

INSPECTION REPORT

**OSSETT SCHOOL AND SIXTH FORM
COLLEGE**

Ossett

LEA area: Wakefield

Unique reference number: 108276

Headteacher: Mr Martin Shevill

Reporting inspector: Mr David Cox
10297

Dates of inspection: 11th – 14th November 2002

Inspection number: 249649

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of students:	11 – 18
Gender of students:	Mixed
School address:	Ossett School and Sixth Form College Storrs Hill Road Ossett West Yorkshire
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr David Drake
Date of previous inspection:	April 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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10297	D Cox	Registered inspector		What sort of school is it? The school's results and students' achievements. How well are the students taught? How well is the school led and managed? What should the school do to improve further?
19339	S Evasdaughter	Lay inspector		Students' attitudes, values and personal development. How well does the school care for its students? How well does the school work in partnership with its parents?
22411	A Axon	Team inspector	Mathematics	
19596	B Treacy	Team inspector	English language/literature	
4145	C Harrison	Team inspector	Biology Chemistry Special educational needs	
11933	D Driscoll	Team inspector	Information and communication technology Design and technology	How good are the curricular and other opportunities?
15462	C Blakemore	Team inspector	Government and politics	
15208	A Briggs	Team inspector	Music Drama	
22590	R Castle	Team inspector	Geography	
15832	J Vanstone	Team inspector	History	
21975	A King	Team inspector	French Classical civilisation	
2597	C Jackson	Team inspector	Business studies Sociology	

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Ossett School and Sixth Form College is much bigger than most other secondary schools, and is a comprehensive school in Ossett, Wakefield. The school educates students between the ages of 11 and 18. There are 1666 students on roll, which is significantly higher than when the school was last inspected. There are 323 students in the sixth form. The school is very popular with parents and is well over-subscribed. A new headteacher took up post in September 2002. The school is a designated specialist technology college.

The socio-economic circumstance of the students is average, with eligibility for free school meals being 9.2 per cent. The school has a very low proportion of students with English as an additional language. There are no students at an early stage of language acquisition. The vast majority of the students are from white British backgrounds. The attainment of students on entry is average. There are 123 students on the special educational needs register; this is 9.1 per cent of the 11-16 school population, which is below the national average. There are 33 students with statements of special educational need, which is broadly average. Students are on the register mainly for moderate learning difficulties and speech or communication difficulties. There are five students with physical difficulties.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a very good school with a good and improving sixth form. Students' achievements are very good. The school has improved rapidly as a result of the very good leadership provided. Teaching is very good overall and particularly impressive in Years 10 and 11. Students leave with GCSE results that are now well above average and are much better than would usually be expected given students' standards on entry to the school. Students in the sixth form do better than expected and leave with results that are above average. Overall, the school is providing good value for money.

What the school does well

- There is a super ethos in the school. Students have very good attitudes and come to school with a real passion for learning and a will to succeed. This is a school where it is 'cool to learn'.
- Very good teaching in Years 10 and 11 results in students achieving very well and attaining examination results that are much better than would usually be expected given their attainment on entry to the school.
- Very good leadership since the previous inspection has resulted in the school making very good progress.

What could be improved

- The arrangements that the school makes for students with special educational needs are good overall but there are aspects that are not as effective as they could be, notably the arrangements for students in the 'enhancement group' in Year 7.
- Students' achievements in design and technology are poor in the sixth form.

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 very good progress since it was last inspected in April 1997. Examination results at GCSE have shot up and results at post-16 have risen significantly. The quality of teaching has improved, although it was pretty good at the time of the previous inspection. The very good leadership provided by the past and present headteachers and the leadership group has brought about this very good rate of improvement. The school has addressed the key issues from the previous report very well although students still do not receive their entitlement to religious education in the sixth form.

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
	1999	2000	2001	2001
GCSE examinations	B	A	A	A*
A-levels/AS-levels	N/A	N/A	B	

Key	
very high	A*
well above average	A
above average	B
average	C
below average	D
well below average	E

Standards at the end of Year 9 are above average and students do better than expected. Standards are above average in English, mathematics and science. Results in the 2002 national tests were above average in English, mathematics and science when compared with all schools. Results were well above average in science and above average in English and mathematics when compared with similar schools. Results have improved at a similar rate to that seen nationally.

Standards at the end of Year 11 are well above average and students achieve very well. Results at GCSE level were well above average in 2001 and students did much better than expected. Results have risen significantly since the previous inspection and this trend has continued in 2002. In 2001, results were very high compared to similar schools and placed the school in the top five per cent of schools nationally.

By the end of Year 11, standards of literacy and numeracy are well above average. The school's targets for its performance are challenging and the school is successful in meeting these targets.

Standards in Year 13 are above average overall and students do well compared to their standards when they start the sixth form. Standards are now above average in most subjects and are well above average in biology and history. Standards are average in drama and government and politics but well below average in design and technology. Students achieve very well in biology, chemistry, history, sociology and music. They achieve well in all other subjects with the exception of design and technology where achievement is poor.

Results at A-level in 2001 were above average in business studies, music and sociology; average in art and design, biology, chemistry, computer studies, English language, history, mathematics and vocational information technology; below average in English literature and geography; and well below average in drama, graphical applications and vocational business. Overall, students did very well in sociology but did not do as well expected in English language, English literature, geography and history. Results improved significantly in 2002 in English language/literature, geography and history.

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Students' attitudes are very good. The very good attitudes owe much to teachers' consistently upheld expectations that students should always give good attention to their learning.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Students' behaviour is good although the rate of exclusion is relatively high.
Personal development and relationships	Students' personal development is very good in the main school. Students' relationships both with each other and with the adults in the school community are very good.

Attendance	Attendance is well above average.
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Students' personal development in the sixth form is good. In some subjects, however, students do not always show self-motivation and this is an area of students' personal development which could be extended.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

The quality of teaching and learning is good in Years 7 to 9, very good in Years 10 and 11 and good in the sixth form. Students learn much more than is usually expected.

The difference between the good teaching in Years 7 to 9 and the very good teaching in Years 10 and 11 is the sheer urgency that teachers put into their lessons. Lessons are better structured and teachers use deadlines for the completion of examination work to spur on students. A significant strength of the teaching in Years 10 and 11 is the vast amount of work that students are expected to do in lessons, and also outside of normal lesson times. Throughout the main school, it is the consistency of the good teaching that students receive that enables them to make good progress in lessons and achieve very well overall. Teachers set demanding targets for students and the students respond by working hard. Teachers have very good strategies to manage the behaviour of students and consequently relationships between staff and students are very good. Most teachers play a good part in developing students' skills in reading, writing and everyday mathematics. Teachers are not always fully aware of the needs of all students, particularly those with special educational needs.

Teaching is good in the sixth form. Many of the characteristics found in the teaching in the main school are also evident in the sixth form. Students respond to the good teaching by working hard. When teaching is less effective, opportunities are missed for setting tasks that would require students to read more widely and to become more independent learners. In design and technology, teaching is poor. Teachers do not have a good enough idea of what is expected at A-level and so set their targets too low.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The school provides a good curriculum for its students. There is very good extra-curricular provision. There is a good choice of A-level courses for sixth form students.
Provision for students with special educational needs	The arrangements that the school makes for students with special educational needs are good overall but there are aspects that are not as effective as they could be, notably the arrangements for students in the 'enhancement group' in Year 7.
Provision for students with English as an additional language	The school makes no special provision although the curriculum meets the needs of students with English as an additional language well.
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual,	The school's provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good overall and underpins the school's ethos.

moral, social and cultural development	
How well the school cares for its students	Good attention is paid to students' welfare and personal guidance.

The range of vocational courses on offer in the sixth form is narrow and does not allow a suitable route for students to progress from some of the vocational subjects they study in the main school. The sixth form curriculum does not meet fully the requirements for religious education. The school has good links with parents although written reports to parents do not state clearly enough what it is that students need to do to improve.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The quality of leadership and management of the school is very good overall. The very good leadership and management provided by the past and present headteachers and the leadership group have resulted in very good progress being made.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors support the headteacher well. They have a very good understanding of the school's work.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good. The school has good systems in place to monitor and evaluate its performance although middle managers are not involved enough.
The strategic use of resources	Good use has been made of funds from the technology college status; significant improvements have been made in information and communication technology. The principles of best value are applied well.

The school has a very good match of teachers and support staff to the demands of the curriculum. There are just enough resources although resources in the library are rather limited. The school has enough accommodation. The leadership and management of the sixth form are very good. The school does not always seek the views of parents sufficiently.

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 very good standard of teaching. The very good results that students achieve. The good care that students receive. The way the school is managed. The extra-curricular activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents are not always kept well informed about progress. The school does not always work closely enough with parents.

Inspectors agree with all the positive comments made by parents. Parents are justified to some extent about how well they are kept informed because, although annual reports have improved in some important ways since the previous inspection, they do not always inform a student on how to improve. Generally the school works well with parents although it does not always consult with them about school policies.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form is larger than that found in most other schools. There are currently 177 female and 146 male students in the sixth form. The students come from a wide range of backgrounds that are very similar to those of the main school; one-third of students join the sixth form from other schools. Overall standards of attainment on entry to the sixth form are average but improving. The school provides a wide range of two-year courses leading to A-level, and a smaller number of vocational qualifications.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The sixth form provides a good education where the needs of all students are met well. Teaching is good and students learn well so they leave with results that are better than those expected when they started the courses. Good progress has been made since the previous inspection; standards and results have improved significantly as a result of very good leadership and management. The cost effectiveness is good.

Strengths

- Teaching is good, so students learn well and leave with better than expected examination results.
- The very good leadership provided by the head of sixth form and high level of teamwork ensure that emerging problems are sorted out very quickly.
- The teaching in biology, chemistry, history, music and sociology is very good so students achieve very well in these subjects.
- Students enjoy the sixth form and apply themselves diligently to their studies.

What could be improved

- Students' achievements in design and technology are poor in the sixth form.
- Religious education is not provided for all students in the sixth form.
- There are not enough opportunities for students to work on their own and to develop independent learning skills in subjects such as English, mathematics and government and politics.
- Students do not always find that the advice given to them, on what subjects they should study in the sixth form and what possible route they might pursue after school, to be very helpful.

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	Good. Results were average in 2001 and in 2002 there was a significant improvement in results. Students achieve well as a result of good teaching.
Biology	Very good. Results were average in 2001 and much better in 2002. Students achieve very well as a result of very good teaching.
Chemistry	Very good. Results were average in 2001 and much better in 2002. Students achieve very well as a result of very good teaching.
Design and technology	Poor. Results were well below average in 2001 and lower still in 2002.

	Students' achievement is poor as a result of poor teaching.
Business studies	Good. Results were above average in 2001 and were equally as good in 2002. Students achieve well as a result of good teaching.
Information and communication technology	Good. Results were average in 2001 and improved considerably in 2002. Students achieve well as a result of good teaching.
Music	Very good. Results were above average in 2001. Students achieve very well as a result of very good teaching.
Drama	Good. Results were well below average in 2001 but improved significantly in 2002. Students achieve well as a result of good teaching.
Geography	Good. Results were below average in 2001 but improved in 2002. Students achieve well as a result of good teaching.
History	Very good. Results were average in 2001 and were much improved in 2002. Students achieve very well as a result of very good teaching.
Government and politics	Good. There were no results for 2001. Current students achieve well as a result of good teaching.
Classical civilisation	Good. Results were well above average in 2001 and were equally as good in 2002. Students achieve well as a result of good teaching.
Sociology	Very good. Results were above average in 2001 and were equally as good in 2002. Students achieve very well as a result of very good teaching.
English language/literature	Good. Results were average in 2001 in English literature. Results were much improved in the combined course in 2002. Students achieve well as a result of good teaching.
French	Good. There were no results in 2001. Students achieve well as a result of good teaching.

Physics was also sampled. Results at A-level were average and students performed as well as they did in most of their other subjects that they studied. One lesson was observed and teaching was good and students were achieving well.

Art and design was also sampled. A-level results were average and students performed as well as they did in most of their other subjects that they studied. One lesson was observed and teaching was good and students were achieving well.

German was also sampled. A-level results were well above average and students achieved very well. One lesson was observed and teaching was very good and students were achieving very well.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Good. Students feel very well supported at a personal level: they feel there is always someone to turn to and they have trust in and respect for their tutors. They also feel that they were helped to settle well into the sixth form. There is insufficient guidance for those who choose not to go on to higher education.

Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Very good. The head of sixth form has a very good idea of the strengths and weaknesses in provision and how to improve, because the sixth form tutors work well together as a team. As a result, standards are improving. The curriculum is successful in ensuring that students of all levels of attainment can continue their education; however, the range of vocational courses on offer in the sixth form is narrow and does not allow a suitable route for students to progress from some of the vocational subjects they study in the main school.
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STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school helps students to settle well into the sixth form and sixth form work. • Students are taught well and challenged to do their best. • Students are helped and encouraged to study and research topics independently. • Teachers are accessible to help if students have difficulties with their work. • Students enjoy being in the sixth form. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students are not given helpful and constructive advice on what subjects to do in the sixth form. • Students are not well advised by the school and/or careers advisers on what they should do after they leave school.

The inspection team agrees with most of the students' views. However, the inspection team feels more can be done in some subjects to encourage students to become more independent learners.

COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

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

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

There is a super ethos in the school. Students have very good attitudes and come to school with a real passion for learning and a will to succeed. This is a school where it is 'cool to learn'.

1. Students' attitudes are very good and are underpinned by the very good provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, which makes a positive contribution to preparing them for adult life in higher education, employment and the community. Students' relationships both with each other and with the adults in the school community are very good, with a very high level of consideration and co-operation apparent all the time.
2. Consistently high expectations of good and considerate behaviour result in a very pleasant civilised atmosphere in the school. The school's understanding of what is right and wrong feature highly in the school's induction procedure for new students and, by the end of the first half-term, Year 7 students have internalised the standards and expectations of Ossett School. Members of the school staff provide excellent examples of mutual respect and positive relationships and this affects very positively the manner in which students treat each other. Good work by year leaders and form teachers develops a sense of community in which individuals matter. Co-operation between individuals is further developed through opportunities for collaborative work in most subjects.
3. Relationships are very good, because of teachers' firm but fair approach to managing the students and also because students appreciate that teachers want to help them make the best possible progress with their work. This creates an atmosphere where mutual respect flourishes not only between staff and students but also between the students themselves. Individuals readily work together and support each other irrespective of any differences in backgrounds.
4. Sixth form students show very good, responsible attitudes to learning and also to the wider opportunities offered by the school. They are keen to benefit from the choice they have made to enter the sixth form, so they are willing and co-operative in lessons. They all readily mix and work together without regard to differences, such as diverse backgrounds, and form a friendly and harmonious community.
5. Students are very keen to do well. Students openly talk of the opportunities provided by the school and know that doing well at school will prepare them well for adult life. Students are proud of their school and the way that success is celebrated by all. A real strength is the way in which students, particularly boys, find it 'cool to learn' without fear of being labelled a 'swot'.

Very good teaching in Years 10 and 11 results in students achieving very well and attaining examination results that are much better than would usually be expected given their attainment on entry to the school.

6. Teaching is very good in Years 10 and 11. More than eight out of every ten lessons are taught to a good standard and there is a significant amount of very good and excellent teaching. This very good teaching results in students achieving very well during these years. Students enter the school with standards that are average. By the end of Year 11, standards have been improved significantly and are at least well

above average. In 2001, GCSE results were well above average and improved even further in 2002.

7. Lessons provide a very good environment for learning. Students have the confidence to try things out, to attempt a more ambitious answer or to put forward an opinion, secure in the knowledge that the reactions of both teacher and fellow students will be sensitive and supportive. Teachers have high expectations; they work students hard. Students have very well organised workbooks, which provide a very good basis for revision when examinations come around. Students speak of the high level of support they receive during the examination seasons and how well they are prepared for the pressures of examinations.
8. A strength of the teaching is the way in which teachers openly encourage students to ask questions and to seek help if they do not understand a topic. This not only helps to build students' self-confidence but also strengthens the bond between teachers and students.

Very good leadership since the previous inspection has resulted in the school making very good progress.

9. The school has made very good progress since the previous inspection, not least because of the very good leadership that was provided by the previous headteacher and which is being continued by the current headteacher. Standards at GCSE level have improved significantly. The leadership of the school has not shirked its responsibility to provide the best possible education for its students. For example, the science department was found to be under-performing and action was taken. New staff were employed and a new head of department was appointed; the result of these changes has brought about one of the most successful departments in the school.
10. Just over two years ago, a new head of sixth form was appointed. He is providing very good leadership and good progress has been made in a relatively short time. Many of the improvements in the sixth form can be attributed to his appointment.
11. Parents say that the school is always seeking to improve and this is certainly true. This drive to improve is shared by staff and governors; they all know that they should always be asking how standards could be raised. There are many examples of this approach in action. Each year there are 'subject reviews' where heads of departments are questioned in detail about the examination results in their subjects.
12. The headteacher is held accountable by the governing body. Governors have a very good knowledge of the school and are very well informed about standards. Governors are keen for the school to continue to improve. They are well aware of relative weaknesses and what is being done about them. The chair of governors has an excellent knowledge and understanding of the school, of recent developments and of the areas of the school that require improvement.
13. There is a good level of delegation to senior managers in the school. The other members of the senior leadership group share the headteacher's determination to improve; they carry out their roles very well. For example, the standards of students' personal development are expected to be just as high as their academic achievement.

14. High standards are now the norm because of the very good leadership; academic standards in the main school are generally well above average and students' attitudes are very positive.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

The arrangements that the school makes for students with special educational needs are good overall but there are aspects that are not as effective as they could be, notably the arrangements for students in the 'enhancement group' in Year 7.

15. Overall, the school's arrangements for students with special educational needs are good. These students generally receive the support that they need and are enabled to learn at the same rate as other students. The result is that, at the age of 16, almost all students, irrespective of any special needs that they may have, gain at least five GCSE passes at grades A* to G.
16. The major factor, in ensuring that students with special needs learn as well as others, is the quality of the teaching they receive within lessons. In the majority of lessons in the school, teaching for all students is good or better. Teachers know individual students well and generally ensure that students are provided with tasks that are broadly appropriate for them and through which all can learn effectively and make good progress. They provide support where necessary if students struggle with particular activities. When learning support assistants work with individuals or groups of students, they are usually effective in ensuring that everybody can keep up with the lesson. All teachers receive copies of individual educational plans to give them information about students' particular needs and possible strategies that they can use in lessons. These plans provide useful general information but teachers sometimes need more specific guidance about how they can best support individual students within their particular subjects. Some of the targets in the individual education plans are rather vague and general so it is difficult to be sure whether the target has been achieved.
17. A group of nine students in Year 7, all of whom have weak literacy skills, are taught in a separate 'enhancement group' for nine of the subjects on their timetable. This grouping is effective in providing intensive support for students in improving their reading and spelling. There are, however, significant weaknesses in the arrangements for these students. The teaching for several subjects is provided by a teacher who is not a subject specialist and the lesson content and activities are sometimes inappropriate. For example, in a history lesson, the strong emphasis on a topic started in a literacy lesson was inappropriate for Year 7 history. Hence there is no guarantee that students are covering all the aspects of the National Curriculum requirements for these subjects. An additional problem arises, for example in art and design, where students do not have access to the specialist facilities available to other students in the year group. In all the lessons where they are taught as a separate group, irrespective of whether they receive specialist teaching or have access to appropriate facilities, these students are working with a very small number of others, currently all boys, where all the participants have similar difficulties. In these circumstances, students do not receive the stimuli, the chance to see a wider range of students' work or the opportunities for social interaction that would be provided by more contact with a greater number of students of the same age. The ability of these students to cope well in a larger mainstream group, provided they have appropriate support, was amply demonstrated in a mathematics lesson where students enjoyed the three-part lesson and quickly developed an understanding of parallel lines.

18. The school has recently established a 'pathways' unit for a small number of students who have particular problems or are finding it difficult to cope in their ordinary lessons. Students may spend whole days in the unit at first but, for most of them, the aim is gradually to re-introduce them to normal mainstream lessons. The unit provides a secure and supportive environment where students can re-gain the confidence they need or establish more appropriate patterns of behaviour. There are, however, weaknesses in the arrangements and students do not always learn enough while they are in the unit. Some students occupy themselves with low-level tasks such as colouring in or randomly exploring a computer package, rather than tackling real work that requires them to make an effort and learn something new about the particular subject.

Students' achievements in design and technology are poor in the sixth form.

19. In design and technology, results in the 2001 A-level examinations were well below average and were lower than those in 2000. Results in 2002 were even lower and students do not perform as well as they do in other subjects. The standards of students' work currently in Years 12 and 13 are well below average and students' achievements are poor.
20. Teaching is poor because teachers do not have a good enough idea of what is expected at A-level and so set their targets too low. As a result, students are not working hard enough and not putting in enough time and effort outside of lessons. The subject has been managed unsatisfactorily, resulting in falling standards and examination results. However, things are now improving somewhat under the new head of department. On arrival, the head of department's priority was to improve standards in the main school and in this he has been extremely successful. Nevertheless, this meant spending less effort on developing the sixth form.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

21. To improve further the quality of education provided and students' standards, the management of the school should:

Improve the curriculum for the students in the Year 7 'enhancement group' by:

- ensuring that this group of students is better integrated into the life of the school;
- ensuring that this group of students has better access to more specialist teaching;
- ensuring that all teachers are fully aware of the specific needs of all students with special educational needs.

(Paragraphs: 16 and 17)

Improve the standards attained by students in the sixth form in design and technology by:

- improving the quality of teaching by ensuring teachers have a greater understanding of the demands of the A-level course;
- setting more demanding work for students.

(Paragraphs: 19, 20, 24, 25, 34, 84, 85 and 86)

Sixth form

- Provide religious education for all students in the sixth form. (Paragraph: 35)
- Provide more opportunities for students to work on their own and to develop independent learning skills in subjects such as English, mathematics and government and politics. (Paragraphs: 29, 33, 60, 62, 127 and 149)
- Provide students with better advice on what subjects they should study in the sixth form and what possible route they might pursue after school. (Paragraph 44)

Minor weaknesses

- When funds become available, improve the quality and quantity of resources in the library.
- Seek ways of providing better continuity for students taking vocational courses from Year 11 into the sixth form.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 - 11	49
	Sixth form	66
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		58

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 7 - 11							
Number	2	11	22	12	1	1	0
Percentage	4	22	45	24	2	2	0
Sixth form							
Number	3	24	29	8	1	1	0
Percentage	5	36	44	12	2	2	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1343	323
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	124	0

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	32	1
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	122	1

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	4

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	10
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	43

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	6.1
National comparative data	8.1

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.8
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)

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2001	129	139	268

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	98	87	92
	Girls	122	95	85
	Total	220	182	177
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	82 (75)	68 (68)	66 (66)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	43 (35)	45 (40)	33 (25)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	92	87	94
	Girls	118	96	98
	Total	210	183	192
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	79 (71)	69 (69)	72 (72)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	40 (33)	46 (38)	33 (25)
	National	31 (31)	42 (39)	33 (29)

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	104	130	234

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	57	104	104
	Girls	95	130	130
	Total	152	234	234
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	65 (57)	100 (100)	100 (100)
	National	48 (47)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	50.8
	National	39.0

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

Vocational qualifications	Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	0
	National	N/A

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	70	54	124
	Average point score per candidate	15.7	18.1	16.9
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	18.0	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	57	53	110	1	0	1
	Average point score per candidate	15.9	18.5	17.1	8	0	8
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.7	17.4	9	11	10

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

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	1640	173	0
White – Irish	0	0	0
White – any other White background	1	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	0	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Indian	7	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	6	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	0	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	2	0	0
Black or Black British – African	0	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	3	0	0
Chinese	2	0	0
Any other ethnic group	5	0	0

No ethnic group recorded

0

0

0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	98.24
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.0

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	22
Total aggregate hours worked per week	613

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	73.0
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	25.9
Key Stage 4	22.8

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2001/2002
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	£
Total income	4452550
Total expenditure	4384175
Expenditure per pupil	2768
Balance brought forward from previous year	-27460
Balance carried forward to next year	40915

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	15
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	23

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	0
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	1666
Number of questionnaires returned	439

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	37	54	6	1	0
My child is making good progress in school.	43	49	3	0	4
Behaviour in the school is good.	39	50	4	1	5
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	28	54	12	2	2
The teaching is good.	39	54	2	0	4
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	25	45	16	5	8
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	47	41	6	2	3
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	65	32	2	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	27	43	16	5	8
The school is well led and managed.	41	46	3	1	8
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	41	49	5	1	5
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	33	48	5	1	12

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

22. Students do well in the sixth form. The students who left at the end of Year 13 in 2001 did so with above average results, despite joining the sixth form with average standards. The current Year 13 were broadly average, in terms of standards of attainment, when they joined the sixth form and they are doing well so their standards are now above average. Their good progress reflects the good teaching they receive in the sixth form. There is no significant difference in the performance of males and females or students from different ethnic backgrounds. Results in 2002 were an improvement on the 2001 results.
23. Most students follow AS and A-level courses and do well. The school has a relatively low proportion of students in the sixth form with special educational needs. These students study a range of subjects and do well, because the courses are suited to their needs and they receive lots of good quality support from teachers and assistants. Some of these students return to Year 12 to start advanced level courses after completing intermediate level courses the previous year.
24. Standards are now above average in most subjects and are well above average in biology and history. Standards are average in drama and government and politics but well below average in design and technology. Students achieve very well in sociology, biology, chemistry, music and history. In all other subjects that were inspected they achieve well with the exception of design and technology where achievement is poor.
25. The reasons for the different rates of progress made on the different courses are usually directly linked to the quality of teaching. So, for example, the teaching on the chemistry course is very good so progress is much better than expected, while in design and technology both teaching and progress are poor. In design and technology, the coursework is of a similar standard to good GCSE level work rather than the standards expected for A-level. Most aspects of the work lack any real depth or detail. Teachers do not have a good enough idea of what is expected at A-level and so set their targets too low.
26. Good progress has been made since the college was last inspected, particularly in the last two years. Results are now higher and students are achieving well.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

27. On the whole students have very positive attitudes to the school. They enjoy the sixth form and apply themselves diligently to their studies. They are generally punctual to lessons and tutorial sessions and their maturity and good sense is demonstrated by the appropriate questions they ask in lessons and the commitment with which they approach their studies and want to find out what they need to do in order to improve their work. Students have very good working relationships with each other and with their tutors. In a music lesson, for example, students demonstrated these very good relationships in the way in which they were so openly appreciative of the work of their peers and the way they valued the opinions of others on the music they were reviewing. Sixth form students set a very good example to younger students in the

school. Their attendance has decreased slightly over the past year but still remains high in comparison to other schools.

28. Students' attitudes to learning are also very good. In an exciting lesson in information technology, where Year 12 students were working on developing a 'smart card' for school dinners, the challenge offered by the teacher; the exciting way in which this topic was taught and the inspiration transmitted from the teacher meant that all students were totally involved. Occasionally, when lessons are not sufficiently interesting or stimulating, a minority of students' behaviour does not come up to this more usual high standard, as in a design and technology lesson where the work was too simple, or as in a lesson on government and politics where they did not become sufficiently involved in the lesson. Part of this lesson in government and politics involved tasks which were insufficiently challenging at AS-level, for example copying information, and consequently some students switched off and few became engaged with the topic. The result was that when students were asked to discuss the issues in small groups or as a class this was not successful as few made appropriate contributions to either agree with or challenge the point of view put forward.
29. Students' personal development is good. Students are mature and articulate in their communications with adults and each other. They can respond extremely well when opportunities are presented for them to work independently. An example of this is when some information technology students in Year 12 were set some research for a project. The class went to remarkable lengths to research the topic, above and beyond what might normally be expected. Students do not, however, always show this degree of self-motivation and this is an area of students' personal development which could be extended.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

30. Teaching is good overall and as a result the students learn well and make good progress. When teaching is most effective, the teacher possesses very good subject knowledge. This was seen in a Year 12 English lesson in which transcripts of dialogue were examined. The teacher led the students through the text with considerable verve and insight, probing them to look more deeply, to draw parallels with earlier work they had covered and taking every opportunity to introduce new concepts and technical terms. Students enjoyed the intellectual challenge of the work, concentrated closely and knew they were making rapid progress.
31. Teachers mostly manage their classes very well with strategies that interest and challenge students in lessons. In these situations students respond well to the demands made on them; they participate fully in class and learning is very good.
32. Most teachers have an easy and confident manner, with which they interact with students in lessons, using telling questions to establish the degree to which students have understood the topic. Written work is marked well and students know how well they are doing, and the regular monitoring of progress helps maintain their effort and ensure most achieve well in the subject.
33. In subjects where the teaching is not as good, students are far more passive in lessons. They sit quietly, do as they are told and take relevant notes, but the teacher does not involve them, preferring instead to adopt a lecturing style which students do not like. This lecturing approach also has the drawback that it does not prepare students for later life in terms of equipping them with the skills of debate, enquiry and research.

34. In design and technology, teaching is poor because teachers do not have a good enough idea of what is expected at A-level and so set their targets too low. This is demonstrated in the marking, where work of a very mediocre standard is described as 'excellent'. Too little is expected of students either in terms of the depth or amount of their work. As a result, students are not working hard enough and not putting in enough time and effort outside lessons.

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

35. The curriculum is good. In general the school goes to great lengths to ensure that the courses available in the sixth form meet the needs of their students. They do this by providing an exceptional range of subjects at AS and A-level and providing great flexibility in the way that students can combine courses to meet their particular requirements. Some, for example, will study four subjects to AS-level in Year 12, while others will study three plus general studies. Other students follow a good course in the key skills of communication and information technology in order to improve their basic skills, so they make better progress in their other subjects. Courses other than AS and A-level are available, such as the provision to retake some important GCSE subjects. The subjects on offer at AS-level and beyond include some unusual ones such as archaeology and classical civilisation, but the requirement to teach religious education to all students is not met.
36. The range of vocational courses is narrow and does not allow a suitable route for students to progress from some of the vocational subjects they study in the main school. Where such courses are available, as in information and communication technology for example, they are very popular. Courses in other vocational subjects are available in the locality, so the school has ensured that students do have appropriate options to consider, but the students concerned prefer to stay at the school and study different subjects instead. The school has plans to introduce a wider range of vocational subjects in order that students can continue to study the subject of their choice at their preferred institution.
37. The school provides very good opportunities for students' personal development. Students experience a wide range of activities, which contributes to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. However, the most important influences on students within the school are the very positive atmosphere for learning and the support and individual attention that students receive from their teachers. Students are expected to be responsible and to work hard. They receive much encouragement and specific advice in order to help them develop self-knowledge and personal organisation. Students have individual interviews with tutors in their morning registration times. These interviews are carefully planned and provide, for example, detailed advice on how the particular student can manage their time effectively, taking into account the problems that many students face in trying to balance study, part-time work and leisure activities.
38. When students are provided with opportunities for reflection and spiritual awareness, they respond very well. Students observed the minute's silence on Armistice Day with genuine respect and thoughtfulness. Their assembly in the same week challenged them to consider the importance of traditions and the necessity to question their value and relevance; students could recall the strong message of the assembly much later in the week. Nevertheless, students indicate that most assemblies, although informative and interesting, have only limited spiritual content and few opportunities to

reflect on matters beyond everyday experience. Similarly, some such opportunities that occur within lessons are not exploited fully.

39. The school provides very good opportunities for social and moral development and for the aspects of cultural development that relate to music, drama and the arts. The very good range of enrichment and extra-curricular activities plays an important part in the life of the sixth form and provides ample opportunity for students to work in teams and to gain new experience and understanding. Several subjects include demanding considerations of difficult issues: the impact of HIV/AIDS in various countries, the 'cash for questions' issue in parliament and rights and responsibilities in the care of young people. The sixth form council makes sensible suggestions, for example about the wording of notices around the school, and the school's management team responds quickly.
40. Displays in corridors challenge stereotypes and encourage students to re-consider any pre-conceptions or negative images. However, the school acknowledges that it does not yet provide enough opportunities for students to develop an understanding and appreciation of the rich variety of cultures represented in Britain today.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

Assessment

41. Procedures for assessing students' attainment are good. There are major strengths in subjects such as chemistry, biology and history, with weaknesses only in design and technology where grades are too generous. The available information is used well to monitor and support students' progress. This is a consequence of a very good and effective tutorial system, which operates on a fortnightly timetable during time allocated for sixth form registration. The individual tutorial system enables very good support and help, which challenges and extends students. The tutorial system is the main tool for tracking students' progress through the sixth form. Their overall performance in GCSE examinations is used to set 'minimum target grades' for AS and A-levels; however, the baseline is overall performance rather than performance in specific subjects related to those they are taking in the sixth form. Students themselves appreciate the opportunity to be involved in setting their own targets and planning their own progress, saying that it helps them focus on what they need to do to meet their aspirations.
42. The head of sixth form and subject leaders work closely with each other in order to track and support students' academic progress. The assessment system has evolved over the last two years and as a consequence examination results and standards are improving. Since the previous inspection good progress has been made in assessment.

Advice, support and guidance

43. Overall, parents are kept well informed about how their children are progressing in their studies in the sixth form. They receive two interim written reports and a full annual report and there is good attendance at Parents' Meetings. Most written reports to parents do not state clearly enough what it is that students need to do to improve, for example what specific areas of their work would need to improve in order for their work to meet the requirements for the next higher grade, though there are notable exceptions to this, for example sociology and English.

44. The school makes good arrangements for the health and safety of students, there is a counsellor available for students who are going through difficult times and the premises manager and his staff take great care to ensure that the extensive and multi-level school buildings are as safe as possible. Appropriate risk assessments are made and acted upon but there is a need to review provision for first aid. Only one member of staff has had recent training in this. Students feel very well supported at a personal level; they feel there is always someone to turn to and they have trust in and respect for their tutors. They also feel that they were helped to settle well into the sixth form. A significant number of students do not find that the advice given to them on what subjects they should study in the sixth form and what possible route they might pursue after school to be very helpful. Students feel that each subject tries to sell itself without considering what might be best for the student. They were also of a view that although there was a surfeit of information about Oxbridge and other university options, there was insufficient guidance for those who choose not to go onto higher education.

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

45. Both parents and students hold the school in high esteem.
46. Parents are, on the whole, very pleased with most aspects of school life. They are particularly pleased with the very high expectations that the teachers and school managers have of their children; they also like the good progress their children make, the good behaviour; the fact that children enjoy coming to school and that teaching is good. A significant proportion of them would, however, like to see the school working more closely with them and keeping them better informed about how well their children are making progress.
47. Almost all students enjoy the sixth form and would recommend it to others. They feel that the range of courses available in the sixth form is well suited their talents and aspirations. The school is keen to offer courses which students are interested in and in the past have been careful not to offer courses that are available at local colleges. Key staff meet with students to discuss option combinations and are usually able to meet students' requirements with the exception of dance and drama.
48. The vast majority of students also feel that they are well taught and challenged and the inspection team found ample evidence to support this view. Students are particularly impressed with the sociology department though they also name a range of subjects including mathematics and the sciences as favourites. Students very much appreciate that teachers are available for advice when it is needed and that there are clear points of contact when they need help. They also feel that they are helped to study independently, though they feel that Internet access at school is too slow and they prefer to work on their own computers at home if they have them. Inspectors judge that more could be done to facilitate independent learning.
49. The only concerns expressed by students in significant numbers are to do with the advice they are given to assist them in choosing options that best suit them – advice about the options available after school and the range of activities and enrichments available. Around one third of students felt that there was insufficient advice on options other than higher education. Around one in five did not feel that they were given impartial advice on which subjects to study in the sixth form but, rather, that teachers were keen for the students to study the subjects that they taught. Almost a

third would also like to see improvements in the sorts of activities available for them in the sixth form. The school already provides a plethora of activities including a sixth form debating society and the school has recently consulted with sixth form representatives to ask what they would like the £1,000 raised by parents to be spent on. The school agreed to meet the students' request and buy a portable music centre and hire an aerobics teacher to enrich further the out-of-lesson time that students spend in the sixth form. They are keeping half of the money in reserve to spend once the impact of these new initiatives has been reviewed.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

Leadership and management

50. The leadership and management of the sixth form are very good. The current head of sixth form took up the reins only two years ago. Since that time the sixth form has gone from strength to strength. Central to the head of sixth form's work is a commitment to continuous improvement and to ensuring that all students achieve well. The result of this approach can be seen in the improvements in examination results, the quality of teaching and the very positive attitudes of the students. The school's aims and the values that underpin the work of the sixth form are relevant to the needs of the students and are embedded very well in all aspects of the school's work. There is a very good relationship between the sixth form and the main school. Students in the main school, and in particular students in Years 10 and 11, appreciate the support and guidance provided by the older students.
51. The head of sixth form leads a close knit team of tutors who meet frequently, both formally and informally. This allows any problems to be identified at an early stage and the system of referral from class teacher up to the head of sixth form allows him, and his tutors, to have a very good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in provision. Good use is made of most of the data available on standards. The plans for the improvement of the sixth form are good. The cost effectiveness of the sixth form is good.

Resources

52. Overall, the match of teachers and support staff to the demands of the curriculum is very good. Staff are well deployed in sixth form teaching with very good in-depth knowledge; there is, for example, a wide range of industrial experience, which enhances the teaching in the Salter's science course. Technical staff undertake a valuable role in assisting and supporting the teaching of the curriculum. The secretarial, clerical and site management staff make a positive contribution to the smooth day-to-day running of the school. The school has effective procedures in place for supporting the professional development of teachers. The continuing professional development of teachers is good. There are good induction arrangements through departments for new teachers, for instance, training to use the interactive whiteboard in history and geography. The arrangements for performance management are satisfactory.
53. The school has enough rooms. However, opportunities for independent learning are sometimes restricted by shortcomings in the accommodation. As a result, many sixth form students say that it is easier to work independently at home than in school. The suitability of the music accommodation is unsatisfactory for large group rehearsals and practical activities and there are not enough areas for individual musical study, which restricts opportunities for students' independent learning.

54. While resources overall are satisfactory, it remains the case that the resources needed to foster independent learning are unsatisfactory in English, mathematics and government and politics. The resources in the library are outdated and do not help students to develop independent learning skills.

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

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

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2001.

GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	10	50	62	10	15	0.8	1.5
Physics	1	0	52	0	4	0	0.9
Chemistry	2	50	43	0	5	0.5	0.8
Biology	1	0	52	0	2	0	0.8
Other Social Studies	1	100	74	0	11	1.0	1.5

GCE A level and AVCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	32	100	87	31	43	5.8	5.8
Biology	16	94	88	13	34	5.1	5.2
Chemistry	9	100	90	22	43	5.6	5.9
Physics	8	88	88	25	40	5.0	5.7
Graphical Applications	9	78	88	0	22	2.7	4.7
Business Studies	25	96	92	40	32	5.9	5.5
Business VQ	7	N/a	N/a	N/a	N/a	4.3	10.4
Economics	4	100	89	25	36	6.0	5.5
Computing Studies	32	84	86	25	23	4.7	4.6
Information Technology VQ	10	N/a	N/a	N/a	N/a	9.6	10.0
Art and Design	10	100	96	40	46	6.2	6.6
Drama	7	100	99	14	38	5.4	6.6
Music	5	80	93	40	35	6.0	5.7

GCE A level and AVCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
Classical Studies	1	100	95	100	49	8.0	6.5
Geography	29	79	92	28	38	4.8	5.7
History	20	80	88	35	35	5.5	5.4
Sociology	21	95	86	33	35	6.2	5.3
General Studies	46	98	85	41	30	6.0	4.9
Other Social Studies	21	95	86	33	35	6.2	5.3
English Language	25	92	91	28	30	5.2	5.3
English Literature	9	78	95	33	37	4.9	5.9
Communication Studies	3	100	93	67	31	7.3	5.5
German	3	100	91	67	40	6.7	5.8

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

The focus was on mathematics, biology and chemistry, but physics was also sampled. In physics, in 2001, A-level results were average and students performed as well as they did in most of their other subjects that they studied. One lesson was observed and teaching was good and students were achieving well. The teacher had a good knowledge of the subject and planned a good variety of activities and students responded well.

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- The good teaching leads students to achieving well in A-level mathematics; the good level of knowledge and understanding of the teachers leads to clear exposition and explanation of concepts.
- Good attitudes of students contribute well to their level of commitment to study in year 13.
- The subject is well led and standards are rising.

Areas for improvement

- Students do not have sufficient opportunities to take an active role in lessons, or to ask questions and to search for reasons why something works.
- Students have limited opportunities to develop study skills, to read about topics in preparation for lessons and to undertake their own study, due to a limited range of library resources.

55. In total 52 students study the subject in the sixth form, of whom 16 students are studying it at A-level. Students generally complete the A-level course. The school offers AS and A-level in the three areas of pure mathematics, mechanics and statistics. Students in both Years 12 and 13 have the opportunity to study further mathematics, which includes the study of discrete mathematics. The school also gives students the opportunity to retake their GCSE and there are currently 30 students following that course.
56. In the 2001 examination, results were average in A-level mathematics. In 2002, there was a significant improvement in results and over the last four years results are improving at a rate greater than the national trend. There has been an improvement in results since the previous report. The students' performance in A-level mathematics is in line with their other subjects.
57. In 2001, 28 students were entered to retake their GCSE in mathematics and 50 per cent attained grades A*-C.
58. In the work seen during the inspection the standards that students attain by the end of Year 12 are broadly average and this represents an average level of achievement for those students. Attainment in the statistics module is better than that of the pure module and the mechanics. In pure mathematics, students are beginning to develop good skills in integration and they use this new understanding to calculate areas bounded by a curve and a linear function. In mechanics, students demonstrate a good understanding of Newton's first and second laws and apply them to problems well.

They progress to applying a secure understanding of centre of gravity and centre of mass well when solving problems involving uniform and composite lamina.

59. In the work seen during the inspection, the standards that students attain by the end of Year 13 are above average and this represents a good level of achievement for those students. The students begin the second statistics module and they demonstrate a good understanding and application of the binomial distribution and variance. They progress to applying the Poisson approximation to the binomial distribution accurately. Commendable work was seen in pure mathematics where higher attaining students demonstrated very good integration techniques. They integrate trigonometric functions skilfully using a proficient understanding of trigonometric identities. This prepares them well for more advanced problems.
60. Teaching is good overall and students learn well as a result. Teaching is never less than satisfactory. The best feature of the teaching is the good knowledge and understanding of teachers, of both the AS and the A-level courses. This is used to good effect when questioning the students, and is even evident when the teacher answers questions asked by the students. The teachers' understanding of the subject is such that they can explain principles clearly and use symbols effectively. Subject content is accurate and is planned and prepared effectively. The explanations are clear, so that only one explanation is needed. This also promotes the students' confidence in and respect for their teachers. However, there are missed opportunities to challenge students' thinking and to develop their capacity for independent study and research. Teachers generally plan their lessons well and the better lessons have clear learning objectives. In these lessons, teachers structure the lessons well and keep up a brisk pace. As a result students are motivated and prepared to contribute to the lesson; they showed this when applying a systematic approach to integration. Learning is good because students generally concentrate hard on their work and complete a substantial amount of work. Teaching methods are sound; in the better lessons, students are asked probing questions which develop good thinking skills, for example when students are learning how to find the sum of arithmetic progressions. Students are presented with challenging problems that stimulate them to think hard about mathematical principles and this develops their understanding well. For example, in a statistics lesson, students had the opportunity to consolidate new understanding in stages and then were presented with a challenging problem that combined the features learnt. They tackled this well. This level of questioning and challenge is not always evident. There are instances where the didactic approach makes too little demand on students' initiative and there are missed opportunities to involve students more actively in lessons.
61. Teachers generally provide good guidance to students on the quality of work. The quality of marking is better where the teachers point out where students have made mistakes and indicate what they need to do to improve. This enables teachers to monitor the understanding of students and set targets for further improvement. It also helps students when they revise for examinations. Students often have access to computers both at home and in school and are encouraged to make full use of these resources to support their work in lessons.
62. The students generally have a mature approach to mathematics and are well motivated. Consequently these students put in a high level of intellectual effort and acquire new knowledge expeditiously. Students are attentive in lessons and show a keen interest in the subject, but in a minority of lessons are a little hesitant to answer or ask questions. In the better lessons, the teachers conduct lessons at a stimulating pace, resulting in rapid gains in knowledge, skills and understanding, for example

when students were consolidating their skills in integration. The teacher explained a systematic approach to integration so that students could learn how to identify the most appropriate procedure to use. The pace and well-planned examples enabled students to learn quickly and effectively how to use this method for solving complex integration problems. Students work well, but there need to be more opportunities for students to make extended contributions in discussions involving the whole class. Students are generally alert throughout the lesson and a good level of concentration is maintained. Homework is set regularly. It is used effectively to consolidate and extend new work that is introduced in the lesson.

63. The leadership and management of the subject are good overall, with a clear emphasis on improving standards. The department has made good progress since the previous inspection. The A-level results have improved steadily.

Biology

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

Strengths

- A-level results were average in 2001 and improved significantly in 2002.
- Teaching is enthusiastic and very carefully planned; students respond by working hard in lessons and in their own time.
- Students' files are very well organised and contain detailed notes that provide a valuable resource for further study and revision.
- Leadership and management of the subject are very good and have produced a dramatic improvement in A-level results over the last two years.

Area for improvement

- The department does not make enough use of information and communication technology to support learning.

64. The department offers courses in AS and A-level biology. There are 29 students taking the subject in Year 12, making biology one of the more popular AS subjects in the school. Almost all those who begin the AS course continue to the end of the year and take the examination. Thirteen students are taking biology in Year 13.
65. GCE A-level examination results in 2001 were close to the national average. Of the 16 students following the A-level course, two gained the higher grades A and B. Overall, students gained similar results in biology to their average results across their other subjects. There were equal numbers of male and female students and they gained similar results. Results had improved significantly between 2000 and 2001. Results in 2002 were much better than those in 2001. All students gained pass grades and almost two thirds gained the higher grades A and B. In relation to their GCSE grades when they started the course, most students achieved much better results in 2002 than might have been expected.
66. Standards of work seen during the inspection were well above the national average in the current Year 13 and match those indicated by the 2002 A-level results; this represents very good achievement. Students use specialist terms well and have very good recall of, for example, their earlier work on the structure of the brain. Students' files are exemplary. They are very well organised and contain detailed notes that provide a very secure basis for further study. They also contain many and varied

homework tasks which, even when not entirely correct, show that students have tried hard. Standards of students' investigative coursework broadly match their attainment in other aspects of the subject. Higher attainers make good use of their understanding of principles when evaluating their investigations whereas lower attainers do not always express themselves clearly when writing evaluations. Nevertheless all groups show care and attention to detail in carrying out and writing up their coursework.

67. Overall, students in Year 12 are achieving standards that are broadly average for students at this stage but they are learning well and many are already showing better attainment than expected. Students work well when investigating the amount of enzyme in various substances and most can explain why more oxygen is produced in their experiment when ground liver is used instead of a large piece. However, there are a few students whose subject knowledge from Years 10 and 11 is not as good as expected at AS-level and they are finding it difficult to keep up with the demands of the course.
68. Teaching and learning are very good. The strength of the teaching in this department lies in the quality of the whole experience that teachers provide for students. The three teachers involved in teaching biology at this level all have slightly different teaching styles but all have very secure subject knowledge and enthusiasm for the subject. All expect a great deal from students in terms of effort and organisation and students respond by working hard in lessons and in their independent study time. Students ask when they do not understand and take an active role in the learning process. They enjoy the subject, particularly the practical work, and are very appreciative of the support they receive from teachers, both within lessons and at other times.
69. Teachers provide a good variety of activities, both in individual lessons and over time. The department makes occasional use of CD-ROMs and data-logging equipment but teachers are aware that they do not yet make enough use of information and communication technology to support and enhance learning in biology.
70. A particular strength of teaching is revealed in students' files in Year 12. Students were required to give presentations to the class on aspects of cells and to provide an information sheet for other students to keep. This is a valuable activity enabling students to deepen their understanding by having to explain ideas to others. The activity was, however, made even more important and meaningful by the very detailed feedback sheet completed by the teacher, giving students praise and encouragement and also suggesting how the work could be improved.
71. When teaching is very good, learning is particularly quick and secure. For example, in a Year 13 lesson on the brain, students moved quickly from understanding the basic features of the brain to being able to identify precisely which parts of the brain would be used when undertaking various activities like holding a conversation or watching television. Moreover, there was also an opportunity within the lesson for students to appreciate the wonder of the brain and to consider the fascinating story of the man who survived for some time with a bar through his head.
72. Students are given target grades so that they have an idea of how well they should be doing and they are fully involved in tracking their progress towards this target. The target grades provided for the department lack precision and are sometimes over-ambitious for lower attaining students. The department rightly adjusts the grades, in negotiation with students, to give a more realistic working target. However, more

precise 'official' targets would provide a better basis for measuring the department's success at the end of the course.

73. The leadership and management of the subject are very good. The head of department leads a happy and hard-working team of teachers and technicians who share a strong commitment to ensuring that students achieve the best possible standards. She provides a very good role model for less experienced colleagues.
74. There has been excellent progress in biology since the time of the previous inspection. The improvement in A-level results has been dramatic, rising from well below average at the time of the previous inspection to average in 2001 and improving still further in 2002.

Chemistry

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

Strengths

- A-level results were average in 2001 and much better in 2002.
- Students work hard and do particularly well in investigative coursework.
- Teachers enjoy the subject and provide students with challenging and stimulating activities.
- Very good leadership and management of the subject have resulted in excellent progress since the previous inspection.

Area for improvement

- Numbers of students taking chemistry are lower than expected in a school of this size, particularly in Year 13.

75. The department offers courses in AS and A-level chemistry following the 'Salter's Chemistry' science syllabus. There are 16 students taking the subject in Year 12. Most students who begin the AS course continue to the end of the year and take the examination. Only two students are taking chemistry in Year 13; this is a very low number for a school of this size and is surprising, given the quality of the provision.
76. GCE A-level examination results in 2001 were close to the national average. Of the nine students following the A-level course, two gained the higher grades A and B and all gained pass grades. Overall, students gained similar results in chemistry to their average results across their other subjects. There were only three female students, too few for any meaningful comparison of the results of male and female students. Results were better in 2001 than in any of the three preceding years. The A-level results in 2002 were much better than those in 2001. All students gained pass grades and almost three-quarters gained the higher grades A and B. In relation to their GCSE grades, most students achieved very well in the 2002 A-level examinations.
77. Standards of work seen during the inspection are above the national average in the current Year 12 and Year 13 and this represents very good achievement. Students are especially enthusiastic about practical work and do very well in investigative coursework, particularly in Year 13. Students are working very methodically to find the purity of samples of aspirin and the acidity and hardness of water from various parts of a stream. Investigation reports from last year's Year 13 students are immaculately presented and show thorough understanding of, for example, the limitations of their

experiments. Students in the current sixth form have well-organised files containing detailed notes, along with plenty of homework and tests, all of which have been very carefully marked so that students know what to do to improve.

78. Teaching and learning are very good. One of the strengths of the department is the consistency of teaching quality; teaching in individual lessons is always either good or very good. Teachers enjoy the subject and are very knowledgeable. They expect a great deal of students who, in turn, respond by working hard both in lessons and in their own time. The department places great emphasis on students genuinely learning things for themselves rather than simply being given information, and teachers provide challenging and stimulating learning activities for students. For example, Year 12 were asked to “blend 20 million litres of petrol a year at the lowest possible cost”, given certain requirements and background data. They were first excited and then slightly overwhelmed by the task. However, they battled with the ideas and calculations, asked for help when it was really needed and gradually succeeded in arriving at a suitable blend. They consolidated their understanding of petrol as a fuel and learned much about a ‘real’ chemistry situation.
79. In a very good lesson, the teacher provided a clear, concise explanation of how to decide the oxidation states of the various elements in a compound. She then offered slightly different tasks to students according to how confident they were that they knew exactly how to proceed. Those who were struggling were grouped around her for step-by-step guidance. In this way, each individual student, irrespective of his or her ability, was able to make very good progress with the topic.
80. Students following the chemistry courses appreciate the fact that teachers are always happy to give them extra help outside lessons. In fact, one teacher indicates meaningfully that she “expects visitors” when she is aware that some students will find a piece of homework very demanding.
81. The leadership and management of the subject are very good. The head of department has successfully introduced a course that was new to her and ensured that all teachers are gradually gaining experience in teaching all aspects of the course. There is a strong sense of teamwork among both teachers and technicians and a shared commitment to improvement, backed by impeccable planning and organisation.
82. The department has made excellent progress since the time of the previous inspection. A-level results have improved from well below average at that time to average in 2001, with a further significant improvement in 2002.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

The focus was on design and technology.

Design and technology

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

Strength

- The new head of department has both the vision and expertise to improve the department.

Areas for improvement

- Standards are well below average and students are underachieving badly as a result of poor teaching. Students are not working hard enough or putting in enough time outside of lessons.
- Teachers do not have a good enough idea of the standard expected at A-level.

83. The school offers courses at AS-level and A-level. The current course is product design, but previously students have been following a course in graphical applications. There are around six students following the course through to A-level each year. It is very rare for a student not to complete a course.
84. Results in the 2001 A-level examinations were well below average and were lower than those in 2000. Results in 2002 were lower still and students do not perform as well as they do in other subjects.
85. The standards of students' work currently in Years 12 and 13 are well below average and students' achievements are poor. The coursework is of a similar standard to good GCSE-level work rather than the standards expected for A-level. Most aspects of the work lack any real depth or detail. When researching existing products, for example, students tend to cut pictures out of catalogues and make general comments about their uses, rather than carrying out a detailed analysis of the product. There is too little experimentation to produce the best results. When researching ideas for a desk lamp, for example, the questions are based on impression rather than data, so the question asks "What sort of light level would you like; low, medium or high?" rather than measuring light levels from different sizes of bulb at different distances from the lamp. The amount of work is far too limited. Students in Year 13, for example, are already weeks behind in their final project despite only starting the project in September.
86. Teaching is poor because teachers do not have a good enough idea of what is expected at A-level and so set their targets too low. This is demonstrated in the marking, where work of a very mediocre standard is described as 'excellent'. Too little is expected of students either in terms of the depth or amount of their work. As a result, students are not working hard enough and not putting in enough time and effort outside of lessons. There is no sense of urgency to the work in lessons because targets for completion of work are either too lax or not enforced.
87. The leadership and management of the subject are unsatisfactory, resulting in falling standards and examination results. However, things are now improving somewhat under the new head of department. On arrival, the head of department's priority was to improve standards in the main school and in this he has been extremely successful. Nevertheless, this meant giving less priority to the development of the sixth form. Some improvements were put in place; there is now a scheme of work for other teachers to follow and a development plan for the sixth form. The timetable has been reorganised to allow students full use of workshops when previously they had been available for only one lesson each week. However, the sixth form has been allowed to deteriorate since the last inspection; standards have fallen as the quality of teaching has declined.

BUSINESS

The focus was on business studies.

Business studies

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

Strengths

- Students achieve well because of the good teaching they receive.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and share their enthusiasm for business studies with students.

Areas for improvement

- Not all teachers are using an appropriate variety of teaching strategies within the classroom.
- There is a lack of resources to encourage independent study.

88. The department currently offers courses at AS and A-level GCE; the vocational AS-level [three units]; the vocational A-level [six units]; Intermediate GNVQ [Full Award]; and GCSE business and communication systems for their post-16 students. This provides students with a broad and balanced choice of courses and the school is currently seeking to also develop the 12-unit [Double Award] vocational A-level. Currently 75 students have taken the subject up in Year 12 making a total of 112 sixth form students studying business-related courses. It is a popular sixth form subject. It is very rare for a student not to complete the course. There is a good mix of male and female students.
89. Results in the 2001 A-level were above the national average. Results in 2002 in A-level and AS and GCSE were equally as good. However, in the three- and six-unit Vocational awards, whilst most passed the course, there was a significant proportion of lower grades. In 2001, the last year of the Advanced GNVQ, students achieved results well below the national average.
90. Standards in Year 13 are currently above average and this represents a good level of achievement. Students' knowledge and understanding of topics they have studied earlier are secure. Standards in Year 12 are above average and this represents a good level of achievement given students' attainment on joining the sixth form. They are able to confidently and accurately use a wide range of business terminology; they have a clear understanding of key business concepts. Students apply what they have learned to case studies and the real economy and make good use of real vocational contexts in their assignment work. Students analyse the information that they have collected and are able to draw conclusions and make predictions, rather than just accumulate and present information. Students in both Years 12 and 13 have very good literacy skills and express their understanding clearly and in detail when answering spoken or written questions. Students are able to develop their key skills through the business curriculum. Higher attaining students who follow the graduate certificate have key skills lessons, and build portfolios of evidence. However, the department offers all students the opportunity to collect evidence, and it is then the responsibility of the key skills teachers to assess the evidence.
91. Teaching is good overall and students learn well as a result. One of the best features of the teaching is the secure subject knowledge of teachers. This is used effectively when questioning the students, but is even more evident when the teacher answers questions asked by the students. The teachers' understanding of the subject is such that they can explain principles clearly. Teachers have a genuine enthusiasm for their

subject. Most teachers establish an excellent atmosphere for learning; they inspire students, who respond well to the challenges set for them. In a Year 12 Intermediate GNVQ lesson, students who are currently retaking their GCSEs constructed highly effective *PowerPoint* presentations on aspects of Employment Law, using efficiency techniques, and then applied the legislation to a well-known national company. Teachers make very good use of real business to enable students to understand the practical application of work in class. Teachers use assessment and monitoring procedures well. They make effective comments on students' written work so students know how well they are doing and how they can improve their work. Students are interested in their lessons, concentrate well and work hard. When there are weaknesses in teaching, it is when the teacher does not make the students fully aware of what they are doing and why they are doing it, when anecdotal evidence is discussed without examining the concepts which underlie it, and when teachers are not using an appropriate variety of teaching strategies within the classroom.

92. The leadership and management of the subject are good. The newly appointed head of department leads by example. She is putting secure systems in place and has a commitment to excellence. For many years, Year 12 students have taken part in the Young Enterprise Award. Advisers come in from local and national companies. One member of staff has gained the Young Enterprise Link Teacher Certificate. In 2001 there were 24 students taking part and there was a 100 per cent pass rate with virtually all the students achieving credits or distinctions. Book resources are good but there is a lack of appropriate resources to encourage independent study for students.
93. There were no specific references to business studies in the previous report; hence it is not possible to assess progress since the previous inspection.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

The focus was on information and communication technology.

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

Strengths

- Students achieve well as a result of good teaching.
- Standards are improving as a result of the good leadership provided by the head of department.

Areas for improvement

- Access to the Internet is slow in school, which disadvantages some students.
- Progress is not as good in some lessons when students are allowed to just get on by themselves without the teacher first checking what students need to do.

94. The school offers courses at AS and A-level as well as an advanced vocational course. The courses are very popular and very few students do not finish their course.
95. Results in the 2001 A-level examinations were average and students performed as well as they did in their other subjects. Results have been improving year on year, from well below average in 1998, and this trend continued into 2002 when results improved considerably.

96. The standards of students currently in Years 12 and 13 are above average and students are achieving well. Students have been working on their practical coursework recently, before going on to the theory work. As a result, their practical skills are better than their understanding of theory. All are very competent users of a wide range of software and easily move information between different applications. Students are particularly good at researching for their projects so they have very good information from which to develop their projects. Those on the computing course have a good understanding of how to structure a solution, but they do not always refer back to the analysis of their research in order to target the final product exactly to the requirements of the end user. Those on the vocational course have covered a lot of work in a relatively short period and are particularly good at developing presentations using multimedia.
97. Teaching is good and students learn well as a result. A significant strength is the way that the teachers insist on students working on real-life situations. In Year 12, for example, all students work on a short project based on improving some aspect of the school, such as electronic registration or smart cards for paying in the canteen. This is also a good example of how teachers find interesting ways of teaching concepts that could be boring. With this particular example, students worked in groups to investigate and report back on a particular topic. The teacher's high expectations were enforced by very strict deadlines; all students were working exceptionally hard in order to support the work of their group as a whole. When students work on their own, they make better progress when the teacher starts by checking exactly where they have got to and telling them what they need to do next. In other lessons, students tend to get on with their work, but the support is not as well focused until the teacher gets around to seeing them.
98. The leadership and management of the subject are good. The staff go to great lengths to seek the views of students and then to react to them. The department has made several changes to the curriculum, for example in response to issues raised by the students. Other changes have been made in order to address issues raised by examination results. The order of coursework and theory has been reversed, for example, in order that theory is closer to the written examination so students have the work fresh in their minds. Some resources are now good, in particular the availability of notes for students on the computer network that have been produced by teachers so that they have notes that match the specific work they are doing. This approach also has the advantage that students do not waste valuable time in lessons simply writing down what the teacher says. However, access to the Internet is too slow and some students do not have this facility at home and so are placed at a disadvantage.
99. The improvement in the subject has been good since the school was last inspected. Standards have risen as a result of improved teaching and students are now achieving well.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The focus was on music and drama, but art and design was also sampled. In art and design, in 2001, A-level results were average and students performed as well as they did in most of the other subjects that they studied. One lesson was observed and teaching was good and students were achieving well. The teacher gave good guidance and students responded extremely well.

Music

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

Strengths

- Music provision is effective for all its students because of the excellent leadership and management of the subject.
- Students gain very good musical skills because of the high quality and enthusiastic teaching.
- There are excellent relationships between staff and students.
- Students' performance skills are improved because of the high quality opportunities for extra-curricular musical activities.

Areas for improvement

- The accommodation and areas for individual musical study are not suitable for students' independent learning.
- The number of students studying the subject is relatively low considering its success at GCSE level.

100. The school offers courses in AS and A-level music. In 2001 results at A-level were above the national average. All but one student completed the AS course and continued with the subject into Year 13. It is very rare for a student not to complete a course. Numbers choosing to study the course are low considering the very high take-up of music in Years 10 and 11. However, a large number of sixth form students are involved with extra-curricular musical activities throughout the school.
101. The standards of work seen during the inspection are above average in both Years 12 and 13. Students' achievement is very good considering their wide variation in musical standards when they start the course. Performance standards are high as was demonstrated by one Year 13 girl who skilfully performed a two-part invention by Bach on the piano. Written and theoretical work, though sometimes less impressive than performance skills, shows a good understanding of how to evaluate musical characteristics and styles. Students in Years 12 and 13 have very good speaking and literacy skills and are able to express their views clearly when answering spoken or written questions. They are good independent learners and also work co-operatively in small groups. Performance skills are greatly enhanced by the regular opportunities to take part in high quality ensembles and expert tuition from the visiting instrumental teachers.
102. Students learn very well because the teaching is very good. Through the teachers' carefully structured planning, clear explanations and expert demonstrations, students improve their skills and extend their understanding and appreciation of the music they study. Students respond very positively because lessons are highly organised and very musical. Students are made aware of what they are going to learn and why at the outset and most lessons end with a clear summary to reinforce learning. Teaching is geared to making students aware of, and progressively responsible for, their own learning. Students are provided with very good practical worksheets and a range of well thought out questions. There are excellent relationships between staff and students in all lessons, creating a very good atmosphere for learning. Teachers build students' confidence with effective use of praise as they circulate around the groups to ensure students are working hard during practical sessions. They have high expectations and keep a sharp focus on the skills which students need to master and how they will be assessed, and ensure that tasks are constantly challenging. Teachers are inspirational musicians and use their own skills very well to demonstrate musical concepts to the students. This was expertly demonstrated in a

senior choir rehearsal when the teacher gave excellent guidance by demonstrating the musical qualities she required of the talented singers.

103. The leadership and management are excellent and have resulted in good progress since the last inspection. The staff team are highly skilled and work well together. They are supported well by seven visiting instrumental teachers from the local music service. The school has recently been awarded the highly prestigious status of Artsmark Gold for the variety of high quality creative opportunities it provides for students. The head of music is an inspirational leader and through her clear vision the department has a very positive impact on the ethos of the whole school. The well-produced documentation ensures students make good progress through regular monitoring and target setting. Accommodation is unsatisfactory for large group rehearsals and practical activities and there are not enough areas for individual musical study, which restricts opportunities for students' independent learning.
104. The extra-curricular contribution of music to the enjoyment and achievement of students is excellent. The department provides an invaluable dimension to the cultural and social life of the school. There is a wide range of activities including orchestras, choirs, jazz groups, a staff band and annual musical productions. The subject has a very positive impact on the ethos and atmosphere of the school by fostering students' self-esteem, awareness and respect for others. Many of the groups include members of staff and even school governors. Students are encouraged to use their musical skills throughout the school and willingly undertake support roles. For example, a Year 13 student directs the jazz group, and the lower school recorder group is also organised by two sixth form students. The music department has good links with partner primary schools and enjoys a high profile within the local community. Links with professional music companies and visiting artists are particularly well developed. The orchestra recently appeared at a national festival in the Royal Festival Hall and the choir undertook a successful concert tour of Germany in the summer of 2002.
105. The subject has made good progress since the previous inspection. Standards have improved and teaching is now very good.

Drama

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

Strengths

- Teaching is knowledgeable and enthusiastic and students achieve well as a result.
- Students gain in confidence and learn to work together well in both group and whole class situations.
- Relationships between students and teachers are very good.

Areas for improvement

- Marking is not consistent so students do not always know how well they are doing.
- There is an imbalance between written and practical work which leads to some students not remaining motivated.

106. The department offers courses in AS and A-level drama and theatre studies. In 2001 results at A-level were well below the national average. Numbers choosing to study the course are increasing as the subject grows in popularity. All students have passed the examinations for the last four years. Students' results in drama in 2002 compare favourably with those for other subjects, with male and female students achieving similar standards.

107. The standards of work seen are generally in line with the national picture in both Years 12 and 13. Students achieve well in relation to their ability on entry to the course. During Year 12, students make good progress, rapidly improving their knowledge, skills and understanding of all aspects of drama through a well-planned series of topics and enthusiastic teaching. They enjoy the practical aspects of the subject and are eager to learn. Recently there has been an increased focus on written work because this was identified as a weaker area of the last examination. In discussion, one Year 12 student felt that the emphasis on writing was reducing the amount of practical work and as a result she was beginning to lose interest in the subject. Not all students studied GCSE drama before starting the course. This means that they initially lack confidence in their ability to perform and are not fully used to the need to co-operate in group preparation before presenting a performance. Because the teaching is good and lessons are well planned, students become more confident in sharing ideas, rehearsing how to present them and then showing them to an audience.
108. Year 13 students are good independent learners and work very well together in small groups. They use their very good relationships to bring the best from each other in group work, in taking initiative and responsibility, and in generating original ideas from outlines proposed by the teacher, as was seen when one Year 13 female enthusiastically coached the group in a rhythmical vocal warm-up. They can incorporate powerful imagery into their pieces and have particularly strong skills and understanding of devised theatre. A group of four male students, for example, used the song *So strong* by Labi Siffre as the inspiration to create a piece dealing with racism. They devised a TV game-show format incorporating judge, jury, prosecution and defence to imaginatively portray their ideas and views. They showed less skill, however, in how to use appropriate drama theory and vocabulary in their work. Students with special educational needs make good progress because they are well integrated socially and relish the ways in which practical drama can offer them a different chance to succeed.
109. Overall, students learn well because the teaching is good and on occasions very good. Lessons are well planned and students are keen to get involved in work because of the lively and stimulating way in which teachers use their own knowledge and enthusiasm. Teachers have high expectations and very good relationships with students. In the better lessons there is an active response to challenge and creativity, with close links between enjoyment and hard work. Students are taught to assess their own and others' work and use this evaluation to improve their creative skills. Teacher's individual strengths are used effectively to maintain students' focus and offer a variety of teaching styles. Students learn routines effectively in well-managed warm-up sessions. The way in which teachers give students tasks to explore in groups results in good learning of how to propose ideas, negotiate them, and then develop them using group strengths. Students are given, and value, responsibilities for assisting with lower school lessons.
110. There is good leadership and management of the subject and this has led to good improvement since the previous inspection. More students are choosing the subject as an option for A-level each year. Documentation and schemes of work are well produced and ensure lessons are well planned. The department has strong links with local teacher training courses and regularly involves student teachers in its work. This ensures the staff team have fresh ideas. All students are provided with good quality textbooks to enable them to research the subject. Marking is not consistent and results in some students being confused about the marks given for particular pieces

of work. Accommodation is generally good with a purpose-built drama studio with modern lighting and audio facilities and an interesting range of costumes and props. However, other spaces used for practical work, such as the Year 11 common room, are unsatisfactory.

111. Drama provides a very good range of enrichment performance opportunities, which are enthusiastically supported and appreciated by students and the wider community. In addition to the wide range of activities provided by the college, many students are involved with local theatre groups. Seven Year 13 students represented England in the 'Magic net European Festival' in Germany earlier in the term.

HUMANITIES

The focus was on geography, history, government and politics, classical civilisation and sociology.

Geography

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

Strengths

- Teachers have very good specialist knowledge and high expectations of their students.
- Students have good positive attitudes to the subject and teacher/student relationships are good; both enhance learning.
- The department works well as a team; leadership of the department is good.
- Fieldwork is used well and extends learning.

Areas for improvement

- Students' work needs to be even more closely monitored to ensure sufficient demands are made to improve their examination results.
- The monitoring of teaching takes place within the department; however, regular, consistent and focused observation of teaching is needed to share good practice.

112. The school offers geography at AS-level and A-level and it is very rare for a student not to complete the course. At present 61 students study the subject in the sixth form of whom 18 students are studying it at A-level. A small minority of students retake their AS-level in Year 13. Over the last four years similar numbers of students have studied A-level geography; the percentage of students passing has fluctuated over this period from above average to below average.
113. In 2001 standards in GCE A-level were below average; in 2002 results improved. Students did achieve well in terms of their transition from GCSE work.
114. Standards of work seen in Year 13 are currently above average and this represents a good level of achievement. Students have good, positive attitudes to geography although they find the work challenging. In a Year 13 lesson, for example, students had to analyse data related to different African countries. Higher attaining students coped well with the task but lower attaining students found it difficult and needed extra time to complete density and choropleth maps. Students show a good knowledge of most of the topics that they have studied, such as population differences in more and less economically developed countries, climate and vegetation. They cogently discuss a range of topics. This is well exemplified in a Year 13 lesson where students showed a good knowledge and understanding of the effect of HIV on people in Africa,

USA and Europe and the different impact upon these people. Students in Year 12 are in the early stages of their AS course and the standards they are achieving are above average for students at this stage. This represents a good level of achievement given students' attainment on joining the sixth form. Students make effective use of past work when introduced to a new topic. This was well demonstrated in a Year 12 lesson where students developed work on the Demographic Transition model. They look at the five stages of development and successfully contrast and evaluate development between countries such as Sweden and Ethiopia. The department makes good use of tests to give an early indication to students of the standards of work that are required in geography at this level. Students' files are well organised and their written work is good; the majority of work seen is very well presented, with great care and attention to detail.

115. Teaching is consistently good and students learn quickly as a result. Students appreciate the quality of teaching they receive from all their teachers and indicate that they enjoy the course, though they find some parts difficult. Many students find aspects of physical geography challenging. Teachers have very good subject knowledge; they present information very clearly, which results in students acquiring very good knowledge, skills and understanding. This was well exemplified in two different Year 13 lessons on soil profiles and hurricanes. All teachers are very enthusiastic about the subject and this is conveyed to the students and reflected in their positive attitudes. Fieldwork is good; it successfully supports classroom work. Teaching is usually demanding; most lessons move quickly and students have to concentrate really hard to keep up. For example, students had to track and analyse the impact of two different hurricanes. Students' efforts linked with the teachers' support ensures they successfully plot the path of a hurricane. Very good challenging questions ensure students have good understanding of, for instance, the impact that health education has on population growth. Students work hard in lessons and willingly answer questions. Often the two-way questioning develops into a debate as observed in the Year 13 lesson on population and HIV. Teachers plan their lessons well and lessons have clear objectives, although these are not always shared with the class. Teachers expect students to supplement schoolwork with independent work at home. The scrutiny of work shows that they successfully do this judging from the sheer volume of work students have in their files. Teachers make efficient use of homework time to do routine tasks like drawing graphs and to prepare for future topics. The marking of students' work is good; it indicates where students have made mistakes and what they need to do to improve. Some students use computers in both presentation of work and investigation. Individual tutorials outside curriculum time help to enhance learning.
116. Leadership and management are good. There is a clear commitment by the team to improve standards for all students. A strength is the way the three teachers work together giving clear continuity and progression from the Year 12 course into Year 13. All teachers have a good knowledge of the course structure; changes made to the course for 2002/03 are already impacting positively on standards. Staff are developing high quality materials in some modules for use with the interactive board so raising standards of expectation and presentation. Assessment, monitoring and tracking the progress of students are good. Teachers are observed teaching but this is neither regular nor consistent or with a specific focus. However, regular, consistent and focused observation of teaching is needed to share good practice.
117. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good. Many of the positive features have been maintained. Teaching is now less teacher directed and students are involved in their learning and make better progress.

History

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

Strengths

- Enthusiastic teachers use very good subject knowledge and challenging learning methods to inspire students' interest in, and enjoyment of, the subject.
- Students are highly motivated and work hard to succeed.
- Students' performance is closely monitored and accurately evaluated, and students are very clear about what they must do to improve their grades.
- Results at AS and A-level improved significantly in 2002.

Area for improvement

- A small minority of students do not play a sufficiently active part in class discussions.

118. The school offers courses at AS and A-level. The growing popularity of the courses offered is shown by the yearly increases in the number of students choosing history at AS-level and the high proportion of them who continue with the subject at A-level. It is very rare for a student not to complete a course.
119. The A-level results in 2001 were in line with the national average. Comparisons in this school show that students gained lower grades in history than in most of the other subjects that they took. The results in 2002, however, were much improved. All students gained a pass grade and the proportion of students gaining one of the highest grades, A or B, was high. These compare well with grades gained in other subjects that the students studied. The results in the AS-level examinations show that a high proportion of students gain better grades than was predicted by their prior attainment.
120. The standards of work seen during the inspection are well above average in both Year 12 and Year 13 and students are achieving very well. Students' very good understanding of the knowledge they acquire is evident in the answers of Year 13 students to probing questions asked by teachers in lessons. So, for instance, whilst discussing whether there was any practical alternative foreign policy to appeasement, for the British Government in the 1930s, they clearly appreciated how the Representation of the People Acts passed in the decade after World War I meant that public opinion weighed more heavily on policy makers than ever before. In such discussions a small minority of students hesitate to take chances to voice their opinions. All students undertake an individual research project into a famous leader of their choice and their writing shows that students successfully employ their analytical skills in evaluating the factors that make for greatness. In writing on such contrasting people as Atlee, Churchill, Hitler and Emmeline Pankhurst, students demonstrate the depth of their research and use supporting evidence convincingly to justify their conclusions.
121. In Year 12 also, students produce oral and written work of a very high standard. In a lesson concerned with the difficulties facing the Weimar Government in 1930s Germany, for example, small groups had animated discussions about the relative importance of the variety of issues that undermined democracy. They dealt well with the challenging questions put by the teacher that required them to clearly explain why they held their opinions. The hard work that students undertake is reflected in very full folders that show how effective note-making techniques provide them with a very good knowledge base. The progress they make towards writing very effective essays

is clearly evident over time. An early essay on the Weimar Republic by one student that lacked sufficient supporting evidence was followed by a much more convincing essay accounting for its downfall.

122. Teaching is very good on both courses and it promotes very good learning. The basis of this high quality is the deep knowledge and understanding that teachers have of the subject, and the clarity with which they organise the work to be done. This is evident in the easy and confident manner with which they interact with students in lessons, using telling questions to establish the degree to which students have understood the topic. Very good guidance for students is provided through very high quality study guides, prepared by teachers for each unit of study. That is followed up by marking of work that is thorough and contains clear analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the writing, with helpful suggestions about how to improve. Progress checks take place frequently and require students to undertake self-reviews in preparation for tutorials with teachers, at which student targets are set for the next period of time. The consequent respect that students have for their teachers is displayed in their responses in class, and in the high regard they have for the quality of tuition provided when asked for their views. Students are highly motivated and are very good independent learners.
123. The high standards in the subject are underpinned by the shared commitment of teachers to ongoing improvement. The leadership provided by the acting head of department is very good. He sets clear expectations for high standards of teaching, assessment of students' work, monitoring of students' progress and informed feedback that makes students clear about the quality of their work and what they must do to continue their improvement. In all of these aspects he leads by very good example.
124. The subject has made good progress since the previous inspection. The proportion of students gaining higher grades at A-level has increased and is on an upward trend. The standard of teaching is now very good, and students consistently achieve very good standards in their work.

Government and politics

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

Strengths

- The GCE A-level results in 2002 were higher than is normally seen.
- The arrangements to assess students' attainment and progress are very good and enable them to achieve well on the A-level course.

Area for improvement

- Improve the leadership and management of the subject by clearer development planning and supporting new teachers more.

125. There were no GCE A-level entries in 2001, but results in 2002 were high compared to what is normally seen, particularly at grades A and B. The results are a progressive improvement on those of recent years. It is rare for a student not to complete a course.
126. The standards of work seen in both Year 12 and Year 13 are average. This represents good achievement given their standards of entry to the course. Students have a sound foundation of knowledge required for the AS and A-level courses, such

as the structure and differences between the American and British political systems. They know a wide range of terms and use them in appropriate context to describe and explain the workings of government. In Year 12, for example, most students were able to recall knowledge of terms such as 'legislation' and 'select committee', except for lower attaining students who were confused about the differences between select and standing committees of Parliament. They made little use of examples to show understanding of topics in written work. High attaining students have a good foundation of knowledge; they express themselves well in written work and are confident when developing ideas in discussion. In a Year 13 lesson about the powers of American presidents, for example, they researched information well to debate the 'checks and balances' of the political system and made very good use of examples to argue their position. Other students, however, do not develop ideas enough in discussion because they limit responses to factual answers and do not explain ideas. The work of lower attaining students is reduced because of grammatical weakness. Most students show understanding of the working of political structures through real-world application. In Year 13, for instance, students were able to recall knowledge of many American presidents in order to plot their achievements on a graph, enabling comparison of the relative contributions of each to American and international life.

127. Teaching is good and students learn well as a result. Teachers have very good knowledge of topics and plan their lessons very well. In particular, they regularly consolidate work learned earlier through tests and real-life simulations in class. Consequently students make good progress in the acquisition of knowledge and in linking theoretical study to the democratic processes in America and Britain. In a Year 13 lesson, for example, students researched and debated issues about the power of the president of the USA. They showed maturity in preparing their argument and were competent in challenging the interpretation and views of others. As a result students gained confidence in making speeches and made excellent progress in improving their understanding of the checks and balances that operate in the constitution. In some lessons, however, there is insufficient reference to case studies, such as about the role of political pressure groups in shaping government policy. Consequently students write in abstract terms and answers are insufficiently explained. Teachers do not provide enough opportunities for students to work on their own and develop skills of enquiry and research.
128. Teachers mostly manage their classes effectively with learning strategies that interest and challenge students in lessons. In these situations students respond well to the demands made on them; they participate fully in class and learning is good. Occasionally, however, students are passively involved in learning and the expectation of them in the lessons is too low. This results in reduced concentration and co-operation, and insufficient is learned. Teachers set clear objectives for lessons but do not consistently make enough use of a summary session to assess the gains that students have made. Written work is well marked and students know how well they are doing; the regular monitoring of progress helps maintain their effort and ensure most achieve well in the subject.
129. The leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory. The schemes of work are being revised; they are an improvement on the previous provision and better inform on the planning of work. The arrangements to assess and monitor students' progress are very good and make a significant impact on students' morale in the subject and on the good achievement most students make. The subject improvement plan forms part of the overall planning for history and politics. This is unsatisfactory because it is not clear which aspects refer to the government and politics course, and the responsibilities for monitoring its implementation are not sufficiently clear. The

opportunity for teachers new to the school to engage in information sessions about the work of the school is good, but the monitoring and support of teaching are unsatisfactory. The subject makes a very good contribution to the development of students' social and moral understanding, particularly when learning about 'sleaze' and impropriety in political life. Resources for learning overall are satisfactory but the library resources are poor and make little contribution to learning.

130. There was no report at the last inspection.

Classical civilisation

Overall, the quality of provision in classical civilisation is **good**.

Strengths

- Standards are above average, and in the past two years all students gained A or B grades at A-level.
- The teacher has excellent subject knowledge, and teaching is good.
- The students contribute their ideas very well in lessons, and are developing as independent learners.

Areas for improvement

- There is no explicit planning for the teaching of the subject.
- The accommodation is cramped, which restricts the range of teaching and learning styles which can be employed.

131. The school offers courses at AS and A-level, and because of low numbers opting for the subject, there is sufficient flexibility to adapt the course to an individual student's needs by allowing Year 12 and Year 13 students to opt into modules with a different year group.

132. The grades obtained at A-level are well above average. One student sat the A-level examination in 2001, achieving a pass at grade B. Results in 2002, when the two candidates entered obtained an A and a B grade, indicate that high attainment is being maintained. The numbers of students who take the subject each year are too small to allow reliable comparisons to be made with national examination figures, or with results of other students in similar schools.

133. The standards of work seen during the inspection are above average in both Year 12 and Year 13 and this represents good achievement. The students have good knowledge of the texts they are studying and are able to communicate this knowledge with confidence in lessons. Their understanding of the classical background to the texts is well developed. They make comparisons and point out contrasts with the modern world, and they are able to use relevant technical terms. By Year 13 they have sufficient knowledge and understanding to explore, for example, the significance of the ways in which characters in Greek tragedy behave and react, and they use their knowledge confidently to support their views. This represents good achievement, given that the students have not studied the subject prior to entering Year 12. On the basis of a very limited sample of work made available during the inspection, the students' progress in their written work over the two years of the course is also good. Their work in the very early stages of the course tends to be rather superficial in scope. However, their essays display good knowledge and understanding of the prescribed texts, and some thoughtful comparisons of, for example, ancient Greek with modern Western European drama. By Year 13 the students have learned to write with confidence and more depth, competently comparing, for example, the work of

Aeschylus and Euripides, and the way in which each dramatist engages the audience's sympathy for a major character. The students employ a good range of detail and general argument, and their assertions are suitably supported by careful reference to the text, with some good insights into the craft of the dramatist.

134. The teaching is good and brings about good learning. The teacher is enthusiastic about the subject, and has excellent subject knowledge, which enables him to put the topics studied into a wide classical context. This degree of scholarship provides a very rich educational experience for the students. Lessons are carefully structured, although the teacher is experienced enough to allow a promising alternative line of discussion to be pursued which can often open up valuable avenues of debate. The students are challenged to think for themselves: for instance, in one lesson seen, they watched part of a video recording of a Greek tragedy in translation and were asked to deduce different characteristics and conventions of Greek tragedy from what they observed. This approach sustained the students' interest and made the lesson stimulating. The teacher explores ideas with the students and encourages them to reach their own conclusions by asking subtle questions such as "Is it possible that...?" or "Do you think perhaps that....?" which makes the students think hard about the work and reach a balanced interpretation. This is a technique which is very successful in developing the students' intellectual independence, as well as their discussion skills. However, the range of teaching and learning strategies employed by teachers is limited because the accommodation for the subject in a small office with no tables for the students to work at means that it is difficult to teach other than in a tutorial style.
135. The students are very well motivated, show considerable interest, and are capable of independent study. Because of the teacher's high expectations of their involvement in each lesson, and the small numbers in the groups, the students show commitment to their work, and appreciate the need to be up to date in their reading and the importance of contributing their observations to discussion in lessons. They have very positive attitudes to the study of the classical world and its literature and respond well to the academic approach to the work.
136. The subject is managed satisfactorily. The curriculum in classical civilisation offers considerable breadth, not only in terms of literature, history and archaeology, but also the students' wider cultural understanding. The subject makes a very good contribution to the students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. There is, however, no explicit planning for the teaching of the subject, nor for the systematic development of key skills, such as literacy or information and communication technology, or for the planned inclusion of spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects. This lack of a formal scheme of work makes it difficult for the school to monitor the curriculum effectively and to evaluate the overall effectiveness of teaching and learning in the subject. There is, however, a useful and comprehensive course handbook on the school's classics website, which has helpful hyperlinks to guide the students to the wealth of resources in the school and elsewhere, including the Internet.
137. The last inspection report did not report on classical studies in any detail, so it is not possible to comment in any meaningful way on progress since the last inspection.

Sociology

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

Strengths

- The very good teaching leads to students achieving very well.
- The subject is very popular with students, not least because of the very dynamic head of department.
- Students are enthusiastic in their learning and make very good progress in lessons.

Area for improvement

- Improve the consistency of high quality teaching by sharing the very good practice within the department.

138. Sociology is a highly popular subject in the school. There are a total of 135 students following sixth form courses. There are 92 Year 12 students, the vast majority taking the AS course and a few GCSE. Forty-three students are taking the A-level course. This results in there being large teaching groups, but the students following these courses are extremely well supported in their learning and all achieve very well in relation to their prior attainment. It is rare for students not to complete the course.
139. Results in 2001 were above the national average and students achieved very well given their GCSE results on entry to the course. The most recent A-level results in sociology are similar and students achieved very well. In the last few years, results have always been at least in line with the national averages and often better.
140. Students greatly appreciate the quality of teaching and learning that they receive and the systematic way in which learning is consolidated. They appreciate the balance between independent learning and supported learning, the teachers' use of diagrammatic representation of ideas, the challenging pace of working in lessons and their variety. They also speak highly of the way teachers link the work to current events. They appreciate the way in which independent learning and the homework are fully integrated with lessons, so that, as one student put it, "If you don't do the homework, you can't do the lesson."
141. Standards in Year 13 are currently above average and this represents a very good level of achievement. Students have secure knowledge and understanding of the topics currently being studied. Standards in Year 12 are above average and this represents a good level of achievement given students' attainment on joining the sixth form. They already have an understanding of different theoretical traditions and can define and illustrate key concepts by reference to contemporary society. They are developing advanced critical skills. They shrewdly question whether or not everyday assumptions and stereotypes are supported by evidence. Whilst Year 12 students are beginning to express themselves clearly when evaluating their findings, Year 13 students demonstrate higher level speaking and listening skills. Students talk enthusiastically and in a confident and knowledgeable manner about the evidence in their files. Year 13 students have a sound understanding of the theoretical foundations of the subject. In an A-level lesson on secularisation and televangelism, students demonstrated a thorough comprehension of secularisation, arguing the pros and cons, and then began brainstorming the features of televangelism. They demonstrated highly developed, evaluative skills as they argued that this could be a way for religion to be revitalised, but that this did not represent a growth in the popularity of religion.
142. Students are able to describe in detail the findings of both quantitative and qualitative research. They plan their work thoroughly, demonstrating that they appreciate how to relate their enquiries to previous research and they have an assured knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the methodologies that they plan to use. They are highly

competent in the collection of data and are well used to analysing their findings and coming to conclusions warranted by their evidence. Students are confident, thoughtful and perceptive.

143. The teaching of sociology is very good and brings about very good learning although occasionally it is inconsistent. The breadth and depth of the teachers' understanding of the subject enable them to give clear explanations of concepts, theories and principles. They are particularly skilled in making use of contemporary events for illustration. They use successful methods in their teaching and these result in effective learning. Over a period of time, lesson plans and students' work demonstrate that the range of methods used is varied and students are able to develop different ways of working. Teachers make particularly good use of questioning as the lesson goes along to ensure that students fully understand what they have been taught so far. Assessment is very well organised. Teachers make very effective comments on students' written work so that they know how well they are doing and how to further improve their work. Students respond by working hard; their notes are detailed and their files well organised, providing a valuable basis for further study and revision. Students find the marking of essays very constructive and well supplemented by oral comments which very much help them in target setting and improving their work.
144. The leadership and management of the department are very good. The head of the department ensures very clear educational direction for the subject. An enthusiastic and gifted teacher, he leads by example.
145. There were no specific references to sociology in the previous report hence it is not possible to assess progress since the previous inspection.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus was on English language and literature and French but German was also sampled. In German, in 2001, A-level results were well above average and students achieved very well. One lesson was observed and teaching was very good and students were achieving very well. The teacher had a very good knowledge of the subject and planned a good variety of activities and students responded very well.

English language and literature

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

Strengths

- Standards currently being attained are above the national expectation for the course.
- The quality of teaching is good and leads to students achieving well.
- Leadership and management of the department are good.
- The department is responsive to students' needs and stated preferences and so offers a range of complementary subjects.

Areas for improvement

- Many students are not as independent in advancing their own learning as might be expected.
- The resources provided to support independent learning are unsatisfactory.

146. In 2001, results in A-level English literature were below the national average. These results were consistent with those obtained by students since 1998, being either in

line with the national average or below it. In 2002, students did not prepare for English literature; instead they studied a course which combined English language and literature. The examination results obtained in the new subject were substantially better than those obtained in English literature in recent years.

147. The school offers English literature and language courses at AS and A-level and the subject is a popular choice for A-level. The majority of students who start the course finish it.
148. Evidence gathered during the inspection indicates that attainment in Year 13 is above the national expectation. This places attainment higher than the levels obtained in the 2001 results but in line with those obtained in 2002. The reason for this is that the new course is being taught effectively and has aroused the enthusiasm of students. When their prior attainment is taken into account, students' achievement is good.
149. By the time they reach Year 13 most students are articulate, accustomed to working in groups and ready to advance their own understanding by sharing ideas with teachers and fellow students. This was seen, for example, in a lively Year 13 lesson on *Othello*, in which students examined in close detail how Shakespeare communicates Iago's growing influence upon Othello's state of mind by the way in which he unconsciously adopts some of Iago's speech mannerisms. Most students understand how language skills develop from infancy onwards. They can analyse the different stages in fine detail, as was seen in a Year 12 lesson in which transcripts of the speech of children of 18 months and three years of age were compared. Students understand how language can be analysed in different ways and most are capable of using a wide range of terms referring to linguistic and literary features. However, the extent to which concepts are understood is variable. Lower attainers, for example, tend to equate 'lexis' with 'vocabulary', whereas higher attainers can also give examples of lexical fields and can explain the origins of a sample of words. Even so, all students benefit from being able to use technical terms when they seek to explain the effectiveness of language in the literature they study. Students are mostly enthusiastic about the course and derive satisfaction from seeing their skills develop. Year 12 students, for example, could explain how much more deeply they understood the stories of Edgar Allan Poe than they had when they had read them lower down in the school. Despite this enthusiasm, however, few students read much more than what is essential and few have developed independent learning skills to the extent that might be expected.
150. The quality of teaching and learning is good. When teaching is most effective, the teacher possesses very good subject knowledge. This was seen in a Year 12 lesson in which transcripts of dialogue were examined. The teacher led the students through the text with considerable verve and insight, probing them to look more deeply, to draw parallels with earlier work they had covered and taking every opportunity to introduce new concepts and technical terms. Students enjoyed the intellectual challenge of the work, concentrated closely and knew they were making rapid progress. Students also make rapid progress when teachers skilfully introduce them to new ideas then provide them with opportunities to explore these ideas in groups. This was seen when Year 12 students analysed extracts of dialogue from Iain Banks' *The Wasp Factory*. They were able to explain most convincingly how the linguistic mannerisms of the different participants were used to define relationships. Good pace, variety, and ample opportunities for students to be active ensure that they maintain their interest in the work and grow in confidence. All the marking is satisfactory and some of it is very good. At best it is rigorous, detailed and clear, and specific about what students need to do to improve.

151. When teaching is less effective, opportunities are missed for setting tasks that would require students to read more widely and to become more independent learners. Such an approach would also help to prepare students more fully for the demands of study at university.
152. The leadership and management of the department are very good. The head of department has played a lead in introducing improved teaching strategies that have led to standards being raised. She and her colleagues have been prepared to introduce new courses that they felt would better meet students' needs and lead them on to greater success. Teamwork is strong and teachers are ready to share their expertise. The department is particularly aware of, and responsive to, what the students themselves would like. An example of this is that English literature has been re-introduced in Year 12 to meet the preferences of a relatively small number of students.
153. Progress since the previous inspection has been good. Standards attained by students are higher. It is no longer the case that students' skills in speaking and listening are limited or that they could sit through a whole lesson and have nothing to say. Now they are mostly articulate and confident. The quality of teaching has improved. While resources overall have improved from being unsatisfactory to being satisfactory, it remains the case that the resources needed to foster independent learning are unsatisfactory.

French

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

Strengths

- Teachers speak French well and have very good subject knowledge.
- Students are motivated and well involved in lessons, and participate very effectively in discussion in French.
- Leadership and management of the department are good and are bringing about significant improvements.

Areas for improvement

- Recruitment to AS and A-level courses is very low.
- Opportunities for visits abroad suitable for sixth form students are limited.

154. The school offers courses at AS and A-level. There are no vocational language modules offered.
155. There were no candidates for A-level French in 2001. Students have been successful in passing the examination over the period 1998-2000, although the proportion of students gaining the highest grades, A or B, is low. Because of the low numbers of students choosing to study the subject, comparison with national results is unreliable, and no clear pattern of trends in results from year to year emerges. In the most recent A-level examination (2002) there were four candidates, one of whom obtained an A grade.
156. The standards of work seen during the inspection are above average, and suggest that the firm management of the department recently put in place is already leading to an improvement in teaching and learning. Students are achieving well. Levels of understanding of spoken and written French are good. The students in Year 12

develop confident speaking skills, although their knowledge of vocabulary is still somewhat restricted, and they make frequent grammatical errors. Fluency in French develops well over the two-year course, so that by Year 13 the students are able to discuss confidently with their teacher, despite occasional errors. For example, in a Year 13 lesson seen, the students commented and argued effectively in French about the relationships, views and motivation of characters in a French literary text. Towards the end of their first term Year 12 students attempt, with some success, to produce more complex writing using a much wider choice of vocabulary and structure than they used at GCSE. They continue to improve, using a good range of more sophisticated language, and their achievement in both speaking and writing by Year 13 is high. By the end of the course, the highest attaining students write confidently and relatively accurately, using a variety of different sentence patterns, and a good range of idiom and tenses.

157. The students have very good attitudes to learning, and are developing independence in their approach to work, largely because their teachers are successfully fostering the expectation that independent learning is important. The students work well on their own and prepare effectively for their lessons. They take it as the norm that they should speak French in lessons, write useful notes in French or in English, and ask questions to clarify their understanding. They are very forthcoming in lessons, and by Year 13 have sufficient confidence and competence in French to contribute effectively to discussion with their teacher and the other students in the group.
158. Teaching is good overall and as a result the students learn well and make good progress. The teachers are fluent speakers of French and have very good knowledge of the literature and themes which form an important part of study at this level. They plan very carefully for their lessons, choosing strategies which ensure that the students are sufficiently well prepared to contribute confidently in French to the lesson. For example, for a Year 12 lesson, the teacher had prepared prompt cards to help the students to conduct conversations in pairs so that they were not at a loss for what to talk about and could concentrate on speaking good French. In a Year 13 lesson on a French novel, the students had been asked to prepare their response to seven key questions beforehand, with the result that they were sufficiently well prepared to confidently join in a lively discussion with the teacher. The teachers conduct their lessons at a brisk pace, and ensure that the work offers plenty of variety and intellectual challenge so that the students concentrate and apply a good level of intellectual effort. Such teaching strategies promote effective learning.
159. The leadership and management of the subject are good. There has been significant management turbulence in recent years, and there was no head of department for a significant period last year. There are now much more sharply focused strategies and policies for the sixth form since the beginning of the current term when an acting head of department was appointed. There is now a very good A-level curriculum in place, supported by a newly compiled scheme of work and well-chosen textbooks. This is having a very positive effect on teamwork in the department and on the quality of the teachers' planning. It is very much to the acting head of department's credit that all this has been accomplished in a matter of weeks. School procedures for monitoring the students' academic performance, analysing the data, and setting appropriate targets, are very good. The department is well equipped with suitable resources for teaching the subject, but the school library, although well stocked with French literary texts, has little to support the students in their topic work, and is under-provided with French dictionaries. The students at present do not have the opportunity of participating in a study visit to a French-speaking country in order to use their French in an authentic setting, and to gain valuable insights in support of their topic work,

since visits abroad have been put on hold until management issues have been resolved.

160. There has been satisfactory progress in French since the time of the last inspection. The recent improvements in the management of the subject mean that the department is well placed to continue to improve.