

INSPECTION REPORT

MILL HILL COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL

Mill Hill, London NW7

LEA area: London Borough of Barnet

Unique reference number: 101359

Headteacher: Dr Alan Davison

Reporting inspector: Brian Oppenheim
2686

Dates of inspection: 15 – 17 and 20 – 21 January 2003

Inspection number: 249640

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Foundation
Age range of pupils:	11-18 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Worcester Crescent Mill Hill London
Postcode:	NW7 4LL
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr. Martin Dannell
Date of previous inspection:	24 April 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities (sixth form)	Aspect responsibilities (sixth form)
2686	Brian Oppenheim	Registered inspector	Business education	What sort of school is it? The school's results and students' achievements How well is the school led and managed? What should the school do to improve further?
9980	Joanna Adams	Lay inspector		Students' attitudes, values and personal development
14446	Barry Simmons	Team inspector		How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to students?
2731	Penny Holden	Team inspector	Sociology	How well are students taught?
12003	Andrew Marfleet	Team inspector	Religious education	Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development
1830	Stuart Charlton	Team inspector	Mathematics	
32297	Chris Martin	Team inspector	Geography	
27238	Alan Lazell	Team inspector	Design and technology	
6364	Geoff Strack	Team inspector	Information and communication technology	
31685	Val Girling	Team inspector	Art	How well does the school care for its students?
23402	Birendra Singh	Team inspector	Biology Chemistry	
3258	David Bain	Team inspector	Psychology	
32198	Gerry Gurhy	Team inspector	History	
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REPORT CONTENTS

Page

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

8

Information about the school
How good the school is
What the school does well
What could be improved
How the school has improved since its last inspection
Standards
Pupils' attitudes and values
Teaching and learning
Other aspects of the school
How well the school is led and managed
Parents' and carers' views of the school

ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM

13

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

17

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

21

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

22

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

23

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

28

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

28

The school's results and pupils' achievements
Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

29

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

30

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

32

Assessment
Advice, support and guidance

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

32

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

33

Leadership and management
Resources

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

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Mill Hill County High School is a mixed comprehensive school for 1552 pupils aged 11 – 18 including 401 in the sixth form. This makes the school much larger than average, particularly the sixth form. The school is a designated Technology College. Many pupils come from the local area but others live further away and there are many more pupils applying than there are places. Most pupils come from white heritage backgrounds and just over one fifth come from a range of other ethnic and cultural backgrounds including Black, Indian, Pakistani and Chinese. Just over a fifth speak a home language other than English but nearly all are proficient in using English at school. The school receives extra money to support 12 ethnic minority pupils. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is lower than the average for England. Fifteen per cent of pupils have identified learning needs which is broadly similar to the national average. Just over three and a half per cent of pupils have a statement of need: this is higher than average. The school runs a special educational needs unit for up to 32 pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties. The unit is about 25 minutes' journey from the main school. The proportion of pupils who join and leave the school mid-year is low. The school allocates 10 per cent of Year 7 places on the basis of pupils' potential technological aptitude, 10 per cent on musical aptitude and five per cent on dance aptitude. The achievements of pupils when they join the school at the start of Year 7 represent the full range but attainment overall is above average.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Mill Hill County High School is an excellent school that has many outstanding qualities. Pupils achieve very high standards in all that they do: examination results are first rate and pupils' personal achievements are very good. The high quality of the teaching means that pupils learn very effectively. The school is led and managed by the headteacher and key staff exceptionally well, with sensitivity and skill. One of the unique qualities of the school is the emphasis on helping every pupil achieve their best. Pupils receive an extremely high quality of education in its widest sense and their needs are met very successfully. This explains why their achievements are so high and why the school provides very good value for money.

What the school does well

- Examination results and standards of work in lessons are very high.
- Teaching is very good. There are very good working relationships between teachers and pupils that create a very good climate for learning.
- The curriculum provides superbly for the needs, interests and aspirations of all pupils regardless of ability, gender, ethnic background or attitude.
- The school is led extremely well by the headteacher. Senior and key managers play their full part in achieving improvement and excellence.
- The quality of the care and support given to all pupils is second to none: all pupils are helped to achieve their best according to their particular needs.

What could be improved

- Examination results and standards of work in art are not up to the same high standard achieved in other subjects.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has improved very successfully since the last inspection in 1997. Significantly, examination results have continued to rise at a faster pace than results nationally: given the school's already high standards in 1997, this represents an outstanding achievement. The quality of education has also improved significantly: teaching, the curriculum, pupils' and students' learning and the way key staff lead and manage their teams are all much enhanced. All in all, pupils and students get an even better deal than they did in 1997. All the important points identified in the last inspection have been dealt with successfully: for example, the management of subjects is now very good because responsibilities are spread amongst key staff. The only area that has not seen a change is the provision of a daily act of collective worship where the school is still not meeting the legal requirements.

STANDARDS

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

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

Key

well above average A

above average B

average C

below average D

well below average E

** National results for 2002 are not yet available

Pupils and students achieve very high standards at Mill Hill County High School. In 2002 examination performance at the end of Year 11 was outstanding and in the top five per cent of all schools nationally. Pupils start school in Year 7 with a broad range of attainment and prior experience, and make very good progress as they move up through the school. The school has maintained its very good examination performance over the past few years, improving year on year at a faster rate than the more modest increase in results nationally. The school's results are also outstanding when compared with those of similar schools and are also within the top five per cent. Eighty-four per cent of pupils gained five good GCSEs by the end of Year 11 which is well above average. The proportion achieving at least five passes is also very high: 216 pupils out of a total of 219 achieved at least five GCSE passes and all gained at least one GCSE pass. This shows that the school is extremely successful in meeting the needs of all pupils.

The results of the 2002 national tests in English, mathematics and science, taken at the end of Year 9, are similarly high. As with GCSE results, the school has maintained its high national test results over the past few years. They are improving faster than the national trend, illustrating that the school adds very significant value to pupils' learning.

Students do very well at AS and A Level. 2001 is the last year in which results can be compared with other schools and these show that performance is well above average. The 2002 results maintain these high standards and although it is not yet possible to compare them with other schools, students achieve a high proportion of the highest grades, A and B, in nearly all subjects. In many subjects performance is in the top five per cent and nearly all results are well above the average. In art and English standards were average in 2001: however, in 2002 A Level results in both subjects improved especially in English where they are likely to be well above average.

The work seen during the inspection confirms that pupils achieve increasingly good standards as they move from Years 7 to 9 into Years 10 and 11. Similarly, as students move into the sixth form they

progress well and the school adds value to their learning. The improved examination success in English, for example, is reflected in students' work in lessons: in many subjects this work is of a very high standard. In art, standards of work are not up to the same high levels achieved in other subjects. Pupils' and students' speaking and literacy skills are developed well, and their written work is good and often very well presented. They are numerate and develop their skills in mathematics well. Pupils' information and communication technology skills in Years 7 to 11 are broadly as expected but their improving skills have not yet made a difference in the sixth form. Here, the key skills in information technology are not high enough.

A particularly strong feature of Mill Hill County High School is the way teachers successfully support pupils and students with special educational needs. These pupils make particularly good progress and often achieve good results in examinations. Similarly, the small proportion with English as an additional language do very well.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Excellent. Pupils are extremely well motivated and very keen to do well. They work hard in lessons because they are encouraged and stimulated by their teachers.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. Teachers expect high standards of discipline and as a result pupils behave very well in classrooms and around the school.
Personal development and relationships	Excellent. Relationships between pupils and teachers are very strong: as a result pupils' personal development is very good and they respond very well to the opportunities provided by the school.
Attendance	Very good. Pupils and sixth formers enjoy school and all that it has to offer.

Pupils' attitudes, the values with which they leave school and their relationships with teachers are all outstanding qualities.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

The quality of teaching is very good. This is because teaching is consistently good and very good. Particular features of this effective teaching are teachers' knowledge of and love for their subjects and the way they convey this enthusiasm to their pupils. Teachers take great pleasure in bringing their subject to life in lessons and to make sure this happens they plan thoughtfully and effectively. They make lessons really interesting. As a result pupils listen carefully and are ready to participate in discussion both in small groups and the whole class. Pupils throughout the school take their learning seriously because they respect their teachers and their expertise: this is one of the reasons why relationships are so good. Another feature of this very good teaching is the way teachers ask questions to spot whether pupils understand or need extra help or whether their knowledge needs to be extended. This is one of the reasons why pupils of all abilities and backgrounds do so well. Teachers expect every pupil to succeed and they do all they can to help them with practical and effective support.

The quality of teaching in English, mathematics and science in Years 7 to 11 is very good and helps pupils achieve very well. The skills of literacy and numeracy are taught well in lessons. Pupils often read passages from relevant texts in class very expressively and teachers ensure that written work is accurate. Subject vocabulary in science, for example, is often highlighted and displayed in science lessons.

There are still a very few lessons where teaching is less than satisfactory. Teaching is not consistently good in art and this limits pupils' achievements. However, the school has appropriate plans for improvement that are beginning to have an impact.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Excellent. Pupils experience a very wide range of subjects and activities that meets their needs and prepares them for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life extremely successfully.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Pupils with special educational needs are provided for very well. The Oak Hill Campus, and the support provided across the school, such as the one year sixth form, ensures that all pupils make very good progress with their learning.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Very good. Pupils with English as an additional language are well supported with the right help and those new to learning English make good progress.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. The school has a strong moral code and very positive relationships amongst staff and pupils. The school successfully fosters the rich diversity of cultures represented by its pupils. Pupils' spiritual awareness is developed very well through many subjects.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school cares for its pupils extremely well. The systems for assessing pupils' academic and personal development are highly effective in ensuring that all pupils get the right help and support to achieve their full potential.

The curriculum and the way the school cares for its pupils are both outstanding qualities of the school. The statutory requirements for providing a daily act of worship and for teaching religious education in Years 12 and 13 are not met.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Excellent. The skilful leadership and management give a very strong steer to the school's educational direction in which all staff play an essential part. This makes sure that all pupils and students receive a high quality education and achieve their best.
How well the governors	Governors carry out their work very effectively. Although a few statutory requirements are not met, the governing body has a

fulfil their responsibilities	very strong understanding of its role and what needs improving.
Aspect	Comment
The school's evaluation of its performance	Very good. The thorough way the school monitors and evaluates its performance ensures that it has a clear view of how to improve. This is one of the reasons for the continuing improvement in pupils' achievements.
The strategic use of resources	Very good. The school is very careful to ensure that there are sufficient resources available to support improvements and innovation.

The school applies the principles of best value very effectively. Surveys of student opinion, the evaluation of examination results, the management of the building contract and the way examination results are continuing to improve from an already high level, all show how successful the school is in promoting improvement. The high quality of education at the Oak Hill campus is a very strong example of how these principles are applied in practice.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school helps all pupils to achieve well and make progress. • The school expects pupils to work hard. • Teaching is good. • Behaviour is good and pupils are helped to become mature young people. • The school is well led and managed. • The support given to individual pupils. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In some subjects there is not enough homework. • Some parents felt that there is not always enough information about pupils' progress. • Some parents felt that the school did not work closely enough with them.

These express the views of the 15 per cent of parents who returned questionnaires and the 37 parents who came to the pre-inspection meeting with inspectors. Overall, parents are very satisfied with the school and express strong support for its ethos and achievements. Inspectors support these positive views and confirm that the school meets the needs of pupils and parents extremely well.

Evidence from the inspection shows that enough homework is given to pupils. Often in lessons the homework is relevant to the class work and adds effectively to pupils' learning. Teachers are careful to ensure that pupils record the homework in their diaries and that previous work is marked. Some parents at the pre-inspection meeting felt that the wording of reports was not always helpful. However, inspectors judged that broadly reports are helpful. Inspectors judged that the school's assessment procedures are very good and that parents are kept well informed about their children's progress. The well-attended Year 9 parents' evening, that took place during the inspection, illustrates the effectiveness of the school's procedures for providing information about pupils' progress. Broadly, the school works closely with parents: this is supported by the views of parents at a recent meeting of the "Friends" of the school.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

There are 401 students in the sixth form which makes it much larger than most schools. Applications to the sixth form far exceed the places available. The ethnic mix of the sixth form broadly reflects that of the main school: most are White and just over a fifth represent a range of other backgrounds including Black, Indian, Pakistani and Chinese. There is a very broad range of mainly academic subjects and some Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) courses. The school also provides courses in the key skills of information and communication technology. Some students are given the opportunity to join a one-year sixth form programme that includes GNVQ courses. All Year 11 pupils are given the opportunity to join the sixth form. The very high GCSE results, and the high demand for places, means that overall attainment at the start of Year 12 is above average. Most students take advanced courses and programmes leading to AS Level, A Level and AVCE qualifications.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

This is a highly effective sixth form that gives all its students an excellent education. AS and A Level results are high, work in lessons is of a very high standard and is improving. This is because the teaching is very good which, in turn, means that students make good progress. The sixth form is particularly effective in meeting the needs of all students, regardless of need and background. This is because of the very strong relationships, the high quality of care and advice for students and excellent leadership and management. All this means that the sixth form's cost-effectiveness is very good.

Strengths

- Standards are well above average and students achieve highly.
- Teaching is very strong because teachers have a passion for their subject. This ensures that progress in Years 12 and 13 is good.
- The curriculum is excellent and provides for students' needs and aspirations extremely well regardless of race, disability or prior attainment.
- Relationships are extremely positive and mean that students are highly motivated learners.
- Students are given excellent support and high quality guidance: as a result they are very well prepared for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life.

What could be improved

- Students' key skills in information technology are not as well developed as they should be.
- The way some teachers use a wide range of teaching techniques that are matched well to students' learning needs should be shared more widely.

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

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

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

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	Very good. Examination results are well above average and very high standards have been maintained. Teaching is good, with some very good features, enabling all students to make good progress.
Biology	Excellent. The quality of teaching in biology is very good. Students' attainment is very high and they achieve very well.
Chemistry	Very good. Most students achieve very well and overall attainment is very high and well above average. The teaching in chemistry is very good.
Design and technology	Very good. Students' attainment is well above average and teaching is very good. Achievement is high but more students could be getting the top grades at A Level.
Business studies	Very good. Examination results are very high and students achieve very well because teaching is strong. Students respond well to the demands made upon them.
Information and communication technology	Very good. Examination results in 2002 are in line with the national average but the very good teaching and positive attitudes of the students mean standards are returning to the very high levels of earlier years.
Art	Good. Teaching is good and students learn well as a result. Standards are improving with students achieving better than expected at AS Level in 2002.
Media studies	Excellent. The quality of teaching is very good with all students achieving very high standards. Results at examinations are well above national averages.
Geography	Very good. Results are well above average and rising. Assessment and feedback to students is a particular strength. Staff have a strong subject knowledge and teaching is consistently very good.
History	Very good. The quality of teaching is good. Students achieve very high results that are well above average. They make very good progress in history.
Religious studies	Very good. The quality of teaching in religious studies is very good. Students' attainment is well above average. They achieve well and have very positive attitudes to their studies.
Sociology	Very good. Standards are high. Teaching is good or very good. Students are conscientious and interested learners and achieve well.

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Psychology	Good. Most students pass A Level. Fewer students than average have attained the highest grades but standards are improving with AS Level results in 2002 well above average. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and students' attitudes to the subject are very positive.
English	Very good. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Students attain high standards and achieve very well. Teachers guide their students very successfully and ensure that they achieve their best.
Modern foreign languages	Very good. Standards are above average and most students choose to continue into the second year of the sixth form. Teaching is very good and the foreign language is used extensively in lessons. Students respond very well to their teachers' guidance and to the range of relevant topics.

Across the sixth form the work in other subjects is of similar, very high quality. In all subjects, students achieve well and attain high standards. In physics, law, economics and drama standards are very high with a high proportion gaining the top A Level grades in 2002. The provision for students in the one-year sixth form is very effective: all students regardless of need or background achieve very well.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Personal support and guidance for students are excellent. All students receive a personal interview and excellent advice about courses that are most suitable for them. Careers guidance is also excellent and there is a strong emphasis on personal development. The excellent support given to students in the one-year sixth form ensures that all students, regardless of background or need, achieve well.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	The excellent way the school is led and managed means the sixth form is highly effective. The attention to detail, and the high quality of the guidance and support for students, means that all students regardless of background achieve well. Very high standards have been maintained despite a large increase in the number of students.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students enjoy being in the sixth form. • Students are treated as mature young people. • Students have very good relationships with their teachers. • Teachers always give up their time to help and support students. • There are opportunities to help younger pupils. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students are not always advised well about careers. • Some students felt that they were not advised well about their progress. • Some students felt that their work was not assessed thoroughly enough.

Questionnaires were returned by 82 per cent of the sixth form students. Nearly all had positive views about the sixth form and this was supported by the formal and informal discussions inspectors had with students. Other evidence from the inspection confirms the strengths identified by students. Inspectors judge that students receive good advice about their career options and information about progress. Work is usually marked well with some helpful comments about targets. When asked, students were able to tell inspectors these targets and how well they expected to do in their examinations.

COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

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

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Examinations results and standards of work in lessons are very high

1. The very high standards achieved at Mill Hill County High School illustrate how extremely successful the school is in meeting the needs of all its pupils. Pupils start in Year 7 with a broad range of attainment and prior experience but standards are above average overall. They make very good progress as they move up through the school. The school has improved its very good test and examination results over the past few years and at the end of Year 11 examination performance is outstanding.
2. GCSE results are very high compared with all schools in England and with those schools that have a similar proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals. In both cases, performance is in the top five per cent of schools. When the GCSE results are compared with the same pupils' achievements in the 2000 National Curriculum tests, taken at the end of Year 9, performance is very high showing that pupils make very rapid progress in Years 10 and 11 and that the school adds the highest value to pupils' learning.
3. A more detailed analysis of the 2002 GCSE results shows that all pupils gain at least one GCSE pass. The proportion of pupils who achieve at least five passes is also very high: only three pupils out of 219 achieved less than five GCSE passes. The proportion that achieves five GCSE passes at grades A* - C shows a similar pattern of very high achievement with 84 per cent of pupils gaining these high grades. This means that just 35 pupils did not meet this very high standard, a figure that matches the proportion of pupils who have special educational needs. Nearly all subjects perform very well at GCSE and results are consistently well above average or very high.
4. At the end of Year 9 standards are similarly high. The 2002 national test results in English, mathematics and science are well above average. Fewer pupils achieved the highest levels in English but the work seen in lessons suggests this is simply a hiccup and that results will reflect these higher levels this year. As with GCSE results, the school has maintained its high national test results over the past few years and the trend of improvement is above the national trend. What is significant is that the school has succeeded in helping pupils progress from these high levels to even better GCSE results: this illustrates how effective the school is in striving for improvement.
5. Over the last five years GCSE standards have risen at a faster rate than results nationally. Given that results have been very high for the last five years, raising them even higher is an especially significant achievement. It shows how successful the school is in improving pupils' achievements and helps to confirm the school's outstanding success. Targets for GCSE results are appropriately demanding but realistic and the school met those for 2002.
6. The work seen in lessons confirms the high test and examination results. In nearly all subjects achievement in lessons mirrors the Year 9 test and GCSE results: pupils make very good progress and the school adds very significant value to pupils' learning. This is because teaching is effective in helping pupils achieve their best.
7. Students with special educational needs make particularly good progress and often achieve very good results in examinations. In 2002 nearly all pupils with statements of special need gained at least five GCSE passes. This is because of the support they receive from teachers and learning support assistants. Pupils' needs are diagnosed accurately and the individual education plans detail the support they are provided very clearly. When pupils are taken out of class for help with their work the support is precise and well targeted which ensures that they gain the right skills to make progress on their return to lessons.
8. Only a very few pupils speak English as an additional language and broadly they are fluent bilingual speakers. The one or two pupils who are still developing their skill in speaking English as an

additional language make very good progress in lessons because they are supported well, highly motivated and taught very effectively.

9. Standards of literacy are high and pupils are articulate and confident. This is partly because pupils are given good opportunities to discuss ideas in groups and answer searching questions. In a very good Year 9 history lesson about the lead up to World War 2, for example, pupils had a range of different opportunities to discuss the failures of the League of Nations in the 1920s and 30s. Similarly, pupils have good numeracy skills and use these in many subjects including, for example, science, business studies and design and technology. Moreover, the mathematics department develops pupils' number skills very well.

10. There are a number of factors that contribute to the school's very high standards, including:

- the quality of the teaching, much of which is very good;
- the very strong relationships between teachers and pupils promote a very positive ethos;
- the excellent curriculum provides very successfully for the needs of all pupils;
- the excellent way the school is led and managed;
- the extremely high level of care and support for pupils.

Teaching is very good. There are very good working relationships between teachers and pupils that create a very good climate for learning.

11. Teaching is very good because it is consistently of a high quality. There are particular features of this effective teaching.

12. Teachers' knowledge of, and love for, their subject is evident in the way they transfer this enthusiasm to their pupils. Teachers take great pleasure in bringing their subject to life in lessons and to make sure this happens they plan thoughtfully and effectively. They make lessons really interesting. As a result pupils listen carefully and learn new information. They are ready to participate in discussion both in small groups and as a whole class. In a Year 10 drama lesson, for example, the pupils were asked to work individually, in pairs and then in assigned groups. Each task was set up well by the teacher so that the different groupings gave pupils new challenges and involved all. Pupils throughout the school take their learning seriously. This was exemplified in a Year 7 design and technology lesson where pupils were making an animal puzzle and learning how to use a saw. Pupils took the task, the new skills they had been taught, and the need to take care of health and safety, with gravity and thoughtfulness.

13. Another feature of this very good teaching is the way teachers ask questions to spot whether pupils understand or need extra help or whether their knowledge needs to be extended. This is one of the reasons why pupils of all abilities and backgrounds do so well. Teachers expect every pupil to succeed and they do all they can to help them with practical and effective support. In an excellent Year 9 science lesson at the Oak Hill Campus where pupils were checking the reaction of metals the teacher asked individual pupils questions to check their understanding. When this showed that some had made an inaccurate assumption the teacher asked pupils to add a step to the experiment they were carrying out. This let them see for themselves the error they were making and helped them make the next step in their learning.

14. One of the results of these features is that teachers have excellent relationships with their pupils. This is why pupils take their learning seriously: they respect their teachers and their expertise. In an excellent Year 8 geography lesson, for example, the very good relationships encouraged pupils not just to think for themselves but also to respond with respect to the contributions of others. The teacher's very high expectations and pupils' excellent behaviour and attitudes meant that there was an excellent climate for learning, or ethos, in the lesson. As a result, learning was very effective and pupils made very good progress in their understanding. Similar characteristics were evident in a very good science lesson looking at chemical reactions. Here, pupils responded very well to the teacher's high expectations, good planning and considerable subject knowledge, all of which ensured that pupils made very good progress with their learning. The teacher's great respect for pupils was reciprocated: pupils had excellent attitudes

to their work, took responsibility for using chemicals carefully and worked very effectively in small groups. Again, the ethos in the classroom promoted pupils' learning very effectively.

The curriculum provides superbly for the needs, interests and aspirations of all pupils regardless of ability, gender, ethnic background or attitude.

15. The school provides all pupils with a broad, balanced and relevant curriculum that provides excellent opportunities to learn and experience achievement and success. It prepares them for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life extremely successfully. In Years 7 to 9 all subjects of the National Curriculum, together with religious education, are taught. Pupils who show linguistic ability start a second modern language or Latin in Year 8.

16. In Years 10 and 11, the curricular provision is excellent. All pupils study a broad and relevant curriculum which includes an extended core of English, literature, mathematics, a double science award, technology, religious education and a modern foreign language. All pupils also follow a general course in physical education, and personal, social and health education. The school has very successfully introduced the new statutory requirement to include lessons in citizenship for all pupils. The school caters very effectively for the aptitudes of all pupils by allowing them to study optional subjects from geography, history, religious studies, art, business studies, physical education, drama, dance, and French, German and Latin. There is also the opportunity for pupils to take the GNVQ intermediate course in information and communication technology. Most pupils take a total of ten subjects at GCSE level.

17. The provision for extra-curricular activities is also excellent and makes a valuable contribution to the students' education. There is a wide range of out of school clubs and activities at lunch time and after school. The school's own analysis estimates that half of all pupils in the school take part in these activities: evidence from the week of the inspection confirms that many pupils enjoy taking part in the activities and clubs that are available to them.

18. Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. The school is a genuinely multicultural community, but with scope for different groups to be themselves. A good example of this is the voluntary religious groups such as the Muslim prayer group and the Jewish group. Another reason for the provision being strong is the way teachers and other staff model good moral and social practices in their caring attitude, their commitment to the well-being of the pupils and in ensuring that everyone achieves their best.

The school is led extremely well by the headteacher. Senior and key managers play their full part in achieving improvement and excellence.

19. One of the main reasons why Mill Hill County High School strives for, and achieves, continuous improvement and excellence is because highly effective leadership and management influences everything the school does. The skilful and thoughtful leadership of the headteacher is central to giving the school a clear focus for its work. What is significant is that leadership and management are concerned with harnessing the skills and expertise of key staff by giving them responsibility and expecting high standards in everything they do. This enables these key staff to lead on aspects of the school's development and, in turn, ensures that all share in the task of achieving excellence. In essence, leadership at Mill Hill is about managing change successfully. The evaluation of teaching and learning (known as EOTL by teachers) is an example of how this works in practice. The focus is deliberately not just on subjects but monitoring teaching and learning to check the impact of issues such as gender, writing, or information and communication technology on standards. The curriculum directors are central to this process. What is particularly effective is the way senior and middle level leaders are encouraged to take a lead in this task: curriculum directors and heads of department all have a strong commitment to the school's success and the achievements of pupils and lead their areas very well.

20. One of the ways the school achieves continuous improvement is by using performance data very effectively to monitor school and subject effectiveness and to track pupils' progress. What is particularly significant is that data does not replace teachers' expertise or knowledge about pupils; instead

it is a tool to monitor the school's efforts. Thus, performance data is not as an end in itself, or to apportion blame, but to ask pertinent questions about how well the school is doing and whether there is room for improvement. An example of this is the identification of the underachievement of boys from Black backgrounds. Here, analysis revealed that about four years ago these pupils were not doing as well as they should. The school used experience from other schools to work to improve achievements but subsequent analysis of data showed that the dip in performance was a "blip". In other words, the school is careful to use data to understand what is happening before concentrating effort and resources on improvement. Another example of the intelligent use of data is the way it is used by senior managers to get an overall picture of performance without getting bogged down in the minutiae of the figures. As a result, curriculum directors and heads of department can account for their subject's performance with a range of qualitative as well as quantitative data.

21. Another aspect of the excellent leadership and management is the way it uses the commitment and expertise of governors to support the school's achievements. The governing body takes its responsibilities very seriously and is not complacent. It has a clear understanding of its strategic role and how this works in practice. The management of the building project exemplifies this understanding. Governors have established a clear role for the site manager and have properly stepped back from the day to day management. Governors are also good advocates for the school and with the headteacher are very successful in gaining extra funding for a range of initiatives. This includes, for example, the new building and, more recently, the funding for training middle level leaders. The outcomes speak for themselves: the new building significantly enhances the accommodation and subject departments are very well led.

The quality of the care and support given to all pupils is second to none: all pupils are helped to achieve their best according to their particular needs.

22. The school provides extremely successfully for all pupils regardless of background or need. This is achieved in a number of ways. First, the support for pupils with special educational needs is very good. Special needs teachers and learning support assistants have a thorough knowledge of pupils' needs because of the detailed and precise individual education plans. In Year 8, for example, three pupils with statements of special educational need were supported very well by the learning support assistants. The teacher used each pupil's individual education plan very productively to help set a series of short tasks. This involved pupils' spoken contribution most effectively and was further enhanced by the way the teacher praised pupils for their work. All in all, pupils achieved well as a result of the well-targeted teaching. What is most interesting is that this is one of the characteristics of the most successful lessons and is one of the reasons why teaching across the school is very good.

23. The mentoring programme is also an example of the high quality of the support for pupils. Here, Year 10 pupils act as "buddies" to Year 7 pupils throughout their first year at school. What this does is to ensure that pupils new to the school are helped to settle in and make the most of what is on offer. Importantly, too, it provides good opportunities for older pupils to take on wider responsibilities and develop their social and moral awareness.

24. The school's systems for tracking pupils' progress are very well thought out and ensures that those who are not doing as well as they should are identified early and given clear targets. In a number of subjects, pupils' achievements and track record are carefully noted and used to check their progress. Pupils are often given good feedback and, where necessary, these assessments provide clear targets for improvement: examples of this were seen in information and communication technology, history and geography lessons as well as many other subjects. Frequently, target setting is based on prior achievement ensuring that it relates closely to pupils' needs. In religious education, for example, prior attainment is used not just to predict future learning but also to help shape teaching methods.

25. Another example of the way the school provides extremely successfully for all pupils is the way all the available data is used sensitively to help predict pupils' achievements thus ensuring that none fall through the net. The school is very careful to use data analysis in a way that stresses the progress made by individual pupils and that rewards positive achievement. It carries out a thorough analysis of school wide data and uses this to evaluate the work in departments. However, the school places greater

emphasis on using this data sensitively to support teaching and learning by relating the information to individual pupil progress. This is effective because the school is able to identify what is happening right across the school. Teachers also have a firm understanding of the particular needs and progress of individual pupils. Both sets of data, at school level and at pupil level, show that the school understands how data can be used as the starting point for identifying the positive: data alerts the school to potential problems and is used to inform developments.

26. A very good example of the quality of care and support given to all pupils and the way they are helped to achieve their best is the Oak Hill Campus. This is a highly successful and effective unit which gives its students a very positive experience of education and makes a very good contribution to their personal development. It is generally successful in changing students' negative attitudes to learning and to themselves into positive ones. Most pupils attend very regularly and progress well against prior attainment. A significant number attain accreditation results near to, and in some cases above, the norms for their age.

27. Teaching at the Oak Hill Campus is consistently good, and sometimes very good, and relationships are of a very high quality. As a result pupils' attitudes are good and they work hard. In a mathematics lesson, for example, the teacher knew the pupils very well and was able to gain their full attention with ease. As a result they worked hard and were able to concentrate on their work. The teacher was careful to praise pupils' efforts and this was also very effective in promoting their learning. There are many other examples of similarly good teaching and this, and the focus on pupils' learning, demonstrates that the school's care and support is directed towards pupils' achievements and on giving them the opportunities to do their best. One of the main reasons for this is that the head and the deputy head of the annexe provide very effective leadership and manage the campus and pupils' learning very well. This ensures that pupils benefit from the education that is offered.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Examination results and standards of work in art are not up to the same high standard achieved in other subjects.

28. Only in art is performance average overall. Pupils do relatively less well than in other subjects although evidence from the inspection shows that standards are beginning to rise and in 2002 all pupils achieved a GCSE pass. The reasons for this relatively lower achievement are partly historical: standards were judged at the last inspection as barely adequate. The evidence of this inspection indicates that not enough progress has been made in improving the provision for art but that the new head of department has appropriate plans in place to develop the subject.

29. Over the last few years, therefore, pupils' experiences of art have been limited and their skills have not been built up systematically and incrementally over time. This is the reason for GCSE results that are only average. The department is clearly committed to improving its performance and pupils' achievements and has begun to fill the gap in pupils' skills. This explains the rise in the proportion of GCSE passes in 2002. However, there are areas that need improving including:

- too much emphasis on secondary sources means that pupils do not have enough opportunities to develop imaginative work;
- often, pupils' outcomes are determined too closely by the teacher: for example, following a worksheet from which poor drawings are copied;
- reference to famous artists is somewhat limited especially in pupils' sketch books;
- sketch books are disappointing in terms of quality and tend to be characterised by unfinished, underdeveloped work. The layout of pages is uninteresting and there is a limited understanding of placement or spacing;
- the quality of outcome is often basic: ceramic work, for example, is not glazed, papier-mâché work is rough and rather flimsy and pupils' drawing and observation skills are below expectation.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

30. Mill Hill County High School is an excellent school with many outstanding qualities. This means that the areas pinpointed for improvement are minor: the school needs only to “fine-tune” some aspects of its work and has already identified some as priorities in the school development plan.

- i. Improve examination results and standards of work in art so that they match the same high standards achieved in other subjects by:
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to develop imaginative work;
 - make greater reference to famous artists;
 - improve the quality of pupils’ sketch books;
 - improve the quality of the finished product.

Sixth form

- i. Improve students’ key skills in information technology by:
 - ensuring that the course builds on students’ previous learning.
- ii. Broaden the range of teaching techniques so that they better match students’ learning needs by:
 - sharing the good practice that exists in many subjects.

In addition the school should consider:

Meeting the statutory requirements for providing a daily act of collective worship and for religious education in the sixth form.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 - 11	56
	Sixth form	86
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		34

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 7 – 11							
Number	6	15	27	6	2	0	0
Percentage	11	27	48	11	4	0	0
Sixth form							
Number	5	31	45	3	2	0	0
Percentage	6	36	52	3	2	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 - Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1,552	401
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	59	n/a

Special educational needs	Y7 - Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	32	3
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	212	5

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	307

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	5
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	26

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	5.1
National comparative data	708

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.2
National comparative data	1.2

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2002	124	96	220

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	112	108	110
	Girls	93	86	89
	Total	205	194	199
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	School	93 (89)	88 (88)	90 (85)
	National	66 (64)	67 (66)	66 (66)
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 6 or above	School	44 (65)	79 (73)	68 (54)
	National	32 (31)	45 (43)	33 (34)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	109	112	119
	Girls	89	88	96
	Total	198	200	215
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	School	90 (90)	91 (84)	98 (93)
	National	67 (65)	70 (68)	73 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 6 or above	School	69 (56)	73 (63)	73 (62)
	National	32 (31)	44 (42)	34 (33)

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 (Year 11)

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2002	117	102	219

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	92	114	117
	Girls	92	102	102
	Total	184	216	219
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	84 (71)	99 (98)	100 (98)
	National	50 (48)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	58.8
	National	39.8

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

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

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

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	59	81	140
	Average point score per candidate	19.8	21.6	20.8
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	18	17.5

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS examinations			For candidates entered for Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All	Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	46	78	124	17	9	26
	Average point score per candidate	20.6	20.8	20.7	13.1	14	13.4
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.9	17.4	9.8	11.4	10.6

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

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

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	764	51	3
White – Irish	0	0	0
White – any other White background	81	13	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	2	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	2	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Indian	127	7	0
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	146	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	19	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	2	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	5	2	0
Black or Black British – African	21	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	53	2	0
Chinese	16	0	0
Any other ethnic group	56	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	92	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Financial information

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	102.84
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	15.1

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	34
Total aggregate hours worked per week	1058.25

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	69.2
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	23.7
Key Stage 4	24.2

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial year	2001/02
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	£
Total income	5,302,481
Total expenditure	5,684,051
Expenditure per pupil	3,893
Balance brought forward from previous year	91,487
Balance carried forward to next year	9,917

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	36
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	39

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	5
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1553
Number of questionnaires returned	233

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	51	40	5	1	3
My child is making good progress in school.	55	37	6	0	3
Behaviour in the school is good.	38	51	6	1	4
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	32	44	17	5	2
The teaching is good.	40	50	3	1	6
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	32	44	17	3	3
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	50	41	7	0	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	72	26	1	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	34	48	13	2	3
The school is well led and managed.	55	41	3	0	1
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	45	47	4	0	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	43	45	7	2	3

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

31. On any measure the school's results and students' achievement are very high. In 2001 GCE A and AS Level results were well above average. The national results for 2002 are not yet available but the school has maintained its high performance with students achieving a large proportion of the top grades, A and B, in nearly all subjects. In many subjects performance is in the top five per cent nationally and nearly all results are well above the average. There are no differences in the achievements of males and females and their results are similarly very high. The proportion of pupils who continue into the sixth form and subsequently get places at university is very high. Also significant is that there are more students applying to the sixth form each year than there are places. Ninety-eight per cent of students move from Year 11 into the sixth form or college and a similar proportion complete their courses. The proportion of students going on to university has increased from 66 per cent in 2000 to 95 per cent in 2002. These figures illustrate clearly how highly students achieve and are a measure of the school's success in creating a high achieving sixth form.

32. The best results are in biology, business studies, communication studies, drama, economics, history, physics and sociology although this is not to underestimate the considerable achievements in other subjects. In English, for example, standards improved in 2002 and are likely to be above or well above average. In nearly all subjects 100 per cent of students entered gained a pass at A Level. The only exception was in geography but even here standards are well above average. Standards in art are broadly average but there are early signs of improvement with more students than expected gaining good grades in the AS Level course. The school's analysis of results indicates that students make good progress and that the sixth form teaching adds value to their achievements. This is backed up by evidence from lessons.

33. Students achieve well in the key skills of communication and number where they make good progress overall. Their progress in information technology is not nearly so strong and students' skills are not as good as expected. Part of the reason for this is that students do not start the sixth form with high enough information technology skills. However, the programme for teaching information and communication technology lower down the school is beginning to improve standards. In addition the way the school now incorporates information technology into the careers programme is also helping to improve students' skills although there is still more to be done.

34. The work seen in lessons broadly confirms the standards reached in examinations. It also confirms that some subjects are improving and doing particularly well. In English, physics, economics, history and sociology, for example, standards in lessons confirm the improvement in examination results in 2002. In other subjects, standards in lessons are equally high and show that students make good progress as they move through the sixth form. In a very good Year 13 mathematics lesson, for example, the teacher's very good knowledge of students and expert questioning to test out what they knew and understood, consolidated their learning very effectively. Similarly, in a Year 12 English lesson the teacher's very good planning and ability to bring to life work on "The Handmaid's Tale" ensured that students learnt very effectively. They participated fully in the lesson and gained a much better appreciation of the author's style than they had at the start. Other very good lessons, such as history, drama and biology in Year 13 and religious education, business studies and ICT in Year 12, showed the same high level of achievement brought about by teachers' careful attention to detail and very good subject knowledge. Indeed, there are many examples of effective achievement in nearly all subjects taught in the sixth form: these examples simply illustrate the school's high performance.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

35. Students are very keen to achieve well in their academic studies, to be full members of the school community and to prepare themselves for the next stage of their adult lives.

36. Their attitudes to work are very positive; they work very hard often showing great enthusiasm for their subjects. For example, in a Year 13 psychology lesson students approached the task of making a presentation with a clear desire to learn how to present effectively and an understanding of how this would contribute to their studies, and to their wider skills and their future work. Many students show a high degree of interest in researching the subjects they are studying beyond their lessons, at home, to broaden their learning. The school has carried out a survey of students' views and this shows students have a mature attitude to their work and a good understanding of the ways in which they can learn, through lecture style teaching, group and individual work.

37. The very positive attitudes to school are also reflected in the high level of involvement with the whole school; students in the sixth form are an integral part of the school community. They are involved in a wide range of activities; supporting younger pupils in lessons, acting as members of the school council, working for their Duke of Edinburgh Awards and working in the community as millennium volunteers. All these contribute significantly to their personal development which is excellent. Students have a strong understanding of their role and responsibilities as members of a community. In their lessons and in discussion they show a high level of respect for others and appreciate their contributions and ideas. For example, students in a Year 12 media studies lesson debated moral and social issues related to the research of different behavioural psychologists in a mature and thoughtful way.

38. All the above factors contribute to the excellent relationships in the sixth form; students relate extremely well to each other and to their teachers and this is a major factor in the high standards that they achieve. They work very constructively together discussing and sharing ideas, being able to question respectfully and appreciating different views. They clearly enjoy being taught and are confident in discussing both their work and other issues with their teachers and tutors.

39. Attendance is high reflecting students' very positive attitudes and their desire to achieve and to continue learning after school.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

40. The quality of teaching in the sixth form is very good. This follows on from the very good quality of teaching pupils receive in the main school. Features of this effective teaching include:

- Teachers' passion of and love for their subject which motivates students extremely well and brings the subject to life in lessons. This was a feature in many lessons right across the sixth form and across subjects, and often led teachers to provide animated and erudite introductions to new ideas and information. Students often mirrored this interest by completing extensive research around topics that interested them.
- Planning is thorough ensuring that all elements of the course are covered fully. Individual lessons are carefully planned as well as courses as a whole. Teachers use their knowledge of the course and of their students' progress to influence whether topics are extended or reinforced.
- Paired work and small-group work are used very effectively: opportunities to discuss ideas and express views develop students' understanding of the subject well. Students worked in a variety of groupings, whole-class, threes and fours, pairs and individually during a Year 13 media studies lesson. This kept every student thoroughly involved in the lesson and gave them a variety of different ways to work so that they all learned a great deal.
- Teachers have high expectations of students: this is one of the reasons why students' achievements are so high. In a religious education lesson for Year 12 students looking at the

work of the philosopher Kant the teacher expected the most of them. He ensured they tackled a challenging topic in a sharp and intellectual way, helping them grasp important aspects of Kant's theory with well-chosen examples and perceptive questioning.

- There are very well developed systems for assessing students' progress and checking that they are doing as well as they should: as a result students know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. For example, in an excellent Year 12 information and communication technology lesson the teacher had very good records of students' past marks to help determine what students needed to work on.
- Teachers' very good subject knowledge and understanding is closely linked to their knowledge of students: this ensures that work is well matched to the needs and aspirations of students. In a Year 13 law lesson where students were revising for their modular exams the teacher used excellent subject knowledge to add additional case studies to explain an aspect of law that they found difficult. This up to date and relevant subject knowledge both interested students and clarified their understanding so that they made excellent progress.
- In lessons time is used well so that the pace of students' learning is brisk. Most lessons are single 60 minute lessons and particularly in practical subjects time is used very well to get everything completed. In a Year 13 biology lesson, after a short and interactive recap of the digestion of fats, students were very well briefed to carry out an experiment. This they did successfully. The whole lesson was carried out at a very brisk pace and students completed a great deal of work. Lessons such as these are well organised and teachers involve students actively in tasks early on so that they make the most of every minute.

41. As a result of this very good teaching, learning is very effective. The particular features of learning are:

- Students believe they will succeed and work hard to achieve their goals. Students have high aspirations for their futures and a clear understanding of what they wish to do after school; they know the grades they need and this compels them to learn.
- Students' knowledge of their learning is very good. This is because the good assessment procedures, followed by most teachers, helps students know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.

42. Where teaching is only satisfactory it is because teachers lecture for too long with students taking notes, being asked the odd question. Although students do gain information from these sessions they do not learn as much as when they have to think, answer questions and analyse and make decisions for themselves.

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

43. The sixth form curriculum is excellent. The school provides all students with a very wide choice of GCE AS and A2 courses, some vocational courses, and a very good range of opportunities for extending learning outside lessons. However, as at the time of the previous inspection, the statutory requirements for the teaching of religious education are still not being met.

44. Students have 30 subjects to choose from at A Level when they begin the sixth form. Most students are successful in obtaining the combination of subjects that they want. The school offers students the opportunity to take the advanced vocational certificate of education (AVCE) in information and communication technology and media, and the intermediate GNVQ in information and communication technology. Law, psychology and critical thinking are available together with more traditional or typical subjects. The critical thinking course is an interesting development because it is used by the school to provide a range of studies to extend students' experiences. Students are very

positive about the curriculum. They enjoy what the sixth form has to offer and are enthusiastic about their studies.

45. All students are offered a wide range of opportunities to broaden their knowledge and experience as well as improving their physical, practical and presentation skills. Activities include first aid, Japanese, Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme, skiing, golf and squash. Within this programme students also take the Level 3 key skills communication course which further extends their learning.

46. All students take part in a personal, social, citizenship and health course that places emphasis on careers advice, life skills and preparation for university. Amongst the topics covered are drug and sex education, personal safety advice from the local police, eating disorders information and study skills workshops. Outside speakers make an important contribution to this course.

47. Very good opportunities are provided for students' personal development. Many students are involved in actively organising aspects of sixth form life and main school events, such as assemblies, fund-raising for charities and mentoring younger pupils. They also organise the running of the sixth form committee. Students are also encouraged to establish their own community activities. Last year for example, there was a very active Amnesty International Group.

48. Students have many opportunities to enrich their learning outside the classroom. A wide and varied programme of additional activities is available to them. Drama productions and very successful choirs and orchestras give many creative opportunities to students. Sporting interests are well catered for. School exchanges and residential visits to Europe give many students additional opportunities to widen their experiences. Visits by school groups to New York and Borneo have also taken place. Many field studies, lecture visits and theatre trips also greatly extend their learning and contribute significantly to high standards and students' personal development.

Provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

49. Provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good, although the requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship is more honoured in the breach than the observance in the sixth form. Spiritual development is promoted well by the religious studies courses but is also provided for in the performing arts and in English, for example. In the latter, the religious themes in texts such as 'The Handmaid's Tale' are used very well. There are voluntary religious groups in the school for Christians, Jews, Hindus and Muslims, and sixth formers take a leading part in running some of these.

50. Provision for moral development is a feature of several subject areas, including a compulsory course in personal, social, citizenship and health education, religious studies, where a large part of the course is devoted to a study of ethics, and in geography, where interesting work is done on the issue of asylum seekers and immigration. Social issues emerge in these subjects as well, as they do in history. Opportunities for social development include participation in the school council and the prefect system. Students work collaboratively in many of their lessons and good relationships are fostered.

51. Students' cultural awareness is developed in the curriculum effectively through subjects such as music, dance and drama. The school's extra-curricular provision, such as trips within this country and overseas, also enhances the cultural as well as the social experiences of many students.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

Assessment

52. Overall, the procedures for assessing students' attainment and progress are very good. The school has comprehensive information on individual students' earlier achievements that are used efficiently to guide the setting of targets for learning. Students are mentored by subject teachers and tutors and involved at every stage in negotiating targets and assessing themselves against examination

criteria. This enables them to understand clearly how to evaluate their work and how to improve. The mentoring and target setting process is working very well in art, media, history, geography, drama, design and technology, English and physical education. Students with individual learning needs are very well supported as in the case of a blind student who achieved extremely well in his exam courses. Students are involved in formulating written reports and statements about their attainment that are sent home, keeping parents well informed.

Advice, support and guidance

53. The quality of personal support and guidance is excellent. All students receive a personal interview and excellent advice about courses that are most suitable for them. Induction arrangements are comprehensive and ensure students who are new to the school are well prepared and supported. Careers guidance is excellent throughout Years 12 and 13 with great emphasis on personal development. Valuable contributions to students' learning are made by outside agencies and work experience: for example, students of modern foreign languages spend time abroad and return not only more fluent speakers in their chosen language but far more confident and outgoing. Excellent support is provided in the one-year sixth form for those wishing to gain entry to AS and AVCE courses.

54. The systems for supporting students' entry to university are similarly excellent. There are comprehensive procedures for guiding students through the application process and teachers take very seriously their role in providing statements of support.

55. Any students in danger of underachieving are identified early and mentored by sixth form tutors who monitor progress effectively and support pupils' needs, working with outside agencies where necessary.

56. Attendance is monitored closely and procedures to improve it are very effective. The head of sixth form and the heads of Years 12 and 13 lead a cohesive team of tutors extremely effectively and this ensures that students are supported and cared for very well. Health and safety procedures are comprehensive and managed well.

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

57. Parents think highly of the sixth form and appreciate the contact between school and home. The vast majority of parents agree that the school sets high standards, that the behaviour is very good, and that the school is well led and managed. In particular they feel that the teaching is good and that their children are being helped to become mature and responsible adults. Those who attended the pre-inspection parents' meeting praised the ease with which they can make contact with the school and seek its help and advice. The inspection evidence agrees with parents' and carers' very positive comments.

58. Students are also very appreciative of the school's provision in the sixth form. They value the support that their teachers give and feel that they achieve well. Students who join the school from other schools say that they are welcomed and quickly become part of the Mill Hill County community. Sixth form students feel that their lessons are characterised by friendly but respectful interaction, and very good relationships with staff. They report that their teachers are always available for help, and advice, which is particularly focused towards choosing the right university course. Inspection evidence supports the strengths identified by the students. The very good relationships seen during the inspection create a caring and supportive ethos, which supports both the academic and personal development of the students.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

Leadership and management

59. The sixth form is led and managed extremely well and stems from, and contributes to, the excellent way the school as a whole is led. This is part of the key to the success of the sixth form. The sixth form is an integral part of the school and is managed and led in a way that emphasises its role in helping students to mature and achieve in Years 12 and 13, and in preparing them for the responsibilities and challenges of the world of further and higher education. The head of the sixth form has a strong influence on the way the sixth form is managed and led. As well as giving a clear direction to its work, the head of sixth form also has other whole-school responsibilities which illustrates the way the way leadership and management tasks are spread amongst staff. A measure of the school's success in creating a high achieving sixth form is that more students apply each year than there are places: the sixth form is held in high regard by the local community. Similarly, the five students who gained Oxbridge University places last year provide another example of the sixth form's effectiveness. This excellent management has a number of outcomes including:

- the guidance and support for students is of a very high quality;
- all students regardless of background achieve well which is illustrated clearly by the consistently high AS and A Level results and the good AVCE performance;
- high standards have been maintained despite the large increase in the number of students staying on in the sixth form.

60. The quality of support and guidance is commented on earlier in this report but it is the way this is managed and led by teachers responsible for sixth form students that makes it so effective. There is a comprehensive range of procedures designed to ensure that teachers have a thorough understanding and knowledge of students' achievements so that their progress can be tracked carefully. This is carried out very effectively by the heads of Years 12 and 13 and their assistants, all of whom have a firm knowledge of students and how well they are doing. What is significant about their work is the lack of complacency. In Year 12, for example, there is concern to ensure that arrangements for supporting those students who have come from other schools are sufficiently rigorous. Here, weaknesses have been identified and there are plans to follow up the initial induction programme. This is an indication of the attention to detail in the way the sixth form is led and managed.

61. The one-year sixth form is another example of the way the leadership and management contributes very positively to the achievements of all students. Here, students who have not achieved well at GCSE, or who are not yet ready to move into the sixth form, are given the opportunity to take an intermediate course of study. This consists of a mixture of GCSEs and GNVQ courses with the balance depending on students' needs, aspirations and previous achievements. This is one of the reasons why the sixth form meets the requirements of all its students, regardless of need or background.

62. The way the performance of the sixth form is monitored and evaluated is very good. Examination results are used very effectively to track individual students and the head of the sixth form carries out a value-added analysis, which is used to check that students are meeting their targets.

63. The sixth form is cost-effective and the money allocated for students' education is used appropriately. The sixth form does not receive extra money from funds allocated for pupils in the main school although some of the money meant for sixth form students is used lower down the school; this is a feature of large sixth forms. Students have a wide range of courses to choose from, including the one-year courses, which meet their needs very well.

64. The governing body fulfils its responsibilities well. The statutory requirements for religious education and a daily act of collective worship are not fully met but governors' support for the development of the sixth form is very effective. The governing body's involvement in budget planning is shown in the very good cost effectiveness of the sixth form.

Resources

65. There are sufficient learning resources for the sixth form courses including information and communication technology. Access to computers is not always easy for students mainly because space

for the sixth form is very limited at present. This will be resolved by the new accommodation, currently being built, which will enable the school to provide more study space. Students have appropriate access to the library but, again, this will improve with the new building. Teachers are very well matched to the subjects they teach and the school has specialist teachers for quite a range of courses such as law and media studies. This contributes well to pupils' learning and is one of the reasons why teaching is very good.

The library

66. There is a large number of fiction and non-fiction books and a satisfactory range on different subject areas. Many books are dated and need to be replaced. The school is, however, fully aware of this and a plan is in hand for a new library in the new accommodation and for replacing the outdated books. The new librarian has a clear understanding of how to organise an effective library provision. The school plans to install 28 computers in the new library so that classes could be taught library skills effectively as well as research skills.

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

In the inspection, 15 subjects and courses were inspected and are reported on in detail. Work in other subjects and courses was sampled and contributed to the overall picture of teaching and learning in the school. The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2001. National results for 2002 are not yet available.

GCE AS Level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A - E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Biology	1	100	52	-	2	2.0	0.8
Mathematics	2	100	62	50	15	3.0	1.5

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	43	100	87	65	43	7.8	5.8
Biology	24	100	88	63	34	7.4	5.2
Chemistry	20	100	90	65	43	7.3	5.9
Physics	19	100	88	58	40	7.5	5.7
Design and technology	12	100	91	42	30	6.3	5.4
Business Studies	22	100	92	77	32	8.27	5.5
Economics	15	93	89	53	36	6.8	5.5
Information and communication technology	11	100	86	55	23	7.3	4.6
Art	9	100	96	56	46	6.7	6.4
Dance	8	88	89	63	39	6.3	5.5
Drama	14	100	99	86	38	8.7	7.0
Media studies	23	100	93	78	31	8.7	5.5
Music	2	100	93	-	35	6.0	5.7
Geography	14	94	92	50	38	6.7	5.7
History	17	94	88	41	35	6.3	5.4
Religious studies	8	100	92	88	38	8.8	5.9
Sociology	17	94	86	41	35	5.7	5.3
Other social; studies	42	98	87	48	34	6.7	5.3
English Literature	29	97	95	31	37	6.0	5.9
French	3	100	89	67	38	8.0	5.6
German	4	100	91	75	40	8.0	5.8
Business AVCE	11	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	12.0	10.5
Information technology AVCE	8	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	14.3	10.0

Media, Communication and Production AVCE	7	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	14.6	11.6
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SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

67. The focus of the inspection was on mathematics, chemistry and biology, but physics was also sampled. In physics, examination results were well above average last summer. With 100 per cent A - C passes, students did better than expected considering their GCSE results. Two lessons were observed. Both were at least good. In both lessons there was an emphasis on developing pupils' understanding. Questioning was good and teachers explained technical terms and concepts well.

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- The consistently high standards which students achieve in AS and A Level examinations. These are well above the national average.
- Overall, the very good teaching enables all students to achieve very well. The significant proportion of very good teaching provides very good learning opportunities.
- The acting head of department provides strong leadership and management.
- The very good relationships between staff and students and between the students themselves set a very positive climate for learning.

Areas for improvement

- The written comments which teachers make when they mark and assess students' work are not sufficiently specific about how to improve.
- Teachers' planning does not identify a wide range of teaching styles to ensure that the key skills of communication and information technology are developed.

69. The results which students attained in the 2002 AS and A Level examinations were very high and will be well above the national average when national results are published. The subject has maintained the very high standards established in previous years. All aspects of the work seen during the inspection indicate that the present Year 12 and Year 13 students are achieving similarly high standards. The department pays particular attention to developing the knowledge and skills students will find beneficial in Higher Education. Consequently the choice of topics available within the suite of mathematics qualifications reflects this requirement rather than being chosen as the 'easiest' for students to study. The pure mathematics, statistics and mechanics modules are particularly well chosen and allocated across Years 12 and 13 to enable the needs of both one- and two-year courses and of single and double mathematics to be met. This ensures that the students on all of these courses develop very good understanding of basic and advanced mathematical concepts and set out solutions clearly and logically.

70. Overall, the quality of teaching is very good. It enables most students to make very good progress. The students who make the best progress overall in their learning are often those who only just met the sixth form entry requirement of at least a grade B at GCSE. A strong feature is the teachers' subject knowledge. This is not just based on very good individual knowledge of mathematics, but also on a clear understanding of the requirements of the examination syllabus. A particular feature of the lessons observed was the continual reference to how the answers to examination questions should be structured in order to maximise the marks scored. This gives the students great confidence in their teachers and enables them to develop their own confidence in managing the workload of AS and A Level module tests.

71. The relationships between staff and students, and between the students, contribute very successfully to establishing a learning environment in which success is expected. Teachers use these relationships very well to develop students' understanding of the concepts by encouraging them to help each other. Teachers set high expectations so that all students are keen to learn and consequently their behaviour is very good, supported by good attendance. Teachers expect students to complete work outside lessons and they respond to this very well. Teachers' planning is securely based on coverage of

the examination syllabus and they make very good use of commercial schemes. All students have their own textbook and revision study guides covering each module and these form a sound basis on which teachers build. Teachers mark work regularly and very effectively encourage students to assess their own work and that of their peers. The quality of oral feedback is very good and students are well aware of their targets and how these can be achieved. However, teachers put little written feedback on students' work about how they might improve. The planning indicates appropriately that the choice of teaching strategies is the responsibility of individual teachers but there are missed opportunities to develop the key skills of communication and information technology.

72. The acting head of department only took up his role in January of this year, having previously been the second in the department. This has ensured good continuity for the department with a clear vision about how it should develop. The good schemes of work provide effective guidance for teachers and ensure that the requirements of the syllabus are covered. Since the last inspection mathematics has maintained its high performance successfully.

Biology

73. Overall, the quality of provision in biology is **excellent**.

Strengths

- The very high examination results in 2002 confirm the trend in the last three years of very high standards in biology.
- The standard of work seen in Year 13 is very high and most students show a clear sense of responsibility for their own progress.
- Teaching overall is very good and students engage positively in learning. Teachers have good subject knowledge. Lessons are well structured with a variety of activities that enable students to learn well and improve their knowledge and understanding.
- The subject is very well led and managed.

Areas for improvement

- More help and encouragement to students in communicating, explaining and developing their thinking orally would enhance learning.

74. Standards have remained very high for the last four years. In the 2002 summer examinations all students achieved A - E grade passes. Of these, 60 per cent obtained A and B passes. These results place student attainment well above the national averages of 41 per cent and 92 per cent respectively. Overall students' achievement is very high and standards are similar to those reached at the previous inspection: the school has maintained these very high achievements successfully.

75. In most years the number of female students taking A Level biology has been higher than male students. All students perform very well in comparison to those in similar schools but the male students did better than female students in 2000 and 2001. There are, however, no significant differences in their results over time.

76. The standard of work seen in Year 13 is very high. Pupils' experimental skills are very good. They carry out sensitive procedures safely and with due care. They have a good understanding of the concepts involved. In one year 13 lesson, for example, pupils successfully carried out experiments on the digestion of fats and were able to discuss results of the tests; for example, how the some of the fatty acids combine with bile salts to form microscopic particles. In another Year 13 class students were able to discuss complex principles of plant growth showing a good level of understanding of the process. The higher attaining pupils were able to apply the theory to explain what happens in practice.

77. The standard of work seen in Year 12 is also very high. Pupils are achieving well and are successfully building on their GCSE knowledge and understanding. In one Year 12 class students were able to discuss the idea of DNA knowledgeably and in another Year 12 lesson pupils were able to discuss the differences between cells and enzymes confidently.

78. Teaching overall is very good. Teachers have good subject knowledge. They plan lessons well and pitch them at an appropriately high level. They have high expectations of their pupils and lessons have a good pace. Class experiments are organised well which enables pupils to complete tests and observations efficiently allowing time at the end to discuss results. Marking of assessed tasks is good and feedback is very good. Students respond well to this approach. They engage with lessons very well, work hard in lessons and are very productive in homework and assignments. Questioning is good with technical terms explained well. This helps most students to deepen their understanding. Some, however, remain too passive to benefit as well as they might from this. More help and encouragement to enable these pupils to contribute in class discussion would enhance their learning.

79. The biology curriculum is good and students get very good guidance and support in preparing for their external examinations. More opportunity to explore the wider context of biology, such as digestion and malnutrition, GM foods or reference to famous scientists such as Crick, when discussing and explaining concepts, would enhance learning. Biology is very well managed and led and contributes significantly to students' achievements.

Chemistry

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

Strengths

- Results have been consistently very high and well above average over the last four years.
- Students have a very good grasp of ideas in chemistry and are able to apply them well in answering questions. They achieve very well.
- Teaching overall is very good; teachers have good subject knowledge, explain concepts well and provide very good guidance. This helps pupils learn effectively.
- Pupils are motivated and engage diligently with tasks.
- The subject is very well led and managed.

Areas for improvement

- Some students tend to be passive in lessons and lack confidence in contributing to class discussion. Although well supported in other ways, they are not brought into discussion enough.

81. The GCE A Level examination results last summer confirm the very high standards reached in previous years. All students passed with over 80 per cent reaching A - C and 64 per cent obtaining A and B grades. These results are well above average and these high standards have been maintained well since the last inspection. Students achieved well above predicted grades based on their GCSE results.

82. In most years the number of male and female students taking A Level chemistry has been roughly equal and the total number has been around 20. There are no significant differences in their results over time.

83. The standard of work seen in Year 13 is very high and is well above average. Pupils show excellent attitudes to work and achieve very well. Most have very good knowledge of key concepts in chemistry. In one Year 13 lesson most pupils understood complex theory and were able to describe changes in different reactions. In another Year 13 lesson, most pupils were able to discuss the oxidation states of vanadium with confidence. The weaker students found it harder to explain their understanding of the oxidation states.

84. The standard of work seen in Year 12 is also very high. Most students have acquired good knowledge of some key ideas in chemistry. In one year 12 lesson students were able to use their knowledge of functional groups to write down structural formulae for chemicals. In another Year 12 class most students were able to carry out experiments to determine the relative solubility of hydroxides and sulphates. Most understood that the solubility of the hydroxides increases but decreases in sulphates. Weaker students were unable to explain their understanding of solubility.

85. Teaching is very good overall. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and show enthusiasm for chemistry. They explain concepts well. This motivates pupils and engages them fully with lessons. Work is pitched well, connects with prior learning and is linked to what should be achieved during the lesson. This offers a good structure for pupils to consolidate previous learning and to acquire new knowledge and understanding. Teachers give clear instructions and organise class experiments very well. In one Year 12 class, for example, clear instructions and good organisation enabled all 16 pupils to carry out and complete safely the experiments in a relatively small laboratory. Lessons have good pace and classes are managed very well. Teachers provide good revision notes, present helpful experimental demonstrations and ask probing questions. Marking of homework and other assessment tasks is good. Very good written and oral feedback is provided.

86. Pupils respond very positively to the good quality of teaching they receive. They work hard, concentrate and are very productive. The higher attaining students make good oral contributions during class discussion. The weaker students contribute much less.

87. Teachers use a variety of teaching styles to make their lessons interesting. More pupil participation in class discussion would raise the achievements of pupils further. More opportunities and encouragement for pupils to communicate, explain and develop their thinking orally would deepen learning and especially help the weaker students to improve.

88. The chemistry curriculum is appropriate. Students are prepared very well for external examinations and teachers provide good guidance and support. The inclusion of a wider context of chemistry with opportunities to discuss spiritual, moral and cultural issues, for example, the 'big bang' and the creation of matter or the morality of our dependence on fossil fuel etc. would enhance the coverage and broaden understanding. Chemistry is very well managed and led. Resources are good.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

89. Design and technology is the only subject taught that falls in this curriculum area and this was the focus of the inspection.

Design and technology

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

Strengths

- Standards of design work are very good and examination results are well above the average nationally.
- There are excellent systems in place to establish targets for individual students, and to monitor their progress. Students are clear about what they need to do in order to improve.
- Students enjoy their work in design and technology, showing high levels of motivation. They are confident, articulate and analytical when discussing their design proposals.
- Leadership and management of the course are very good. A team ethos is a strength of the department.

Areas for improvement

- The number of high grades could be increased further by raising students' technical capability.
- The link between school-based designing and making activities should relate more closely to the commercial worlds of product design and manufacture.

91. Recruitment to the subject is strong and increasing, attracting students from outside the school, and with significantly more females than males. In recent years all students have achieved at least a pass, with an increasing proportion gaining A and B grades. Standards have improved well since the last inspection.

92. Overall, standards in the subject are high when compared to all other schools, although some students are underachieving given their prior attainment. Design portfolios reflect high standards in the areas of graphical presentation, in the selection and aesthetic development of design ideas, and the use of models and prototypes. However, students in Year 12 are not always clear about the basic properties of materials and how they can be processed. These shortfalls in their technical capabilities explain why some students underachieve and why in lessons the quality of completed practical work is broadly average rather than higher. Nevertheless, students are enthusiastic, confident and articulate, and show good levels of analytical skills when describing their design proposals.

93. Students benefit from visits to the Design Museum and the Alessi factory in Milan, and from working with local manufacturing companies. This has helped them understand how industry works and some of the issues related to mass production. However, students do not have a strong enough understanding of the link between designing and making activities in school and the commercial world of product design and manufacture. Again, this is about students' technical capability and explains why the very high performance at A Level could be even higher.

94. The quality of teaching is very good and characterised by careful planning, a brisk pace and high expectations. Teachers have clear objectives, and encourage students to set individual targets at the start of each lesson through discussion with their peers, known as 'working partners'. This arrangement is effective in maintaining good progress in a timetable comprised essentially of single lessons, and in promoting good lines of communication between the teachers in the department who contribute to the A Level programme. A team ethos for teaching prevails which is effective in maximising the expertise of staff.

95. Teachers are technically secure and provide good individual support and guidance. There are excellent systems to establish targets for achievement for individual students, and to monitor their progress. Students feel they are supported well by teachers and are clear about what they need to do in order to improve. As a result, they are well motivated in lessons and remain on task throughout.

96. Good provision is made in the department for computer-aided design (CAD) and manufacture (CAM). Design folders incorporate elements of word processing, spreadsheets and the graphical presentation of survey data. Extensive but discriminatory use is made of the Internet for research purposes. A training programme is underway to enable students to benefit more from the use of a national CAD program.

97. The issue of insufficient accommodation identified in the previous inspection has been partially resolved with the construction of an additional teaching room. However, a shortfall in the availability of specialist accommodation still limits the growth and development of the subject in the sixth form, which in turn has a detrimental effect upon standards at A Level.

98. The head of department provides creative and dynamic leadership, and is an effective role model to students and staff alike by setting and maintaining high standards. An arrangement that gives responsibility for teaching Year 12 and 13 to designated teachers is underpinned by good team work. In lessons teachers refer directly to previous work with another teacher, or to that which will follow. Technician support staff are effectively deployed to enhance the quality of learning and to make the best use of available time.

BUSINESS

99. The focus of the inspection was business studies at A and A/S Level. Economics was also sampled. Here standards are well above average and teaching is very good.

Business studies

100. Overall, the quality of provision in business studies is **very good**.

Strengths

- A Level examination results are very high and students achieve very well.
- Teachers have a very secure knowledge of the subject and most lessons are well prepared.
- Teachers' relationships with students are very good and they have high expectations: this motivates students well.
- Assessment is very thorough and the systems to support and promote students' learning are good.
- Students have very positive attitudes to their work and this promotes their learning effectively.

Areas for improvement

- The range of teaching techniques is sometimes quite narrow and as a result students are passive learners.

101. Overall, standards of attainment and students' achievements are very high. This is demonstrated in the very high A Level results and the quality of students' work in lessons. In 2001, 77 per cent of students entered for the A Level examination achieved grades A and B compared with 32 per cent nationally and all students gained grades A - E: this puts results into the top five per cent of all schools. Results in 2002 are a little down on those for 2001 but not markedly so and still represent very high achievement. These high standards have been maintained effectively since the last inspection.

102. Students have a very secure knowledge and understanding of the ideas involved in business studies and many are able to apply these well to the "real world". In a Year 12 lesson introducing economies of scale, for example, students made good progress. By the end of the lesson they were able to define economies of scale and apply this to the takeover of the Safeway supermarket chain. A particularly strong feature of this lesson was the way the teacher made sure that all the students were productively engaged in their work. This is why they made very good progress and achieved well. Most students have good information and communication technology skills and know how computers are used in business settings. The quality of much of their written work is very good, especially in their course work portfolios. The quality of presentation is high and shows attention to detail. It also shows evidence that students develop good analytical skills and draw appropriate conclusions from a range of information.

103. Students are highly motivated: they are keen to do well in business studies and have very good attitudes towards their work. They also have excellent relationships with each other and with their teachers whom they respect as much for their care and concern as for their subject expertise. This is one of the reasons why students make good progress and achieve very well.

104. The other reason that students make good progress and achieve so well is that teaching is strong overall. Nearly all lessons are at least satisfactory, most are good and some are very good. There are two particular strengths that define teaching: teachers have a very secure subject knowledge and understanding of business studies and they establish very positive relationships with their students. A very good Year 13 lesson on finance illustrated both these features very effectively. Here, the brisk start to the lesson, and one student's question about the previous unit of work, showed very clearly the excellent relationships and the students' willingness and ability to ask pertinent questions. Another significant strength was the way the teacher moved this quickly to the main topic asking searching questions that tested students' understanding well. The teacher's expectations were well matched to the demands of the examination syllabus and as a result students were stretched by the work set. In another good Year 13 lesson students worked on a case study assignment as revision for their examination. Here, too, students were well motivated and focused because the teacher's good subject knowledge was used effectively to challenge their thinking. What was also significant is that the case study about a well known computer company interested students: it was a relevant and topical subject and the teacher was able to use her subject knowledge to extend students' learning, particularly in applying their knowledge to a real life scenario.

105. In a few lessons, where teaching is satisfactory, there are weaknesses that mean that students do not achieve as well as they should. In these cases, the range of teaching techniques is quite narrow and the lesson tends to be directed by the teacher. This provides too little opportunity for students to contribute their ideas and they remain somewhat passive.

106. Recent changes in staff have meant that there has been some upheaval in recent weeks but overall business studies is efficiently managed and led. This explains why since the last inspection examination performance has continued to be very high.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

107. The focus of the inspection was on AS Level, A Level and the AVCE information and communication technology courses. Lessons where students were developing their key skills in information technology were also sampled. Here, standards are below average: the key skills groups in Year 12, for example, were working at a fairly low level and carrying out tasks, such as setting up a database or a spreadsheet, that are characteristic of younger students. These skills have not been developed well enough lower down the school. They are now improving but the new arrangements have not yet had time to make a difference in the sixth form.

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

Strengths

- Teachers' planning and organisation.
- Teachers' knowledge and understanding of information and communication technology.
- Use of resources including the school intranet.
- Use of assessment for the GCE and AVCE courses.

Areas for improvement

- Examination results.

109. Standards, as seen during the inspection, are above average in GCE and AVCE lessons. After several years of examination results being very high, they fell in 2002 to a level close to the national average. An analysis indicated that this was a weaker group who were also more difficult to manage. It is anticipated that results for 2003 will be high again. The evidence from the inspection indicates that students are on track to improve their examination performance. The Year 12 students on the AS Level information and communication technology course are able to design and produce an invoice form for a small business, while those doing AVCE information and communication technology, design and produce a spreadsheet containing macros at several levels. The Year 13 AVCE information and communication technology students are able to use Visual Basic (a computer language) to create good quality computer programs.

110. Teaching is very good. In almost all the lessons observed during the inspection teaching was good or better. In almost half the lessons teaching was very good or better. From a scrutiny of students' work it was clear that teaching had covered the requirements of the course through a variety of interesting scenarios. The work had meaning for the students and this encouraged their commitment and their subsequent learning. Students were helped, by careful teacher planning and preparation, to develop useful files of notes, guidance and completed assessments which aid revision. Teachers' subject knowledge is good and up to date. Teaching is effective and enables students, who have not followed an examination course in the subject at GCSE, to succeed in the sixth form. Homework tasks are regularly set and these reflect the style of examination questions which students will meet at the end of their course. Good preparation by the teachers has led to this accumulating wealth of information being readily available to support students in their learning. When work is returned to students, advice is given, when appropriate, on how it could be improved.

111. Students work hard and concentrate in lessons and the project work in particular helps them to develop independence in their learning. Some of the extended writing tasks they are given to do encourages the development of their literacy skills and, through a focus on the implications of the availability of information and communication technology, contributes to students' social and moral development. They enjoy the subject and are well supported.

112. Leadership and management of the subject are good. Careful records of students' attainment are kept and used to monitor and evaluate their individual progress and provide focused targets for improvement. Overall, improvement since the last inspection is good.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

113. The focus of the inspection was art and media studies. Music was also sampled: teaching was good and pupils achieved well.

Art

114. Overall, the quality of provision in art is **good**.

Strengths

- Strong subject knowledge of teachers.
- Very good assessment procedures informing progress.
- Good integration of visits to put artists' work into context.
- High standard of presentation in work journals.

Areas for improvement

- Continue to develop knowledge and understanding of art history.
- Use information and communication technology more creatively.
- Breadth and originality of final outcomes to match the quality and range of research.
- Enhance the curriculum through the introduction of themes that explore aspects of spiritual and moral issues.

115. Standards at the end of Year 12 and Year 13 in 2001 were around the average nationally and students achieved much as expected. Results in 2002 at the end of Year 12 show that almost half the students achieved grades better than expected. This is because of important changes since the last inspection resulting in improved leadership and management of the department and better teaching. This good teaching has not yet had sufficient impact on standards to get them up to levels similar to other subjects but the improved AS Level results in 2002 shows that they are rising.

116. At the end of Year 12 and at the end of Year 13 standards in work seen during the inspection are in line with expectation, with some students in both Year 12 and Year 13 working at a very high standard. High attaining students draw very well from observation and use colour effectively in a variety of media. A Year 12 student investigating natural forms in depth, for example, referred to the work of William Morris and developed work into a variety of media. In another example, a Year 13 student developed her own fantastic monster in clay from excellent drawing inspired by her research into the genre of science fiction. The quality of independent research is good with standards of presentation generally very high but in some cases research becomes an end in itself rather than a starting point for original ideas. Information and communication technology is well used as a research and recording tool but underused as a means of generating and developing new ideas. The introduction of emotive and contentious issues would give a new dimension to themes being followed at present. Students are perceptive and articulate but knowledge and understanding of artists' work is limited in both years. The quality of expression in both oral and written work is depressed due to the lack of subject specific vocabulary and a breadth of knowledge normally expected at this level, as in a Year 13 lesson where students struggled to express their thoughts about artists' work on landscape. Visits to galleries and museums and formal art history lessons are having a positive effect on students' work.

117. Teaching is good and students learn well as a result. There are very good features of both. Very good features of teaching are comprehensive planning; clear aims; brisk pace with timed tasks and high quality individual attention enabling those with special educational needs to make similar good progress to their classmates. Rigorous application of the assessment marking criteria makes exam

requirements clear and indicates ways for students to improve. Very good learning is exemplified by the motivation of most students to work independently in and out of lessons and their ability to use skills learnt in other subjects in the art lessons.

118. The art department has been through a difficult time over the past two years with considerable disruption. This was resolved with the appointment of a new art teacher last year who has recently been promoted to head of department in September 2002. As a result of this, the art department has moved forward considerably on major issues including the establishment of new A Level courses and a very good system of assessment. There was a full range of grades and improved achievement at AS Level in 2002. Recruitment to the sixth form has improved and retention from AS to A Level is excellent. Leadership and management has improved since the last inspection and the department has made some good progress.

Media Studies

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

Strengths

- Teaching and learning.
- Standards of students' work.

Areas for improvement

- There were no significant areas for improvement apparent during inspection.

120. The standard of work across all aspects of both the advanced vocation (AVCE) and A Level courses is very high, matching examination results achieved. Students have a good knowledge of the basic media concepts that underpin all courses and can demonstrate understanding of these concepts and issues both within written work and in practical productions. They are able to produce a wide range of very good quality media products and accompanying production documentation and evaluation. The use of video to produce moving image products, such as television advertisements, and documentary and film trailers, is a notable strength and at times reaches broadcast quality. Students of all abilities can critically analyse and have an understanding of the codes and conventions being used to communicate messages within a wide range media products. Class discussion is lively and of a high standard with students using appropriate and increasing sophisticated media language and terminology. Students also display a mature level of participation and mutual support in small-group discussion and debate about current work, media issues and concepts.

121. A Level results are consistently well above national average. The 2001 results placed the school in the top five per cent in the country with 78 per cent of students achieving a grade A or B. In 2002 all students gained an A - C grade. Girls are getting more grade As than boys but overall the degree to which boys are performing less well than girls is in line with the national picture. Results on the advanced vocational course are also above the national average and improving with 25 out of the 27 candidates entered for the 2002 examination achieving either a grade A or B.

122. The quality of the teaching is very good. Lessons, taught with energy and enthusiasm, are well planned and include a variety of different types of learning activity. High quality resources, individual and group tasks are introduced at appropriate times throughout lessons. This maintains student interest and lesson flow. Tasks are often complex and increasingly difficult which ensures students of all abilities are able to participate successfully, experience success and are suitably challenged. All three teachers have a sound knowledge and command of the subject and possess the facilitation skills needed to conduct the wide range of different learning activity that characterise each lesson, much of which involves whole-class and small-group discussion. Students respond very well to all aspects of the curriculum. They are keen to learn and clearly enjoy the subject, participating with energy and enthusiasm. There is also good rapport between teachers and students.

123. The leadership and management of the department are very good. There is a clear vision and a practical commitment to continuous improvement focused on the quality of teaching and learning. The

quality of teaching is regularly monitored and evaluated and all teachers benefit from a programme of professional development to meet personal and subject specific needs. Planning and documentation is thorough and comprehensive and linked where appropriate to whole-school priorities and plans. The department has a wide and comprehensive range of teaching and learning resources and is currently developing its video editing facilities to meet the needs of this increasingly popular subject.

124. Work is regularly assessed and marked. Student self-assessment is also well developed with individual targets negotiated for each student. Records and students' work are well kept within a tidy and organised department. The media studies curriculum is also taught in such a way as to make a significant contribution to whole-school priorities such as the development of information technology skills, social skills as well as aspects of citizenship. The department is also playing a key role in the school's efforts to develop further as a technology college.

125. The department has good links with a number of outside bodies such as the use of classroom resources produced by the English and Media Centre. Students' experience of the media industry is also broadened by regular trips to media institutions such as Elstree Studios or by contributions from visiting professionals including parents.

HUMANITIES

126. The focus of the inspection was geography, history, religious education, sociology and psychology. Lessons were sampled in government and politics and law where attainment overall is high. In law it is very high and in 2002 two thirds of students attained grade A at A Level.

Geography

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

Strengths

- Standards of the A Level course are well above average.
- Teachers are knowledgeable and enthusiastic and lessons are well planned.
- Use of detailed feedback to enable pupils to make progress.
- Very good, well planned and varied provision for fieldwork and coursework.

Areas for improvement

- Better accommodation to provide subject facilities for the sixth form.
- There is a need for greater access to information and communication technology suites for whole-class teaching.

128. Standards overall are good. A Level results are above the national average; there has been a steadily rising trend since 1999 for the higher grades. All students who started the AS Level course completed it in 2002; their results were well above national averages. Standards seen in lessons and in students' work were well above average. Most students start the course with grades A to B at GCSE and the inclusive policy of the department allied to the consistently high grades at A Level represents good achievement. There were no significant differences in the standards attained by students of different gender or ethnicity.

129. Students show good knowledge and understanding of their work in lessons, and work in their files indicates good understanding of a wide range of physical and human geography topics and topical issues such as types of pollution and hazards. They work confidently on their own to build up case studies and complete research using a variety of sources including information and communication technology. Students produce detailed coursework, well structured and focused on particular research questions. Lessons demonstrate the application of many key skills by the students. All students are particularly confident in oral work and contribute well in discussions.

130. Teaching is consistently very good and this enables students to learn very well. Lessons are well paced, resources are varied and well structured to bring out the learning objectives. Teachers are knowledgeable and have an enthusiasm for the subject. This provides both support and challenge to students. Some marking is through oral feedback, which provides clear advice, and written work is marked with informative feedback offering clear direction for future progress. Written marking is for a number of specific planned tasks and for coursework. Homework is frequently used for students to build up their own case studies and to research topics such as the issue of refugees. This encourages and supports independent learning effectively. Literacy is supported through some use of writing frames, for example, for some case studies and examination preparation. ICT is widely used for Internet research and is well used by students when they select and study a syllabus topic for themselves.

131. Fieldwork is based at Slapton in Devon and is well planned, stimulates students' learning and is appreciated by them. This involves students using a wide variety of graphs, maps and diagram work and some very good use of annotated photographs. This fieldwork provides a very good experience of independent learning in Year 12 and develops research skills well. The good use of a wide variety of resources further benefits students when they reach Year 13. Students consider themselves well supported by teachers and enjoy lessons.

132. The subject is led and managed well and there is a very good departmental co-operative ethos as shown in the sharing of ideas and teaching resources. There is also a strong commitment to raise the already high standards. There is target setting for students based on prior achievement and this is supported by detailed on-going assessment and feedback. Improvement since the last inspection has been good although until the new building is ready, accommodation is inadequate.

History

133. Overall the quality of provision in History is **very good**.

Strengths

- Students achieved very good results in relation to their prior attainment in their AS and A Level examinations in 2002.
- Teaching is good. Skilful questioning challenges students to consider and recast their ideas.
- Detailed schemes of work and resource packs for each unit are good. They promote effective teaching and learning.
- Students are actively encouraged to develop skills of research and analysis.
- Assessment processes are very good. This ensures that students are clear about the grade they are working at and how to improve the quality of their work.
- The management of the department is very good and creates an ethos where there are high expectations of students.

Areas for improvement

- Student folders tend to vary in the quality of their organisation. The learning of some students would benefit from greater support from their teachers in the organisation of their work.

134. Students build upon their very good achievement at the end of Year 11 in their GCSE examinations. The trend over the last three years has been for a steady improvement in A Level grades. At the end of Year 13 they attain results that are well above the national average. In the last two years all students have achieved an A - E grade and 67 per cent of students achieved the highest grades of A or B in 2002. There was a marked improvement in the performance of girls in 2002, with 83 per cent being successful at the highest grades. This shows very good improvement since the last inspection.

135. Students have a good knowledge and understanding of the past. They can make effective use of evidence and recognise its limitations. Their skills are developed progressively through well-planned course units. They have a clear understanding of causation. A Year 12 group studying the reasons for the reform of the Poor Law in 1834 was able to explain the causes and their relationship to each other. They could justify why some causes were more significant than others. Students recognise that there

may be different interpretations of periods, movements and events. A Year 13 group was beginning to develop an understanding of this by analysing different aspects of historical events.

136. Teaching is good, with some very good. Lessons are well planned and most have pace. Teachers have high expectations of students and they, in turn, expect to achieve at the highest grades. Students analyse information and present their conclusions to the rest of the class. Skilful questioning probes understanding, and challenges students to reconsider and recast their ideas. A Year 13 group assessed Bismarck's success in managing the Congress of Berlin. Teachers have prepared extensive resource packs to help students to develop skills of independent research and analysis.

137. Students are very positive about history. They respect the subject knowledge of their teachers and find their enthusiasm for teaching history very motivating. Students are very articulate and have the confidence to express their ideas. They make effective use of historical concepts, such as 'particularism' and 'utilitarianism'. They work effectively in groups with other students.

138. Assessment processes are very good. Work is marked thoroughly. This ensures that students are clear about the grades they are working at and how to improve the quality of their work. The quality of organisation of student folders tends to vary. Some are meticulous but others, especially weaker students, are disorganised. The department should consider how it might support the organisation of student work systematically.

139. The management of the department is very good. There is an ethos of enthusiasm for history and high expectations of students. Detailed schemes of work guide teaching and learning. These have been very helpful for less experienced teachers within the department. There are good processes for the support of teacher work, and for monitoring the achievement of students.

Religious studies

140. Overall, the quality of provision in religious studies is **very good**.

Strengths

- Examination results and current standards are well above average.
- Students have very positive attitudes to the subject.
- Teaching and learning are good.
- There is very good subject leadership.
- Assessment of students' work is very good.

Areas for improvement

- The statutory requirement for all students to receive religious education is not met.

141. The school has only entered candidates for A Level religious studies over the past two years, but results have so far been well above the national average. Seven of the eight candidates in 2001 attained A or B grades, the other achieved a C. Nine out of thirteen candidates in 2002 achieved grades A or B in the A2 examination, as did four of the six AS candidates. Work seen during the inspection confirms that these high standards are being maintained, amongst the six who are continuing with A2 and with the twenty who are now taking AS religious studies. Although these students performed well at GCSE, they are undoubtedly making good progress with the subject in the sixth form, following a much more demanding syllabus. This is true of all students, including one who is visually impaired. The vast majority of students taking religious studies are girls, but they represent a range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

142. One reason why students are achieving well in religious studies is that they have a very positive attitude to the subject and work very well with each other and with their teachers. They communicate a real sense of enjoyment about their studies, making a lively contribution to their lessons. They are not afraid of voicing their own opinions and are ready to take responsibility for their own learning. They listen well and take notes without being prompted.

143. Good teaching also contributes to the achievement of students. Both year groups are taught by highly qualified specialists who know the subject very well, though their teaching styles contrast markedly. They use a range of methods to engage their students and have high expectations of them. Potentially, some of the material studied can be very abstract, but it is brought alive by lively teaching. In a Year 12 lesson on the philosopher Kant, complex principles were made effective by vivid examples of the moral choices involved in different approaches to ethics. Students were still discussing the issues after the lesson had officially ended. Work on environmental ethics with the Year 13 students proved very challenging, but the teacher, aware that they were struggling to grasp the categories under consideration, adapted the subsequent lesson to ensure that confusion was dispelled and that the learning was consolidated effectively. Students are encouraged to share their opinions and personal beliefs, which can be a valuable resource in lessons.

144. Teachers assess the work of students very effectively and are thus able to set appropriate targets for them. Very good use is made of predictions based on prior attainment, which are drawn on to shape the teaching methods used as well as to support individual students. This is just one feature of the very good subject leadership that is found in religious studies. Another is the way in which teaching and learning are monitored and developed.

145. The curriculum is very appropriate for the students who have chosen to take religious studies at this level. There is little provision for the majority of sixth formers to receive any religious education, which is their entitlement by law and which was an issue raised by the previous inspection. The head of department is aware of this deficiency and does not find it acceptable. Although the provision has not improved since the previous inspection, the introduction of the A Level courses, and the results achieved, have been very successful.

Sociology

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

Strengths

- Standards are high and students do very well in exams with 80 per cent achieving an A grade at A Level in 2002.
- Teachers have a thorough knowledge of the subject and keep up to date with current sociological research.
- There are very good working relationships between teachers and students that create a good climate for learning.
- Students show a keen interest in lessons, take their work seriously and study hard.

Areas for improvement

- Students' files are too variable in their organisation and usefulness for reference purposes: some very well structured and presented, whereas others are a disorganised collection of papers and notes.
- Some students, particularly some at AS Level, rely heavily on teachers to guide them through every piece of work.

147. Results at A Level in 2002 were an improvement on the good results the year before which were above average nationally. Many more girls than boys do the subject but the small number of boys achieved well. Standards have improved since the last inspection especially at the higher grades. The number of students taking sociology is comparatively small, about 15 per year, but there are enough students this year to run two good-sized groups. Some of the students studying at AS Level last year did not achieve well or did not finish the course. The department has analysed these results and has appropriate plans in place to improve retention rates particularly by supporting the less able students.

148. Standards of work in lessons in both Year 12 and 13 are above average overall although there is a wide range of ability. Essays and assignments are completed diligently and show that students have good literacy skills. Students are very mindful to take copious notes in lessons and to keep any handouts they are given. All have files containing this information and their essays. Some students have organised

these files well with cross-referencing and in useful sections so that they can use them as a helpful learning resource. Other students have stored the information in a variety of less useful ways; some chronologically or sorted into essays, notes and handouts for example. These students will find it harder to use their files for revision and review. Year 12 students have an elementary understanding of the principles and practice of research methodology. For example, they are learning to collect their own data and use it systematically. Their ability to look at data and to answer questions based on that data is beginning to develop. In a lesson looking at work on family theory students looked at information from the British Attitude Survey to test out Elizabeth Bott's theories about the family. Most students were able to make a sensible deduction from the information available. Year 13 students are able to discuss new religious movements in sociological terms, they also understand the differences between cults and sects by the way different sociologists classify them. They are developing a good understanding of ideologies such as those of Marxism and can use this knowledge to examine ideas around radical and conservative forces for change.

149. Students make good progress from AS to A2 Level. Some students find the subject very challenging at the beginning of Year 12 because their general knowledge of society and relevant contemporary issues is underdeveloped. They have a great deal to learn. Consequentially at AS Level many students rely on the teacher's guidance to make links between theories and methodologies, to analyse and produce rational conclusions. Those who continue on to A2 Level have a strong grounding in the subject and become more analytical and independent in their thinking and they require less support from their teachers.

150. Teaching and learning is very good. Both teachers have a genuine enthusiasm for sociology which is evident in every lesson when they engage the students in interesting debate about current topics and link it to the topic in hand. Teachers are very good at questioning the students to get them to generalise and make sensible deductions from new information and that which they learnt previously. Students are involved in the lessons as they often have to work pairs or small groups feeding back to the whole class what they have learnt. They listen to one another with respect and value each others' opinions. Students are developing a mature and objective view of a range of values and perspectives often alien to their own. Relationships are extremely good and students are keen to learn and to do well. The department has a strong learning ethos where teachers and students work together in the exploration of sociological understanding.

151. Leadership is very good and constantly strives to improve both the standards students achieve and the quality of the courses offered. Both teachers in the department continue to develop their relevant and recent sociological knowledge and use every opportunity to look for articles and papers they might add to a current course. They both teach Year 12 and Year 13 and use their own particular interests in sociology well to give the students a broad and interesting experience.

Psychology

152. Overall the quality of provision in psychology is **good**.

Strengths

- AS results were well above average in 2002.
- Teachers of psychology have excellent specialist subject knowledge, linked to practical experience of using the subject outside education.
- Students display a good understanding of psychological concepts, good recall of research findings and, in many cases, good analytical skills.
- There are excellent relationships between students and teachers, and consequently students have very positive attitudes towards the subject.
- A seminar-based approach to teaching places an appropriate emphasis on students carrying out research and delivering presentations.

Areas for improvement

- The proportion of higher grades, A and B, at A Level.

- Further development of seminar-based approaches to teaching, encouraging all students to participate fully in discussions and to make use of information and communication technology in carrying out research.
- Address staffing and accommodation issues resulting from the increasing popularity of the subject.

153. Psychology has traditionally had small numbers of students in each year group. After a gradual rise in 2000 and 2001, the subject has rapidly grown in popularity with currently around 50 students in Year 12.

154. Results in psychology have generally been good at A-Level, with almost all candidates attaining a grade A - E, although, except in 2001, the proportion attaining grades A - B has been below average. In 2001, half of the eight candidates attained grade A or B, but in 2002 this dropped to three out of 14, although another six attained grade C. However, in 2002, two-thirds of the 15 students entered for AS Level, who were taught in school, attained grades A - B and another fifth grade C. These were very good results, with 13 of the 15 achieving better than analyses based on their GCSE performance predicted. Four other students were entered for another AS examination based upon distance learning. Although three attained a grade, their achievement was lower than predicted by GCSE scores. Performance at AS Level, and subsequent assessment of coursework and class work, suggests that attainment at A-Level will rise this year.

155. Much of the work observed at both AS and A-Level was of high quality. Whilst psychology is a new subject for all students in Year 12, most approach it with enthusiasm. Students display a good understanding of psychological concepts and are able to apply their knowledge to discussion of new topics. They have good recall of research findings and psychological theories. Some make good use of the Internet to carry out research and a student was observed challenging the teacher by citing specific research not known to the teacher to support their argument. Many students display good analytical skills and good understanding of wider issues, such as the ethical issues related to the use of animals in psychological experiments.

156. Year 12 students are able to use their own and others' experiences to analyse responses to stress. Some have carried out web searches of aspects of eating disorders. Year 13 students display a good understanding of the differences between heterosexual and gay and lesbian relationships and the reasons for these differences. In both years, students respond well to direct questions from their teachers and are able to make coherent arguments to support views and, on occasions, challenge theories. However, in all classes there are some students who only respond when directly questioned and do not participate fully in discussions. Teachers are encouraging students to make seminar style presentations, which abler students recognise is significantly improving their understanding. Overall, attainment in Year 13 is above average, with some students well above average, and with all making good progress. From early in the course, students are appropriately introduced to essay writing skills. This results in good quality responses to timed written questions and coherent, well-presented coursework, which also displays a good range of appropriate statistical analyses.

157. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning are good. The subject is taught by two unqualified teachers, who both have excellent specialist subject knowledge, linked to practical experience of using the subject outside education. Recruiting a suitable second teacher in response to extra student numbers caused some disruption at the start of this year, but a good appointment has been made. Both teachers are adopting a good range of teaching strategies which place an appropriate emphasis on students taking responsibility for their own learning, through encouraging them to carry out research, including web searches, and to prepare and deliver presentations, and by moving towards a seminar-based approach. They recognise that success in improving students' study skills will result in an increase in the proportion of students achieving higher grades. Students are positive about this approach, although some found it difficult at first. Students benefit from their teachers' up to date knowledge of research and interesting plans are being made for visits, for example to a prison psychologist, and links with psychologists abroad. Teachers make good use of searching questions targeted at individual students. They plan effectively, paying due regard to the needs of individuals. Students are prepared well for written tasks, with good use of essay writing frames, and thorough

diagnostic marking which makes clear students' targets for improvement. Good use is made of e-mails to keep in touch with students and provide them with additional resources.

158. The subject is well led. Students are provided with a broad curriculum, which addresses the examination syllabus. However, the teachers' practical knowledge of applications of psychology enables them to enrich the curriculum. Students address moral and social issues, for example, in the study of different types of relationships, the effects of stress and the ethics of experiments. The school's analyses of examination results are used appropriately to evaluate performance. Limited accommodation currently results in psychology being taught in a variety of rooms, many of which do not support a seminar approach and the use of information and communication technology. However, this accommodation will improve once the new building is complete.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

159. The focus of the inspection was on English, French and German.

English

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

Strengths

- Recent results in the A Level course have been high. Students achieve high standards in writing.
- Teaching is very good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and guide their students very effectively to ensure that they achieve their full potential.
- Students display very mature attitudes to learning and are developing independent learning skills effectively.
- The subject is led and managed very effectively.

Areas for improvement

- Occasionally, not all students are sufficiently involved in class discussion, which hinders the progress of some students.

161. The provision in English caters for some 111 students, including some AVCE students. All students are offered A Level courses in English literature.

162. Examination results for A Level English literature in 2001 were in line with the expected levels for this course. However, all the evidence suggests that 2001 was not a representative year and the results for 2002 show high standards of achievement, with 57 per cent of students attaining grades A - B. The national average was not available during the inspection but compared to the 2001 results, standards are very likely to be well above average.

163. The observation of work during the week of inspection confirms the high standards achieved in 2002. Students in current Year 12 and Year 13 attain standards that are well above average. Most reach high standards in literary criticism and are able to express personal responses to literature successfully. Reading skills, such as reading for meaning, are well developed. Students know their set texts and analyse the writing style of different authors with reference to plots, characters and the use of language. They are developing good independent study skills. This was seen in a Year 12 lesson where a student presented the critical study of 'Snow Falling on Cedars' confidently, supporting the character analysis with appropriate quotes from the text. All students make very good progress in all aspects of the subject.

164. The quality of teaching is very good and makes an effective contribution to the very good progress students make during their time in the sixth form. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and are skilful in developing their students' writing style, including effective and imaginative uses of a wide range of sophisticated vocabularies. For example, in a Year 12 lesson, while studying the opening section of 'The Country Wife', students were supported very efficiently to gain clear understanding of irony and ambiguity in the text that the author used to portray the society's attitudes to women at that

time. This led to a stimulating discussion and students gained good understanding of the theme and characters. Teachers have high expectations of their students and use time very well to maintain a brisk pace and challenge them. They have very good understanding of their students' learning needs and ensure that students get an accurate picture of what they must do to achieve high standards. For example, in a Year 12 lesson, students' work was evaluated thoroughly with reference to the examination marking criteria. Similarly, in a Year 13 lesson, while studying war poems, students were given clear understanding of how to approach best the unseen part of examination. All these good practices have a very positive effect on students' learning. Students work very effectively in pairs and groups, as well as in whole-class seminars. They respect their teachers and recognise that teachers value their contributions in lessons. The subject makes a positive contribution to the personal development of the students, supporting them to approach debates of various social issues presented in the texts, in a responsible and mature manner.

165. The leadership and management of English are very good. Teachers work very closely as a team and are committed to maintaining high standards. The quality of teaching is monitored and reviewed regularly and good practices are shared.

Modern foreign language

166. Provision for modern foreign languages in the sixth form is **very good**.

Strengths

- Very good teaching.
- All candidates achieve high standards in public examinations.
- Lessons are well planned and use of the foreign language is extensive.
- Assessment procedures are good, enabling students to develop their awareness of what they need to do to improve.

Areas for improvement

- Encourage students to be active in lessons, making use in particular of the opportunity to practise speaking the language they are learning.
- Increase the opportunities available for students to use information and communication technology in lessons.

167. The students entered for A Level in both French and German in 2001 achieved better results in these subjects than they did in the average for all their other subjects. Boys have been as successful as girls in both languages, but fewer boys than girls have chosen to take languages in the sixth form in recent years and the overall numbers choosing languages for A Level have been low. However, these trends are changing: this year in Year 12 numbers in both languages are well into double figures and more boys than girls have chosen to take A Level German. Standards are above average and the majority of students in recent years have obtained a grade C or better, with several gaining grade A. A few students drop their language after completing the AS examination, but in both the last two years, the majority has chosen to continue.

168. The quality of teaching observed in sixth form lessons is very good overall and sometimes excellent. Teachers are well prepared, very good at their subject and respond well to students' needs. The full range of skills is practised in lessons and the topics chosen are important and relevant to their interests. A range of different learning activities is employed and this gives students the chance to develop their own learning styles. They respond conscientiously and are hard-working throughout their lessons. They have respect for their teachers who provide strong encouragement and guidance, both in lessons and when marking their work. The only weakness is that in some lessons students can become rather passive, preferring to listen rather than to participate actively. In most cases, however, teachers challenge students with stimulating activities, often involving group and pair work, and students join in with enthusiasm. In Year 12, in both French and German, they require considerable support when involved in conversation and written work displays some gaps in their knowledge of grammar. Students receive

plenty of practice in examination technique in Year 12 and this encourages them to feel confident as they approach their AS Level papers. In Year 13, they speak with confidence in both languages and have no difficulty responding at normal speed to what is said to them. Their written work is accurate and of a high standard. In a Year 13 lesson, students were easily able to understand when their teacher explained grammatical points, using appropriate terminology, in German.

169. The curriculum is broad and balanced and appropriate to the students' needs. One of its strongest features is a work experience placement for students in both France and Germany during the summer break between Year 12 and Year 13. Students report great benefits and it is evident that they develop personally, culturally and academically from the experience. Students also appreciate the resource library, dedicated for the use of those taking A and AS Level French and German. Their ability to read for pleasure and for information is advanced by the availability of so much interesting and relevant material in the form of books, magazines, audio and video cassettes. Students are encouraged to use information and communication technology facilities, especially the Internet, to further their language studies at home, but opportunities for doing so in lessons are currently restricted owing to lack of equipment in working order. Teachers of both French and German attach importance to the need for students to become independent learners and have developed several strategies for achieving this. Students report that they learn how to work independently, especially as they move from Year 12 to Year 13.

170. A curriculum director, who is not a teacher of French and German, oversees the work of the department, but the strategic, as well as day to day, management functions are carried out by individual subject leaders in each language. This arrangement is working well and the leadership and management of the department are good. Appropriate assessment procedures are in place in the sixth form and the departmental handbook is comprehensive and thorough. Teachers have a clear view of what constitutes good practice and are planning many appropriate developments. These include improvements to the quality of learning in Years 12 and 13, which have already been successfully completed, as well as improvements in the main school. There has been very good improvement since the last inspection.