attainment and subsequent achievement.

Standards and achievement

188. Standards are high. In 2002, all students entered for A-level examinations passed except one, and the percentage of top grades was very high compared to the national average. The average points score, which is a measure of the performance of all students, was well above the national average in 2002, following a few years when it was below the national average. Four students last year sat the further mathematics examination; all four passed at grade A.

189. The number of students entered for the AS-level examinations was low from 1998 to 2001 and no patterns of performance can be identified. In 2002, over 40 Year 12 students were entered for the new AS-level examination. The percentage of students who achieved the highest grades A/B was about twice the national average but, although the pass rate was slightly above the national figures, several students received ungraded results. The department has responded to these results with careful analysis and well-judged modifications. The present Year 12 students completed a very useful revision booklet during the last summer holidays, which contained extension work from the higher tier of the GCSE course.

190. In their statistics module, students understand the multiplication rule to be used with Venn diagrams. Tree diagrams are also used with confidence. Students understand the theory of independent events and confidently complete examples of sampling with and without replacement. Brainstorming by students about the different types of distribution which they may encounter, and the parameters which are required, shows good understanding. Students show good competence in handling standard integrals. A few students have trouble in bringing together various aspects of their mathematical knowledge; for example, their algebraic skills, which are good, and integration methods, where some work has been forgotten.

191. The evidence from work seen in lessons and in students' folders shows good progression - increasing difficulty of examples is seen in written work. Students take great pride in their files of written work; different sections of the syllabus are very well organised. The marking of students' work is completed very regularly; there are many helpful comments by teachers on how to improve. Students comment that they appreciate that their work is corrected regularly and value the teachers' comments. Longer-term assessment is now much more structured and includes a larger number of tests; the structure of the courses has been revised to help students' development of mathematical concepts.

Quality of education

192. Teaching is good overall, with four-fifths of lessons seen being good or very good. In particular, teachers' knowledge and understanding of mathematics and the requirements of the courses are very good. Teachers present their lessons extremely fluently; they show excellent command of the subject, and are able to deal very confidently with students' questions. They help students in a caring manner, building a strong working rapport with their groups, and supervise some very good collaborative learning. Teachers' expectations of students are very high and the students respond very positively. Teaching methods are mainly traditional and are strongly teacher-directed; this, together with the under-use of ICT, limits students' ability to take responsibility for their own learning. Students concentrate very intently in lessons and always show a very high level of interest in developing their mathematics. They know

their abilities in the courses and have good knowledge of their target grades, because their work is regularly assessed and discussed with teachers during and after lessons.

Leadership and management

193. Leadership and management of mathematics are excellent. Monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning take place regularly, but have not yet closed the gap between the average and very best practice. Good analysis of examination and test results takes place, and can be extended to include value added calculations. Sixth form courses are very cost effective as teaching groups are large. Some students with weak results at GCSE have been allowed to start the course, and some who are not succeeding are allowed to continue with it: this slows the pace of the work. The match of staffing to the curriculum is excellent, with almost all the mathematics teachers taking their share of post-16 classes. Teachers enthusiastically share their expertise in mathematics with the students.

Chemistry

194. Provision in chemistry is **very good**. Standards are well above those nationally at both AS and A level and teaching is very good.

Strengths

- Standards are well above the national average at both AS and A level.
- Very good teaching leading to very good learning; teachers have excellent knowledge and understanding of chemistry.
- Experienced A-level teachers work very well as a team to deliver a very interesting course.
- Students achieve well in relation to their prior attainment in chemistry because of their excellent attitudes and the very good teaching.
- The students' organisation of their comprehensive notes gives them an accurate record from which to revise.

Areas for improvement

- The head of department currently has insufficient time to monitor the work of the department.
- There are insufficient sensors and computers to help students improve their already very good experimental skills.
- The department does not have sufficient links with industry for the A-level course studied.

Standards and achievement

195. GCE A level examination entries are high: about 50 students have been entered in each of the last four years. Nearly all students gained a pass grade, a well-above-average proportion achieved grades A and B, and students' average points score was well above the national average. Very few students failed to complete the course. The department does not have a minimum entry grade at GCSE, and students with less than the highest GCSE grades achieve some outstanding results.

196. Results for Year 12 at AS-level are also well above the national average. Both the proportion of students who gained a pass grade and that obtaining the highest grades were well above the national average. Chemistry is a very popular and cost effective subject. There are currently five groups in each of Year 12 and Year 13, and the number of students who have opted not to continue to study chemistry in Year 13 is relatively low. The majority of students plan to continue with chemistry-related courses at university. It is clear that the teachers have managed to transmit their enthusiasm for the subject to their students.

197. The standard of work is well above average. Students' mathematical knowledge is very good, enabling them to cope well with the calculations required for chemistry. Consequently, when choosing their coursework investigations, they are able to select those which will meet the criteria at the highest level. By Year 13 students have very well-developed laboratory skills, planning their investigations very well. Students' skills of evaluation are of the highest order; they modify their plans skilfully so that accurate, repeatable results can be obtained. Students learn very well because the teachers use

very effective modelling techniques. For example, in a Year 12 lesson, students learnt very well how molecules move when they absorb energy. A key feature of this lesson was the way the teacher used video clips of people moving to model the types of movement that molecules undergo, capturing the students' interests through her excellent, innovative approach so that they understood this quite difficult concept very well. Students have very complete notes from which to revise. These notes show a consistent approach by the teachers with the correct amount of intervention.

Quality of education

198. Teaching is very good and students learn very well. The main strengths of teaching are teachers' excellent knowledge and understanding of chemistry, very good planning, and a very wide range of methods and resources used to aid learning. Teachers provide students with many opportunities to develop their basic skills of communication, numeracy, and ICT. However, because of a lack of sensors and computers, students are unable to carry out data logging. It is unsatisfactory that, with such well-developed experimental skills, students cannot obtain data directly from sensors linked to computers. The department makes good provision for gifted and talented students. Students have every opportunity to extend themselves through the open-ended nature of the coursework investigations.

199. Students show exceptionally high levels of interest. Excellent relationships with each other and their teachers lead to a very purposeful working atmosphere in the classroom.

Leadership and management

200. The head of department leads and manages very well. He works closely with his colleagues so that the courses are well planned and the examination board's requirements met. Importantly, the department takes full advantage of the modular approach by entering Year 12 students for their first module test at the earliest opportunity. This policy is far better for the students since it reduces their workload at the end of the summer term. This is a very strong team of teachers who all benefit by sharing best practice with each other, but the head of department does not have enough time to observe his colleagues in the classroom.

201. At present, the department does not have sufficient links with industry. The course used is based on the application of chemistry, and it is thus very important that the teachers give their students the opportunity to see for themselves any chemical applications in local industry.

202. An excellent technician team supports the work of the department. One of the technicians received recognition in 2002 with a National Award for Science Technicians for her outstanding contribution. The department gives due regard to health and safety. Teachers make good use of "Hazcards" and of the written risk assessments supplied for the course practical work.

203. Since the last inspection standards have improved from above to well above the national average. Chemistry teachers can be justifiably proud of the work they do for their students.

Biology

204. Provision in biology is **good**; standards are above the national average and teaching is good.

Strengths

- Standards are above the national average at both AS and A level.
- Teachers have excellent knowledge and understanding of biology.
- Good teaching leading to good learning.
- Good leadership and management of the subject.

Areas for improvement

- There are insufficient sensors for students to carry out data logging in their experimental work.
- Those students who do not study chemistry beyond GCSE find it difficult to cope with some aspects of the biology course.
- Underachievement is not always recognised early and corrected.

Standards and achievement

205. In 2001 the proportions of students who gained a pass grade and the highest grades, A and B, were both above average at both AS and A level. Results in 2002 were still better and are likely to be well above average in both examinations when comparative data are available. Previous A level results, although varying from year to year, were above the national average. Very few students have failed to complete the course, which is a compliment to the department for maintaining students' interests.

206. The number of students choosing to study biology is very high. There are currently five groups in Year 12 and four in Year 13, and for Human Biology there are two groups in each of Years 12 and 13. Biology is a very cost-effective subject. Importantly, the number of students who have opted not to study biology to A2 Level is relatively low. Again this reflects well on the department. Students' results at AS and A level overall are in line with expectations based on their GCSE results. The department has no entry requirements for the course, and groups contain students with a relatively large range of prior attainment. There are several examples where students achieve far more than might be expected from their performance at GCSE.

207. The standard of work of current students is above average. Year 13 students have above-expected knowledge and understanding of previous work on genetics, and apply their knowledge well. Students in Year 12 have made a good start on the new course. They have above-expected knowledge and understanding of cell structure. They also were able to apply this knowledge well when investigating stem cells by computer simulation. Those students who do not study chemistry beyond GCSE find it difficult to cope with some aspects of the biology course. Standards would improve if extra time could be found to bring students' knowledge of chemistry up to the right level. Students' notes are of the highest quality. This is testimony to the hard work of both the students and their teachers.

Quality of education

208. Teaching is good, and students learn well as a result. The principal strengths of the teaching are the teachers' excellent biological knowledge and understanding. They plan carefully and use a wide range of methods and resources to aid learning, and provide students with sufficient opportunities to develop their basic skills of communication and numeracy. However, until very recently, teachers have not been able to provide students with the opportunity to use data-logging equipment because there were insufficient sensors and computers. The department now has sufficient computers but sensors are still required. It is very important at this level that students can link sensors to their experiments and then use the computer to analyse the experimental data. In the lessons seen, students learnt well because the teachers made high demands on them. Good lesson planning linked to challenging questioning techniques all help to raise standards. This is a good team of teachers, but recent staff changes and long-term absences have caused problems of continuity.

209. Students show high levels of interest and respond well to the variety of teaching styles they experience. The majority of students plan to study a biology-related course at university - further evidence of the way these teachers have been able to transmit their own enthusiasm for the subject to others.

Leadership and management

210. The good provision for biology stems from good leadership and management. Like chemistry, this department takes full advantage of the modular approach by entering Year 12 students for their first module test at the earliest opportunity. This is a forward-looking department which has seized the chance to pilot a new sixth form course which, although it will put extra demands on the teachers, will further stimulate students' already high interest in the subject. Teachers' analysis of students' results should be more rigorous, to identify any underachievement early so that it can be corrected.

211. An excellent technician team supports the work of the department. The department gives due attention to health and safety. Teachers provide written risk assessments for experimental work and meet the requirements.

212. Since the last inspection standards have been maintained. Biology teachers should be proud of the work they do for their students.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

213. In this curriculum area, the school provides courses to AS/A-level in food technology, graphics and textiles. Numbers wishing to study food technology do not always justify running the course; however, the small number who took the examination in 2000 and 2001 generally achieved well. Results in the product design (graphics/textiles) course have been very strong: all students passed in 2002, with a high proportion achieving top grades. In the small number of lessons sampled, standards of work were high and teaching was very good.

BUSINESS

214. Within this curriculum area, the school currently runs the AS/A-level course in business studies, which was inspected in detail.

Business & Economics

215. Provision in business education is **good**: sound planning to meet the needs of the new specifications and good teaching lead to well above average examination standards.

Strengths

- Examination results are well above average.
- Departmental planning to meet the needs of the new specification is very thorough.
- Lessons are planned to include a variety of activities to ensure that students know what they have to do to achieve high grades.
- Teachers offer high levels of support to their students.
- Students respond well to the subject by working hard and by always being willing to contribute to class discussion.
- Leadership in a period of challenge has been good.

Areas for improvement

- Data on prior attainment are not used to inform curriculum planning and target setting.
- Students do not learn enough about the wider business environment.

Standards and achievement

216. The business A level is one of the most popular options in the sixth form and results since the last inspection have been very good: in the last three years, almost all students have passed, and in 2002 over half gained A or B grades. This exceeds national averages and results in business are in line with those of other subjects. Results for the new AS examinations show further improvement with 80 per cent of the 2002 entry gaining the top two grades.

217. Evidence from work seen in lessons and in files during inspection shows that standards are usually very good and are always better than average. Most students build on their understanding from GCSE to make rapid progress. They are able to construct and use break-even, cash flow and stock control early in their AS course. The most successful A-level students show flair and confidence when applying difficult concepts such as investment appraisal. Weaker students have a much less secure understanding of basic business concepts and are slower in applying the outcomes of PEST analysis to their individual business plans. These shortcomings limit opportunities to gain marks for higher-order skills.

218. Students build up effective sets of notes and are given extensive opportunities to practise examination techniques. There is less evidence of the extended individual research and contact with the local business community which would help secure a more thorough business understanding.

Quality of education

219. The quality of teaching is always at least good and is often very good. Students are fully involved in all lessons and are given good opportunities to contribute to the development of their notes. Most staff are well qualified to teach business studies and are able to provide clear examples of current business practice. Course planning is thorough and both schemes of work and lesson plans have been revised to meet the needs of the new examination specifications. Performance in the first year of the new course was used to identify what students need to do to achieve top grades, but data on prior attainment is not used for target setting or to inform curriculum planning. Good use is made of past papers and marking schemes to enable students to understand examination requirements clearly. Conscious efforts are made to ensure that students are coached to develop higher-order skills during the AS part of their course, and this helps ensure a smooth transition to the second year of studies.

220. The marking and assessment of students' work are thorough. Feedback, both written and oral, is detailed, and individual students are given clear guidance as to what they need to do to improve their performance. Business studies teachers have developed excellent relationships with their students who respond very positively to the support that they are offered.

221. Progress has been made in addressing issues raised in the last inspection especially in respect of encouraging greater student involvement in discussion and debate. However, students are still too reliant on a narrow diet of note-taking and examination practice.

Leadership and management

222. Leadership and management of business are good. The newly-appointed head of department has had to cope with difficulties over staffing and he has worked hard to ensure that this has not had an adverse effect on students. He has developed a high level of collaboration between teachers, and is committed to continuous improvement. The developing programme of classroom observations has yet to have a major impact on departmental developmental planning and links with local businesses have yet to be fully developed.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

223. Within this curriculum area, the school runs the A and AS level IT courses, which were inspected in detail.

Information and Communication Technology

224. Provision for AS/A level ICT is **very good**: examination results are consistently well above the national average, teaching is very good and there is rapid improvement.

Strengths

- Results in examinations are well above average.

- Students make excellent progress in coursework.
- Teaching is very good and often excellent: lessons are well prepared and move at a brisk pace.
- Clear guidance is given to students, enabling them to gain high grades.
- Relationships between teachers and students are friendly and motivate students to achieve higher levels.
- Leadership is very good and there are excellent relationships within the department.
- Technical support systems are very good.

Areas for improvement

- The use of ICT across the curriculum does not support the development of students' ICT skills.
- The network room is not air-conditioned which may lead to failure of the computer network.

Standards and achievement

225. Results in AS-level examinations are well above the national average. In the most recent examinations, all students achieved at least a pass, and two-thirds achieved the highest grades. Evidence from work seen in lessons and in students' coursework during the inspection confirms that standards are well above the national average. The highest-attaining students make excellent use of the software packages available, using complex functions in spreadsheets and databases.

226. Students are highly motivated and have the confidence to tackle new techniques such as adding validation functions into Excel spreadsheets. Teachers are aware of the value added targets set for each student and make special arrangements for assisting those students who are falling behind target.

Quality of education

227. Teaching is at least very good. Students are set work that builds the confidence of those who are lower attainers, while providing extended opportunities for the more able. The teachers' knowledge of ICT enables them to use technical terms with confidence and use anecdotes which illustrate their points colourfully.

228. Lessons are very well planned with a good range of activities and are conducted at a brisk pace. Opportunities for learning are enhanced by the very good range of software and hardware available. Students may use the ICT area outside lesson times to continue their coursework and increase their skills. Homework is very well used and enables students to use their own initiative to complete their work.

229. Teachers have established very good relationships with students, enabling the latter to interact positively within lessons and remain highly motivated. Students are keen and enthusiastic to be involved in practical work.

Leadership and management

230. An extremely competent manager with vision and purpose leads the ICT department. She has an excellent working relationship with her colleagues, including the ICT technician and network manager. As a result, the school has excellent, reliable and well maintained ICT

facilities. However, the reliability of the network is jeopardised by the lack of cooling in the network room.

231. All sixth form students in general (not just those studying the subject to examination level) have high levels of ICT competence. Those who have studied in the main school have benefited from the compulsory GCSE and key skills courses.

232. Since the last inspection, the head of department has ensured that high standards have been achieved and that the school has the infrastructure to build upon a highly successful resource. Information and communication technology across the school was a key issue in the last inspection; improvement since that time has been good within ICT as a subject but students' skills are not systematically reinforced by work using computers across all subjects. Access has been increased to a wider group of classrooms by the use of radio-linked laptop computers and a good booking system but there are still issues with ready access by some subjects and staff to the network.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

233. Within this curriculum area, the school currently runs the AS/A level course in Sport Studies, which was inspected in detail.

Physical education/sports studies

234. Provision for physical education/sports studies is **very good** with excellent features: standards are high and teaching very good.

Strengths

- Leadership and management are very good.
- They have led to high standards and achievement in AS and A-level examinations relative to students' other subjects and the national average.
- Students' personal exercise programmes (produced for AS-level) show very effective application of a range of theoretical principles to physical performance.
- Students' positive views about the quality of teaching, academic and personal support.

Areas for improvement

- There are insufficient opportunities for students to learn using ICT skills.

Standards and achievement

235. A-level results are well above the national average, and students achieve grades higher than those in their other subjects. Results for AS-level in 2002 were above the school average.

236. Overall, current Year 13 students produce well above average work; they achieve very well. A particular strength is their ability to link personal performance with theoretical aspects; this is evident in their physical exercise programmes submitted as AS-level course work. All programmes include extremely detailed work with accurate use of technical vocabulary and an excellent grasp of principles, intelligently interpreted in relation to their chosen activities. Students' notes show that many are confident in their use of number. They understand and apply various physiological formulae and are able to relate them to performance. They have a good grasp of technical vocabulary and are confident to use it when speaking. This is evident in class discussions, as in a debate about sportsmanship and gamesmanship. The students have strong moral views and argue intelligently, using background knowledge and personal experience to add depth to their views. They use ICT effectively when presenting their course work, but there are too few opportunities to use these methods to enhance other aspects of their work.

237. Students in Year 12 have made a good start to the AS-level course and are achieving well. Their writing shows a good understanding of the work covered so far. In particular they have a good appreciation of how various fitness tests can be related to improving their own personal performance. The standard of note-taking varies among students: the highest-attaining students can research independently whilst others have notes that lack depth, with little independent research. Not all students are yet confident in using technical vocabulary fluently when speaking. Two lower-attaining students are finding it difficult to grasp concepts and may not be totally suited to the course.

238. The students who follow the Community Sports Leaders Award have a very mature approach to the course and organise games for younger students well, with attention to detail

for safety, rules, equipment and organisational factors. They explain the rules clearly and are fair in their assessment of each other's work.

Quality of education

239. The quality of teaching and its impact on the students' learning are very good. The most effective teaching involves very high expectations and a good range of tasks that stimulate a variety of responses from the students. All the teachers know their subject very well, leading to stimulating lessons that motivate the students, firing their interest. An example of this was seen in a lesson on gamesmanship in sport. The students had to relate their own personal experience of either their 'stretching of the rules' or how they felt as a recipient. This, combined with thought-provoking questions from the teacher and watching a well-chosen clip of video, resulted in the students gaining a far greater understanding of positive and negative deviance. There are too few teaching strategies used to develop the students' use of ICT. Marking of homework assignments is constructive and targets are set, agreed by the teachers and students. Lower-attaining students are not always given a sufficient range of tasks to meet their needs. This occasionally results in them making slower progress because they do not understand.

240. The students respond very well to all aspects of examination work. Between the teachers and the students there is a mutual respect that creates an effective and supportive learning environment. Students work well in small groups and as a class. The teachers extend a high level of independence to the students and they adopt a mature and diligent approach to their work as a result. They appreciate their teachers' efforts and feel well supported in every aspect. The recreational programme and fitness suite are popular with the students.

Leadership and management

241. Leadership and management of the AS and A level courses are very good with excellent features. All courses are very well managed and meticulously planned. Assessment is excellent. The teaching team is determined to improve the teaching and to raise standards still further. Careful analysis of examination results and students' work leads to changes in teaching techniques and the setting of astute targets that are reviewed. This individual support is seen by the students to be positive and helpful. The theory classroom has a positive impact on learning: it is a stimulating environment and a base for resources for the subject. Provision for ICT is limited. At present there is no projector to enable students to give Powerpoint presentations and the links with universities do not provide good access to physiology laboratories. The school has an excellent range of extra-curricular activities that contributes effectively to developing the students' skills and social experiences.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

242. The school does not run courses in this curriculum area.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

243. The school provides courses to AS/A-level courses in art, drama (theatre studies) and music. The art and music courses were inspected in detail, and the theatre studies course was sampled. Results in drama are above the national averages for both the proportion of students passing and that achieving the highest grades. One student gained a national award for giving the best performance in the A level examination. Standards were very high and teaching very good or excellent in the lessons observed.

Art & Design

244. Provision in art and design is **very good** with some excellent features: results are excellent and teaching is consistently at least very good.

Strengths

- Teaching is very good, and some is excellent. Students receive excellent quality individual advice and guidance.
- Teachers' enthusiasm for their subject and determination to raise standards ever higher enables all students to achieve their best.
- Examination courses are extremely well planned, structured, and delivered. Excellent use is made of educational visits abroad, artists in residence and visiting speakers.
- Innovative use of ICT and computer-aided design promote high standards.

Areas for improvement

- Learning opportunities are reduced by poor accommodation; there is no separate room or storage facilities exclusively for sixth form use.

Standards and achievement

245. Examination results are well above average at both AS and A-level and, on the basis of current assessments, the school expects the 2003 results will maintain the trend of improvement. Standards of work seen during the inspection were well above average, and show a steady improvement since the last inspection. Numbers taking the subject are increasing and retention rates are good. The progress and achievement of students in Years 12 and 13 are very good in relation to their prior attainment and their predicted results. Some students achieved high grades having not taken art since Year 9.

246. Students have a good understanding of the use of a wide range of visual media. Ideas for projects show initiative, and are highly expressive and creative. They understand, for example, how complementary colours give maximum impact and how art is influenced by social change. For example, Year 12 students study the portrait theme; they not only make larger-than-life self-portrait paintings, but also make very good use of digital photography to record ideas and manipulate portrait images. They research the theme well, making reference to the work, styles, and techniques of well-known portrait artists and use these to develop work of their own, showing very good understanding of the use of a wide range of media. The work of well-known artists is used effectively to develop students' own styles and technique throughout the course. Students use ICT well; they understand the value of graphic work, and use scanners, computers and printers to enhance and manipulate images. Year 13 students organise the preparation for their written and illustrated contextual study extremely well; they research, select and arrange material, based on their recorded observations and response to the art of other times and cultures. Students have very original ideas. Documentation of processes and lines of enquiry are very inventive - for example, the influence that technology has on art and design. Students use many sources of reference including art books, museums, art galleries, the Internet, and talking to visiting artists, all of which result in high-grade work. Students have very good understanding of the requirements of the examination and its assessment criteria; this helps them achieve high grades.

247. The enthusiasm and the positive attitudes of students are major strengths. Students have very mature attitudes, and talk confidently about their work, to teachers and each other, showing well above average knowledge and understanding of many aspects of art and design. Study skills and self-assessment procedures are well advanced. Excellent use is made of

course assignments involving trips to art galleries abroad, and working with visiting artists, (including ex-students on degree courses).

Quality of education

248. Teaching and learning are consistently very good and there is some excellent teaching. All teachers have very good subject knowledge and enthusiastically promote their subject. Carefully-prepared resources, clearly-stated aims and objectives, and well-communicated subject knowledge result in effective learning. Teachers make every effort to help students at all attainment levels to achieve their full potential. They have high expectations of their students and set challenging tasks. Course structure and planning are extremely well detailed. Regular review and assessment of work are very good, and the quality of one-to-one oral feedback is often excellent. All students receive regular written comments on their work in progress in the form of 'post-it' notes. Students receive very good help with study skills, and guidance on self-assessment procedures. They are encouraged to use ICT for research and computer-aided design to help develop design ideas.

Leadership and management

249. Leadership is very good. There is a determination to raise standards and improve teaching and learning still further. Courses are well structured and delivered. High-quality resources promote high standards, and displays in the art rooms and around the school are informative and create an inspirational and stimulating environment. Teamwork is excellent, and students benefit greatly from the range of expertise and interests of teachers. Short-term development plans identify the main areas for improving teaching and learning, for example the monitoring of teaching, but there are no long-term plans to review the possibility of offering alternative courses, or to improve the departments' accommodation and facilities. Currently the learning opportunities for sixth form students are limited by poor accommodation; there is no separate room or storage facilities for sixth form use. However improvements since the last inspection are very good: there has been a steady improvement in standards, and courses have grown in popularity. AS and A Level courses are successfully established, and results are very good.

Music

250. Provision in music is **excellent**. Results are well above average as a result of high quality teaching and leadership; performance is frequently outstanding.

Strengths

- The quality of teaching both within the curriculum and as part of the extra-curricular provision, which inspires students to attain musical standards to the highest level.
- The quality of the department's procedures for assessing students' attainment and progress, which provides a solid base for improvement.
- The leadership of the head of department, who has a clear vision and direction for the sixth form department.
- The involvement of a large number of sixth form students in the extra-curricular programme, where some performances are of the highest quality.

Areas for Improvement

- ICT: the school's use of music technology does not enable students to develop the breadth and variety of their musical experiences and skills.

Standards and achievement

251. Standards in the sixth form are very good. Recent results in both AS and A level indicate that students attain standards that are well above average. The department has a good record of examination results, which have been consistently well above the national average over the last few years, and which represent an improvement from the standards noted at the time of the last inspection. An increasing number of students opt for this examination course.

252. In lessons observed and in the review of coursework, which includes an analysis of students' performances and compositions and a scrutiny of their written work, standards are well above average for those who are at this stage of their course of study. All-round skills are developing very well. Students in Year 12 make very good critical judgements in their analysis of pieces of music in the selected areas of study. They know musical terms and can analyse aspects of baroque music, recognising musical features such as counterpoint, figured bass and cadence. They are developing an extensive musical vocabulary. They have a clear understanding of harmony. Students in Year 13 display very good knowledge of musical terms and understand features of instrumentation, scoring and ornamentation. They perform fluently and sing accurately. In a class lesson observed, there was a good inter-relationship of listening, performing and composing. An example of outstanding musicianship occurred from a gifted Year 13 A-level student who gave a very musical performance of two movements of a Handel sonata to the Year 12 AS-level group. This performance formed the basis for discussion and analysis of the piece. In their compositions, the students are also developing musical ideas with some imagination, for example in a theme and variation, which showed a good grasp of musical development and structure. Post-16 students, including those on examination courses, make a significant contribution to the extra-curricular activities – choir, string chamber group and orchestra – where they demonstrate the ability, through their performances, to communicate music in a convincing musical style, with assurance and high levels of skill. In both Years 12 and 13, written work and course notes are well organised. Careful and realistic marking ensures that students are able to identify how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.

Quality of Education

253. Teaching is very good overall and much is excellent. Teaching, some of which was inspirational, has a positive impact on students' learning. At its best, the teaching is characterised by expert subject knowledge, reflected in careful planning and the clear objectives and good exposition of the material to be learnt. Teaching inspires the students, who respond eagerly to the very challenging work set. A variety of teaching strategies is used very effectively to support the students' learning. Learning is also very good with much that is excellent. Self-study materials are well designed to support and further enhance learning. Students show consistent interest in their work; they work at a good pace with high levels of sustained concentration. There is a high degree of intellectual and creative effort in their work. They are developing very good independent learning skills. Other key skills of communication, improving their own performance and working together, are also well covered. Information and communication technology (music technology) skills are less well developed. Students display very positive attitudes to music. In both year groups, all the students are keen and interested in their work. They have very good relationships with each other and with their teachers. They respect each other's views; this was particularly noted in the Year 12 lesson when students responded sensitively to the performance of the Year 13 student.

Leadership and Management

254. The head of department provides excellent leadership and management of the sixth form music course, with a clear vision and direction for the subject. AS and A level work builds very effectively on the practice at GCSE. The quality of the procedures for and practice of assessing students' overall performance are very good. Regular assessment, individual targets, the recording of students' work and a careful analysis of recent examination results form a basis for future planning. All examination course students take part in a number of extra-curricular activities, which support and enhance their study: a significant number of non-examination students also take part in these activities. The quality of these activities, notably the chamber choir and the chamber string group, is outstanding. Some of the musical performances that were heard during the inspection were simply breathtaking. There is not enough effective use of ICT, in particular computers and associated software to support the students' musical and study skills. This is an area for development that is recognised by the department and it is included in the current departmental improvement plan.

HUMANITIES

255. In this curriculum area, the school provides courses to AS/A-level in classical civilisation, history, sociology and geography (all of which were inspected in detail), and in religious studies (RS), government and politics and psychology, all of which were sampled. Results in RS have been around the national average in recent years; sampling of current work and teaching in the subject suggested very rapid improvement and the achievement of high standards. Teaching in the AS/A-level RS Philosophy and Ethics course is always very good with strong, confident subject knowledge, good questioning and appropriately planned strategies to extend and deepen students' understanding. Results in government and politics have been well above average, with all students passing and a high proportion achieving the highest grades; in the lessons observed, teaching, learning and achievement were very good. Psychology is a very popular option and achieves very good results; the one lesson seen was very well taught.

Classical civilisation

256. Provision in classical civilisation is **very good**: standards are very high and teaching is very good and often inspiring.

Strengths

- Standards of work are very high.
- The teachers have excellent subject knowledge, and share their love of the subject with enthusiasm.
- The students are inspired and challenged at a very high level.
- Relationships between teachers and students are excellent.

Areas for improvement

- Assessment of the students' work is not yet used in a formal way to track progress and to ensure that the students have an accurate picture of their achievement.
- Use should be made of external visits to provide added enrichment.

257. The school offers courses in Latin and classical civilisation at AS and A level. The focus for this inspection was on classical civilisation.

Standards and achievement

258. There have been few candidates for the A-level examination over the past four years and there were none in 2001. In 1999, all five students gained an A or a B grade. The grades obtained in the most recent examination, in 2002, are likely to be above the national average once national comparators have been published, and the candidates generally achieved better in classical civilization than in the other subjects they took.

259. At the time of this inspection, the numbers in Years 12 and 13 were much healthier. The standards of work seen are very high in both years. The students have a very strong understanding of the work covered and are able to communicate their knowledge with confidence in lessons. Their knowledge of the historical and mythological background to the classical period is well developed, which aids their understanding of both the texts they are studying and the themes in the art and architecture component of the course. They can sustain an argument and use language effectively to communicate ideas, drawing well on their previous learning. For example, in Year 12 they can summarise the features of early Archaic Sculpture and, using this knowledge, are able to discern from slides, with only minimal prompting from the teacher, detailed ways in which Greek sculpture evolved over the following hundred years. Similarly, students in Year 13 confidently apply their knowledge of the Aeneid to offer and defend points of view in debate about the characterisation of Aeneas. This represents good achievement in learning about aspects of classical civilisation, and in using the key skills of literacy and communication. Written work is very good and, by Year 13, the students are making relevant points about the topics they are studying, supporting them with a good range of argument. A particular strength of the work of the highest-attaining students is the way in which they write both succinctly and with depth and perception. Most essays submitted are word-processed to a good standard. The students follow up any weaknesses or omissions in their written work by annotating it meticulously with points made afterwards in the teacher's feedback, so that they have a good basis for subsequent revision. There was some evidence in the written work examined that a very few relatively weaker students in Year 12 leave work unfinished, which indicates that they may not be secure about all the work they have covered.

Quality of education

260. The teaching is very good overall, prompting good achievement and very high attainment. It is stimulating, and often inspiring, which ensures that all students are fully involved in lessons. The teachers have excellent subject knowledge, resulting in confident, interesting teaching, and an ability to put the texts and topics studied into a wide classical context. They bring enthusiasm and a real love of their subject to the lessons, and their high degree of scholarship provides a very rich educational experience for the students, who learn very well as a result. The lessons are very well structured and are carefully planned to build effectively on prior learning. Expectations of what the students can achieve intellectually are consistently high, and there is a high degree of challenge in the tasks set so that the students work hard. A significant strength of the teaching, seen in all lessons, is the skilful way in which teachers elicit ideas and information from students, offering them opportunities to develop their skills of critical analysis as well as their intellectual independence. Relationships between teachers and students, and between students, are excellent, and are built on mutual respect; such relationships, allied to demanding teaching, are another important factor in bringing about very good learning. Good use is made of time, and the pace of

lessons is usually brisk, although extended time is appropriately given to some activities, such as group preparation for a debate, so that the students have the space to work collaboratively, or more independently. The teachers make good use of a range of resources, including some very high quality slides, taken by one of the teachers, to support the art and architecture units. Another particularly useful feature of these units is the provision of templates for the students' notes, each of which has a black and white copy of an individual slide and space for the student to write a commentary; this ensures that they have an valuable *aide-mémoire* for revision purposes. Homework is used very well to provide opportunities for the students to consolidate the work done in the lesson, to reflect, and to be challenged to make a personal response or to do some research before writing. Marking is thorough, regular and supportive. Work is graded according to A-level criteria, and the teachers comment in writing on each piece of work, giving critical, helpful advice so that individuals know how they can improve the quality of their work.

261. The students are very well motivated and are capable of independent study. They show commitment to their work and enthusiasm for the subject. They are well organised, and contribute with confidence in lessons, listening to each other very well, and expressing points of view clearly, supported by evidence.

Leadership and management

262. The subject is managed well and competently led. The curriculum offers considerable breadth, in terms not only of the literature, history, art and architecture of the classical world, but also wider cultural understanding. The subject makes an excellent contribution to the students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The department's procedures for assessment are good, and sound use is made of assessment information to give an indication of progress through the course. Assessment data are not yet used to track the students' progress in order to give them an accurate picture of their achievement, nor to set appropriate targets for the students' or the department's work. The department has, however, already identified this as an area for development in its planning. Staffing, accommodation and teaching resources are good, and are effectively deployed to offer very good learning opportunities. More use could be made of visits to classical sites, lectures or drama productions, such as those provided at the time of the last inspection, in order to enhance still further the quality of learning. Despite this, the work of the department is highly successful and progress since the last inspection is good.

History

263. Provision in history is **very good**: standards are very high and teaching is consistently very good.

Strengths

- Standards are very high: results are well above average and the quality of students' coursework is often excellent.
- Teaching is very good
- Students' attitudes to learning are excellent

Areas for improvement

- The information in students' personal folders is not well organised for revision.

Standards and achievement

264. Standards at AS/A-level are high. In 2002, all students passed, with two-thirds gaining grades A or B, results that are well above the national average for this subject. The number of A grades has risen consistently over the past three years. At AS-level, standards are also high; in 2002, over 60 per cent gained grades A or B, with only one student failing to be graded.

265. Students' performance during the inspection confirms this picture of very high achievement. Individual instances of coursework are outstanding. One student's review of the difficulties facing Lord Liverpool's government, and another's ability to relate the history of musical instruments to the social context of the time, were both very good indeed. Some of this work is well up to university standard. It is typical of the work that these students produce that, far from merely recounting historical fact and opinion, they use the insights and techniques developed in the historiography paper to balance contrasting perspectives as a matter of course. *'And where would A J P Taylor sit in regard to this issue?'* was the question posed by an exceptionally confident and committed student, who genuinely wanted to know the answer. It is the consistently high quality of the teaching that is responsible for these impressive learning skills and attitudes. Across the sixth form, students value their history, making immense efforts themselves to come to terms with the detailed and complex periods they are studying, and demand that their teachers make the same effort to ensure them the high grades they deserve.

Quality of education

266. Teaching is very good; at times, it is excellent. Some of the exchanges between staff and student were immensely impressive. Teachers demand that students rise to the occasion; the challenge to even the most able to push back their personal boundaries is explicit. Teachers' subject knowledge is frequently profound. The questions they pose, and the answers they receive, are consequently first rate. Although students may well encounter a similar breadth, depth and mastery if they move on to study history at university, they may not experience the same combination of sharpness of wit, insight and personal affection. Teachers are immensely proud of their students and celebrate their achievements readily. In the course of the inspection, teaching staff uniformly spoke of the success individuals have had in obtaining places in higher education. Students are aware of this and, in their turn, are full of praise for what has been provided for them. Relationships are excellent.

267. There are two areas where the department should review its practice. The first concerns the pace and pitch of teaching which, at times, are very demanding. The department needs to be sure that all students really are following what is being discussed and know how to make the best use of it. The second area concerns the way that students organise their personal files. History is a very detailed subject and the temptation to staff to add just a little more is not always resisted. Consequently, the files of some of the students contain large amounts of written and photocopied material, and using it to best effect to grasp the overall

picture and the connections between the various key themes when revising, is not something they will find easy without guidance.

Leadership and management

268. Leadership in history is good. Other than in respect of the use of ICT, which is still too dependent on student's personal interest and access to equipment, the subject has experienced consistent improvement. Standards have risen, teaching quality has been improved and the numbers of students opting for history in the sixth form, and going on to higher education to continue their studies, remain high. The department is buoyant and self-confident. Much of the credit for this must go to those who have led this department, both now, and in the very recent past. The subject has had to come to terms with the uncertainties surrounding the review of advanced examinations last summer but has never lost its sense of purpose and commitment. It is a very successful department.

Geography

269. Provision in geography is **very good**: as a result of very good leadership, standards and high and teaching very good.

Strengths

- The high standards of attainment.
- The very good teaching.
- The commitment of students to their studies.

Areas for improvement

- The retention rate of students from AS on to A2 courses.

Standards and achievement

270. Students' performance in the GCE A level examinations over the past four years has been consistently high, although in 2001 it dipped to just above the national average. In 2002 results were once again well above the national average, with two thirds achieving A or B grades. These were the best results in geography since 1993. The number of students opting to study geography through to A2 level has been falling, down to eighteen students in the current Year 13. Students' performance in the AS examinations in 2001 was outstanding, with nearly three-quarters achieving A or B grades. Results were lower in 2002 but were still well above the provisional national average. The department has been quick to investigate the reasons behind some variation in results and appropriate actions have been taken, such as participation in examination board training courses and changes to the schemes of work. Observation of lessons and scrutiny of students' work in Years 12 and 13 confirms the picture of high standards and the good achievement of each student. They are committed to their work, speak with enthusiasm about different aspects of the course and are clearly enjoying geography. They particularly value the variety of teaching and learning styles within their human geography options. They are aware of what they need to do to improve their work. Students in both years are able to handle data with great confidence and are developing good geographical skills. They readily explain the geographical patterns that they can identify and are very aware of the conflicting interpretations that are sometimes possible, such as the extent to which human actions are responsible for global warming. The teaching of geography encourages them to debate and question from a very strong knowledge base.

Quality of education

271. The teaching of geography is very good. Strong features are teacher's very good knowledge and planning. For example, in a Year 13 lesson, the students were giving very well-informed presentations on aspects of the impact of human actions on the atmosphere. The teacher was able to make very sharp interventions when either the students' factual detail was inaccurate or, more tellingly, when additional detail was needed. As a result, the students were able to debate and to question each other spontaneously. Teachers are very aware of the assessment demands of the syllabus and the learning needs of their students and these inform their teaching. Where possible teachers make good use of up-to-date materials taken from the press and Internet. The residential fieldwork visit to North Devon has had a particularly positive

impact on students' learning. That students enjoy the subject is evidenced by the high number who went on to read geography at university in 2002.

Leadership and management

272. The leadership and management of geography are very good. The head of geography, together with his colleagues, has worked very hard to successfully develop the new AS and A-level courses. There has been good improvement since the last inspection. An appropriate focus is being given to examination requirements and the teaching is underpinned by good planning in schemes of work. There is a strong, shared commitment to raise standards and to succeed amongst teachers and students alike.

Sociology

273. Provision in sociology is **very good**: students respond very positively to high expectations and very good teaching, and achieve high standards as a result.

Strengths

- Outstanding examination results.
- Highly effective lesson planning designed to engage and involve all students.
- Teachers' expectations are very high and good support is offered to students.
- Students are given a thorough grounding in the theoretical foundations of the subject.
- Leadership is highly effective and good use is made of data to set and monitor individual learning targets.

Areas for improvement

- Accommodation is cramped especially for large classes.
- Students are not set a wide enough variety of tasks.

Standards and achievement

274. Sociology A-level is well established as a sixth form subject and results since the last inspection have been very good. All students pass and, in 2002, 60 per cent gained A or B grades. This exceeds national averages, and results for the new AS examinations show further improvement: almost four-fifths of the 2002 entry gaining the top two grades, considerably better than most other subjects.

275. Students make very good progress in developing a sound understanding of this demanding subject. Second-year students show an impressive understanding of different sociological perspectives. The written work of the most-successful students shows both depth and sophistication, for example by providing a detailed and well argued critique of Marxist approaches to the sociology of education. First-year students show a quick appreciation of sociological method and this is reflected in

effective questioning of each other and perceptive responses to teachers' questions about the 'nature/nurture' debate in relationship to children's behaviour. Second-year students showed no hesitation in interpreting and using numerical data to investigate the extent to which women's roles have changed over the last 20 years. Both sets of students work very well together and show sensitivity towards those holding views different from their own.

Quality of education

276. Most teaching is very good. All lessons are well prepared and lively. Teachers almost always have high expectations that students should understand thoroughly the theoretical basis of the subject. These skills are developed with a great degree of student involvement, making the acquisition of difficult concepts easier. Thus, first-year students show rapid progress in learning about the significance of the social construction of behaviour, and second years work quickly to evaluate critically competing theories on the existence of poverty in contemporary society. Less-effective teaching is characterised by lower intellectual expectations and less student discussion. Even when teaching is no better than satisfactory, students still work hard and make rapid progress. Marking of students' work is thorough, and clear indications are given to help them improve their grades. The department has already introduced target-setting procedures based on prior attainment. These are used on a regular basis to monitor the progress of individual students and to keep them informed. Given the ability and high motivation of students, opportunities are missed to promote the development of skills useful in higher education, such as using seminar-style approaches and undertaking more first hand research.

Leadership and management

277. Leadership of this small department is very good. The head of department approached inspection with great openness and a desire to continue to improve the teaching and learning of sociology. She is a thoughtful, reflective practitioner whose planning skills are very good and who enjoys full and active support from the senior management team.

278. Accommodation is cramped and badly in need of a face-lift.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

279. In this curriculum area, the school provides courses to AS/A-level in English literature, French and German, all of which were inspected in detail; and in Spanish, which was sampled. Results in Spanish have generally been around the national average in recent years, but were well above that average in 2002, when all students passed, nearly 90 per cent achieved grades A and B, and most of the students went on to read Spanish at university.

English

280. Provision in English is **very good**: results and teaching are both very good and students respond extremely well.

Strengths

- The GCE A2 results in 2002 were well above the national averages and included a significant increase in the proportion of students attaining grade A.
- The students' response to their teachers is at least very good and often better.
- Teaching is very good.
- Departmental leadership is successful in enhancing the students' examination results.

Areas for improvement

- The department does not celebrate British cultural diversity because it does not use non- European texts sufficiently.

Standards and achievement

281. In 2002, the results attained at A-level in English and English literature were well above national averages and showed a ten percentage point increase on those of the previous year. The AS English literature results were a significant improvement on those of the previous year in the number attaining the higher grades.

282. Students' work seen during the inspection was invariably very good or better. A very large number of students produce grade A essays with detailed textual analyses and intelligent character studies. Their literary appreciation is of a very high level. In several cases the students have produced work of a standard equivalent to a second year undergraduate level, especially in their analyses of Shakespearean texts. In one outstanding Year 13 lesson on the main themes of Brian Friel's *Translations*, students were able to produce convincing arguments that unravelled abstruse and complex political and philosophical themes. They showed a high level of understanding of how language works, how people use it to manipulate others and how it is often confusing. Students gave outstanding examples of language confusion through some superb readings of the play.

Quality of education

283. Teaching is very good. Teachers have outstanding relationships with their students. The result is a productive learning environment within which students can take considerable risks in responding to literature. In one outstanding Year 13 lesson, the teacher had agreed the task with her students: to produce an article focusing on Carol Ann Duffy's key words. The students worked in small groups and used mind mapping very effectively which enabled them to extract salient points to use. The teacher moved from group to group helping, challenging and exhorting. The students brought in other poetry, notably Andrew Marvell's *To His Coy Mistress*, to illustrate quite difficult language points. The teacher led a plenary session and pushed hard to enable students to give grade A responses across all areas of their analyses. In turn the students responded with considerable enthusiasm in a mature and enlightened literary way. Assessment strategies are effective, with students being told exactly what they need to do next to improve further.

284. The students invariably respond very well to their teachers' challenges. They work co-operatively and produce some high standard responses to literature. They were curious and interested, always seeking to present the best arguments possible. Occasionally, when presented with relatively limited questions, they responded with less than their usual flair but even then students engaged in fairly sophisticated discussions within their groups.

Leadership and management

285. Departmental leadership is very good. The head of department undertook a very effective analysis of the most recent examination results. The strategies needed to improve the results still further have now been incorporated into the departmental improvement plan. Teachers who teach sixth form classes have a strong commitment to success and improvement. They work closely to ensure that provision remains very good. Given the school's high number of visible minority ethnic students, the department does not celebrate British cultural diversity sufficiently and there is little use of non-European texts.

French

286. Provision in French in the sixth form is **good**: students achieve very high standards in their work as a result of good teaching and of their own very good attitudes to learning the subject.

Strengths

- Levels of attainment in examinations and in work seen are very high, and examination results have shown steady improvement over the past four years.
- The teachers have excellent subject knowledge and high levels of competence in French.
- The students are highly motivated and well involved in lessons.
- They accept it as the norm that they should speak French in lessons, and participate with confidence in the foreign language.

Areas for improvement

- Assessment data gathered do not give the department and the students a clear enough basis for tracking progress and discussing improvement.
- The accommodation for teaching French at this level is unsatisfactory.

Standards and achievement

287. Results achieved by the students in the 2001 A-level examination were very high, and the proportion of students achieving A and B grades was much higher than the national average for all schools. In the recent 2002 examination the students again achieved very highly. Since 1999 a clear rising trend in results emerges.

288. The standards of work seen during the inspection are equally very high. Levels of understanding of spoken and written French are very good. The students contribute to lessons fluently and readily in French, and sustain the use of the foreign language well. They bring a very good standard of French to their AS course and build rapidly on their GCSE level French, acquiring a wide range of vocabulary and idiom at the beginning of Year 12. They show very good knowledge of the topics and the texts they are studying. They interpret text well and begin to write discursive essays in French with some success. By Year 13 they can speak and write French with minimal errors using complex structures and a wide range of vocabulary. Most have good knowledge of grammar, so they are well able to bring some sophistication to their use of the language, for example, by incorporating the subjunctive confidently and correctly in speech, without prompting, or by transposing sentences written in colloquial language into correct, more elegant French with good grammatical control. Pronunciation and intonation are good, and most students speak with confidence, so that they are able to adopt a role and to question and defend a point of view very effectively, as in a lesson where two students were able to role-play an unscripted interview between a radio presenter and a young woman from a disadvantaged area with impressive aplomb after only a few minutes' preparation. In their written work, students in Year 13 use a good range of topic-specific and general vocabulary. They vary the construction of their sentences and use increasingly complex structure, tenses and verb forms, generally successfully. The highest attainers write with confidence and with a high level of accuracy. They can write in the correct style for the task set and their topic work is well balanced and coherent, with a good sense of overall perspective.

289. The students have very good attitudes to learning, and are developing independence in their approach to work. They work well on their own and prepare effectively for their lessons. They take it as the norm that in lessons they should use French as the medium of communication, they write useful notes in French or in English, and respond well in discussion. Relationships are excellent, and the students collaborate most effectively in pairs and groups.

Quality of education

290. Teaching is good overall and, as a result, the students learn well and make good progress. The teachers are fluent speakers of French and have excellent knowledge of the literature and themes which form an important part of study at this level. They plan carefully for their lessons, choosing a range of stimulating activities and strategies which ensure that the students are fully involved and challenged. Good use is made of a range of suitable resources, and broadly effective use is made of time, although occasionally a lesson is insufficiently well planned for all the objectives set to be accomplished. In the most effective lessons, objectives are shared explicitly with the students at the outset and reviewed at the end, so that students have a clear idea of how well they are progressing. Good use is made of homework to extend and consolidate the work done in the lesson, and to offer real opportunities for independent study. Marking is thorough, but it is not always made clear to the students how well they are progressing towards their A-level goal, because A-level grading is not used frequently enough, and there is only occasional use made of critical, helpful comment to explain clearly how the student can improve the quality of her work.

Leadership and management

291. The management of the teaching and learning of French in the sixth form is good, ensuring effective co-ordination of the work of those teaching the subject. The head of department monitors teaching and learning on a regular basis, and close analysis is made of examination performance and appropriate action taken. However, more effective use could be made of the information collected from observing lessons in order to review the subject formally, and to provide a basis for enhanced leadership. Insufficient use is made of assessment data to give the department a clear view of the potential of individual students and to ensure that they, and their teachers, have a fully informed picture of how each student is progressing in relation to AS and A-level criteria. The department is well equipped with resources for teaching French at this level, and the school library has a good range of suitable dictionaries, texts and newspapers to support the students in their work, and some lighter texts to encourage them to develop their interest in France and French. French is taught in a variety of classrooms, not all of them suitable for the purpose, so that teachers have to transport equipment and other resources; and the rooms themselves, in particular a science laboratory, do not support a full range of language learning activities effectively.

292. Good progress in the teaching and learning of French has been maintained since the last inspection.

German

293. The quality of provision in German is **good**: standards are above average and teaching is good.

Strengths

- The use of German as the main means of classroom communication.
- The concentration on the culture, politics and recent history of Germany.
- Students' enthusiasm for the subject.

Areas for improvement

- Numbers vary from year to year, with small classes providing a difficult challenge to staff and students alike.

Standards and achievement

294. Standards reached in public examinations have been at least satisfactory. In 2002 there was a 100 per cent pass rate at AS level, with half the group obtaining grades A or B, and there were similar successes at A level. The small numbers taking the examination lead to some fluctuations in the quality of results, but they have generally been above national average in recent years.

295. Work seen in classes was generally good. Year 12 currently contains four students, only two of whom were present during the week of the inspection. The difficulty gradient from GCSE to sixth form work is considerable, and students at this level still find difficulty with some of the basic problems of German grammar, such as case, gender and word order. GCSE German revolves round a small number of simple themes and the leap from this very basic vocabulary to the sophisticated lexis of AS and A levels is very demanding. Nevertheless, students are beginning to write and read more fluently and were able to discuss intelligently the role of various countries of the European Union. With only two students present, the burden of contribution on each is considerable, as it is on the sole teacher of German. An increase in student numbers and a sharing of the teaching load would improve quality.

296. The larger group (eight students) in Year 13 provided a better basis for class discussion. Here, some of the earlier complexities of German grammar have been overcome, a wider vocabulary has been mastered and students devoted themselves enthusiastically to a modern text concerned with East Germany before the fall of the Berlin Wall. Lessons seen were conducted almost entirely in German and, although some members of the class were still diffident in speech, most were willing to attempt to express themselves in the language, and to incorporate corrections in later contributions. There was a general good humour in the class and a clear keenness to do well. Written work has also progressed and there is evidence of work to a high standard for the coming examinations.

Quality of education

297. Good teaching is a major contributor to the good level of work in Year 13. The teacher has a good command of the language, shows a great enthusiasm for it, and gently insists on students' using it in class. Marking is consistent and sensitive. The subject also makes a very good contribution to the cultural life of the school. A planned

student visit to Berlin is a very good example of this, as is a series of talks on contemporary German literature.

Leadership and management

298. The sole teacher of the subject organises the course well, plans carefully to ensure its continuing improvement and has ensured the provision of a good range of resources.