

INSPECTION REPORT

KEN STIMPSON COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Werrington

LEA area: Peterborough

Unique reference number: 110882

Headteacher: D McPartlin

Reporting inspector: W K Baxendale
02928

Dates of inspection: 9th – 13th December 2002

Inspection number: 249643

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Community

Age range of students: 11 – 18

Gender of students: Mixed

School address: Staniland Way
Werrington
Peterborough

Postcode: PE4 6JT

Telephone number: 01733 765950

Fax number: 01733 765951

Appropriate authority: The governing body

Name of chair of governors: Mrs. P Reeson

Date of previous inspection: 19th May 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
02928	W K Baxendale	Registered inspector		How well the students attain The quality of teaching and learning Leadership and management
12775	J Goodchild	Lay inspector		Students' attitudes, behaviour and personal development How does the school care for the students? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
03943	D Innes	Team inspector	English language English as an additional language	
27050	V Blackburn	Team inspector	Science	
24124	S Argyle	Team inspector	Art and design	
22524	S Innes	Team inspector	Design and technology	Students' learning opportunities
22458	G McGinn	Team inspector	History Business studies	
30978	E White	Team inspector	Geography	Assessment
17404	J Tolley	Co-ordinator inspector	Modern foreign languages	
15208	A Briggs	Team inspector	Music Information and communication technology	
18462	B Jones	Team inspector	Physical education Psychology	
01407	P Scott	Team inspector	Physics	

30046	R Parker	Team inspector	English literature Special educational needs Equal opportunities	
04773	P Gilliatt	Team inspector	Religious education Citizenship	
30699	A Kemp	Team inspector	Mathematics	

The inspection contractor was:

Independent School Inspection Services (ISIS)
3 Harrowby Road
West Park
LEEDS
LS16 5HN

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Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Ken Stimpson Community School is an average sized, all-attainment comprehensive school with 853 boys and girls on roll. There are 122 students in the sixth form that is closely federated with three other schools. Students are mainly from white British origins, but an above average proportion, six per cent, are from an ethnic minority, with English as an additional language, although very few are beginners in the language. The attainment of 11 year olds starting the school has been regularly below average, but in 2002 this rose to average. A higher than average (about one third) proportion of students is on the register of special educational needs. Similarly above average, one student in 25 has a statement of special educational need, mainly for specific learning difficulties or because of emotional or behavioural difficulties. In any year there are very few high attainers. An average proportion of students is eligible for a free school meal. The school manages, but shares in partnership with the LEA (local education authority), community sports and library facilities.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a rapidly improving school that provides a good, very well thought out, education for all its students. Excellently led and very well managed, the school uses and also serves its local community enterprisingly well. Standards are rising. The students and staff play full parts in creating the warm, purposeful learning atmosphere. Teaching and learning are good. The governors hold the school very well to account. The school's many strengths outweigh some weaknesses. Considering the good quality of education and the school's careful stewardship of its resources, the school provides good value for money. The school is the driving force behind a cost-effective federated sixth form, which has successfully increased the students' learning opportunities.

What the school does well

- The school has a deep commitment to continuous improvement.
- The school is a harmonious community with a fully shared, clear sense of direction.
- The students' personal development is very good.
- Leadership is excellent.
- Very good support systems are helping to raise students' achievement.
- Standards are rising.

What could be improved

- The quality of provision in design and technology is poor.
- Too many students make insufficient improvement in their literacy skills.
- The information available to teachers about the special educational needs of students who do not have a specific statement is insufficient.

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 made a very good improvement since it was last inspected in May 1997. All but one of the recommendations of that inspection have been implemented. The school now has a very clear strategic vision that involves everyone concerned very closely: a former weakness is now a major strength. Teaching and learning are checked regularly and findings are used well to improve quality, although there is room for some greater standardisation of rigour in the checks made. All statutory requirements are now met. There is still scope for further refinement in the way teachers are given information on some students' special and advanced learning needs so they may be helped the more to progress. Examination results rose substantially in 2002.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by students 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	2001
GCSE examinations	D	D	C	E
A-levels/AS-levels		D	*	

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

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

Attainment is below average but, confirming the parents' opinions, the students achieve well throughout. National test results for 11 year olds show that Year 7 starters are behind the standards expected in English, mathematics and science. The school uses other assessments that reinforce this information. It makes very good use of the data as benchmarks to measure progress and to set targets for improvement. Practice is successful as, by the time they take national tests for 14 year olds, students have raised their game and are now average. As with 16 year olds, taking GCSE, there was a big leap forward in 2002, with 14 year olds reaching average standards. A ten per cent point rise in the proportions obtaining higher grade GCSE passes to about the national average was a result of the meticulous way the school builds on analyses of how students are doing. Rising standards have attracted more parents to the school and the 2002 intake's attainment was average; standards are set to go on rising. Girls do better than boys by about the same margin as that found nationally.

Generally students enter the school with well below average reading and writing skills so they find difficulty in work that requires precise understanding of written texts or that requires clear written expression. Many make good progress in reading, but inaccuracies in spelling and grammar pervade the written work of too many all the way through to the sixth form, hence the above average proportions on the register of special educational needs. The students do better in mathematics, science and other subjects that make fewer demands on free expression through writing. The school does well in raising the appreciation of technical terms surrounding, for example, history and geography. The students use information and communication technology (ICT) well to support learning. They create music, art and drama work well, but there is a recurrent weakness in the students' grasp of related theory that reveals and justifies why things happen or are used in production. The students make things well in design and technology, but underlying theory is very weak, so standards are going down.

The school makes very good provision for students with English as an additional language, who make very good progress, and for those with complex learning difficulties, who also do well, often with one-to-one help. There is room for improvement in the way information is passed to class teachers to allow them to make better-focused provision for those with less acute special educational needs. Similarly, higher attainers occasionally waste time, waiting for others to catch up. They do well but could be stretched even further.

In collaboration with the LEA, the school sets realistic yet demanding targets for improvement and is doing well in meeting them.

Sixth formers achieve well and standards are rising because the students now have a broader range of courses to select, with the new GNVQ ones better suited to the ways some learn. High attainers do well in AS and A-level business studies and physics, for example, but others also achieve well in GNVQ health and social care and business courses that raise their aspirations and confidence. In the sixth form, boys make slightly better progress than do the girls.

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Students are prepared to work hard; nearly all get real satisfaction from success in study. They take part in a wide range of out-of-school activities. Students from an ethnic minority and those with special educational needs play very full parts in school life and do well.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. This is a socially harmonious school; bullying is not an issue and all students are encouraged to be responsible for their own actions and how they affect others: this underpins the rising standards.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Students are encouraged to manage their own learning from the start. Senior students help juniors to settle in. Work done to make the neighbourhood a more pleasant place is exemplary.
Attendance	Satisfactory. Attendance is broadly in line with the national average; a few parents condone persistent absenteeism and spoil their child's chances of achieving well.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

Good quality learning and teaching are cornerstones of the school's successful efforts to improve and to raise standards. A substantial reduction in the amount of unsatisfactory teaching and a similar rise in the proportion of good teaching signify good improvements since the previous inspection.

The quality of teaching in English, mathematics and science is good, raising students' interest, aspirations and standards. Very nearly all teachers have a good knowledge and understanding of their subject and how to teach it. Most lessons proceed at a good rate with stimulating activities that do not go on for too long. A particular strength is the way teaching get students involved, knowing clearly what they are to learn, with teachers checking how well they are doing. The emphasis placed upon personal development and citizenship permeates learning in most subjects, as imaginative planning generates good discussions on pertinent issues; students learn well from this and from the regular contributions of outside adult specialists. Good teaching makes a conscious effort to raise students' weak literacy standards and is successful in developing oral competence and technical details related to the subject; this is of particular help to students with English as an additional language who make very good progress as a result.

There is a big weakness in teaching and learning in design and technology, where not enough emphasis is placed on why things happen rather than the mechanics of making things, in both food and resistant materials. Teaching and learning are unsatisfactory in the subject.

Special educational needs provision has improved and students who are given one-to-one sessions to help them meet their specified targets are taught well, so making good progress. Others, without the benefit of a statement, are taught less effectively because the class teachers do not have the requisite information on their needs to be able to cater for them.

Students learn well. Good, helpful marking of written work helps learning and most students do their homework, but its contribution to learning is no more than satisfactory overall, as not all complete it as intended.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Very good. The curriculum meets legal requirements and the needs of all students. Personal, social and health education (PSHE) is very strong, promoting the school's emphasis on developing mutual respect. A good range of choices for Years 10 and 11 now has more alternative courses to GCSE. Very good links with the local community make the curriculum more interesting and relevant; standards are rising.
Provision for students with special educational needs	Satisfactory. There is effective support for students with special educational needs, but the recommendations of the special educational needs Code of Practice are not fully in place. Consequently, some students' needs are not fully appreciated or catered for by their subject teachers.
Provision for students with English as an additional language	Very good. Provision reflects the school's emphasis on respect very closely. Students from minority groups flourish; they make very good progress in oral English; lessons have many discussion opportunities.
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good. The school operates on mutual respect. The commitment of the staff provides a very good example for students who understand how to improve attitudes and behaviour. Ethical issues and citizenship play strong parts. The students help each other well and broaden their horizons through many out-of-school activities and a sharing of inter-racial traditions.
How well the school cares for its students	Very good. Child protection measures are very good. The school has very good systems for monitoring academic performance and personal development and excellent ones for the promotion of good behaviour. There is very effective careers education and very good practice in acting on the results of assessments to set targets for improvement.

The school has very good relationships with the parent body, nearly all of who supports its very good efforts on behalf of the students very strongly. As a result of the school's broadening appeal, the number of first choices for admission in September 2003 exceeds its capacity for the first time since opening.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good. Leadership of the headteacher and senior team is excellent: they have given the school a very clear sense of direction and established a strong commitment to equality of opportunity. Standards are rising as a direct result. Some work is still to be done in the management of departments, especially design and technology.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Very good. The governors have an excellent understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They hold the school very well to account, for example setting clear improvement targets.

The school's evaluation of its performance

Very good. Analysis of results and progress is thorough and very well used to raise standards. Teaching and learning are monitored very regularly and very nearly all those with delegated responsibility pull well together to put policy into action.

The strategic use of resources	Very good. The school applies principles of best value meticulously and supports all developments through excellent financial planning, so contributing very much to rising standards.
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Staffing and learning resources are good because they are so well planned. Recruitment procedures are a model of good practice. The accommodation is satisfactory, although there are recurrent, time-consuming issues over the management detail of shared facilities.

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's high expectations of students' endeavours to do their best. • The approachability of the school so that questions or problems can be aired easily. • Students like going to a school where they are making good progress and becoming mature young persons. • Teaching, leadership and management are all good. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The amount of work to be done at home.

The inspection team is in full agreement with parents on the points raised. The report confirms the many qualities of an improving school in which students do try hard and achieve well. The function of homework in raising standards could be improved, as could some parents' collaboration in ensuring its completion and, in the case of a few, making sure their child attends more regularly.

ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM

KEN STIMPSON COMMUNITY SCHOOL

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

There are 122 students in the smaller than average sixth form. Numbers joining the sixth form are constant. Most courses are of an advanced standard, either as academic AS and A-level courses or vocational A-levels with the exception of GNVQ Intermediate and Foundation business and health and social care. There are no specific admission restrictions for joining the sixth form, and most students enter with five or more GCSE results at grade C, or better. The students' attainment profile is, nonetheless, well below that often found, mainly because the school has so few high attainers in Years 7 to 11.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

Provision in the sixth form is good. The sixth form is cost effective and provides good value for money. Standards attained in examinations are below average compared with all maintained schools, but there is good achievement in relation to students' prior attainment. The quality of teaching and learning is good. The sixth form is very well managed and organised. Leadership and strategic planning in the sixth form are excellent. The school plays a leading role in the drive towards improving quality and broadening provision through the federation arrangements with three other schools. The school is enabling its students to develop into mature young adults who take a responsible attitude towards their studies and their role in school.

Strengths

- Students achieve well in relation to prior attainment.
- Standards in physics and business studies are above average.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good.
- Students' attitudes towards their learning are very positive and they have very good relationships with their teachers.
- The curriculum provides students with an improving range of courses relevant to their needs.
- Leadership of the sixth form is excellent.

What could be improved

- Low levels of literacy are adversely affecting standards for some students.

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	Satisfactory. Students make satisfactory progress as a result of good teaching. Attainment is below average. Subject management is good.
Physics	Very good. Attainment is above average; students achieve very well because of good teaching and learning and the students' very good mathematics. Subject management is very good.

Biology	Satisfactory. Attainment is below average. Most students make satisfactory progress. Teaching and learning are satisfactory, but do not always match the needs of all students. Subject management is unsatisfactory.
Business studies	Very good. Attainment is above average and students achieve very well as a result of very good teaching. Very good relationships promote effective learning. Subject management is very good.
Art	Good. Attainment is below average. Students make good progress in a wide range of media. They benefit from good teaching. Subject management is good.
Geography	Good. Attainment is below average but students achieve well as a result of very good examination preparation. Good teaching, which includes very detailed marking, ensures that students have a good understanding of how to improve. Subject management is good.
Psychology	Satisfactory. Attainment is below average. Students make satisfactory progress in relation to prior attainment, as a result of satisfactory teaching. Subject management is good.
English literature	Good. Attainment is well below average. Limited previous experience of literature adversely affects standards attained by some students. Good teaching enables students to develop their skills and understanding satisfactorily. Subject management is good.
English language	Good. Attainment is below average, but students achieve well. The quality of teaching is good. Inaccuracies and lack of clarity reduce the quality of writing of some students. Subject management is good.

Work was sampled in other subjects. Teaching was good overall in these subjects; for example, in French and drama lessons the quality of teaching and learning was good and students achieved well. In GNVQ health and social care standards attained are below average but students achieve very well in relation to prior attainment as a result of excellent relationships and very good teaching.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Very good educational support and guidance are given to students. Half-termly mentoring sessions, which enable students to set targets and support their academic progress, are very effective.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Leadership in the sixth form is excellent. Planning is clearly focused on raising standards and improving provision. Standards and provision are regularly reviewed with curriculum leaders and appropriate action taken to raise standards. However, in those subjects where provision is shared across the federation there is, as yet, a lack of clarity about overall responsibility for monitoring and evaluation. The school is committed to providing a wide range of courses, which effectively meet the needs of its students, and has been successful in doing this through its collaboration with other schools in the federation.

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">• They enjoy being a member of the sixth form.• Teachers are accessible for help.• They are well taught and challenged.• Their views are responded to by the school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of personal study time in Year 12.• Time lost from lessons through travel between sites.

Inspectors agree with the positive views of students. They felt that the school knows its students well and takes pride in its ability to help them overcome problems. The school is aware of the lack of personal study time in Year 12 and makes appropriate arrangements with individual students to address this problem. Currently the school is reviewing transport arrangements within the federation to minimise time lost in travel.

COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

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

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

As Year 11 students were engaged in mock GCSE examinations during the inspection week, no lessons were observed. A very close scrutiny of their written work and extended discussions with some of the students provided the basis of evaluations. Year 10 lessons were inspected very thoroughly.

1. Attainment has been consistently below average since the previous inspection but, confirming the parents' views, achievement is good; standards are rising. Because of improved checking on how students are doing and the meeting of targets to do better, there was a big jump in national examination and test results amongst 14 and 16 year olds in 2002. Results that were much nearer to national averages were some of the fruits of the now excellent leadership and very good management. Improvements in results also came in the wake of the very good work done to get the students to appreciate the value of commitment, hard work and the effects of their actions on the learning of others. Close checking of teaching and learning quality and of improving the home-school dialogue contributed significantly, too.
2. Up to September 2001, students' attainment each year was below average when they started Year 7. There were fluctuations, but typically, at least 65 per cent of all other 11 year olds nationally were further forward. Very few students were high attainers. The school's very careful analyses of 11 year olds' national test results and of results of a very widely-used assessment system to measure attainment and potential provide the sound basis used for measuring how well students do. Steps taken to raise standards have resulted, since the previous inspection, in annual improvements in students' progress. Each year has exceeded its expected GCSE points score by a wider margin than the one achieved by the year before. The school's progress towards its realistic, yet demanding, targets for improvement is good.
3. Because of the school's well-deserved, broadening appeal it now attracts a wider attainment range. The September 2002 intake's attainment was higher, being average overall. Inspection evidence shows that Year 7 students have higher standards than all other years in the school; they are also making good progress. Standards are set to go on rising.
4. Students usually enter the school with well below average skills of reading and writing. Most have limited vocabularies that restrict their ability to express their ideas satisfactorily in speech or writing or to gain full understanding from their reading. Writing is spoiled by inaccuracies of spelling, grammar and sentence construction.
5. The school makes considerable efforts to raise standards by encouraging wider reading and making special provisions for those with severe difficulties. Despite some inconsistencies, there is much good practice. Teachers of all subjects try to ensure that students know, use and correctly spell words, particularly technical terms, needed for work in their lessons. A helpful, school-produced dictionary is used in classrooms, including lessons in PSHE. Younger students especially are expected to have books with them to read whenever there is time available, in addition to time set aside in English lessons. Students are taught how to organise their material when writing not only in English lessons, but also in several other subjects. Skills of reading

quickly and identifying the main points, scanning and skimming, are practised satisfactorily in business studies, geography, history and modern foreign languages.

6. These provisions combine to raise standards, but several weaknesses persist. Most students continue to have difficulties associated with inadequate vocabularies. There are uncertainties about the appropriate use of formal and colloquial language. Weaknesses of spelling, particularly of words in common use, include confusion of words with similar sounds such as 'where' and 'were' or 'practise' and 'practice'. Such errors undermine attainment.
7. The planning of numeracy across the curriculum is new, but overall, students are able to meet the mathematical demands of other subjects. In science, students employ mathematical applications, mainly connected to graphs. In Year 11 these include graphs showing lines of best fit and histogram displays. In graphics, drawings include precise measurements and accurate angle constructions. Students are capable of using scale and they interpret tables using distance and time data. Surveys that lead to graphs and analyses, for example of social deprivation in inner city districts, provide an opportunity for rank ordering to establish particular characteristic definitions in geography.
8. The contribution of other subjects to students' ICT skills is satisfactory. Most teachers have received relevant training. ICT is particularly well used in mathematics where students have very good resources for research and revision purposes through a very well designed Intranet facility. In science, students frequently use data loggers, temperature sensors and a digital microscope. The physical education department regularly uses digital photography to study movement. Substantial information is gathered from the Internet in several subjects. In music, however, for students in Years 7 to 9, a lack of software prevents their coverage of this important aspect of the course. There is only limited opportunity for students to use computers to control, design and manufacture within the design and technology course, compounding overall weaknesses in the subject. The use of computers outside lesson time is good with substantial numbers attending lunchtime sessions.
9. The school makes very good provision for the 48 students from homes where English is not the first language. A member of staff holds regular interviews, identifies difficulties, sets targets and monitors individuals' progress carefully and effectively. The school makes good use of the local services of the LEA for translation, materials for learning and work with parents. A student from a similar language and cultural background provides very good support for new arrivals. Minority group students benefit from the support of bi-lingual learning support assistants and there are good links with the local mosque.
10. The school analyses carefully the examination results of students from minority groups, as it does for all others. Predicted grades and individual results show that progress and attainment exceed expectation, based on assessments made when the students joined the school. Those with English as an additional language often make very good progress, especially in their oral competence.
11. The school has adapted very well to support a growing number of students with increasingly severe and complex special educational needs. Students who come to the school with significant reading and spelling difficulties make very good progress when they are withdrawn from lessons for extra individual tuition. Those who are given help to catch up with the literacy skills of their peers in Year 7 are now progressing well. However, some students whose special needs have been identified do not

progress as quickly as they might because class teachers do not have enough information about their needs and capabilities to devise challenging individual targets. This is equally true of students who have been identified as having unusual gifts or talents.

12. The attainment of the comparatively few higher attainers is lower than it should be because sometimes teaching fails to extend them and most do not volunteer to do extra work without prompting. However, the school's analyses show, in general, the students' good progress, beyond what would be expected from their prior attainment; their achievement is good.
13. By the time students took national tests in English, mathematics and science, as 14 year olds, their attainment was, until 2002, well below average compared with all other schools and with schools in similar contexts. In 2002, the results improved to average compared with all schools nationally.
14. Work seen during the inspection reflects teacher assessments in other subjects, with above average attainment in music and ICT. Attainment was about average or just below in nearly all other subjects, but well below it in design and technology, the weakest subject in the school. Generally, the girls' performance is in front of that of the boys, at about the national rate.
15. GCSE average point scores have been below average since the previous inspection, compared with all schools and with those in similar contexts. The proportions obtaining five or more higher grade, A*-C, passes were also below average and those obtaining five or more GCSE passes of any grade were well below average. The main reason for the discrepancy was the alternative curriculum arrangement for those encountering difficulties with academic programmes of study. They did well in courses provided both on and off site, but received no formal accreditation. Recognising the anomaly, the school has now revised practice and, whereas until 2002 around one student in eight left without qualifications, currently very nearly all students are engaged on recognised, certificated courses.
16. Girls do better than boys in their GCSE examinations, by about the same margin as that found nationally. Students from an ethnic minority are too few in any year to make secure comparisons but, as with all students, their results exceed their grades predicted by what they had done beforehand.
17. A 10 per cent improvement in the proportions obtaining five or more higher grade, A*-C, GCSEs in 2002 brought standards much closer to national averages, and the average point scores were also much closer, although still below, the national average. The students are obtaining better and better qualifications, demonstrating the successful impact of the structures now in place that raise standards and also have a very positive influence on the students' personal development.
18. Attainment reported in Part D of this report shows lingering weaknesses in literacy standards and comparative success borne out by test and examination results in subjects that make fewer demands on writing at length, such as mathematics and science, with results close to average. The students are better at practical work than at work that requires appreciation of underlying reasons for things to happen. They construct products well in design and technology, but unsatisfactory teaching deprives them of the essential knowledge of the theory behind fabrication; standards in this subject are declining, counter to the overall pattern. In art, music and drama, composition and creativity are well up to average, but students do not investigate

sufficiently in depth to learn about artistic, creative ideas and the moving forces behind them. Standards in ICT are restricted by too small an allocation of study time for successful completion of the short GCSE course, but students are skilful in using computers for many purposes. Backed up by the positive school atmosphere, standards are good in citizenship. It is only in design and technology that students fail to achieve at a rate above expectation.

19. A close scrutiny of students' written work confirms the good achievement they make by Year 11, only spoiled by weaknesses in design and technology and, more generally, in the accuracy of written work throughout most subjects.

Sixth form

20. The range of prior attainment is well below that often found in sixth forms and standards are below average. Compared with all providers nationally, A-level average point scores in 2001 were below average for boys and about average for girls. Generally, over time, boys reached higher standards than their previous attainment suggested they would: achievement has been good. The girls have done slightly less well, but still achieved well. The school's progress towards meeting its targets for improvement is also good. The number of students ceasing study before completing a course is relatively low. In 2001, the students did best in sports studies, where results were above average, and in business studies, drama, sociology and psychology where they were broadly in line with the national average. Results in all other subjects with enough candidates to make comparison valid were below average. There was no candidates in mathematics. Provision has now broadened and in 2002, for which no national comparisons are available, candidates obtained A-level results that were below the previous year's averages in, for example, mathematics and biology. AS results are also below average. Results since the previous inspection have been fairly consistent, but the range of subjects has increased.
21. Amongst current students, girls do a little better than boys in most subjects and students from an ethnic minority portray confidence equal to that of all others and hold their own academically. Of the subjects inspected, achievement is very good in business studies and physics, and is good in art, geography and English language; it is satisfactory in the others.
22. The students' development of the key skills of communication, numeracy, collaboration and the application of ICT is good, except in the quality of their written communication, where weaknesses found amongst 11 to 16 year olds persist for many. Because the style of work suits them better, students often do very well in GNVQ business studies and health and social care.
23. Confident higher attainers gain a good awareness of poetic style and are able to write with poise and good attention to detail because of their good grasp of the content of works they study in English literature. Students' annotations on texts are often careful and helpful. The reading of journals helps to raise standards. Some lower attaining students have a more restricted, simple vocabulary, but they show a good grasp of character. Others fail to join in sufficiently and their standards suffer as a result, through not doing enough work in school or at home.
24. In English language, students have good ideas that develop well, so achievement is good. However, too many, especially the lower attainers, are let down by weaknesses in written work. Spellings, sentence construction and grammatical errors mar

presentation. In drama, students develop a deepening understanding of, for example, classical theatre and culture because the teaching makes heavy demands for more and clearer judgements from them. Clarity of expression improves, but persistent grammatical weaknesses appear in most scripts.

25. The quality of note making is good amongst higher attainers. In business studies courses, good research skills contribute well to the good very achievement that raises standards to above average. Students use the Internet and improve the presentation of their work with relevant graphs and graphics. Lower attainers also do well because they enjoy their work, although their writing lacks detail, relevance and depth of understanding. Higher attainers skim and scan texts efficiently, use technical terms where they should and can evaluate and analyse well, for example, the advantages and disadvantages of privatisation and tax harmony in the European Union. Persistent inaccuracies are the main weakness in what is otherwise work of a high standard. Students are, for instance, able to justify well their survey techniques and they base their conclusions firmly on their findings.
26. Adaptations of original drawings, showing good pencil work, with depth of tone and observation, characterise some thorough, very high quality products in AS and A-level art. Sketch books burst with the students' personal work, which is much better than that they produce on the historic and theoretical aspects of the subject. Standards are raised by study visits, but work on other artists lacks analytical depth and is also spoiled by erratic grammar and spellings. Students use the Internet well to find source materials, but they do not exploit their findings sufficiently through comment or interpretation.
27. The Year 13 physics students' high standards in mathematics are the mainstay of their good achievement in the subject. They make good notes that provide a strong basis for revision, and benefit from model assessment answers to reinforce learning. In Year 12, a full range of attainment is reflected in the work produced, which is normally correct physics even though presentation varies from perfection to unsatisfactory. Students are able to copy work satisfactorily in biology, but teaching sometimes fails to make enough demands on them, so their standards and achievement are lower than they should be. In mathematics, standards attained reflect closely recent below average A-level results. Note making is good and work is well ordered, but some students lack conviction in their responses. As in art and other practical subjects, students are much more at home with practical applications than with the theory of pure mathematics.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

28. The students' attitudes towards school are very good. Students are prepared to work hard and they get an increasing sense of real satisfaction from success in their studies. In almost half the lessons students' attitudes were evaluated as at least very good or, on occasion, excellent.
29. Students participate enthusiastically in the wide range of enrichment opportunities the school provides. Teaching staff provide excellent role models by sharing lunchtime activities with students, for example, playing alongside them in orchestra and jazz band rehearsals. Students from ethnic minorities are fully integrated into the school community, as are those with special educational needs.
30. Relationships between students and with staff are very good. One of the most striking characteristics of the school is the mutual respect shown. Students are valued for

their individuality. They respond positively, developing, through their school experiences, into confident young people. There are many opportunities for collaborative or group work to further develop students' social skills and they willingly share and support each other in their learning. In many lessons, students are encouraged to express their feelings on a range of moral and social issues. They listen with sensitivity to the views and opinions of their fellows that may differ from their own.

31. The school is a socially harmonious community. The school is fastidious in dealing with any misbehaviour and fixed-term exclusions are slightly above average. Behaviour is now very good: this is a substantial improvement since the previous inspection. Behaviour in lessons is very rarely unsatisfactory and frequently very good or excellent. Bullying is not an issue. All students are encouraged to accept responsibility for their actions, and treat everyone with respect; with very rare exceptions, they do so. The introduction of a 'Character Counts' project has made students aware of the effect of their behaviour on the learning of others; this has made a significant contribution towards the high standards of behaviour within the school.
32. The development of students' initiative and personal responsibility is very good; this is also an improvement since the previous inspection where opportunities for students to take responsibility were restricted. From first entering the school students are encouraged to accept responsibility for managing their own learning. During lunch and break times they organise themselves with unobtrusive adult supervision. Students in Year 11 act conscientiously as mentors to Year 7 students to help them settle into school. An active citizens group involves students in decision making that affects both the school environment and local community. For example, students have litter-picked voluntarily in the community on a Saturday and currently are involved in developing a public seating area in the school grounds. A panel of students decides on the allocation of funding for initiatives through the Youth Bank. A group of students has researched and presented the case for asylum seekers to a range of audiences. All of these opportunities make a significant contribution towards students' very good personal development and understanding of citizenship.
33. Students with special educational needs show very positive attitudes to learning. Those who attend individual sessions for support with basic literacy work hard throughout the lessons. They are interested, and can work independently because routines are well established. Resources are appropriate and easily accessible, and there are very good relationships with the adults who work with them. Students make good use of the extra help they get when they are supported in different subjects. They collaborate effectively with support staff. In one Year 7 mathematics class, a boy who worked with a support assistant completed almost twice as much work on probability as some other students within the class.
34. Attendance is satisfactory and broadly in line with the national average. Despite the school's best efforts, some students fail to attend regularly; this ultimately affects their ability to achieve their potential in examinations. The school meets requirements for the registration of students.

Sixth form

35. Students' attitudes to learning are very good in the sixth form; they apply themselves well in lessons and complete work set. Most arrive promptly and are fully prepared for lessons. The behaviour of sixth form students is very good. They set a good example to students lower down the school. Students are well prepared to take responsibility for their own learning by the time they enter the sixth form. Relationships are very good. Students are caring and supportive of each other. For example, a group of female Muslim students has set up a very effective support system for Asian girls entering the school.
36. The personal development of sixth form students is very good. Some choose to become involved in organising and supporting enrichment activities with the lower school. A few help younger students with their reading and support Year 7 tutor groups. Sixth formers are actively involved with younger students who are considering staying on by sharing their experience of both subjects and life in the sixth form.
37. Attendance is satisfactory, but a few students are allowing their progress to be adversely affected by non-attendance. This understandably has a detrimental effect upon their results in examinations so that some fail to realise their potential.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

38. The quality, both of teaching and of learning, is good. The careful introduction of national teaching and learning plans for raising standards in English and mathematics, and very successful PSHE work on getting students to realise the effect of their actions on the learning of others, have contributed to good improvements since the previous inspection. A very significant factor is the reduction in unsatisfactory teaching and a matching increase in the amount of good teaching. Teachers and students contribute very effectively in lessons and outside to the very positive atmosphere that pervades the school. Leadership's close checking of teaching and learning in order to improve quality and to celebrate good practice also contributes very well to the improvements. A further result is the teachers' very good management of students that characterises nearly all lessons in a school that has significant numbers with a history of disruption and learning difficulty. Many are concentrated in Year 8, where there are no significant differences in teaching and learning quality compared with other years. Matching the students' overall higher attainment, teaching and learning are best in Year 7.
39. Teachers have a good knowledge and understanding of their subjects and the craft of teaching them, so giving authority to lessons and helping the students to learn. Very good planning is found in, for example, the common practice of sharing with students at the start of each lesson what it is intended they learn. References to progress and reviews of how much has been learned are raising standards, because the students know where they are. These measures are at the heart of the very good teaching methods in nearly all subjects.
40. Most lessons have a suitable variety of activities that do not go on for too long and maintain a good pace. Students learn through different experiences, with discussion and debate particularly successful in improving their oral skills; this helps those with English as an additional language to make very good progress. Grouped oral work does, however, reinforce local inaccuracies and translates often into imprecise written work. Good use is made of ICT to assist learning in, for example, science,

mathematics and citizenship, where the Internet provided valuable source material for a project on getting things done in a community.

41. The very good teaching and learning in citizenship lessons generate positive attitudes amongst the students who become very closely involved in what goes on through debate, correspondence and design. Excellent use is made of visitors who add relevance to the course by raising the students' awareness of the importance of collaboration in, for example, Balkan peacekeeping operations. Similarly, in PSHE lessons, the students' appreciation of important issues affecting their everyday lives arises from some imaginative teaching that also contributes significantly to the school's very good learning atmosphere, so complementing the tone that leads to good learning and teaching nearly everywhere else.
42. Both teaching and learning are good in English, mathematics, science, art, history, ICT, modern foreign languages, physical education and religious education. They are satisfactory in all other subjects, except design and technology.
43. Although teaching and learning are good in the graphics and textiles sections, weaknesses in teaching undermine standards in the resistant materials and food sections of design and technology; teaching is unsatisfactory in both. The main failure is the absence of teaching about why things happen, such as the science behind food preparation and the reasons why different materials are chosen for different jobs in construction. Teachers in these sections sometimes miss opportunities to extend students' drawing skills and the same teachers' knowledge of the detail of mark allocation is also deficient, so students do not know how to improve their performance.
44. The specialist teaching for students who are withdrawn from lessons is very good. Work is very carefully matched to their needs. Records are detailed and ensure that progress is recorded and used as the basis for future work. Teachers and learning support assistants are fully familiar with materials and computer software. They maintain a clear focus, in every activity, on ensuring that students really understand what they are doing. At no stage is a student able to pretend to understand, or to spend time on activities with no real value.
45. The in-class support for students with special educational needs is also good, and ensures that they can progress well. The practice of linking support staff to subjects has enabled them to develop specialist knowledge and skills, so, for example in art and science, the support assistants contribute to planning and adapting the lesson content. However, subject teachers generally do not have sufficient information for students who have recognised needs but no formal statement of need. Consequently, they are not able to adapt the work to enable these students to move towards individual targets and they are unable to review progress so that students and parents have a clear picture of how much progress is being made.
46. Students work at a very good pace, so learning is good and results in their good achievement as they move through the school. They put their backs into work in class, their written work is often very helpfully marked (the school has effective policy and procedures for checking this) and they complete homework satisfactorily, although teaching sometimes fails to extend the higher attainers sufficiently by this and other means. For example, too often higher attainers find themselves with nothing to do, having finished a task ahead of the rest of the class.

Sixth form

47. Very good relationships, behaviour and attitudes to study on the part of the students permeate the sixth form. Teaching and learning are good. They build well upon the principles of good practice found in Years 7 to 11. The influence of class teachers is very strong, helping the students to pursue a variety of ways to develop ideas.
48. A distinguishing characteristic of the best work in English is the way teachers build up energy and pace in learning through well-focused questions that make the students think, intentionally drawing in the quieter ones, even though these sometimes struggle to express themselves clearly. In both English language and literature courses, the teachers remind students of the importance of clarity of presentation: the style and manner of saying things. Self-criticism is well taught, though students tend to be too negative about themselves. Teachers praise where deserved, for example students' sensible and perceptive contributions when suggesting what might have preceded a studied extract. The best teaching and learning also take place in tightly timed activities that sustain momentum. Sometimes, learning suffers because some students fail to complete homework and, as a result, put pressure on others. In such instances, the students' engagement is unsatisfactory, as they are unable to respond readily and learning is slowed.
49. Teachers make good use of ICT in most subjects. In mathematics, computer-based presentations stimulate interest well. Group work forms a substantial part of mathematics lesson organisation, helping students to learn well overall, as the stronger students help those who find the work harder. Teachers provide very strong support, but this does not overcome some students' lack of confidence in learning by themselves. For example, Year 12 students lacked confidence in using their previously learned work without very substantial prompting and Year 13 students needed very strong support from the teacher to develop a methodical approach to sketching graphs.
50. In biology, extra help is provided outside lesson times, partly because some teachers, who have a good knowledge of the subject, are not fully accustomed to working at A-level. The better biology teaching puts the students on their mettle and requires them to think deeply about what they are doing. Standards are not, however, as high as they could be because, in other instances, teachers talk too much and require undemanding tasks such as copying out instead of throwing down challenges to get students fully involved in their studies. On the other hand, very good teaching and learning in physics build much more strongly on the students' aroused interest and ability to draw upon what they already knew, for example, from mathematics lessons, to make very good progress. Similarly in chemistry, strong challenges to students bring the best out of them in a study of exhaust emissions.
51. Good teaching and learning in art and design make a very good contribution to the students' personal development, for example through cultural study visits. In lessons, students make their own decisions with strong encouragement from the teachers, so they improve the ways they work and think independently. Some of the best teaching and learning occur in A and AS-level business studies lessons. Confidence and challenge intermingle, as the students are taught to gather knowledge from skim reading texts, as teachers sensitively reinforce technical language, checking regularly on understanding and progress. Teachers reward success enthusiastically. They provide very good feedback, always inviting extra comments from the students, so excellent learning takes place.

52. Teaching and, consequently, learning are very good in non A-level courses such as health and social care and business studies. Students are brought to a self-belief that they are able to succeed; they do so. Lively pace and strong questioning produce positive responses from the students who are consistently made aware of how they are doing through very effective assessments. Lively, mature debate is typical of learning that instils well-placed confidence, so students' ambitions are towards higher or other continuing education following a course in one subject or the other.
53. The complementary work in general studies, key skills and PSHE is well taught. It makes a very good contribution to personal development through, for example, the close associations the school has with the community, members of which, such as driving examiners, play important parts in contributing to the good learning experiences and skill development the students enjoy.

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

53. Students have very good learning opportunities throughout the school. The extent to which the school accommodates the needs of all students is a strength that is reflected increasingly in rising standards.
54. Governors and senior managers are actively involved in planning the curriculum that aims to meet the needs of all students. The school evaluates success by closely monitoring the standards achieved by students and modifying the curriculum if necessary. As a result, the breadth and balance of subjects provided are very good and the school succeeds in providing access to the full range of National Curriculum subjects for all students. There is a very good programme for PSHE including sex and drugs-related education, which is taught by a team of specialists, assisted by visiting speakers. A new citizenship course is very good. The requirements of the approved syllabus for religious education are met and all students in Years 10 and 11 follow a short GCSE course in the subject.
55. The school takes very effective action to ensure that students have equal access to the opportunities that it offers. Teachers try to ensure no student is inadvertently excluded from anything that is available and each individual is encouraged to react positively to everyone else. There is an emphasis on respect, and from the very start students are encouraged to work in a range of different groups. This breaks down barriers, and builds respect beyond immediate friendships. This is evident in relationships between teachers and students so, for example, a form tutor can confront unacceptable behaviour very effectively, without reducing the students' self-esteem.
56. Minority groups flourish in the school. Some students from ethnic minorities come from beyond the immediate locality. They are well supported to develop their language skills, and carefully mentored to ensure that they integrate fully, and that they can make good progress.
57. The Key Stage 3 Literacy Strategy has brought extra support for students who have not made sufficient progress in their primary schools. Some, who are still behind in Year 8, are allocated mentors to help them to get back on track. This approach goes to the heart of much underachievement because literacy standards are not high enough, and are hindering progress. As yet, some subject teachers are not sufficiently committed to developing literacy within their own lessons so that students can learn more effectively right across the curriculum. However, the new teaching

practices advocated by the strategy are increasing the pace and variety of activities within lessons. This is improving opportunities for many students, particularly boys who have underachieved in the past. There is still scope in some subjects to ensure that higher attainers know how far they need to stretch. Similarly, all staff have been trained to include teaching and learning about numeracy in their lessons; as with literacy, applications are not uniform. A similar programme for ICT was introduced in September but it is too early to measure its impact.

58. Students with special educational needs are well supported to understand the basic ideas in each subject. Those who are given individual support in place of a modern foreign language make good progress in their other subjects. This is because support staff concentrate effectively on ensuring that they understand what they are doing.
59. Students make informed choices in Year 9 about what subjects they are going to study in Years 10 and 11 and post-16. There is a good range of subjects to select from in Years 10 and 11. An extra range of choices has been added this year; it includes business education in GNVQ and GCSE and provides further opportunities for students to follow a course in German. Over recent years the school has developed an alternative curriculum to provide more attractive options for unmotivated students in Years 10 and 11, or those at risk of exclusion. This has included a range of imaginative placements and courses, and some productive links with local employers. In the past this has had a detrimental effect on the students' qualifications. However, the placements are now coherently linked to appropriate work-related courses within school. There is a new emphasis on ensuring that any student who is capable registers as many examination successes as he/she can. Additions such as the Prince's Trust XL programme are highly valued by students, who gain confidence and self-esteem, as well as a real interest in community and environmental issues.
60. There is very good provision for careers education that begins in Year 7 as part of the very good PSHE programme. Students are encouraged to develop an awareness of the working world by studying aspects of the local community. In Year 9 students are introduced to the careers library and an industry day is arranged for them. The school has very good links with the Connexions service and an adviser is provided for students in Years 10 and 11. Students have good opportunities for work experience in Year 11 and preparation for this begins in Year 10 to ensure the best value is obtained.
61. There is a very good range of out-of-school activities, which provides opportunities for all students to take part according to their interests and needs in sporting activities and clubs. Well-attended study clubs take place daily after school, with staff on hand to help with homework or access to computers. Study visits include the battlefields of France for Year 9 history students, and the Black Country museum for Year 8 students. The mathematics and science departments join forces to organise a mathematics trail in a country park and there is a school band and choir. Provision during the lunchtime includes a Christian club and students have their art lessons enriched by visits to local museums and art galleries. There is a wide range of musical activities including orchestras, choirs, recorder groups and jazz groups that contribute well to the local community. Many of the groups include members of staff from other departments, which gives a positive message to students about learning together.
62. There are very good links with the local community that provides work experience and sharing of the library and sports centre. Effective links with local religious groups both support particular groups of students in school and promote understanding of different

cultures and beliefs. Supported by the police and the Connexions service, the school recently responded to the needs of the community by inviting students to a meeting to discuss the issues of anti-social behaviour. The initiative has resulted in a reduction of such behaviour in the neighbourhood.

63. Links with partner institutions, such as the college of further education, other schools in the post-16 federation and primary schools, are excellent. As a result, students are very well prepared to enter the school in Year 7 and there is better provision of courses for sixth form students.
64. The provision for students' personal development is very good. The school operates very well on a basis of mutual trust and respect, characterised by very good relationships. The school provides very well for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The commitment and attitudes of staff set a very good example for students. They often use opportunities that arise in the classroom to promote students' personal development. Overall, improvement since the previous inspection has been very good.
65. Provision for spiritual development is good. Teaching styles encourage self-respect and respect for others by valuing students' contributions and recognising their achievements. Teaching in English, modern foreign languages and PSHE makes particularly good use of opportunities to raise students' self-esteem and to help them value themselves and other people. However, planning for this aspect of students' education is under-developed, which means that opportunities to develop spiritual awareness and insights are sometimes missed in subjects such as science, art and the humanities. Very well prepared assemblies encourage students to reflect on fundamental issues of meaning and value, such as the assembly held on Remembrance Day.
66. Moral education is very good. Teachers' expectations and the 'Character Counts' programme help students understand the distinction between right and wrong and how they can explain and improve their attitudes and behaviour. Ethical issues and moral dilemmas are considered in subjects such as English, geography and science. Work in PSHE, citizenship and religious education helps students clarify their own moral values and think through the choices they will need to make in life.
67. Social education is also very good. Students have many opportunities to develop social and collaborative skills in lessons, for example when working in pairs or small groups. Work in citizenship and PSHE helps students understand many of their rights and responsibilities as citizens. They can participate in many aspects of school life. Year 11 students, for example, act as mentors for Year 7 students and the school council enables students to contribute to decisions about school facilities and policies. Students are also involved in the life of the wider community through citizenship projects and fund raising for charity. Students organise a wide range of activities to raise money for projects such as the BBC Children in Need appeal and a school in South Africa.
68. The school's contribution to students' cultural development is very good. Opportunities for students to develop an understanding of different cultures are well provided in subjects such as English, geography, art, music and religious education. The school also gives students the opportunity to share in the traditions of different community groups represented in the school, such as celebrations at the time of Eid. Cultural interests and horizons are extended through the very extensive out-of-school activity programme of sport, drama and other clubs. Students are also given a wide

range of opportunities to go on educational visits in this country and on trips and exchanges abroad. Music, as part of the expressive arts department, has a positive impact on the atmosphere of the school by fostering students' self-esteem, awareness and respect for others. The whole department provides an exciting dimension to the cultural and social life of the school. The out-of-school contribution of music to the enjoyment and achievement of students is good.

Sixth form

69. The quality and range of learning opportunities in the sixth form are very good and the curriculum meets statutory requirements. Entry into the sixth form is essentially based upon the students' potential to progress on chosen courses and so the range of courses is modified each year to suit individual needs. There are very good links with other schools within the federation to extend opportunities. This year, for example, GNVQ courses in business education and health and social care are taught at Ken Stimpson. The school plans to extend provision for GNVQ courses next year to meet the growing need. A range of courses has been identified to meet the needs of the least able students over the next three years. Opportunities to provide courses in ICT are restricted by the number of staff available to teach them. The curriculum is enriched by visits to national galleries and the theatre and students have many opportunities to take part in sporting activities.
70. There is very good provision of information and advice on careers and continuing education. Students have a link adviser from the Connexions service and there are appropriate links with higher education institutions. The school provides an extensive range of information to enable students to make informed decisions about their future education, training or employment.
71. The provision for sixth form students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. A number of subjects, such as English, business studies and art, make a very positive contribution to this aspect of students' education. The general studies course provides a good programme of enrichment studies for students, including satisfactory provision for religious education. The course covers a wide range of ethical, moral and social issues and gives students very good opportunities to explore different viewpoints and clarify their own values. The school makes excellent use of visiting speakers and recently organised a very successful World Citizenship Conference for local sixth formers in Peterborough Town Hall, which drew on a very wide range of agencies to lead workshops. Other activities also give sixth form students very good opportunities to develop their personal skills. A well-established post-16 student council, for example, enables students to take responsibility for social and communal activities in the sixth form, as well as providing feedback to the school on curriculum provision. Asian girls are given the opportunity to provide very effective support for younger girls in the school by discussing their problems and helping to raise their aspirations.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

72. The school's ability to educate numerous students other schools cannot handle demonstrates its success in promoting the welfare of those on its roll. Permanent exclusions are average.
73. This is a caring school where the individual needs of its students are important. Students state they feel secure, safe and comfortable in school. They are clear where to go for help if needed and are happy to approach all staff with their problems whether they are personal or academic.

74. The educational and personal support and guidance that students receive are very good. The transition from primary school to secondary school is effective. Year 7 students settle quickly and feel well supported in their early days in school. To provide a constructive working partnership between student, tutor and year co-ordinator, year teams stay with the same students from Year 7 to Year 11. Students are well supported at points of changeover. Guidance for subject choice in Year 9 and for post-16 options is effective through a comprehensive careers programme. Social inclusion funding is effectively used to support disaffected students in Years 10 and 11.
75. The monitoring of students' academic performance and personal development is very good. Underachieving students are identified early and are very well supported by subject staff. Form tutors are, however, only just starting to have responsibility for the academic monitoring of their group. Students starting to give concern are helped by pastoral support plans drawn up in conjunction with their parents, or by mentors from the community. Students in Year 11 identified as underachieving receive very effective extra guidance by senior staff to help them prepare for examinations. The school is well supported by the Connexions service for careers and other work that helps students not to fall out of education. Students benefit from schemes offering extra help to try to overcome weaknesses. For example, special funding has been used to provide mentoring for a group of students in Year 8 to help them raise their level of achievement.
76. Procedures for monitoring and promoting attendance are very good; attendance rates are rising as a result. Attendance is promoted through a range of effective rewards that motivate students to raise their own levels and that of their tutor group. Rigorous monitoring through a computerised attendance recording system provides the data to track students. Parents are telephoned on the first day of absence if there has been no contact from home. The education welfare service effectively supports the school by undertaking home visits and bringing parents into school to try to resolve difficulties.
77. The school's procedures for monitoring and promoting good behaviour are also excellent. The atmosphere in the school is of mutual respect and students know what constitutes acceptable behaviour. Taught systematically from Year 7, through very good PSHE lessons, the 'Character Counts' programme has a significant impact on students' behaviour. Its principles are reinforced by applying them to real-life situations, such as what makes a good friend, and also to incidents of unsatisfactory behaviour within lessons. Senior management regularly visits lessons and uses these opportunities to praise students' behaviour and positive work attitudes. Incidents of poor work and behaviour are systematically met by effective support systems. The adverse effects of bullying are covered very effectively in the PSHE lessons. The very few incidents of oppressive behaviour are recorded and reported through the relevant channels.
78. A good network of care for students with special educational needs is typified in the weekly meeting of support assistants. Support staff know the students and their needs very well, and ensure that emerging concerns are recorded, and circulated through the weekly school bulletins. However, the involvement of all the different support staff with individual students is not monitored and a lack of specific information means that subject teachers cannot set work that precisely meet their needs, nor can they check progress accurately.

79. Procedures for child protection and for ensuring students' welfare are very good. The arrangements for child protection are excellent. Several members of staff have undergone specific training and they are clear about their responsibilities. The staff handbook contains procedures to follow if incidents occur and regular updating sessions are held for all staff. Appropriate procedures are in place for children in the care of the local authority. The provision to ensure the health and safety of students is very good and appropriately involves the governing body.
80. Assessment is used very well to evaluate school improvement. The high profile that the school is now giving to assessment and monitoring, particularly in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form, is contributing significantly to rising standards. The performance of students in public tests and examinations is examined closely by governors, and senior and middle management. The results of individual students are compared with their predicted grades and value added information is circulated.
81. Assessment procedures are good and have some very good features. A formal review each half term effectively charts students' effort in Years 7 to 9 and both effort and attainment in Years 10 and 11. Using baseline data from the national test results for 11 year olds and from other reliable assessments taken at the beginning of Year 7, predicted attainment levels for the end of Year 9 are set for every student in English, mathematics and science. However, in most of the other subjects, students are not made aware of these expectations, which is a weakness. At the start of the GCSE courses, predicted grades based on prior attainment are given to all students for every subject and these grades are discussed with parents. The arrangement is helpful in raising standards, because the students know where they are. In some subjects, assessments are marked using GCSE grades throughout Years 10 and 11, giving students a very good measurement of their progress.
82. The procedures for monitoring students' progress are good. Teachers' knowledge of students' progress is very good and subjects retain very good records. In some subjects, for example mathematics, physical education and science, tests and marks are linked to National Curriculum levels or GCSE grades and then used in discussions with students. Very good practice exists in science where students complete a record card at the end of each module and students' attainment level is included in the reports to parents, and in physical education where GCSE criteria are used for assessment. An excellent booklet which includes subject information, useful websites, the homework timetable, and the school marking code accompanies the Year 8 report.
83. In Years 10 and 11, the half-termly review sheet uses a nine-point scale which combines a judgement on effort and attainment and the school is beginning to make effective use of these reviews to inform discussions between students and form tutors. However, in many subjects, students are not receiving enough information on their progress towards reaching their target grades between the reviews, as marking is generally not matched to GCSE grades.

Sixth form

Advice, support and guidance

84. The provision for education guidance is very good overall. Students who intend to join the sixth form receive the necessary information to make an informed choice about what to study. The range of courses available through the federation is wide and students are encouraged to select those most appropriate for them even if it means they will join the sixth form of one of the partner schools. Students, when interviewed, were very appreciative of the advice and guidance they received from students already studying the subjects they chose.
85. A careers education and guidance programme ensures that students are well prepared for either higher education or the world of work at the end of Years 12 or 13. Visits to, and visitors from, higher education establishments help students prepare for transition. It continues in Year 13, with support in the preparation of both electronic and paper applications to university clearing. Connexions personal advisors work with students who are going into paid employment.
86. The sixth form teams of managers and tutors provide very good personal support and advice for students. Most have good knowledge of sixth form issues and are effective in discussing with students academic performance or personal problems, based on half-termly progress reviews.
87. The school provides effectively for the needs of its sixth formers and helps them to become sensible and responsible young adults. Health and safety are well supervised by the head of sixth form and by sixth formers themselves.

Assessment

88. Assessment procedures are very good in the sixth form. Students are set targets based upon their prior attainment at GCSE and progress is regularly recorded on the post-16 progress cards. In subjects, formal assessments regularly use past examination questions. These are thoroughly marked with clear guidance on how to improve individual pieces of work. In some subjects marks awarded are clearly linked to examination grades and students have a precise understanding of their progress. Very good practice exists in business studies where assessments are built into each unit of work. Students are closely mentored. For example, in science, students are given individual interviews and in geography one-to-one consultations assist students to complete their coursework assignments. The use of assessment to guide curriculum planning is good; GNVQ courses have been introduced and the addition of the English language course addresses students' low literacy levels.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

89. The parents see the quality and effectiveness of what the school provides and achieves as very good.
90. Those who responded to the questionnaire and attended the pre-inspection meeting felt the school had high expectations for their child. Most parents said the students liked coming to school and were making good progress. Teaching was good and they felt very comfortable approaching the school if they had any concerns. They felt the school was very well led and managed. Concerns were expressed about the amount

of homework students received. Inspectors agreed with parents' positive comments. Inspectors noted that homework was not always completed satisfactorily.

91. The school's links with parents are very good. As part of their very close monitoring of the school's work, the governors heed the parents' perceptions of the school, for example in annual satisfaction surveys to help planning and decision making; this is good practice. When difficulties occur parents are encouraged to work in partnership with the school to resolve them. Concerns raised by parents, such as the visibility of black uniforms on dark nights, are heeded and dealt with.
92. The quality of information that parents receive is good. Newsletters keep parents informed about the daily life of the school. A website has just been established so that parents can contact the school and get up-to-date information. A good range of information and curriculum evenings helps parents to support their child's learning. Termly progress reports and an annual report enable parents to monitor the progress of their child. There has been an improvement in the quality of annual reports to parents since the previous inspection. However, reports to parents in Years 7 to 9 do not tell them how their child is achieving in the National Curriculum. Practice is improving; the format of the parents' annual consultation evening is being changed and currently piloted with Year 7 parents to give a full overview of their child's progress and achievement.
93. The parents of students with statements of special educational needs are well informed. The reviews are detailed and cover the targets in their individual education plans very thoroughly. If a student is withdrawn from lessons for extra help, parents' agreement is sought, and they are told how effective the support has been. Beyond this, too much is left to the parents. The school does not consistently keep parents of all students with recognised special needs up to date through a review that evaluates how well the school is supporting progress towards the student's educational or personal targets.
94. The Ken Stimpson School Association supports the school well by organising fund-raising and social events. It raises sufficient funds during the year to support the running of the school minibus. The contribution of parents to children's learning is very good. Most parents ensure that both homework and coursework are completed to meet deadlines. A few parents, however, do not ensure their child attends school regularly, so reducing his/her overall progress and attainment.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

95. The leadership of the headteacher and his senior team is excellent. Appointed some time after the previous inspection, the headteacher works unstintingly to create an atmosphere where respect for others, collaboration and effective learning underlie everything that happens in the school. He and his senior team are eminently successful: improvements in leadership and in management since the previous inspection are very good.
96. The school has a very good management structure, that works; its operation has improvement as its sole purpose. Senior leaders and others with curriculum, year and administrative responsibilities blend remarkably well. They each know what they are intended to do within a close structure that promotes the idea of raising standards through the spread of good practice identified by close critical analysis.

97. The governors hold the school very effectively to account; they are rigorous in the ways they oversee, through relevant active committees, the curriculum, finances, personnel, community and strategy. They survey child protection very closely and place demanding targets upon the headteacher in annual performance reviews. Their minuted meetings show how excellently they play a full part in shaping the direction of the school, not least as a result of their very deep knowledge of its strengths and its weaknesses, clearly identified in discussion with inspectors.
98. The school's very good planning for development is well conceived. The current plan takes improvements in learning as its most suitable theme. Wide discussions and comprehensive questionnaire surveys translate into a very detailed, well-argued development plan, the intermediate steps of which are put meticulously into operation. There is, however, the omission of the way the school plans to operate the new special educational needs Code of Practice.
99. The school is adept at self-criticism and acting on the results. An increasingly successful means of doing so is through a close attachment of each member of the senior leadership team to given departments or years. By this means, the staff is held closely to account not just for results, but also for the interpretation of school policy, for instance on the correction of written work. The minuted results of such sessions illustrate well their generally good impact, although the standardisation of marking has some way to go. Complementing this arrangement very well is an expansive programme of observing and reporting the quality of teaching and learning, although there is some unevenness in the rigour with which the work is done. The improvements in the quality of teaching and learning are, in large measure, attributable to the increased openness and desire to improve. Fully implemented performance management procedures complement the teaching and learning checks and both contribute significantly to decisions on staff training needs, which are very well met.
100. The overall quality and impact of middle management are good. Data and information gathered from a very detailed scrutiny of how well students achieve are now used to set everyone targets to do better. The system is working, in the main; standards are rising and the quality of teaching and of learning is improving. Leaders and managers are given full rein to make group and individual contributions to planning and oversight of the ways plans are put into practice. On the other hand, prolonged absences, stress and apparent unawareness of the requirements of the National Curriculum for the subject have led to a continuous decline in standards in design and technology, counter to the otherwise uniform pattern of improvement in other subjects since the previous inspection. The governors and senior leaders recognise the problem and relevant steps are now resolving it.
101. The leadership and management of the provision for students with special educational needs are satisfactory. The provision has improved in a variety of ways since the previous inspection. Support staff have trained to meet a wider range of needs, and have developed skills and knowledge in different subjects. Students with statements of special need now have appropriate individual education plans. There have been developments to the support for literacy, and to the alternative curriculum in Years 10 and 11. The support team is well managed, as are the resources and use of the support base. However, the school has not put in place basic recommendations of the Code of Practice for supporting all students with special educational needs. As a result, the special educational needs co-ordinator has no means of sharing responsibilities for meeting students learning needs with subject teachers right across the school. The involvement of both students and parents in adopting individual

targets and evaluating progress towards them is not close enough to meet the recommendations of the new Code.

102. Although the school is not easily accessible for physically impaired students, the problem has been thoroughly assessed, and improvement plans are in place. Accommodation is otherwise satisfactory. Learning resources and staffing are good. The school's painstaking procedures in the appointment of staff are proving effective, although recruitment for jobs is increasingly difficult. The school's record of staff development and subsequent promotions to other posts in other schools has improved since the previous inspection and is very good. The administration staff make a courteous and efficient contribution to the effective running of the school. Very good support is provided for newly appointed staff, particularly those who are newly qualified.
103. Expenditure is very carefully arranged and the most recent audit gave full approval to systems and probity. The application of procedures to make sure the school gets the best value for money are excellent and the action taken to meet the school's targets is very effective, because the school has a very good, shared commitment to improve.
104. Considering the very good quality of leadership and management, the good quality of teaching and learning and the rising standards that, nonetheless, have some way still to go and some weaknesses, for example, in design and technology, the school provides all-round good value for money.

Sixth form

105. Leadership of the sixth form is excellent. A member of the senior management team plays a key role in the development and organisation of the sixth form both in school and the federation. The head of sixth form has a clear vision of the way forward and meets regularly with her federation counterparts to evaluate and plan progress.
106. The school is committed to providing a wide range of courses that effectively meet the needs of its students and has been successful in doing this through its collaboration with other schools in the federation. Planning is clearly focused on raising standards and improving provision. The school is successful in identifying and spreading best practice in order to improve overall provision. Standards and provision are regularly reviewed with curriculum leaders and appropriate action taken to raise standards, and the head of the sixth form is well informed about students' achievement. However, in those subjects where provision is shared across the federation there is, as yet, a lack of clarity about overall responsibility for checking the quality of the work undertaken.
107. Procedures are currently being reviewed and refined to ensure consistency across the federation and allow students to be better informed of their progress in relation to examination criteria. Students' views are canvassed regularly and appropriate action taken to improve provision. Any movement between courses is restricted to the beginning of the year and after that dropouts are rare. Very few students fail to complete courses that they start at the beginning of Year 12.

Resources

108. Resources for learning are good. The school's expenditure on resources is above average and the students benefit from comparatively easy access to learning through the use of ICT, including the Internet and laptop computers. The availability of videos and cameras, text books and television is good. There are some difficulties of getting

into computer rooms for private study and the uneven provision of computer-assisted whiteboards causes some inconvenience. Specific grants for the setting up of the resources within the federation have been beneficial so that transport, whilst not ideal, allows students to gain access to a much broader range of learning resources. The library is very well stocked with books to support art and design but less well so for most other subjects. However, as a community library it is responsive to requests and, as a result, no student is deprived of access to information. Similarly, the community provision extends substantially the range of physical resources available for study and recreation.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

109. To raise standards even further, the governors and staff should:

- (1) Improve the quality of provision in design and technology. In so doing:
 - improve the effectiveness of the leadership and of management of the subject to achieve greater cohesion between staff and also to establish a common approach to the teaching of the subject, better to match the expectations of the National Curriculum.
 - raise standards of attainment by including a stronger element of teaching about materials and processes in resistant materials and scientific principles underlying the preparation of food.

See paragraphs 8, 14, 18, 19, 42, 43, 100, 104, 156-161.

- (2) Continue to work to improve the students' literacy skills, especially by raising the students' awareness of the different uses of language for different purposes, especially writing. Widen further students' vocabulary, the accuracy of their spelling and sentence construction.

See paragraphs 4, 18, 25, 57, 113, 116, 119, 142, 148, 158, 172, 174, 176, 179, 181, 199, 219, 220, 226, 245, 248.

- (3) Improve the ways teachers receive details of the precise needs of all students with special educational needs so they may cater the better for them by supporting their needs and reviewing their progress.

See paragraphs 11, 45, 78, 93, 98, 101, 198.

In their action plan, the governors should also show how they intend to increase time for the study of ICT in Years 10 and 11 and how ICT's spread across subjects is to be checked upon.

Sixth form

- (1) Continue to work to improve the students' literacy skills, especially in the use of language and the composition of pieces of extended writing, by concentrating even more on accurate sentence construction, spelling, the use of apostrophes and the sustaining of an argument in essay writing.

See paragraphs as issue 2 above.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	123
	Sixth form	41
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students		86

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 7 – 11							
Number	1	29	53	36	4	0	0
Percentage	0.8	23.6	43.1	29.3	3.3	0	0
Sixth form							
Number	2	10	20	9	0	0	0
Percentage	4.8	23.8	47.6	21.4	0	0	0

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

Information about the school's students

Students on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of students on the school's roll	853	122
Number of full-time students known to be eligible for free school meals	91	8

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of students with statements of special educational needs	29	0
Number of students on the school's special educational needs register	182	5

English as an additional language	No of students
Number of students with English as an additional language	49

Student mobility in the last school year	No of students
Students who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	33

Students who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving

50

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	9.1
National comparative data	8.1

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.6
National comparative data	1.1

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 students in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2002	68	85	153

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	34	51	45
	Girls	53	63	55
	Total	87	114	100
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	57 (44)	74 (55)	66 (55)
	National	66 (64)	67 (66)	66 (66)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	10 (11)	45 (34)	18 (18)
	National	* (31)	* (43)	* (34)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	38	45	42
	Girls	67	68	52
	Total	105	113	94
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	68 (55)	85 (52)	62 (66)
	National	* (65)	* (68)	* (64)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	18 (18)	44 (31)	21 (35)
	National	* (31)	* (42)	* (33)

Percentages in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year. * National figures for 2002 not published at the time of reporting.

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

Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2002	77	68	145

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of students achieving the standard specified	Boys	28	63	68
	Girls	34	58	60
	Total	62	121	128
Percentage of students achieving the standard specified	School	42.8 (32.5)	83.4 (84.1)	88.3 (87.3)
	National	51.2 (48)	88.9 (91)	94.6 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per student	School	36.8 (32.7)*
	National	34.6 (39.0)*

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

Vocational qualifications	Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those students who achieved all those they studied	School	32
	National	
		28
		N/a

* System altered in 2002; point scores were restricted to any student's eight best subjects.

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	10	18	28
	Average point score per candidate	10.5 (9.3)	13.1 (8.9)	12.2 (9.1)
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.7	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	10	18	28	0	0	0
	Average point score per candidate	10.5	13.1	12.2	0	0	0
National	Average point score per candidate	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

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

Ethnic background of students

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of students on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	693	86	1
White – Irish	0	0	0
White – any other White background	6	5	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	1	0	1
Mixed – White and Black African	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	0	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	1	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	6	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	33	6	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	2	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	0	0	0
Black or Black British – African	0	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	5	0	0
Chinese	3	0	0
Any other ethnic group	0	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	101	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Financial information

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	54.2
Number of students per qualified teacher	16.0

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	29
Total aggregate hours worked per week	693

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	77.8
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y13

Key Stage 3	22.2
Key Stage 4	20.6

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial year	2001/2
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	£
Total income	2,898,249
Total expenditure	2,978,713
Expenditure per student	3533
Balance brought forward from previous year	170,441
Balance carried forward to next year	89,977

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	21.6
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	17.03
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	0.5
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	823
Number of questionnaires returned	213

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	49	45	5	1	1
My child is making good progress in school.	49	45	4	0	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	35	54	6	1	3
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	26	55	14	4	1
The teaching is good.	35	57	4	0	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	42	43	12	1	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	59	35	3	1	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	63	35	1	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	41	47	7	2	2
The school is well led and managed.	50	42	2	0	6
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	46	46	5	1	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	48	44	2	1	5

Other issues raised by parents

Parents were keen to express their appreciation of the hard work done to make learning stimulating and interesting. They were at pains to emphasise how they approved of a radical change that had improved the relationships between students and staff; everyone was valued and achievement duly praised. Individual criticisms were made of, for example, some laxity in dress code requirements and lack of sympathy for dyslexia.

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

ENGLISH

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

Strengths

- The quality of teaching and learning is good.
- Very good relationships between teachers and students help to raise standards.
- Attainment is rising.

Areas for improvement

- The quality of much written work is not good enough.
- There is some inefficiency in the use of lesson-time in Years 7 to 9.
- The help to students with special needs, but without statements, to meet set targets is imprecise.

110. Results of national tests taken by students aged 14 in 2001 were well below the national average and the average for similar schools. Boys performed less well than did girls by a wider margin than is found nationally. The trend of improvement in that year and those just before it was below the national trend. Results for 2002 were closer to, but still below, average.
111. GCSE results in 2001 were below average for the proportion gaining higher grades, A*-C, in both English language and English literature. All candidates obtained grades A*-G, but the proportion of entries, particularly for English language, was below average. Girls attained more highly than did boys, reflecting the national difference. GCSE results in 2002 were significantly better for both subjects and, for English language, the proportion gaining higher grades, A*-C, was at the national average: standards are rising.
112. Work seen shows that the attainment of students at the end of Year 9 is generally below average, but attainment in the different skills of the subject is very uneven. Students speak clearly and confidently by Year 9; they respond well to opportunities to express their comments and opinions even though some have limited vocabularies. They listen carefully to teachers and quickly understand the tasks set for them. If unsure, they ask for further explanation. They usually listen attentively to each other when working in small groups or as a class. Students volunteer to read aloud and do so accurately. They show good levels of interest in books being read in class, although many students do not recognise significant detail without help from teachers. Most are usually quick to learn and use appropriate technical terms.
113. Writing is the area of most difficulty. Writing inadequacies limit students' ability to show how much they know and understand. Students take pride in their work and present it neatly. They respond well to encouragement to write in sentences and paragraphs and to become ambitious in their use of words. Only the highest attainers, however, consistently use language that is appropriate to its purpose. Differences between formal and informal expression are not widely understood. Spelling is poor, sometimes reflecting features of local speech, and there is confusion of words of similar sound.

114. The attainment of older students, at the end of Year 11, is closer to, but still below, average. The balance of strengths and weaknesses is the same as for younger students. Students have good speaking and listening skills. Because they are more confident in themselves and in their classmates, they are willing to suggest interpretations of texts they read and films they see. Because their vocabularies are wider, though often still limited, they communicate well in speech. Written work is better organised and usually the content is relevant to the task set. However, errors persist of the same types noted in earlier years, even in the work of students who otherwise are skilful writers. The language of everyday speech is used too often when more formal language is needed. Local speech characteristics contribute to the frequency of errors of grammar and spelling in written work.
115. Students make good progress by comparison with earlier attainment both in lessons and over time. Students are well behaved and want to succeed. They have good levels of interest in their work and become increasingly able to form and express their own judgements. Teachers have good knowledge of individual strengths and needs and usually have appropriately high expectations of all. In a few lessons, however, the pace of learning was sometimes too leisurely for the higher attainers.
116. Standards of literacy improve because of the success of a number of school policies. The English department's efforts to improve the quality of writing by widening vocabulary and teaching essay construction are well supported in some, but not all, other subjects. Students with special needs related to problems of reading and writing benefit from withdrawal for specialist teaching and from the help provided by learning support assistants. This is especially true of those who are supported by statements of need. The targets set for other students with learning difficulties are not communicated to English teachers and there is no expectation that they will contribute to achieving such targets. This limits their contribution to raising the attainment of these students.
117. The progress of students who speak other languages at home, including some who entered the school with very little earlier experience of English, is very good. This is because of the very positive attitudes of the students themselves and the very effective support provided for them and their families by the school and the LEA.
118. The quality of teaching is good. Teachers have good levels of subject expertise. They plan lessons carefully with clear links to previous and future work, so students understand their relevance. Most lessons have a variety of activities and this helps students to maintain their concentration. Tasks are clearly explained, so students begin work with confidence. In the best lessons, teachers ensure that students contribute actively to their learning. Beginning in Year 7, teachers make very good use of questions both to ensure that students have clear understanding and to encourage them to express their opinions clearly. At the end of lessons, students are usually asked to summarise what they have learned and this helps to reinforce their learning. Lessons are usually conducted at a brisk pace and the work provides appropriate challenge for the full range of attainment within the classes. Very occasionally, higher attaining students work at too leisurely a pace.
119. The department benefits from good leadership. Schemes of work for Years 7 to 9 are well adapted to reflect the principles of the national strategy. The curriculum is made more interesting by work on film and other media. The allocation of a significant proportion of lesson time to private reading is intended to encourage students to read more widely. The need for this is clear but the time given is disproportionate given the urgent need to improve writing skills. Monitoring of teaching and learning styles has

improved since the previous report and very good departmental planning is now linked to whole-school planning.

Drama

120. Drama makes a significant contribution to the PSHE of all 11-14 year olds. It is an optional course at GCSE and A-levels.
121. Students have not been examined in drama in recent years, but it was examined within expressive arts in 2001.
122. The attainment of students aged 11-14 is average. In lessons seen they made good progress in exploring issues such as relationships with parents and the abuse of drugs. They are able to demonstrate well-established skills of rehearsal and performance and are learning how to evaluate strengths and weaknesses.
123. Evidence from Year 11 written work indicates that students have developed satisfactory knowledge and understanding. The effectiveness of written work is often reduced by weaknesses of spelling, inaccuracies of expression and poor organisation of material.
124. The need to plan written work was stressed in a Year 10 lesson that was well illustrated by samples of the work of older students. The class demonstrated a very wide range of earlier experience of the subject, but attainment was below expectation for age. All, however, understood how performance might be improved by techniques such as freeze frames.
125. Students had positive attitudes to learning and recognised that the lesson was relevant to their needs; they made satisfactory progress.
126. Students clearly enjoy their work and their positive attitudes produce good behaviour and lead to good progress. The quality of teaching is good. Relationships with students are good. Tasks are clearly explained so that students begin their work with confidence. Lessons are well planned and are conducted at a brisk pace towards clearly identified targets for learning. Occasionally, the pace slows because of minor misjudgements of the time required for different activities.

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths

- Teaching and learning are good; lessons are well planned.
- The department is well led, receptive to change and anxious to continue to raise standards.
- The provision for assessment, recording and checking performance closely is highly developed.

Area for improvement

- The level of challenge offered to higher attaining students does not stretch them enough.

127. The attainment of students on entry to the school is below average. The overall results of National Curriculum tests for 14 year olds in 2002 were well above the national average and well above average when compared to schools with a similar

intake. The attainment overall is significantly better than in 2001 and shows a significant improvement at the higher grades. The overall results were better than English or science.

128. Higher grade, A*-C, GCSE results were just below national expectations in 2002 and A*-G grades were similarly below the national average. These represent a significant improvement from the results of 2001. Attainment at the highest grades, A*/A, however, remains well below national averages, reflecting the relative absence of very high attainers. The proportion of students entered for the examination is below the national average.
129. Year 7 students are competent in using simple sequences and can solve easy linear algebraic equations. Standards in lessons and in work seen largely confirm the recent trend of results for 14 year olds and of GCSE. Many students, including lower attainers, are able to recall, apply and explain previously taught skills. Students are able accurately to describe grid movement of shapes using appropriate mathematical vocabulary and methods. High attaining Year 11 students are able to represent data using unequal class intervals and recognise the main features of cumulative frequency curves.
130. Teaching and learning are good. The best teaching is characterised by very good planning, excellent presentations, often using ICT, discriminating use of alternative teaching material, and constructive relationships, which lead to students' enjoyment of the subject. In one particular Year 8 lesson, students successfully recognised that changes in co-efficient values in an equation directly influenced straight line gradients. The educational needs of these students despite being acute were fully met, which visibly enhanced their self-esteem. In another lesson, good use of computer software ensured that students recognised that changes in co-ordinate values directly influenced straight-line gradients. At the conclusion of the lesson most students were able to calculate both the gradient and intercept of a straight line. In another lesson students who had achieved modest results at age 11 worked very hard with basic number calculations; as a result one student recalled and then confidently explained a simple strategy for multiplying by 9. In the rare instances where teaching was less effective it was linked to student inattentiveness and limited application.
131. The current timetable arrangement of having some classes taught twice on the same day and by different teachers during the week weakens the overall continuity and balance of teaching and undermines standards. The teaching of the higher attainers sometimes lacks the challenge essential to further improve results at the very highest grades at age 14 and 16.
132. Consistent very good behaviour in most lessons fosters enjoyable learning. Learning by students with special education needs is good. Because some students enter the school with below average standards, the department uses helpful catch-up materials to which the students respond positively.
133. The influence of the National Numeracy Strategy is clearly seen. Good practice occurs in most lessons that have brief mental starters and effective use of teaching aids. Most endings rehearse learning, but are too hurried and the students do not get enough chance to show what they have accomplished. However, the overall pattern of lesson routine is enjoyed and anticipated by the students. The department organises a locally esteemed Numeracy Summer School and a good number of other activities during the school year.

134. The department has developed a very good system of assessment, which enables key aspects of students' performance to be easily identified, recorded, monitored and analysed. Students are aware of their targets. Assessment has influenced the sequencing of the curriculum, which now corresponds more effectively with links for future topics. The department is heavily resourced with computer software and has its own highly developed Intranet provision supporting the teaching of the entire age range.
135. Progress since the previous inspection has been good: it is a direct result of good leadership and management provided by the very receptive new head of department who is determined to secure higher standards. She is very well supported by a cohesive and gifted team who are similarly committed to improve attainment and to making learning mathematics enjoyable.

SCIENCE

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

Strengths

- Improving examination results reflect the very good work done by the department since the previous inspection.
- The ways in which students' progress is monitored and assessed raises standards.
- The very good leadership of the head of science and the mutual support of his team are the main reasons for the improvements.

Areas for improvement

- The co-ordination of the opportunities to develop literacy skills in all years is not explicit enough.
- The subject's contribution to citizenship, spiritual, moral and cultural development lacks clarity.

136. Standards in public tests and examinations are improving and reflect the very good work done since the previous inspection. Students are making good progress in all years. They enter the school with below average attainment in science and, by the end of Year 9, many achieve beyond their expected grade. However, at the higher levels, progress is not so marked. In 2001 students' attainment at the end of Year 9 was below all schools nationally and well below similar schools, particularly at the higher levels. There was a significant improvement in 2002, with results in line with all schools, girls attaining slightly better results than did boys.
137. Students make good progress in Years 10 and 11, because of the teachers' high expectations. GCSE results are improving with, in the last two years, the percentage entered for double science attaining above average higher grades, A*-C. Almost every student entered for either double or single science over the last two years has attained a pass grade. In 2001, both boys and girls did significantly better in double science than in the other subjects they took.
138. Standards seen in lessons and in written work are in line with the most recent test and examination results and are occasionally above. In Year 10, for example, students planning an investigation into the resistance of wires were able to identify the range of measurements to take and the apparatus they needed.

139. Students with special educational needs progress well, particularly when supported by learning assistants or when the resources are matched to their specific needs. Easily-read texts and partially-completed sheets help these students make as good progress as others in the class. Identified higher attainers do not sometimes make enough progress, as there is insufficient variety of activity to extend and deepen their understanding.
140. The department holds much information on students' progress in all years. These assessments are related to national levels and GCSE grades and mean that the progress of each student can be tracked. Regular reviews of progress and target setting help each student to achieve well.
141. The quality of teaching is good. Teachers plan the lessons well and share with students at the start what they are to learn and where it fits with the previous one. In the better lessons, teachers set and maintain a brisk pace and reinforce learning with a variety of practical activities. The good technician support means practical sessions are well organised and resourced. Students learn well because teachers' expectations in terms of behaviour and application are high, resulting in well-ordered lessons.
142. Written work is marked regularly and thoroughly with helpful comments for improvement. Students generally respond well but, in the lower years, some students fail to complete work satisfactorily. Homework is set regularly and includes a variety of tasks to develop and extend students' understanding of the lessons. While the literacy skills of speaking and writing are developed satisfactorily in lessons and homework, there is no precise guidance on how to raise such skills even further. Similarly the subject's contribution to spiritual and moral education is too imprecise.
143. The use of ICT to help learning has greatly improved since the previous inspection. Students in Year 10 learnt well about human inheritance characteristics from animated diagrams on a computer explaining how freckles and hair colour are passed on from parents to children. In all lessons, students' response is good. Behaviour is very good and this means that they settle quickly, and work well together. Practical sessions are conducted safely.
144. Leadership and management are very good. The subject leader exercises a considerable impact on developing the work to improve standards. He leads a team of subject specialists who are united in their ambition to raise standards. While the department is well resourced, the storage and preparation areas are too limited, reducing its flexibility of operation.

ART AND DESIGN

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

Strengths

- Standards have improved at GCSE.
- The introduction of Intermediate GNVQ in Years 10 and 11 has been successful.
- Good teaching benefits from very well structured short and long-term planning.
- The range of two and three-dimensional work and the resources to support it are very good.

Areas for improvement

- The use of sketchbooks for students to plan and develop ideas independently is weak.

- Students' written annotation and evaluation of work lack enough depth.

145. Students enter the school with below average attainment. Year 9 teacher assessments in 2002 were below the national average for both boys and girls. GCSE results in 2002 were in line with the national average at higher grades, A*-C; all students gained a pass. This represents a significant improvement from the previous year and the best results since the previous inspection. The first small group of Intermediate GNVQ students was successful, most gaining the equivalent of two GCSEs. More girls than boys take art in Years 10 and 11; girls tend to outperform the boys, as they do nationally.
146. Standards are currently below average in Year 9 and average by Year 11. Students' best work is in practical art. Students in all years experiment well with colour and pattern, often developed from direct observational drawing. They work in a wide range of two and three-dimensional media and show increasing confidence using different materials as they move through the school. For example, students in Years 7 to 9 produce pencil drawings, clay reliefs, collographic prints, clay work and Cubist-style pictures in acrylic paint.
147. By Year 10, students explore well the possibilities of different media in imaginative ways and with full encouragement from their teachers to experiment. Papier-mâché plates, stunningly decorated, were appropriately and humorously entitled 'Dinner with the Artist'. Art and computer-aided design are very well integrated in the GNVQ course. Students advertise their 'teapot package' blending images and text on the computer with strikingly original results. Students in each year make reference not only to artists but also art movements, such as the Fauvists and the Cubists, and through this learning extend their own styles and techniques. They show good skills in collecting material from the Internet and scanning pictures from books in the library.
148. Although they discuss their work with enthusiasm, students do not investigate in enough depth to learn about artists' characteristics and art concepts. They do not attach enough importance to writing their ideas down and using the correct art vocabulary. The higher attainers' knowledge of artists and art movements is insubstantial and sometimes hurriedly recorded. Although students have helpful guides to essay writing and sentence starters prepared by the teachers, their literacy inadequacies let them down, particularly amongst lower attainers. Students' achievement is good in practical work, but there is scope for improvement in personal expression, careful planning and more in-depth evaluation in their art journals.
149. Students' attitudes are good: they like art. It is a popular choice in Years 10 and 11. Relationships develop very well in an atmosphere where each student's work is valued. Students respond well to the relatively open access to the art rooms and to the encouragement by the teachers to catch up or continue work at lunchtime or after school. They enjoy watching and learning from their teachers' good demonstrations but they prefer to be doing rather than thinking or planning. They work well in lessons, though with much reliance on guidance from the teacher. Homework is always set, but not always done as thoroughly as it might be.
150. Teaching and learning are good. The teachers' enthusiasm and varied subject expertise are apparent in the wide range of materials students use. Planning is very good in both the short and long term. It involves the art technician and the learning support assistants whose contribution for students with special educational needs is very effective. At the start of each lesson, teachers explain effectively what is to be learned so that students know what they are doing. Good class management creates

a purposeful atmosphere. Teachers adopt common strategies, for example in their carefully worked out seating plans for each class, which are particularly helpful to new teachers. Teaching is sensitive to individual needs; teachers know the students well and offer very good personal guidance. Teachers' formal assessment of students is very well documented. Tasks are generally challenging, but there is some under-expectation of higher attainers, particularly in the independent use of their art journals. A one-to-one tutorial system, seen in a Year 10 lesson, enabled the teacher to discuss each student's progress and targets for improvement. It overcame the problem expressed by other students who claimed to be unsure of their standard and what they must do to improve.

151. Display in public spaces in the school and in the art rooms is excellent. This is the result of an importance attached to a pleasant working environment, well supported by the very good efforts of the art technician. Students make good use of ICT facilities at lunchtimes and after school, but few students borrow books from the excellent library reserves to pursue their work at home. Students' learning is, however, deepened by many high quality visits to galleries and by professional artists in residence.
152. Management is good; the department has a secure and talented team, after previous difficulties with staffing. Examination data is carefully analysed and examiners' comments noted. The introduction of a vocational course alongside GCSE has been a success and is attracting a growing number of students. Teaching has improved as a result of helpful and positive monitoring by the head of department and by senior staff. Good practice is shared and the talents of the new and inexperienced teachers recognised. The capacity for improvement is good.

CITIZENSHIP

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

Strengths

- Very good leadership and management provide very effective direction for the subject.
- Excellent use is made of visitors and outside agencies to promote students' learning.
- The overall school ethos gives very good support to citizenship.

Areas for improvement

- The contribution of some subjects to citizenship has not been sufficiently planned.
- Ways of assessing and recording students' progress are not yet in place.

153. Standards are above average in Years 9 and 11, and students achieve very well in developing their knowledge, understanding and skills. They show a good appreciation of many of the key citizenship ideas and issues. Students know about the diversity of identities within the United Kingdom and understand the need for mutual respect, as demonstrated in some Year 8 work on asylum seekers. By the end of Year 9 students understand aspects of local government and the part they can play. Students in Years 10 and 11 develop a good appreciation of the role of the European Union and the United Nations. They know how Parliament works and understand the importance of voting. Students also develop effective citizenship skills. Most students are able to justify their opinions in discussion work. They can use the Internet to research information and they have a good understanding of some of the processes involved in taking action on an issue. Year 9 students, for example, understood how and where to find information, advice and support when investigating and undertaking school and local projects, such as testing possible support for the provision of a swimming pool.

The arrangements for the school council mean that all students participate in the processes for electing representatives and holding them to account.

154. The overall quality of teaching and learning in citizenship is very good. Attitudes to the subject are very positive and students enjoy the opportunities for discussion, participation and taking action. Teachers' knowledge and enthusiasm are used very effectively to engage students' interests and extend their learning. Teachers plan very thoroughly and use a wide range of methods which ensures that students make very good progress in lessons. Students are actively involved in their own learning through debates and discussion, designing posters and questionnaires, and writing letters. They undertake research activities and make good use of ICT, as in a lesson when Year 10 students found out about aspects of the European Union. Excellent use is made of visitors and outside agencies. This is very effective in raising students' interest and promoting their understanding. For example, a visit to a Year 8 class from an army officer who had worked in Kosovo greatly enhanced students' understanding of the United Nations and the role of the army as peacekeepers. A support worker from the Active Citizens in Schools project regularly works with classes and enables students to develop citizenship skills, both within lessons and on other occasions, such as supporting a group of students who undertook a 'litter pick' on a Saturday morning in the local area. Teaching and learning in citizenship are very well supported by the school's 'Character Counts' programme, with its very clear emphasis on values and concepts such as respect, responsibility and fairness. In their first term in the school, students explore and are taught the 'six pillars of character' which help to underpin the overall ethos of the school.
155. Very good leadership and management mean that the citizenship curriculum has developed very well in the school. A thorough audit of citizenship topics across the curriculum has led to the development of specific units of work within the school's PSHE programme, and has also identified contributions to citizenship from other subjects, especially dance, drama and ICT. However, the contribution of other subjects, such as English and the humanities, has not yet been sufficiently planned to ensure that all areas of the citizenship curriculum are covered. Ways of assessing and recording students' progress are not in place but careful consideration is being given to developing effective procedures.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- Standards in textiles and graphic products are improving.
- There are good relationships between teachers and students.
- Students have good attitudes to learning and they behave well in lessons.

Areas for improvement

- Attainment and achievement are too low.
- Leadership and management of the subject are poor.
- Teaching and learning in resistant materials and food technology are unsatisfactory.

156. There has been a significant decline in standards since the previous inspection. The proportion of students gaining higher GCSE grades, A*-C, in 2001 was well below the national average. The proportion of students gaining grades A*-G was similar to the national average. The attainment of girls was higher than for boys, but was

significantly below that of girls nationally. Results for 2002 show a further decline in higher grades, A*-C. The teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 were well below average in 2001 but showed improvement in 2002. Students do less well in design and technology than in any other subject.

157. In Year 11 work seen, standards of attainment are well below average overall. Students often have satisfactory practical skills in all materials areas. In food technology, however, they have poor knowledge and understanding of the ingredients they use and the scientific principles underlying food preparation processes. They have only superficial understanding of nutrition. Students have poor knowledge of the properties of the resistant materials they use and of environmental issues, for example when they use wood. In both these areas, students' weak knowledge restricts their ability to plan their projects independently. Standards are below average in graphic products and textiles where the quality of teaching and learning is higher and staffing has been more stable in recent years. In these parts of the subject, students work more creatively and have a sound understanding of the design process, which they use to plan and evaluate their work and to make improvements based on evaluations.
158. In work seen, standards of attainment are below average overall by Year 9. In food and resistant materials, students have unsatisfactory knowledge of the properties of the materials they use or the function of ingredients. Evaluation of their work is superficial and shows insufficient knowledge of the design process. Written work is often weak and students cannot always communicate in writing what they know and understand. Standards are higher in graphic products and textiles. In graphic products, for example, students design and make packaging for toothbrushes, targeted at specified age groups. Higher attaining students have good drawing skills to communicate their ideas and use colour effectively. They interpret their ideas creatively and have satisfactory construction skills when they use vacuum-formed materials and card to create realistic packaging. Although drawing skills are satisfactory in graphic products, students do not apply these skills to provide a suitable vehicle to supplement their writing and to communicate ideas in other materials areas.
159. Achievement is unsatisfactory overall although students in Year 7 are now making good progress in most aspects of the subject. In food technology, students do not learn enough about nutrition, the function of ingredients and the scientific principles involved in food preparation. Except for the current Year 7, students have not learned enough about materials and processes in resistant materials. In graphic products and textiles, students make good progress with learning to interpret design briefs creatively and in developing relevant skills and knowledge which enable them to plan and make products to the standard they are capable of. Because they are not sufficiently well prepared in earlier years, the students' approach to developing coursework in Years 10 and 11 is superficial in food and resistant materials. Students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress because they are well supported in lessons. Boys often do not achieve as well in lessons because they are less actively involved and more inclined to be dependent on the teacher than are girls.
160. The quality of teaching is good in graphic products and textiles and unsatisfactory in food and resistant materials. In the best lessons, teachers plan a good range of relevant activities and prepare students to work safely and independently. They provide opportunities for students to learn to solve problems. In these lessons, teachers use effective methods to teach the design process. They enable students to plan their projects to a good standard by teaching them about materials and

processes in depth and encourage them to work creatively. In unsatisfactory lessons, the focus is too strongly on the development of practical skills at the expense of learning about materials and concepts and developing a more independent approach to learning. Teachers have good technical knowledge but not all are up to date with appropriate teaching methods. Teachers have very good relationships with students, which result in mutual respect and the co-operation of students. Students behave very well in lessons because they respect the teachers. Teachers use day-to-day assessments to provide satisfactory feedback to students about how well they have done but information is not used sufficiently to measure short-term progress or to set targets for improvement.

161. Leadership and management of the subject are poor and improvement since the previous inspection is unsatisfactory. Standards have declined and the department does not have a long-term plan for strategic development of the subject focusing on improving standards. Although individual teachers are keen to improve standards, the department does not currently function sufficiently as a coherent unit to achieve success in all materials areas. This is partly because basic concepts of the subject are not consistently reinforced in all aspects. Long-term absence has adversely affected day-to-day direction of the subject and there are inconsistencies in the way different materials areas are managed. The subject is letting down the overall very good progress the school is making, although the school's aims and values are being met, to a degree, in the parts of the subject where standards are improving.

GEOGRAPHY

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

Strengths

- Good leadership is committed to raising standards.
- Marking is effective in helping students to make good progress.
- Good examination preparation helps to raise standards.

Areas for improvement

- Use of National Curriculum levels and GCSE grades to set targets for students and to measure progress is insufficient.
- The use of different materials for high and low attainers is insufficient.

162. Students' attainment by the end of Year 9 is average. This represents good achievement, as their attainment on entry to Year 7 is low. Standards reached by the end of Year 11 are below the national average, but all students reached a pass grade in 2002 and the percentage of students reaching higher grades, A*-C, has risen significantly over the last three years.
163. In Years 7 to 9, overall attainment is average. Higher attaining students are reaching standards above the national average. High quality written work shows their very good understanding of plate tectonics and associated geographical features. Students of average and lower attainment understand the sequence of events, which is triggered by earthquakes. All students are given good opportunities to write at length and for different purposes. This represents good progress since the previous inspection and is a major factor in enabling students of higher and average attainment to make good progress in Years 7 to 9. However, resources of varied difficulty do not support students of lower attainment and their written work is generally poor. Students make good use of the Internet for research and to produce attractive, informative brochures.

164. Overall, the attainment of students at the end of Year 11 is below average. Higher attaining students make very good progress. They describe and explain well causes of rural-urban migration and have a sound understanding of the development of large cities. They make perceptive evaluations of the effects of urban deprivation. In their written work, students of average attainment do not fully understand the benefits and long-term effects of, for example, strategies that help communities in less economically developed countries. In tests, they are not able to apply their knowledge to answer questions in sufficient depth, and show, for example, limited understanding of the effects of the closure of small shops in rural Britain. The standard of written work of lower attaining students is too low. They require greater support to spell and use geographical terms correctly and to structure their written answers.
165. The quality of teaching is good overall. In most lessons, students make good progress because teachers plan effectively to meet the needs of the students. Such lessons are broken into a number of short, varied activities. For example, a Year 10 lesson on weather and climate included writing and sorting activities, a brainstorming session to list various types of weather, a video of the previous night's weather forecast and finally a simplified synoptic chart for interpretation. Video extracts are often well chosen for maximum impact; for example, a Year 9 student commented that she was "hit by how big and busy Tokyo is".
166. In some lessons, the students made lesser progress because the pace was too slow, instructions were unclear and students' learning not planned. The pace of the work, designed to allow students to work independently, was also too slow when activities did not give students enough guidance and structure.
167. Homework is used effectively to encourage students to acquire new knowledge using the Internet and other library resources and to consolidate learning. Year 7 students produced very good booklets about Australia, gathering information from a variety of sources and, in some cases, demonstrated excellent ICT skills in their production. Marking is very good. Teachers' comments are informative and tell students how to improve their work. However, formal assessment grades are not linked to National Curriculum levels or to GCSE examination grades. Consequently, students are unsure of their standards and of what they need to do to reach higher attainment grades.
168. Their generally good attitude and behaviour help students' learning. Students know what is expected of them and they usually settle quickly at the start of lessons and become actively engaged. They respond readily to teachers' questions, work at a good pace and often achieve well. However, where written exercises are insufficiently structured, students work too slowly and this restricts their learning.
169. The leadership and management of the department are good. The department's handbook and the detailed schemes of work provide a clear sense of direction that is shared by all teachers. Very good strategies monitor the work of the department and there is good emphasis on students' standards of attainment and how these can be improved.
170. Overall, there has been good progress since the previous inspection and the department has the capacity and determination to raise standards further.

HISTORY

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

Strengths

- Good learning and achievement arise from good teaching.
- Good leadership and management of the department raise standards.
- Students' positive attitudes to work and good relationships with their teachers help them improve.

Areas for improvement

- There is inconsistency in supporting lower attaining students and those with special needs.
- There is inadequate challenge for more able students to develop their analytical skills.
- ICT is not used enough to make learning more interesting and to develop history skills.

171. By Year 9, standards in work seen are just below average. This broadly matches the teachers' assessments for 2001 and 2002 for the proportion of students attaining the expected National Curriculum level 5. Boys perform as well as girls. Students achieve well in relation to their attainment on entry to the school, as they begin Year 7 with skills and understanding in history that are well below average.
172. Students have good factual recall and satisfactory skills of simple note-making. More able students, including gifted and talented, develop satisfactory enquiry skills and writing at length in a variety of forms, such as letters or newspaper reports. However, their analytical skills of evaluation and interpretation of evidence are undeveloped when inadequately challenged by rigorous tasks or questioning. Many students have weak literacy skills when they enter the school. They find it difficult to select and record evidence from a variety of sources, or to speak about it confidently. Less able students and those with special educational needs make good progress in developing these skills when they are well supported by the teachers. For example, Year 9 students effectively categorised the problems facing Elizabeth I when underlined evidence, simplified statements and a helpful guide to essay writing were provided. However, such support materials are still limited in quantity and use and so not all students are benefiting.
173. Results in GCSE history have improved in the last two years. In 2001 they were below average at higher grades, A*-C, but close to the average at A*-G. 2002 results improved and, overall, were close to the national average. They were some of the best in the school with many students exceeding expectations and achieving well. In the last two years, there has been no significant difference between the performance of boys and girls.
174. Standards of work in Years 10 and 11 are just below average. This reflects the GCSE results for 2002 and represents good achievement in relation to their attainment at the end of Year 9. Students have a sound understanding of the key events. Gifted and talented and more able students confidently select relevant evidence from a variety of sources and write satisfactorily. Year 10 students effectively describe the traditional view of the cowboy from illustrations when studying the American West. Year 11 students competently research sources on Werrington Village for their coursework. However, skills of writing critically and analytically with strong evidence to support, are less well developed, as are enquiry and recording skills of less able students and those with special educational needs. This is due to their weaknesses in literacy and enquiry skills not being tackled earlier in the way that they are starting to be in Years 7 to 9.

175. Teaching and learning are good overall, an improvement on the previous inspection. Teachers use their good subject knowledge to plan a variety of stimulating activities. Teachers usually set high expectations. Year 7 students were fully engaged in pairs in analysing the qualities of Emperor Augustus from various sources, some of which they could deduce to be biased. The well-prepared support materials and the learning assistant helped students of all abilities to achieve well. However, more able students in Years 7 to 9 are not always sufficiently challenged to think more critically about events or values. Monitoring of progress at the end of lessons is now common practice. Marking is done frequently and clear targets set for improvement. Students in Years 10 and 11 know their predicted grades, record their current progress on review cards and are aware of how to improve. Setting of individual targets related to National Curriculum levels is undeveloped in Years 7 to 9.
176. Students make good progress in lessons as a result of the good teaching. Students acquire knowledge and are learning important new skills of enquiry and organisation. The students' positive attitude to work and their good behaviour help this. It is encouraged by the teachers' good relationships with them and good management. A loss of concentration only occasionally occurs when the lessons lack pace or are insufficiently planned to allow for the weak literacy skills. These are beginning to be tackled by the use of key words and materials for supporting writing.
177. Leadership and management are good. There is clear direction through the department's development plans that reflect the school's priorities. Teaching and learning are effectively evaluated through more regular classroom observation to promote and share good practice. The department is strongly committed to improvement and is well placed to move forward with teachers working well together. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. Teaching standards have improved, as have resources, including a rich programme of outside visits. The use of computers is not yet systematically happening in all classes to enrich the subject and provide students with their entitlement in history.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

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

Strengths

- Teaching is generally good in Years 7 to 9 and students achieve better than expected standards.
- There are good computer facilities; students have good access to the Internet, which helps to develop their research skills.
- Students with special educational needs make good progress because of the good support provided by the learning support assistants.

Areas for improvement

- There is not enough time to teach the GCSE short course to Years 10 and 11.
- Students do not have enough opportunities to use computers to control events.
- Some subjects do not use the computer rooms and specialist equipment enough.
- There is no formal checking of the quality of provision for ICT within other subjects.

178. Teacher assessments show that, by the end of Year 9, the attainment of most students is above average. There are no significant variations between boys and girls or between students from different ethnic groups. Achievement is good when compared to the wide variation in computer skills students have when they join the

school in Year 7. In the GCSE short course examination in 2002 the proportion of students achieving the higher A*-C grades was above average. However, the numbers entered for the examination were very low.

179. By the end of Year 9, all students attain above average standards in the basic ICT skills of desktop publishing, use the Internet, simple spreadsheets and databases and use a range of electronic resources such as scanners and digital cameras. They access software confidently and move information from one application to another effectively and have a good grasp of a wide range of software applications. Higher attainers are occasionally bored in lessons because they are not challenged enough, waiting too often for the others to catch up. Lower attainers, including those with special educational needs and those whose first language is not English, enjoy using the computers. They are sometimes restricted in their work by their low literacy levels, which prevent them from making as much progress as expected because they spend too much time trying to type. Students with statements of special educational needs make good progress because of the good support provided by the learning support assistants who are confident and experienced with ICT. Because they know their students well they modify the work to improve progress. Resources are well adapted to specific need. Links with numeracy are strong as was seen in a Year 9 lesson dealing with the conversion of currency using the Internet and spreadsheets.
180. Standards in Years 10 and 11 are below average because one 50-minute lesson per week is not enough to successfully teach the GCSE short course to all students. As a result, achievement is unsatisfactory. Students chosen to enter the GCSE short course examination have extra out-of-school sessions to make up for the shortfall in lesson time. Nearly all the students follow a Key Skills certification course. Students have good access to the Internet, which helps to develop their research skills. Students do not have enough opportunities to use computers to control events, particularly those students who do not follow the design and technology course. As in Years 7 to 9, higher attaining students work independently and complete tasks faster than others, but they do not always receive sufficiently challenging work to move them forward enough. Coursework folders contain evidence of a range of ICT skills such as the use of databases and spreadsheets to process and present data. Higher attainers have good research skills and are able to select and combine information from various sources, using more advanced program functions and more complex procedures in their individual work. Lower attaining students struggle to understand importing text and graphics into other applications and need lots of help from the teacher and learning support assistants.
181. In Years 7 to 9 students learn well because the teaching is generally good. In Years 10 and 11 teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Teachers have good knowledge and understanding of the subject and mainly prepare their lessons well, but students' weak literacy skills are not always taken into account. Students are taught to be good independent learners. Well-designed booklets help students to focus on mastering the various functions of the software, as well as achieving the main sections of the topic. Explanations are clearly given, using digital projectors to demonstrate procedures and to take students through them step by step. However, in some lessons the higher attaining students are not stretched enough and make less progress than expected. Teachers have suitably high expectations of students' behaviour; they manage students well and so learning is good, because all students enjoy the opportunities to use modern machines with up-to-date software. Teachers circulate the class well, offering good support and guidance to students. In the better lessons, teachers keep the pace of learning brisk, giving clear instructions and providing a good recap of what has been learnt at the end. Work is marked frequently

but teachers' comments do not inform students of how well they are doing or what they need to do to improve. However, immediate feedback to students during practical sessions is good.

182. The leadership and management of ICT lessons are satisfactory. However, at present, there is not sufficient monitoring and support for the use of computers in other subjects. Students consider the effects of the use of computers in society, but these and other elements of citizenship are not a sufficiently planned part of programmes of work. The curriculum leader does not have enough time to monitor the provision throughout the school. There is no regular, formal forum at which he can initiate and lead developments within other subject areas, nor any routine means by which he can monitor delivery and ensure compliance with statutory requirements.
183. There has been very good improvement since the previous inspection. The subject now meets statutory requirements. The school has made funding available to significantly improve and extend the very good computer network system and the ratio of students to computers is now in line with that found nationally, with nearly all computers replaced since the previous inspection.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

The provision for modern foreign languages is **good**.

Strengths

- Standards attained in German GCSE examinations are above average.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good; there is a high level of consistency across the department and this leads to good progress in lessons.
- Students have very positive attitudes towards their learning and are confident linguists.
- The department makes a valuable contribution towards developing students' literacy, oracy and language awareness.

Areas for improvement

- Standards attained in GCSE examinations in French are below average.
- The department does not always make effective use of assessment to ensure all students, particularly higher attaining students, achieve their potential in lessons.

184. In work seen during the inspection standards attained in French in Years 10 and 11 are below average. In German they are above average. There has been an apparent decline in standards attained in GCSE examinations in French since the previous report. However, the proportion of students entered for examination has increased substantially and is now very high compared to national figures. All candidates achieve a grade at GCSE. This represents good achievement in both French and German in relation to prior attainment.
185. There is no significant difference between the performance of boys and girls. All students display a good understanding of grammar rules, and in writing higher and average attaining students apply them successfully to communicate their ideas in the past, present and future; lower attaining students adapt set phrases to write short accounts and descriptions or write following a model. Listening skills are well developed and students respond appropriately to questions and instructions in French and German.

186. By the end of Year 9, according to teacher assessments, students attain standards broadly in line with expectations; this was confirmed by inspection evidence. In German they are above average. Very good learning strategies encourage students to use their initiative and are successful in increasing both their range of language and their confidence in speaking and responding. Students in a Year 8 French lesson developed reading skills by skimming and scanning the next unit of their course book and predicted what they were going to learn; they coped successfully with some unfamiliar language and inferred meaning by identifying familiar words and using visual clues to help them.
187. Students' attitudes towards their learning are very positive. They behave very well, listen attentively and concentrate on tasks set. When asked to work in teams to solve problems or to work in pairs and small groups, they do so sensibly and stay in the language being learned as much as possible. In most lessons students are keen to participate in class oral activities, particularly in games.
188. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall, resulting in good progress in lessons. Examples of very good teaching were seen in both languages. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and use it very effectively to conduct activities in the language being learned and to plan their lessons with well-sequenced activities, which provide achievable steps in learning. Activities that involve competition or games are successful in ensuring that boys' attainment more closely matches that of girls; for example, in a Year 10 lesson students took part in a game of 'Cluedo'. Flashcards and the overhead projector are used well to introduce new vocabulary so that students rapidly understand and use it themselves and teachers' questioning is effective in enabling students to respond successfully. In most lessons activities are designed to enable students to succeed in using the languages for themselves. Teachers provide a good variety of activities that maintain students' interest and increase their confidence in using new language. Students are given frequent opportunities to practise in class activities and informally in pairs and small groups; this is effective in increasing their confidence and competence. They make the best progress in tasks where they are required to give and gather information but opportunities for them to do this are sometimes missed. Progress in developing listening and reading skills is sometimes slowed, as students are not always told clearly enough how to do better. Good support is given to lower attaining students and to students with special educational needs, enabling them to succeed in tasks set. In a few lessons students sometimes have difficulty maintaining concentration when they are not directly involved in activities themselves. In most lessons students are presented with tasks which require them to use their initiative; for example in a Year 10 French lesson they were challenged to remember and reproduce the patterns involved in constructing the past tense in a grid. In a few lessons, however, higher attaining students are not sufficiently challenged and do not make enough progress.
189. Leadership and management are good. The department makes a significant contribution towards students' spiritual and personal development since the learning strategies being employed promote students' belief in themselves as competent linguists and develop their independence in learning and using the languages themselves. Similarly the department is making a valuable contribution in developing students' literacy, oracy and language awareness, highlighting the similarities between languages and focusing on key words and phrases. There is scope to use assessment to plan more effectively for the progress of groups of differing attainment within lessons and to ensure higher attaining students achieve their potential. The department works well as a team and frequently shares ideas. As a result, there is a high level of consistency and a good capacity to improve further.

MUSIC

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

Strengths

- Good leadership and management have led to good progress since the previous inspection.
- Teaching is knowledgeable and enthusiastic.
- Students have good attitudes to the subject and teacher/student relationships are good; both raise standards.
- Students' performance skills are improved because of the good opportunities for out-of-school musical activities.

Areas for improvement

- The department does not make enough use of ICT to support learning in music.
- Musically talented students are not stretched enough in lessons.
- Marking is not detailed so students do not know how well they are doing or how to improve.

190. Music was not offered to examination level in 2001 or 2002. Instead students were entered for the successful expressive arts GCSE examination, with results consistently above average for the last three years. Students' results were better in expressive arts than in most other subjects studied.
191. By the end of Year 9, standards are generally above average. There are no significant variations between boys and girls or between students from different ethnic groups. Students enter the school with a wide range of musical ability, therefore by the age of 14 achievement is satisfactory. Students make satisfactory progress, because the well-planned series of topics improves their musical knowledge, skills and understanding. Higher attaining students have a reasonable vocabulary of technical musical language, which allows them to discuss confidently the music they hear and perform. They can control sounds effectively using electronic keyboards and have an awareness of the different parts within their group. The more musically talented have well-developed performance skills but do not get enough opportunity to play their instruments in lessons; they are not always stretched, waiting for the others to catch them up. Literacy skills are taught well through key words, musical vocabulary and regular opportunities to spell words and read out loud. Students with poor literacy skills cope well in lessons because of the highly practical nature of the course. Lower attaining students do not develop their musical ideas enough. They lack the basic rhythmic skills to maintain their own part within a group performance. Students do not get access to computers with music software, so they cannot create, manipulate and notate their compositions.
192. Standards by the end of Year 11 are below average and this represents a satisfactory level of achievement for these students considering the wide range of musical ability within the group. Students are well focused and are good independent learners. In a Year 10 lesson one girl produced an effective minuet style ternary piece. She performed it with style to the rest of the group who listened with interest. Higher attaining students are good instrumentalists and use their instruments well in performances and compositions. However, these students are less confident with the more theoretical aspects of the course such as musical history and appraising, failing to use technical vocabulary when writing or talking about music. Lower attaining

students struggle with reading music, maintaining accurate rhythm and understanding some fundamental musical concepts such as structure and texture.

193. Students learn satisfactorily because the teaching is generally satisfactory. The best teaching is characterised by good knowledge and understanding and by musical demonstrations. What is to be learned is usually shared with the students at the outset and better lessons end with a clear summary to reinforce learning. Planning is good. Time and change of activity are managed well to maintain good pace. Because of the good relationships within lessons students, including those with special educational needs, are eager to learn and enjoy performing music on the keyboards. They quickly settle down to their tasks and respond well to the practical activities offered. In Years 10 and 11 students are good independent learners. Students enjoy music lessons because of the enthusiastic teaching. In Years 10 and 11 relationships between staff and students are strong and mean that lessons focus on learning in a pleasant atmosphere with students feeling comfortable enough to make suggestions and perform in front of each other. In one Year 10 lesson the teacher's careful questioning and well-structured tasks helped students to consolidate previous work and to deepen their understanding of the structure of ternary form within a minuet.
194. A few students, particularly in Year 8, occasionally disrupt lessons through bad behaviour. Marking of students' work is not helpful enough and as a result students are not aware of how well they are doing or what they need to do to improve.
195. The department is led and managed well. The department is supported well by seven visiting instrumental teachers. These and the wide range of out-of-school activities are well managed. The subject has made good progress since the previous inspection. Numbers partaking in instrumental lessons and out-of-school activities have grown. GCSE music is now offered and is becoming increasingly popular.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- Teaching is good and results in good achievement by students.
- Students' attitudes and their behaviour are good and ensure a good learning atmosphere in lessons.
- There is very good provision for out-of-school sport, which provides opportunities for all students, particularly the gifted and talented, to excel.
- Good use is made of ICT to improve students' learning and skills in using computers.
- The monitoring and development of teaching ensure an effective and consistent approach to teaching and learning.

Areas for improvement

- Results in GCSE examinations are well below average.
- The marking of students' theoretical coursework is not effective enough.
- Planning needs to take account of the contribution to be made to students' wider personal development.
- Individual lessons are not planned to ensure that the needs of all students are met.

196. In 2002, teachers' assessments of the standards of 14 year olds were above average. In the 2002 GCSE examination, students' results were well below average.

This group achieved satisfactorily in relation to their attainment at the start of the course.

197. In the work seen in the inspection, students in Year 9, attain above average standards. Most students are competent in a range of skills and understand the principles of play in games. Students know how to warm up effectively and can do so independently. Students' knowledge and understanding of which muscles they stretch are satisfactory and they are clear about what happens to their body during exercise. In trampolining, many students demonstrate skills that are well above average. Their understanding of how to evaluate the performance of others is well developed and they have a keen awareness of how to ensure safety. Students' literacy and numeracy skills develop satisfactorily, in most lessons. Overall, students of all levels of attainment achieve well in Years 7 to 9.
198. As a result of mock GCSE examinations, the amount of Year 11 work seen was severely curtailed by the organisation of mock examinations during the week of inspection. The limited amount of written work seen showed that students are working much closer to average than previous groups. This is because more students are now studying the subject as a first choice. In addition, the new leadership in the department is raising standards overall. Students show a good grasp of basic anatomy and exercise physiology. Work is neatly presented and is comprehensive, for example in covering the role and function of major muscle groups. The practical work seen in Year 10 shows that students not taking the examination course are working at a level above average. Similarly those students starting their GCSE studies this term are achieving above average standards in their practical work. These students show good hockey skills and a good understanding of the principles underpinning acquiring fitness. Both girls and boys achieve well in Years 10 and 11. Students with special educational needs are integrated well, and generally achieve as well as their peers throughout Years 7 to 11, but lessons are not planned closely enough to ensure that their needs are anticipated and fully met in some lessons. Overall, the practical work is above average for all students. The theoretical work of students taking the GCSE option is below average.
199. The quality of teaching and learning is good. All teachers have good specialist knowledge; they share with students what is to be learned and they prepare well to ensure good pace to their lessons. Very good class management is a feature of all teaching seen and organisation is often of a very high standard. These qualities ensure that learning progresses smoothly and with maximum activity. There are examples of very good planning, but opportunities for students to develop their observation skills, to evaluate their own and others' work and to learn more about the effects of exercise on the body are sometimes missed. The development of numeracy and literacy skills is not always planned, but there is some good practice where opportunities are made for students to consolidate key words and extend their use of the specialist language of the subject. The use of ICT and the teaching of computer skills are undertaken very effectively. Teachers use a range of strategies effectively to give students a share of responsibility for their learning. They use questions skilfully to probe students' knowledge and understanding, and maintain a brisk pace to learning. Target setting helps to create a demanding pace of learning. The marking of students' GCSE coursework is regular and encouraging, but students do not receive enough information to know what progress they are making, or how to improve their work.
200. The relationships between teachers and students are very good. Teachers have very high expectations of the quality of students' responses, behaviour, punctuality and

rate of participation. Students have good attitudes and enjoy their lessons, responding well to the enthusiasm of the teachers. They are well motivated, and have good, and often very good, attitudes to the subject; this is reflected in the good physical effort they put into their work and the very good support for extra-curricular activities. The performance of high attaining students in games is demonstrated by the successes of the school teams. An extensive programme of out-of-school sport provides very good opportunities for all students, particularly the gifted and talented, to excel in their chosen sports, both in the school and beyond.

201. The overall quality of leadership and management is good and is ably supported by a strong, committed staff team. The good leadership provides vision and a clear sense of educational direction. There has been a drive to raise standards, reflected in the notable improvement in the GCSE results in 2002, and the department has benefited from a rigorous approach to monitoring teaching. This has led to a consistent approach based upon effective methods. Improvement since the previous inspection is good and issues raised in that inspection have been successfully tackled.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- Students achieve well at GCSE.
- Thorough planning makes for good progress by students.
- Students' positive attitudes promote good levels of interest in the subject.

Areas for improvement

- Assessment procedures are not yet fully in place in Years 7 to 9.
- The department does not have a programme of visits to places of worship to extend learning.

202. All students follow a GCSE short course in Years 10 and 11. In recent years results have been broadly in line with national averages and sometimes better. Achievement is good with students performing better than their predictions.

203. Standards of work of Year 9 students are at the level expected by the local agreed syllabus. Students have a sound knowledge of Christianity and aspects of other religious traditions. They understand how belonging to a faith community can make a difference to individuals, as in some Year 9 work on contrasting attitudes to war and peace. Students' oral skills are better than their written skills, especially when they are given opportunities to provide thoughtful answers to challenging questioning. Written work tends to be brief and lacks detail because students have difficulty in expressing their ideas. However, higher attaining students produce some good persuasive writing, as in some work by Year 9 students comparing Muslim and Christian beliefs about the environment. Overall, the standards being attained show good achievement from a below average starting point in Year 7.

204. Standards of work of Year 11 students following the GCSE short course are in line with national averages. Students have a sound knowledge and understanding of Christian beliefs on a range of ethical and philosophical issues, such as belief in the afterlife and aspects of medical ethics. Students are able to express their own views, both orally and in writing, and can provide appropriate supporting evidence, as in some Year 10 work on Christian beliefs about good and evil. Students achieve well in

Years 10 and 11. Their understanding of the issues becomes clearer and their written work improves.

205. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers' understanding of the subject is sound and good appreciation of GCSE examination requirements means that students are well prepared in Years 10 and 11. Teachers plan lessons very thoroughly and the consistent sharing of clear and specific learning objectives ensures that students make good progress. Teachers use a good range of methods which leads to effective learning. In one Year 7 lesson on the miracles of Jesus, very skilful questioning and well-organised work in pairs and groups encouraged students to participate fully so that they made rapid progress. Where teaching is less successful tasks and activities are not matched closely enough to the attainment level of the students, and this slows down learning. Teachers give effective support to students in helping them to structure their written work, but insufficient attention is given to developing their understanding of correct vocabulary. Students use ICT for research purposes in Years 10 and 11 but not in Years 7 to 9. Teachers manage students successfully so that they behave well and get the most out of lessons. Students' positive attitudes promote good levels of interest and make a significant contribution to their learning and achievement in the subject.
206. The school has been unable to recruit a specialist teacher in recent years and so all members of the humanities department teach some lessons. Good subject leadership and effective teamwork ensure that successful provision is made for the subject. There are good assessment procedures in Years 10 and 11 but they are not yet fully in place in Years 7 to 9. At the moment the department does not have a programme of visits to places of worship to enhance work. Good improvement has taken place since the previous inspection, especially the successful introduction of the GSCE short course.

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

In the inspection, nine 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 inspected courses completed in 2001.

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	0	N/a	87	N/a	43	N/a	5.8
Physics	0	N/a	88	N/a	40	N/a	5.67
Biology	5	80	88	0	34	3.60	5.25
Business studies	7	100	92	14	32	5.71	5.50
Art and design	4	50	96	25	46	2.50	6.57
Geography	4	100	92	25	38	5.50	5.74
Psychology	12	92	87	25	34	4.67	5.30
English language	0	N/a	92	N/a	30	N/a	5.28
English literature	10	80	95	20	37	4.00	5.91

Intermediate vocational qualifications

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		% gaining distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Health and social care	5	100	N/a	60	N/a	20	N/a
Business studies	9	74	N/a	0	N/a	0	N/a

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

The focus was on mathematics, biology and physics but chemistry was also sampled. In chemistry, no candidates took the A-level examination in 2001 but in 2002 four out of five attained a pass grade. In the one lesson observed, teaching was very good. Students learnt very well because the teacher involved and challenged them as he developed their understanding of the chemistry concerned with the production of exhaust emissions.

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- Teaching is good and lessons are well planned.
- Effective student/teacher support helps raise standards.

Area for improvement

- There is not enough encouragement for students to be less reliant on teachers in their studies.

207. The GCE A-level results in 2002 were below national averages, although the relatively small number of students entered makes valid comparisons difficult. No students were entered during 2001. Most students continue with their studies after AS-level. The department operates an open policy for inclusion in Year 12, and students with modest GCSE grades are given encouragement to study. The Year 12 AS results in 2002 were average; of the seven students were entered, five secured pass grades, with one A grade.
208. The standards of work seen in lessons reflect recent results; there is a wide range of attainment and understanding. In one Year 13 lesson students were introduced to curve sketching, but recalling and applying previously taught skills was hesitant and clearly revealed the range of understanding, with the noticeable few offering the major input to discussion. In another lesson, students from Year 12 were considering types of force and overall were more forthcoming; some made impressive, confident contributions. Students were noticeably more comfortable with the more applied aspects of mathematics, such as mechanics and statistics rather than pure mathematics. This is reflected in the module results.
209. Teaching is good and interesting. For example, competent use of a computer presentation with excellent software enabled easier understanding of functions and links with work completed in Year 11. Students were often expected to work collaboratively which they did naturally: clearly this forms a part of their normal work routine and helps to generate learning that is satisfactory overall. Students from other schools in the federation integrate well. Teachers are sensitive to the range of students' needs, pace is appropriate and students clearly have confidence in the teachers' supportive style, although, on some occasions, this affects progress, as students are too dependent upon the teacher. However, students grasped, for example, the main elements of correlation in a statistics lesson and were able to use the appropriate formulae when considering paired data. Elsewhere students were able to explain factorisation of equations to establish points of interception and to identify stationary points using calculus, which enable a graph to be sketched. Students' application to their work in lessons is good and relationships with teachers are extremely positive.
210. The subject is well managed in the sixth form with the thrust of the teaching reflecting the individual strengths of the department. The open policy for student recruitment influences the style of teaching, which includes a high degree of student support. However, because of their lack of initiative and confidence to research and learn for themselves, the students' progress is undermined. As a result, their gains in knowledge and understanding are less than the effort they put in: this is an unsatisfactory aspect of learning.

Physics

Overall, the provision in physics is **very good**.

Strengths

- Students achieve well and the standards they reach are above expectations.
- Teaching and learning are good; teachers have good subject knowledge and high expectations.
- Students' attitudes to learning the subject are very good; they have interest and apply themselves very well.
- Resources for learning are very good.

Areas for improvement

- Time taken to transfer students between federation schools reduces standards.
- Too few girls study physics.

211. Standards overall are above national expectations. The recent introduction of physics as a sixth form subject means that in 2001 examination data was not available to make comparisons with national figures. The 2002 results of students taking AS and A-level examinations were broadly in line with the national averages of the previous year. In relation to their GCSE results, students achieve well and make good progress in Year 12 and Year 13.
212. The standard of work seen in lessons during the inspection, and from an analysis of students' files and assignments, is above national expectations. Evidence drawn from these sources suggest that the GCE A-level students will in 2003 obtain examination results above the national average whilst those of the AS students will be broadly in line with the national average. In both years, students have a high level of competency in the use of numeracy to progress their learning in physics effectively. Other key skills needed as tools to learn physics are also good, in particular the use of ICT. In Year 13, and to a lesser extent Year 12, students compile orderly and comprehensive notes, which show good evidence of independent study and research skills. Students show good knowledge in electricity and mechanics topics being studied. In a Year 13 lesson, students made very good progress because the teaching was very good and they were able to move from the concrete to the abstract using well-developed reasoning skills. In a Year 12 lesson, students made good progress because they were able to transfer previously gained knowledge and understanding into a new situation to extend their learning.
213. Teaching is good overall. The teachers' knowledge and understanding are very good and they are used to very good effect when directing questions to assess students' understanding and to explain new ideas. These qualities were put to effective use in a Year 13 lesson when the teacher skillfully and confidently teased out formulae associated with electrical capacitance. The pace of learning was quick because the teacher was able to capitalise on the students' competency in using mathematics. Teachers have high expectations of the students and the interest, concentration and application shown by the students reinforce these. Lessons are relaxed yet purposeful, relationships are good and humour is shared. Students work collaboratively when required and listen respectfully to each other's contributions. However, some students are passive in their involvement and teachers are not always quick to involve them in contributing to the class learning. Teachers make very good use of the very good level of resources to stimulate learning, a factor to which students spontaneously referred in discussion. Marking is regular, thorough and constructive and much appreciated by the students.
214. The joint leadership and management of the post-16 physics courses is a good feature of this part of the federation arrangement. They are based on good relationships and close professional dialogue. Because of the professional compatibility of the two teachers the subject has grown quickly and now

approximately one in ten post-16 students study physics, but these are mainly boys. Careful deployment has ensured that experienced staff is teaching the two groups. The time allocated is satisfactory but journeys between federation schools sometimes mean that valuable teaching time is lost; a point which students interviewed saw as detrimental to effective learning. Post-16 physics was not taught at the time of the previous inspection; however, since the subject was introduced there has been good improvement and the subject is now firmly established.

Biology

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

Strengths

- Students' attitudes to the subject are good.
- Relationships between staff and students are very good and students appreciate the help given to them by staff.

Areas for improvement

- The amount of intellectual challenge in some lessons is insufficient to help all students become independent learners.
- The structure of the lessons does not always meet the learning needs of all students.
- The management of the subject is unsatisfactory.

215. The numbers choosing to take the subject have fallen over the last four years but have improved this year. Results have remained well below the national average over the last four years. In 2001, the average point score attained was well below national figures and significantly below other A-level subjects. In 2002, not all students attained a pass grade in either the AS or A-level examinations and there were no higher grades. However, several students did attain grades higher than those predicted from their GCSE results. The current standard of work is mainly below average, but in line with the average. Most students make satisfactory progress given their GCSE and AS-level starting points.
216. Taken as a whole, teaching is satisfactory. Teachers' good subject knowledge allows them to talk confidently about the subject matter and keep the interest of students. In one lesson, students were presented with a body of knowledge and supporting diagrams describing the movement of water in and out of plant cells and then given the task of describing a difficult graph related to the topic. This was challenging and allowed most to develop their skills as independent learners, but was not so successful for the few less confident ones. Where teaching is not so good, students are not challenged by tasks such as copying diagrams. Practice AS examination papers were used satisfactorily to develop students' understanding of difficult questions on magnification and chemical structures. However, not all students benefited fully from the lesson because the teacher did not check the progress of all. In all lessons, students apply themselves well to their work and most have well-organised files.
217. The two teachers currently responsible for teaching the subject are both subject specialists but have insufficient experience in the methods required to teach A-level and the needs of all students are not met fully in the lessons. However, students are very appreciative of the extra help offered to them by staff out of lesson time. There continue to be changes in the management of the subject, which is currently unsatisfactory, but there are plans to rectify this and improve stability and training for the staff involved.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

No subject was inspected or sampled in this domain.

BUSINESS

The focus of the inspection was on business studies.

Business studies

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

Strengths

- Students' attainment is above average and they achieve very well.
- Very good learning arises from very good teaching by very committed and well-organised staff who set high expectations.
- The subject is very well led and managed.
- Students are very well motivated and they have very good relationships with teachers.

Areas for improvement

- Weak literacy skills among Year 12 students undermine standards.
- In the GNVQ course, more able students' powers of critical analysis are underdeveloped.

218. GCE A-level and GNVQ Intermediate courses are provided. Standards at GNVQ level in 2002 were above average with all 11 students gaining full awards, nearly one-third at merit level. Standards have improved significantly over the last three years. Standards at A-level in 2002 were above average for grades A to E. Higher grades were below average, reflecting the absence of higher attainers in the school. Half the students did better than expected. This continued a trend of improvement in the last two years with students attaining better results than in their other subjects. Business studies has consistently been one of the most successful subjects in the school at A-level. Results at AS-level in 2002 were above average, improving on the previous year when they were average. Over three-quarters of students exceeded their grade predictions. Although females did significantly better than males in 2002, this reversed the gender difference of the previous two years. Few students drop out during the AS course and nearly all continue with the A-level.

219. Standards in work seen are above the national average. This represents good achievement for both A-level and GNVQ students compared with their below average prior attainment on entry to the sixth form. Students have a good knowledge and understanding of the key business terms and concepts, for instance in understanding factors influencing business growth, on the A-level course. Most students select and record information relevantly. They have good skills of listening, reading and speaking. Year 12 GNVQ students speak clearly and confidently about their valuable work experience. They understand the arrangements and weaknesses of the customer services in their work place and use it appropriately in their assignments. Skills of extended writing are less well developed in lower attainers, especially in Year 12 on the AS and GNVQ courses. There are weaknesses in structuring paragraphs and in their written expression. However, the teachers are aware of this and are putting support strategies in place to tackle it. Students generally have good ICT skills; they confidently use *PowerPoint* for presentations, spreadsheets, bar charts and pie

graphs, as well as word processing and the Internet, to support their research. Higher attaining students in Year 13 use their very good knowledge to write at length with precise relevance, fluency and well-supported analytical arguments. Such skills are less developed in more able students on the GNVQ course.

220. Teaching is very good. Teachers have high expectations and by setting high standards, make the students believe they can succeed. Their very good subject knowledge is well used to plan a variety of challenging tasks with clearly devised assignment tasks in GNVQ. The lively pace and questioning stimulate strong interest and response from the students. The excellent revision summaries, such as the one in Year 13 on business growth, are very effectively used to involve students fully in the reinforcement of their learning. The teachers' enthusiasm and concern for the students, with much praise for good work, promote excellent relationships. This was shown by the teacher helping GNVQ students with weak writing skills to structure their paragraphs on customer services. Very thorough marking tracks students' progress and guides improvement. Their progress is also constantly monitored by checking their understanding during the lesson and against clearly set aims at the end of the lesson.
221. This very good quality teaching produces very good learning with positive and productive gains in students' knowledge and skills in three-quarters of the lessons. It is also promoted by the good attitudes of the students to work. They collaborate very well. They also display the maturity and strong motivation to take on the responsibility of working by themselves, as the tasks are stimulating and well explained. Consequently, nearly all students meet deadlines and are enthusiastic about the subject. Five of the 15 Year 13 A-level students are considering studying the subject in higher education and all expressed strong appreciation of the support and guidance provided by their teachers.
222. Leadership and management are very good. A clear educational direction is provided for the subject by the enthusiastic head of department. As the subject was not reported on in the previous inspection, direct comparisons cannot be made with the situation then. However, significant changes have occurred. Learning resources, especially the computers in the business studies base room, are well managed and all staff are very well supported. Regular and mutual classroom observation has been well developed as a way of checking the quality of teaching and sharing good practice. There are very good assessment procedures with information of students' prior attainment well used to set targets and track progress. Students are fully aware of their progress and know how to improve. Assessment and examination results are well analysed by prior attainment, gender and background, and guide teaching. A-level students benefit from visits to Euro Disney and GNVQ students from work experience. Local business contacts are used well to enhance the curriculum.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

No subject was inspected or sampled in this domain.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

No subject was inspected in this domain, but two physical education lessons were sampled. The teaching was good and students responded well; learning was good. Levels of attainment are above average in the Year 12 GCE AS course. In the GCE A2 course, attainment is below average in the aspect of the course observed that is dealing with the mechanics of movement.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

No subjects were inspected in this domain, but two health and social care lessons, one at GNVQ and the other at AVCE level were sampled. The GNVQ results have been above average in the last two years, with all candidates receiving accreditation, numerous with merit. The teaching and learning were very good indeed. Students from different ethnic backgrounds were fully involved and their maturity also allowed them to work very well on their own. GNVQ students had a good knowledge of health and fitness and the AVCE students were making very good progress learning about physical aspects of health, because of the excellent teaching methods used.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

Art and design was inspected and drama sampled. The drama course is studied to A-level and one lesson was observed. Groups taking the subject are usually small. In 2001 results at A-level were average. Students now in Year 13 all achieved pass grades at AS-level and their results were above expectation based upon earlier attainment. In the lesson observed students showed good understanding of character and of the dramatic conventions that could be appropriate to a performance, including costume and lighting effects. Students are willing to explore issues and to offer opinions. Teaching was good, with good knowledge of classical drama and a clear grasp of its relevance to students in the present. Assessment of writing identifies students' strengths and indicates well means of further improvement, such as making more specific reference to the text to illustrate judgements. Students' files show good progress in the development of understanding and improving clarity of expression. The quality of writing is sometimes reduced by inaccuracies of punctuation and spelling.

Art and design

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

Strengths

- Good relationships between teachers and students ensure positive and respectful attitudes to work.
- Standards of practical work are good using a wide range of media.
- The quality of teaching is good; students benefit from teachers' detailed lesson and long-term planning.

Areas for improvement

- Students' final pieces show a lack of depth in approach; their planning, written evaluations and research are not detailed and extensive enough.
- Sketchbooks are not used well enough to plan and develop their work independently.

223. Students from both Years 12 and 13 may apply for a one-year AS course; they are taught together. Some students extend this to a two-year full course in A-level.

224. Two students who took A-level in 2002 gained a grade C: this was an improvement on the previous year. However, numbers are too small to make valid comparisons year by year or with national results. The trend since the previous inspection indicates that A-level results have fluctuated with female students gaining higher grades than males. In 2002, nine AS students gained a pass at the lowest grade or failed. Two students are retaking units to improve their grades as they work towards a full A-level.

225. Standards are below average, but achievement is good. Many students find the demands of advanced work very challenging. Students can communicate their ideas in visual form. They are encouraged to experiment and seek appropriate materials by their teachers. Many show a high level of technical skill in a range of media, including digital photography, acrylic, oil pastels, collage, clay, sculpture and printing. Students express a personal view and make connections between their own work and that of art movements and artists. Particularly interesting in Years 12 and 13 is work inspired by visits with the school to Tate Modern in London and the Museum of Photography in Bradford. Students make good use of these visits, for example in comparing artists of portraiture in photography and paint. Students are keen to refine and adapt work as it progresses, seeking guidance from their teachers and suggestions from their peers.
226. Whilst achievement is good in practical application, there is scope for improvement in wider research reading and more evaluative in-depth writing, essential for the higher grades. Lower attainers and those with literacy weaknesses have difficulty in structuring their writing persuasively and in appreciating what a topic properly requires in analysis and interpretation. Practical work is adventurous, but students' written planning and evaluation are weaker. Artists' work is not analysed or interpreted in enough depth. Students regularly download material from the Internet, but too frequently use it indiscriminately and sometimes without comment. Most over-rely on the teacher to provide research materials and secondary source material and to guide planning.
227. Students' attitudes are good. They have chosen to study art because they had enjoyed it in earlier years and have no regrets about their choice. Relationships are very good and there are excellent opportunities for personal development. Students spend much of their free time working practically in the studios on their own. They are grateful for the help their teachers give and the stimulating visits their teachers organise.
228. Teaching is good. Teachers create a purposeful atmosphere in the studios. They are sensitive, encouraging and responsive to individual needs. Teachers are always on hand to help outside lessons at lunchtime and after school. Very good short and long-term planning provides continuity and a clear focus in the work. Teachers' individual and combined subject expertise results in stimulus and variety and an encouragement for students to experiment. The challenge in practical work is high and appropriate to stretch all students. Procedures for assessing students' progress are good, though not all students know what they should do to improve. However, teachers' expectation of written analysis, interpretation and evaluation is too low. How and why art and design movements past and present may influence students' work requires further development. Because this does not occur, students' final pieces are not planned or explained well enough to create an informed response.
229. Students have good opportunities for reflection and are clearly moved by some of the work they encounter. They are supportive of each other and respectful of each other's work. Their visits to galleries and museums and work with professional artists offer good enrichment and widen their understanding. One student took the opportunity of work experience in a local art gallery to use her graphics skills in computer-aided design. She created an advertisement, which the museum placed in a regional arts magazine.
230. Management is good. Rooms, the very good equipment and students' work are all well cared for. New teachers have brought fresh ideas. They receive very good support from senior staff and the head of department. Monitoring of lessons has

helped the department improve and there is now much consistent practice in teaching and in planning. Examination data is carefully analysed and plans are afoot to raise standards by improving literacy and in depth research. The department plan is forward-looking and ambitious to improve.

HUMANITIES

The focus of the inspection was on geography and psychology. No other subject in the domain was sampled.

Geography

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

Strengths

- Good teaching leads to good learning.
- Very detailed marking ensures that students know how to improve.
- Very good examination preparation helps the students achieve.

Area for improvement

- Use of examination grades to set targets for students and to evaluate progress is insufficiently developed.

231. In the 2001 A-level examination, all students reached a pass grade but results were below average. All students were again successful in 2002 though proportionately fewer reached the top two grades. At AS-level, the 2002 results were an improvement on previous years. Results in both examinations represent good progress with most students reaching standards beyond expectations.
232. The standard of work seen in Years 12 and 13 is average. For both AS and A-level courses students build comprehensive portfolios of work which cover topics in detail. All students are able to discuss the competing issues of energy production versus environmental concerns surrounding major hydroelectric schemes such as the three gorges dams in China. Higher attaining students analyse perceptively the factors influencing peak flows using storm hydrographs, but average attainers have difficulty identifying, and particularly explaining, the most important influences. All students apply knowledge gained in personal research well and contribute to classroom debate willingly. This was very apparent in a Year 12 lesson where, in answers to questions concerning the effect of sea level change on the ecosystem of the Maldives, students applied their geographical understanding well. All students are competent users of ICT. When preparing their personal reports and individual studies, they use the Internet selectively for research and to present their work. Higher attaining students in Year 13 compile personal reports of very high quality. They use research skills effectively, evaluate their material well and produce sound analytical reasons for their judgements. The good standard of all such reports is promoted by the high expectations set by the teachers and the good feedback and guidance students receive.
233. Teaching overall is good. As a result, in most lessons students make good progress with their learning. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and lessons are generally well planned. Seminar discussions ensure that students are able to contribute fully to classroom debate, often using the results of their own enquiry. Effective questioning ensures that students regularly redefine concepts and issues thus consolidating their knowledge and understanding. All students are very well

prepared for the examinations. How marks are awarded in the examinations is repeatedly emphasised and past examination questions are regularly used to assess students' learning. The marking of these questions is very good. Full comments recognise what students have done well and give detailed suggestions for improvement. However, the marks awarded by the teachers do not relate directly to examination grades and therefore do not give students unequivocal information about their overall standard nor of their progress towards their anticipated grades. Local fieldwork enhances students' knowledge of urban development.

234. Students enjoy the subject and find it interesting. They have confidence in their teachers' knowledge of the subject. They value the support they receive from their teachers and find them easy to approach. They particularly appreciate the opportunities the subject offers for personal study and enquiry and seminar lessons where they can share knowledge with each other and their teachers. Students feel that their opinions are valued and that they are part of a community working together.
235. Leadership and management of the sixth form are good. In Year 12 the subject is jointly taught as part of the sixth form federation. Through negotiation, staffing arrangements have recognised teachers' expertise in specific areas. Regular meetings are held to review student progress and the course direction. In Years 12 and 13, strong leadership is ensuring that teachers are committed to raising standards and fully understand how this is to be achieved. The curriculum is well planned and the new residential fieldwork is a significant improvement.
236. Overall there has been good improvement since the previous inspection.

Psychology

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

Strengths

- Students enjoy the course and most complete their studies.
- Good relationships are engendered between students and with their teacher.
- The assessment of students and the marking of their work are very good.
- Students are prepared well for their examinations.
- ICT is used effectively to extend students' research skills.

Areas for improvement

- Lesson planning does not take account of the learning needs of different students, particularly those of lower attainers.
- Not enough emphasis is placed on developing students' independent study skills.

237. In 2001 the GCE A-level examination results were broadly average. GCE AS results, too, were average. In the AS course, results in 2002 showed an improvement in the proportion gaining a pass grade, but the proportion of higher grades (A or B) dropped. In the A-level examination in 2002, all six students gained a pass grade and two gained the higher grades. These results demonstrate good achievement when account is taken of their attainment at the start of the courses. In each of these years, the rate of completion of courses was high.
238. In the work seen the standards of the current Year 12 students taking the GCE AS course are below average. The group started the course with some students who were well below average, a large proportion below average, and a small minority who

were broadly average. They are achieving satisfactorily at this stage. The highest attainers can evaluate the work of eminent psychologists such as Bowlby. In the process, some students use technical vocabulary with satisfactory understanding and use appropriate criteria to support their judgements. On occasion, they can support their position with examples drawn from the work of other psychologists. Most, however, still find difficulty in using terms accurately and cannot explain, for example, the essential differences between subjective and objective judgements and how they may relate to an evaluation of a case study.

239. The work seen in Year 13 is below average. This group is achieving satisfactorily when account is taken of their prior attainment. The small group lacks students of above average attainment. The higher attainers can use Freud's ideas to suggest what value there may be in humans dreaming and demonstrate knowledge of Jung's views, using correct terminology in the process. Most of the group approached the discussion very much more from the standpoint of the lay person. They were able to recount an experiment recently examined and in doing so could explain the place of rapid eye movement in studying dreaming. However, when it came to a more general discussion of the place of dreaming, students' assertions had no theoretical backing and their vocabulary lacked a sense of technical knowledge and understanding. The group as a whole found difficulty in clarifying concepts like 'validity' and 'reliability' and could not give examples of 'confounding variables' or explain the idea of 'replicable'. Written work, in both years, is well below average. Handout material from the teacher, while usually organised into files, lacked annotation or evidence of further reading. Notes taken in lessons were often poorly presented and often not well organised.
240. Teaching is satisfactory. The teacher's own subject knowledge and understanding of the course requirements are very good. Lesson planning is very detailed and gives a good direction to work undertaken. Objectives are stated, the lesson structure described and students have a clear understanding of where the lesson is heading. However, the planning does not take close account of the lower attainers' needs when dealing with new and difficult material. For example, when dealing with the concepts of 'validity' and 'reliability', teaching missed giving concrete examples. The teaching of basic skills is sound and, in the case of teaching and using ICT skills, it is good. As a result, students' learning is enhanced and they research the Internet intelligently.
241. The marking of work and the assessment of students are very good. Marking is positive and encouraging and gives students good information about what they need to do to improve further. Students are aware of their target grades and the marking always relates the work completed to the examination grade it would receive. This is done accurately and is very effective in preparing students for their examinations. Question and answer techniques are used widely in lessons. Often this is done effectively and answers given are used as springboards to further work. However, there are occasions where it is too extended and some of the more passive students do not participate sufficiently. Homework is satisfactory, but this independent work is not built sufficiently into classroom learning. Here, expectations of the quality of students' efforts are too low.
242. The subject is well led and managed. Supporting documentation is appropriate and informative for students. Psychology is a well-organised area of study. Students enjoy the subject and the proportion completing their courses is high. The subject was not covered by the previous inspection so it is not possible to comment on changes since then.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus of the inspection was on English language and English literature. One lesson of French was also sampled. French is new to the sixth form curriculum; the first students entered in 2002 were too few in number to make secure comparisons with national averages, but results in AS were disappointingly low, with two-thirds of the candidates unclassified. A Year 12 class was practising grammatical constructions at a very basic level that was too easy for nearly all those present. When given their head they produced work that was much closer to the anticipated standards: most had reasonable accents and read French fluently and with satisfactory understanding; students handled quite demanding language satisfactorily. The meticulously prepared, overall good, teaching lacked a little in expectation at first, but had suitable reinforcement work that kept the students' interest and commitment throughout the lesson, so they learned well.

English language

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

Strengths

- Students make good progress and attain average standards.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good.
- Relationships between students and with teachers are very good.

Area for improvement

- Weaknesses in the writing of some students seriously reduce attainment.

243. The course was introduced in 2000. It is now established as a popular option for students in Year 12, including some from other schools in the federation.
244. At AS-level in 2001, students' results matched and sometimes exceeded expectation based upon earlier attainment. All students gained pass grades and most continued to A-level. The entry at AS-level in 2002 was twice as large with 22 candidates. With one exception, all gained pass grades which represents good achievement by comparison with what they did at GCSE. Most are continuing to A-level. Results at A-level in 2002 were just below average. All students gained pass grades, but the proportion gaining the higher grades, A or B, was below average.
245. Students in Year 12 are responding well to the demands of the course and are attaining satisfactory standards. They contribute sensibly and perceptively to the analysis of dialogue and make appropriate use of technical terms to identify stylistic features. They are also able to identify strengths and weaknesses in the representation of characteristics of regional speech in transcripts. Students are confident in discussion and understand the importance of supporting their opinions with evidence. The quality of written work is more variable. Content is usually relevant and the sense is clear enough to indicate sound levels of understanding. Communication with the reader is too often disrupted by the frequency of errors of sentence construction, including the omission of full stops and main verbs. Some students have expanding but still limited vocabularies and others do not recognise that different kinds of language are needed when writing for different purposes.
246. The attainment of students in Year 13 is average. They have good understanding of the skills of editorial writing. They work effectively in groups or as a full class and, having identified possible answers to questions, are able to use time efficiently in reaching conclusions. They make presentations confidently and, when evaluating

what they have done, show that they have very high expectation of themselves. They are quick to identify strengths in the work of colleagues and applaud their successes. The positive nature of relationships underpins the confidence students have when exploring ideas and is a major contributor to their progress. Students from other schools are fully integrated into classes. Written work is well organised and indicates average levels of knowledge and understanding, but some of the weaknesses evident earlier continue to reduce its effectiveness.

247. Students make good progress within lessons and over the duration of the course. They reach satisfactory and sometimes good levels of understanding. They are well motivated and are prepared to work hard. They show high levels of interest and, when appropriate, good humour, for example when considering the inadequacies of their instructions on how to bath a baby. Students for whom English is an additional language play a full part in all activities and achieve good standards. Positive relationships between students are matched by good relationships with teachers.
248. The quality of teaching is good. Teachers have very good command of their subject and communicate their interest and enthusiasm to students. They consistently expect students to contribute to their learning by making presentations and by contributing to discussion. Students become able to develop and express their own thoughts and judgements. Teachers make very effective use of questions to help students to express and extend their understanding. They expect opinions to be supported by reasons or evidence and are quick to give praise when it is earned. They also recognise the problems that students encounter and are skilful in providing help. For example, Year 12 students were very carefully prepared for a task, which required them to write for different purposes for two different readerships. Inability to recognise the different requirements of such writing is a weakness noted among younger students, which continues for some into the sixth form.
249. Management of the course is good and effective use is made of the special skills and interests of the teachers involved. The decision to introduce the course, as being more appropriate to the aptitudes of some students than English literature, is justified by the interest shown by students and the level of success gained in examinations.

English literature

The overall provision in English literature is **good**.

Strengths

- Teaching is good overall; lessons are well planned to meet higher attaining students' needs.
- Year 12 students' attitudes to the course are very good.

Areas for improvement

- Some students have been recruited to the course without the necessary experience and enjoyment of reading.
- Students with limited literary experience do not have sufficient opportunity or confidence to discuss and consolidate their understanding.

250. Results in GCE A-level examinations have fluctuated over the last four years, but have been in line with students' prior attainment. In 2001 they were well below the national average, but improved to be close to the national average in 2002. When compared to students' earlier attainment, and their limited literary experience, these results show satisfactory achievement.

251. The observation of work during the inspection shows that standards are improving, and the work of students in Year 12 is in line with the national average. The Year 13 group is small, and half of the students originally recruited have left the course. The remaining higher attainers have made good progress. They have developed a good knowledge of the examination texts so that they can quickly illustrate the points they make in discussion. They have developed good research skills, and they have a clear grasp of the genres they are studying so they can, for example, identify classical references in a poem by Keats, and explain what they reveal about the poet's intention. They are confident and self-assured, and their mature understanding enables them to develop a clear personal view of the works. This was clear when they discussed an unusual view of trench life, put forward by a military historian at a recent conference. Those with more limited experience before they started the course are less motivated to explore the texts which were written in a language of another period, and within a different social context. This has undermined their motivation generally, so that they do not always complete homework or take part in extra activities designed to enhance their understanding and so are less well equipped to take their part in class discussion.
252. The recently recruited Year 12 group is larger, with more students who genuinely enjoy literature and study. Consequently they are progressing more quickly. They are responsive in discussion, well informed, and already developing an independent view of the texts ranging from Shakespearean comedy to a modern parody of a modern science fiction novel. They have moved beyond the initial understanding of complex text, and can identify and comment perceptively on themes, which require them to trace a range of allusions to other writers. They are developing effective close reading skills, and despite somewhat colloquial expression, they show their commitment and enthusiasm in informed debate.
253. The teaching of A-level English literature is good. Teachers know their subject very well, and plan meticulously. They mark work effectively, with detailed and helpful comments, which show students what they are doing well, and indicate areas for improvement. They help students to develop skills of note making and formal essay writing, by modelling appropriate techniques. However, they do not subsequently provide regular structured opportunities for lower attainers to use these skills. As a result, some students do not record the understanding that they develop in a well-planned discussion, and the learning is not effectively consolidated. In the best lessons students maintain a brisk pace throughout – starting with a brief and lively activity to set the tone. Teachers refer constantly to the assessment objectives so that students know what they are trying to achieve. Teachers then ensure that higher attaining students are given sufficient guidance, and access to thoughtfully planned materials that will help them to demonstrate the more sophisticated skills. Teachers are not yet fully effective in enabling lower attainers to articulate their more limited understanding, or to maintain their motivation by frequently achieving success at their own level.
254. Students feel well supported and appreciate the very positive relationships. They appreciate the additions to taught lessons such as a recent conference on literature written in wartime. In particular, they feel that they have been well prepared for the demands of the course during Year 11. They knew what to expect in terms of workload, and they have a clear idea of the breadth of reading that is needed to succeed on the course. This is one feature of the effective leadership and management of the subject. Careful advance planning starts to instil appropriate skills and attitudes before students enter the sixth form. Careful monitoring is reducing the

rate at which students leave the course. Detailed long-term planning is ensuring a coherent and enjoyable experience.