

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **THE NORTHAMPTON SCHOOL FOR GIRLS**

Northampton

LEA area: Northamptonshire

Unique reference number: 122083

Head teacher: Mrs P Westwood

Reporting inspector: Mr R Palmer

31198

Dates of inspection: 10<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> February 2003

Inspection number: 249661

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Community

Age range of students: 13 to 18

Gender of students: Girls

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Appropriate authority: The Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Mrs J Martin

Date of previous inspection: 10<sup>th</sup> February 1997

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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31198	R. Palmer	Registered inspector	Provision for students in the sixth form	Information about the school The school's results and students' achievements Students' attitudes, values and personal development How well are students taught? What should the school do to improve further?
13786	S Walsh	Lay inspector		How well does the school care for its students? How well does the school work in partnership with parents? How well is the school led and managed?
15406	J Adey	Team inspector	Art and design	
8216	G Binks	Team inspector	English	
3534	A Braithwaite	Team inspector	Physical education	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to students?
7926	J Bowden		Sociology Provision for students with special educational needs Provision for students with English as an additional language	
30545	D Castell	Team inspector	Geography	
4773	P Gilliat	Team inspector	History Religious education	
30892	K Gordon	Team inspector	Mathematics	
18542	G Griffin	Team inspector	Chemistry	
2597	C Jackson	Team inspector	Business studies Health and social care	
15051	L Kauffman	Team inspector	Information and communication technology	
23188	V Maunder	Team inspector	Science Biology	

31850	D Nevens	Team inspector	Music Citizenship	
21806	P Swinnerton	Team inspector	Design and technology	
31160	I Towler-Evans	Team inspector	Drama	
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## **PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT**

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

The Northampton School for Girls is a comprehensive school for girls aged 13 to 18 years. It serves the borough of Northampton. Students come from all of the middle schools in the town. They reflect the very wide social, economic, ethnic and cultural diversity of Northampton. The school is of average size compared with other secondary schools in England. It has 1037 students, compared with 684 students at the time of the previous inspection in 1997. The attainment of students on entry in Year 9 varies from year to year and is usually average overall. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals (about one in eleven) is broadly average. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is higher than that found in most schools. Seven girls are at an early stage of learning English. About one in every eight girls is from an ethnic minority. The proportion of girls with special educational needs, approximately one in every four, is above average. Most of these students have learning or emotional difficulties. The proportion of girls with statements of special educational needs, one in 40, is average. The school is being reorganised to accommodate girls aged 11 to 18 from September 2004.

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

The Northampton School for Girls is a very good school. The very good leadership and management of the head teacher and the very effective support provided by the governors and senior staff are important factors in the school's considerable improvements and successes. Students improve their standards from average when they enter the school in Year 9 to well above average by the end of Year 11. The school provides a very good quality of education for girls of all social and ethnic backgrounds and levels of attainment. Achievement is high because teachers and students have high expectations of each other. Students respond very positively to the good quality of teaching they receive. The school has many strengths and very few weaknesses. It provides good value for money.

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

- Very good leadership and management have resulted in very good improvements.
- GCSE results are well above the national average and represent very good achievement.
- Good teaching and students' very good behaviour and attitudes to work help them to achieve very well.
- The very good quality of care promotes students' all-round development.
- The quality of extra-curricular provision is excellent in music.

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

- Procedures for identifying students with special educational needs are unreliable.
- Provision for citizenship is insufficiently developed because of staff absence.

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

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

Improvement since the previous inspection in 1997 is very good. Leadership and management have improved considerably and are now very good. The head teacher, assisted very well by senior staff, makes a determined and very positive contribution to the school's many successful developments. Accordingly, girls of all social and ethnic backgrounds receive a very good quality of education. Standards have improved substantially. They were below average at the time of the previous inspection and are now well above average at the end of Year 9 and at the end of Year 11. The school exceeded its challenging targets for GCSE results in 2002. Standards in the sixth form have improved well. The quality of teaching throughout the school has improved considerably. In respect of the six key issues identified for action, improvement is very good overall. However, provision for religious education in the sixth form still does not meet statutory requirements. Numbers on roll have increased and the school is oversubscribed. The school has the capacity and the commitment to make further improvements on its current high standards.

## STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	2000	2001	2002	2002
GCSE examinations	A	B	A	A*
A-levels/AS-levels	B	D	†	

**Key**

well above average    A

above average        B

average                C

below average        D

well below average   E

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

Students' attainment improves as they move through Years 9 to 11. It is well above average by the end of Year 11. This is very good achievement. In 2002, results in the National Curriculum tests taken at the end of Year 9 were well above average in English and mathematics and above average in science. In all three subjects they were well above the results attained by schools that have a similar proportion of students entitled to receive free school meals. Overall, these results were in the top five per cent when compared with students' prior attainment in national tests taken at the end of Year 6. Results have been rising faster than the national improvement. Work seen in Year 9 is currently well above average in English, mathematics and science. It indicates very good achievement in all three subjects. Standards by Year 9 are well above average in geography, history and information and communication technology (ICT). They are above average in design and technology, music and religious education, and are average in all other subjects. These standards indicate very good achievement in geography, history and ICT. Achievement is good in all other subjects in Year 9 apart from art and design and citizenship, in which it is satisfactory. Students of all ethnic backgrounds achieve equally very well.

GCSE results are improving at a faster rate than the national improvement. In 2002, the results were, for the second year running, well above the national averages for all students. They were well above the national average for girls. They were in the top five per cent when compared with the results obtained by similar schools. They indicated very high achievement compared with girls' prior attainment in the national tests taken at the end of Year 9. Students of all ethnic backgrounds and levels of attainment, including those with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language, achieved very well in these examinations. The proportion of students attaining five or more grades A\*-C, two in every three students, has doubled since the previous inspection. All students attained one or more GCSE grades A\*-G in 2002. Standards of work seen in Years 10 and 11 are well above average overall. They are currently well above average and indicate very good achievement in English, mathematics, science, design and technology, geography, history, modern foreign languages and music. Standards are above average and indicate good achievement in art and design, religious education and ICT. In physical education and citizenship, standards are average and represent satisfactory achievement. Achievement is very good overall as a result of good teaching, very effective use of assessment and students' very positive attitudes and commitment to work hard.

Attainment on entry to the sixth form is similar to that found in most schools. AS and A-level results in 2002 were above the national average for 2001 and indicated at least satisfactory achievement. Standards of work seen in Years 12 and 13 are currently above average in most subjects.

## STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	<b>Very good.</b> Students enjoy being at school and work hard in lessons. Their very positive attitudes contribute well to their high standards.
Behaviour, in and out of	<b>Very good.</b> Students' very good behaviour in lessons and around the



classrooms	school helps to provide a very good climate for learning. Levels of exclusion of students are below average.
Personal development and relationships	<b>Very good.</b> Relationships between students and staff and among students of all ethnic backgrounds throughout the school are very good and contribute to a friendly, positive and purposeful climate for learning. Students learn to be tolerant and respectful of differing opinions.
Attendance	<b>Very good.</b> Above average attendance makes a positive contribution to students' very good achievement.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

The quality of teaching has improved considerably since the previous inspection and is good overall. Much of the teaching in all years is very good. It is occasionally excellent. A very small amount of unsatisfactory teaching was seen. Throughout Years 9 to 11, teaching is very good in English, geography and history and good in mathematics and science. It is very good in Years 10 and 11 in design and technology, modern foreign languages and music. Teaching is good in other subjects except that it is satisfactory in personal, social and health education and citizenship in Years 9 to 11, in art and design in Year 9 and in physical education in Years 10 and 11. Teaching is effective in meeting the needs of girls of all backgrounds and levels of attainment, including those who are gifted or talented. The teaching of literacy and of numeracy is good across subjects. Effective support for students with special educational needs helps them to make good progress overall. Learning is good or better in most lessons because students want to achieve their best, concentrate very well and show a keen interest in the work. Students co-operate very well with one another and with staff and work quickly to complete the work set. They learn how to work independently and acquire at least good skills, knowledge and understanding in nearly all subjects.

Teaching has many positive features. Teachers manage their classes very well. They use their good expertise in the subject to motivate students and have high expectations for their success. Good planning of lessons helps students quickly to know the purpose and relevance of the work and to carry out a good range of interesting and carefully timed activities. Teachers generally provide work of appropriate levels of difficulty for all students in the class. Students know that they are expected to work hard and do so willingly. Accordingly, in most lessons work is productive and carried out at a good pace. Teachers, particularly in Years 10 and 11, make good use of marking and assessment to show students how to improve their work. In lessons in which teaching was satisfactory rather than good, teachers did not always ensure that students concentrated fully on the tasks set and tended to provide insufficient opportunities for students to think for themselves. In some of these lessons, a few activities went on for too long and reduced the effectiveness of the revision session at the end of the lesson. In the small number of unsatisfactory lessons, the work lacked challenge, the pace was slow and there was an inadequate range of learning activities.

In Years 12 and 13, teaching varies among subjects and is good overall. Teachers have high expectations and make very good use of their expertise in the subject to help students to achieve well. Students' very good attitudes and commitment to work make a very positive contribution to their own learning. Teachers do not use assessment consistently and effectively enough to enhance students' achievement. In lessons which were satisfactory, teachers tended to do too much of the work and did not make students think enough for themselves.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	<b>Good.</b> The broad range of learning experiences meets the needs of all students. Very good provision in music and good provision in drama support the school's aim to become a specialist performing arts school.
Provision for students with special educational needs	<b>Satisfactory.</b> Students on the list of special educational needs make at least good progress in most lessons. However, procedures for the assessment and identification of students for placement on this list are unreliable.
Provision for students with English as an additional language	<b>Good.</b> The few students at an early stage of learning English achieved very well in external examinations in 2002. They make at least good progress in most lessons because teachers set work of suitable difficulty and provide good individual support when needed.
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	<b>Good.</b> Very good provision for moral development and good provision for spiritual, social and cultural development make an important contribution to students' personal development. They acquire mature and responsible attitudes and learn how to tell right from wrong.
How well the school cares for its students	<b>Very good.</b> Staff provide very good care and support. They value all students equally. Appropriate procedures for child protection and for health and safety are in place. Good use of assessment and very effective procedures for monitoring personal development help students to achieve very well.
How well the school works in partnership with parents	<b>Good.</b> Parents have positive views about the school. They receive very good information about the school's work and, particularly, about students' attainment and progress.

## HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the head teacher and other key staff	<b>Very good.</b> The head teacher, with very effective support from senior staff, sets a very clear direction for the school's continuing very good improvement. Very effective management has resulted in substantial improvement in standards and the quality of education provided in recent years. Management in departments has improved greatly and is good overall.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	<b>Very good.</b> Governors are very effective and supportive. They know the school's strengths and areas for development very well. They carry out their duties very well apart from ensuring the provision of a daily act of collective worship and of religious education in the sixth form.
The school's evaluation of its performance	<b>Very good.</b> Governors and senior staff make very good use of examination results and comparative information to check that the school is doing as well as it possibly could. They set very challenging targets for improvement. Very good systems to monitor and improve the quality of teaching and learning are successful in raising standards.
The strategic use of resources	<b>Very good.</b> Financial management is very good. The school makes effective use of its adequate staffing, accommodation and learning resources to support students' learning. The school considers spending decisions carefully to seek best value and to meet its educational priorities.

## PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Girls like school and they make good progress.</li> <li>• Leadership and management are good.</li> <li>• Teaching is good and expectations are very high.</li> <li>• Behaviour is good.</li> <li>• Girls become mature and responsible.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Links between parents and school are not close.</li> <li>• The amount of homework is inappropriate.</li> <li>• Provision for students with special educational needs should be better.</li> </ul>

The inspection's findings strongly support parents' positive views about the school. Inspectors do not agree with the minority of parents who say that the school does not work closely enough with parents. The links between school and home are at least as good as those found in most secondary schools. Inspectors do not agree with those parents who feel that the amounts of homework set are not adequate. Although there is inconsistency in its timing and setting, homework is of suitable amount and good quality to enhance students' learning. It plays an important part in students' very good achievement. Inspectors agree that there are deficiencies in the procedures for identifying students with special educational needs. Provision for these students is now satisfactory and improving and their achievement is at least good overall.

**INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM**

The sixth form is larger than in most other schools and is growing in size. About three out of every five girls in Year 11 continue their studies into Year 12. A few students join the sixth form from other schools. Currently, there are 215 female students and one male student, who is in Year 13. There were 131 students on roll at the time of the previous inspection in 1997. Less than one third of the sixth form is in Year 13. The larger proportion of girls in Year 12 reflects the increased numbers recently in the main school. The composition of the sixth form matches that of the main school in terms of ethnic groupings and students' backgrounds. A small number of students have special educational needs. The proportion of students entitled to free school meals is above average. The school participates in a sixth form cluster arrangement with four other local schools and two nearby colleges of further education. Together, they provide access to a wide range of AS/A-level and vocational courses. Despite the school's well above average GCSE results, students' attainment on entry to Year 12 is broadly average compared with that of sixth forms nationally. This is mainly because the school operates a policy of open access to the sixth form for students of all backgrounds and levels of attainment. Students study AS-level, A-level and vocational courses in Years 12 and 13. All courses of study at the school have suitable requirements for entry.

**HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS**

The sixth form provides an improving and good quality of education that meets well the needs of students of all ethnic backgrounds and levels of attainment. It is cost-effective. Standards of work seen in Years 12 and 13 are above average and indicate good achievement. The few students with special educational needs and the small number for whom English is an additional language receive good support and achieve well. In 2002, results in AS/A-level and vocational examinations improved from the previous year and were above the national averages for 2001. They represent at least satisfactory achievement. Effective systems for monitoring and improving the quality of teaching and learning are helping to raise achievement. Teaching and learning are good overall and in most subjects. Good leadership and management are developing suitable systems for the assessment of students' work and for the provision of support and guidance for students in Years 12 and 13. Students choose from a suitable range of AS-level, A-level and vocational courses.

**Strengths**

- Standards are rising and are above average.
- Students' very positive attitudes to work help them to achieve well.
- Good teaching enables students to make good progress in most lessons.
- Students have open access to a wide range of courses.

**What could be improved**

- The use of assessment to improve standards is inconsistent across subjects.
- The provision for religious education does not meet statutory requirements.
- Inadequate accommodation hinders students' all-round development.

*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.

Subject area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	<b>Good.</b> Effective teaching meets well the needs of students of varying levels of prior attainment. New and good management is helping to raise standards. AS/A-level results have recently been below average and indicated satisfactory achievement.
Chemistry	<b>Satisfactory.</b> Good teaching on the AS-level course helps students in Year 12 to achieve well. A-level results are usually above average. Standards are average in Year 13 currently and teaching is satisfactory. Students often rely too much on the teacher.
Biology	<b>Satisfactory.</b> A/AS-level results have been below average recently. Standards are currently below average in Year 13 and above average in Year 12. Good teaching helps students to achieve well,
Design and technology	<b>Good.</b> Standards are above average and represent good achievement Coursework folios are of high quality. Students' very positive attitudes and the good teaching they receive help them to achieve well, though a few students depend too much on the teacher.
Business studies	<b>Good.</b> AS/A-level results have been below average recently and indicate satisfactory achievement. Results in the AVCE course have been above average and represent good achievement. As a result of good teaching, students are achieving well on all the business courses in Years 12 and 13. Little use is made of industrial links to promote the vocational aspects of business
Information and communication technology	<b>Good.</b> AS/A-level results in ICT have been below average. Standards are currently average overall. Standards on the new AVCE course in ICT are above average and indicate good achievement. Good teaching motivates students to work independently.
Health and social care	<b>Good.</b> Results on the AVCE course are usually average and represent good achievement. Teaching is good. Unsatisfactory attendance hinders the progress of a few students.
Art and design	<b>Good.</b> AS/A-level results are usually average and represent good achievement. Good teaching and students' very positive attitudes ensure good learning.
Drama	<b>Satisfactory.</b> Standards are below average in Year 13 and indicate at least satisfactory achievement. Good teaching helps students to achieve well on the course in Year 12. Students enhance their skills through a very good programme of extra-curricular activities.
History	<b>Good.</b> Standards of work are average. Students' achievement is good. Teaching is good. Students have very positive attitudes to their work. Leadership and management are good.
Sociology	<b>Good.</b> In 2002 A-level results were well above the national average for 2001. Good teaching results in effective learning and good achievement by all groups of students.
English	<b>Very good.</b> A/AS-level results have been well above average recently. Very good teaching helps students to achieve very well. Students' good motivation and very good working relationships with teachers assist their learning.
French	<b>Good.</b> A-level results are average over time. Good teaching, particularly of grammar, helps students to achieve well.

In a few other subjects, work was sampled. In English language and English literature and language, standards observed were average, students had very positive attitudes to work and the quality of teaching and learning was very good overall. In geography, music and physical education, standards

were above average and the teaching observed was very good. In psychology, standards were above average in Year 13 and teaching and learning were good. In general studies, standards were average and the quality of teaching and learning was good. In personal, social and health education the quality of teaching and learning was satisfactory overall and varied from very good to unsatisfactory.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	<b>Satisfactory.</b> A good programme of information and guidance helps students settle easily into the sixth form. For the most part, they follow courses that match their aspirations and capabilities. Accordingly, rates of retention on courses are good. Most students have very good relationships with their form tutors. They receive good support, particularly when experiencing personal problems. Subject teachers provide good support and encouragement to students. The new personal, social and health education course assists students' all-round development well. It is not valued equally well by all students because the quality of teaching on the course varies from very good to unsatisfactory. Students do not have enough access to specialist careers advice. The new computerised system of registration has not worked well and has resulted in inadequate monitoring and recording of attendance. The use of assessment to help students to improve is satisfactory and increasingly effective.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	<b>Good.</b> Effective leadership and management have resulted in good improvements and the provision of a good quality of education for students of all levels of attainment and social and ethnic backgrounds. Students have equal access to the curriculum. The management of the cluster arrangements is satisfactory. The school aims to raise standards to match the very high achievement seen in the rest of the school. Rigorous and effective monitoring of teaching and learning is helping students to achieve well. The school makes good use of its staffing, resources and accommodation to support students' learning. Accommodation is insufficient to enhance students' personal development. The school does not fulfil its statutory responsibility for the provision of religious education and a daily act of collective worship in Years 12 and 13. The governors carry out their responsibilities for the sixth form well. They have good procedures for seeking best value.

## STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Courses suit their aspirations.</li> <li>• Teaching is good and challenges them.</li> <li>• It is easy to discuss things with teachers.</li> <li>• They enjoy the sixth form.</li> <li>• They learn to study independently.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They are not informed well about progress.</li> <li>• Advice about future options is inadequate.</li> <li>• The range of enrichment activities is narrow.</li> <li>• They are not always treated as adults.</li> </ul>

Students' questionnaires and the many discussions that inspectors held with students indicated that the large majority of sixth form students are happy with the work and life of the school. Inspection findings support students' positive views about the school though they judge that, in a few subjects, students do not have enough opportunities to work independently. Inspectors agree with students that they have not always been informed enough about progress and future options. The school has already introduced procedures to improve these aspects. Inspectors disagree with students about the other two points. The range of enrichment activities is satisfactory and contains excellent provision in music. Students are treated as young adults.

## **COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES**

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

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

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

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

1. Standards have improved substantially since the previous inspection in 1997 when they were below average and students underachieved. Standards are now well above average by the end of Year 9 and by the end of Year 11. They indicate very good achievement overall for girls of all ethnic backgrounds.
2. The levels of attainment of girls on entry to the school in Year 9 are average overall. The intake contains students of all levels of attainment but there are fewer girls of the highest levels of attainment than are found in many schools. Standards improve very quickly as students move through Years 9 to 11. Achievement is very good as a result of good teaching, including much that is very good or better, and girls' very positive attitudes to their work and their strong determination to succeed. The very effective use of assessment to set challenging targets and to show students how to improve has helped to raise standards.
3. In 2002, results in the National Curriculum tests taken at the end of Year 9 were well above the national average for all students and well above the national average for girls. They were well above those attained by schools that have a similar proportion of students entitled to free school meals. The results were very high when compared with those predicted from students' previous levels of attainment in the national tests taken at the end of Year 6. Results in English and mathematics were well above the national average. Those in science were above average. Overall, results in the national tests have been rising faster than the national rate of improvement.
4. In Year 9, standards seen in classes and in scrutiny of work are well above average overall. They indicate very good achievement. Standards are currently well above average in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. They are well above average in geography, history and ICT and are above average in design and technology, music and religious education. Attainment is average in the other National Curriculum subjects. Achievement in relation to students' prior attainment in the subject is currently very good in English, mathematics, science, geography, ICT and history. It is good in all other subjects apart from art and design, citizenship and personal, social and health education, in which it is satisfactory.
5. GCSE results are improving at a faster rate than the national improvement. In 2002, the school obtained its best ever results in the GCSE examinations. The overall results were, for the second year running, well above the national averages for all students. They were well above the national average for girls. Over the past three years, girls' GCSE results have been above the national average for girls. In 2002, the GCSE results were very high and in the top five per cent of similar schools nationally. They also indicated very high achievement compared with students' prior attainment in the national tests taken at the end of Year 9. The proportion of students attaining five or more grades A\*-C in 2002, two in every three students, has doubled since the previous inspection. All students attained one or more GCSE grades A\*-G in 2002. This indicates an outstanding performance when compared with the national performance, the performance of similar schools and taking into account students' prior levels of attainment. At the time of the previous inspection, about one in seven students attained no GCSE grades at all.



6. In Years 10 and 11, standards seen in classes and in scrutiny of work are well above average overall and similar to those indicated by the GCSE results of 2002. They indicate very good achievement. Standards are currently well above average and indicate very good achievement in English, mathematics, science, design and technology, geography, history, modern foreign languages and music. Standards are above average and indicate good achievement in religious education and ICT. In art and design, physical education and citizenship standards are average and represent satisfactory achievement. Students' achievement in other courses, including personal, social and health education and the vocational and work-related courses, is at least satisfactory. Standards in citizenship have been adversely affected because the implementation of the course has been interrupted by long-term absence of staff.
7. The school's detailed and comprehensive records of students' performances show that girls of different ethnic backgrounds achieve equally very well in public examinations at the end of Year 9 and at the end of Year 11. The very good integration of girls of all backgrounds and the high expectations of teachers ensure that students are motivated to achieve academic success. The achievement of the very few girls for whom English is an additional language is the same as that of other students throughout the school in most subjects.
8. Students who have been identified as having special educational needs achieve well overall throughout Years 9 to 11. This is despite the ineffective procedures for the proper identification of the students with special educational needs who are in the category 'school action'. Teachers find it difficult to evaluate the progress of these students towards their individual targets because the individual education plans are often too vague. Senior staff are aware of the deficiencies in these aspects and are in the process of drawing up more suitable procedures to ensure consistency and appropriate target setting. Results in external examinations show that students with statements of special educational needs and those in the category 'school action plus' achieve very well. This is because they receive good support from teachers and learning support assistants in lessons.
9. Students who are gifted or talented achieve well throughout Years 9 to 11. In a few subjects, such as geography and history, they achieve very well. This is because teachers encourage them to develop and use their skills of independent learning through work of suitable challenge and difficulty that makes them think deeply about topics. In most subjects, however, these students make good rather than very good progress because the extension work provided tends to reinforce previous learning but does not sufficiently stimulate new and independent learning. In 2002, the proportion of students attaining the highest GCSE grades of A\* and A was at least average in almost all subjects. It was above average in several subjects including English, chemistry, design and technology, geography, history, modern foreign languages, music and physical education. The outstanding quality of extra-curricular provision in music is a very important factor in the very good achievement in music, even among students who do not study the subject at GCSE.
10. Standards of literacy and oracy are high. Students' skills in speaking, reading and writing are sufficient to assist their work and progress in all subjects. Students read well and write fluently in lessons. In all subjects, students make correct use of specialist vocabulary. Spelling is above average. Students are encouraged to write in different styles for different purposes. In history, for example, students' writing includes interesting examples of diary writing, dialogue, narrative accounts, empathetic personal stories, as well as the accurate making of notes. The few

students at an early stage of learning English improve their literacy skills quickly as a result of specialist support and good encouragement from subject teachers.

11. Students have well above average skills in numeracy by Year 9. They develop and use these skills well throughout Years 9 to 11. Their mathematical skills are good enough to assist their work in all subjects. Students' competence and confidence in the use of number and mathematical techniques enhance their learning in many subjects.
12. Students' skills in ICT are above average overall. When teachers provide opportunities and access to computers is available, students make effective use of their computing skills to support learning in many subjects. They use their good skills in word processing to present their work well in subjects such as English. They access the Internet for personal research and to provide information for their coursework in many subjects as seen in art and design and geography. In design and technology, students use ICT effectively as a tool for various purposes in their work but rarely use ICT to manufacture products. Minimal access to ICT in subjects such as mathematics and science has not had a detrimental effect on students' very good achievement in those subjects, but it has restricted the range of learning activities and the possibilities for enrichment. In science, for example, students rarely extend their work through carrying out data logging and analysis using ICT.
13. The main contributory factors to very good achievement by the end of Year 11 include good and often very good teaching, the high expectations set by the head teacher and senior staff, students' very positive attitudes and strong commitment to learning, and the very effective use of assessment to set targets and to enhance learning. Standards in a few subjects represent satisfactory rather than good achievement. This is mainly because much of the teaching in these subjects is not consistently good.
14. The school sets challenging targets for performance in external examinations. It bases these targets on students' previous attainment and comparisons with appropriate national comparative information. It exceeded by more than seven per cent its suitably challenging target for 60 per cent of students to gain five or more grades A\*-C in GCSE examinations in 2002.

### **Sixth form**

15. Most of the courses taken by students are taught wholly in the school. A few are taught in a shared teaching arrangement with the other schools and colleges in the local sixth form cluster. Students in Years 12 and 13 follow courses that lead to AS/A-level examinations and to intermediate (GNVQ) and advanced vocational awards (AVCE). The attainment of students on entry to Year 12 varies from year to year. It is usually similar to that found in sixth forms nationally. The inspection focused on 13 subjects.
16. Students' achievement in external examinations by the end of Year 13 recently has indicated at least satisfactory improvement from GCSE performance and very good achievement compared with their attainment on entry in Year 9.
17. Standards of work seen in classes in Years 12 and 13 of subjects inspected and sampled, in scrutiny of coursework and written work, and in discussions with students, are above average overall. In the 13 subjects that were the focus of the inspection, standards are currently above average for the large proportion of students

studying English. They are above average in art and design, design and technology and in business studies. They are broadly average in all other subjects. Achievement is good overall taking into account students' earlier attainment in GCSE examinations.

18. Results in AS/A-level and AVCE examinations at the end of Year 13 have reflected the different levels of prior attainment of successive year groups. Overall, they were above average in 2000, average in 2001 and, in 2002, were above the average for the previous year. Results in A-level examinations were below average in 2001. They rose considerably in 2002 and were above the previous year's national average. A-level results in 2002 were well above the national average for 2001 in English literature, design and technology, sociology, economics and general studies. They were below the national average for the previous year in art and design, biology, ICT and for the small number of students in mathematics. Results attained by the few students on the AVCE courses in 2002 were below the national average of the previous year. The overall results in 2002 indicated at least satisfactory achievement compared with students' prior attainment at GCSE examinations. The school's performance in these examinations in 2002 compared well with that of all comprehensive and non-selective schools nationally.
19. Results in AS-level examinations taken at the end of Year 12 in 2002 were below the national average of 2001 in most subjects. Because several students have chosen to re-sit these examinations and have not yet finalised their grades, direct comparisons with the previous year's national averages are not particularly meaningful.
20. Students' achievement currently in Years 12 and 13 is good overall because teaching is good and they work hard and are motivated. In several subjects, but not all, achievement is improving as a result of increasingly effective use of the procedures for assessment. Standards of literacy and numeracy are above average and appropriate for students' work in all subjects. Students of all ethnic backgrounds make effective use of their competent skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT to support their work well across subjects. The school tracks closely the achievement of students of ethnic minority backgrounds to ensure that they make similar progress to that of other students. The few students with special educational needs and those at an early stage of learning English make good progress in the subjects they are studying.
21. There are a few reasons that students' achievement, though good, is not as high as it is in Years 9 to 11. Firstly, students' achievement when they enter the sixth form is now very close to its full potential for most girls. The scope for sustaining the very rapid progress made throughout Years 9 to 11 is understandably reduced. Secondly, not all teachers make the most effective or consistent use of assessment to adjust the programme of teaching or to set targets. In a few subjects, teachers do not have a sufficient awareness of students' current standards and future potential. Accordingly, a few students, who achieved very much better than expected in the GCSE examinations, are finding the work on the advanced courses particularly challenging because they do not always receive work suited to their particular levels of knowledge and understanding. Many teachers are still finding out how to make the most effective use of information from assessment to show students how to improve. Thirdly, a few teachers do not encourage students to engage in independent learning and tend to be too directive about the work for students to do. This is compounded by the limited accommodation available for sixth formers to carry out private study and research. A very small number of students do not achieve as well as they should because of erratic attendance.

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

22. Students' attitudes and values are very good. Personal development and relationships are very good. They indicate why the school is now oversubscribed and popular with parents. These aspects were satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection. They now have a considerable and important influence on standards. The very positive attitudes to their work of students in Years 9 to 11, combined with the good quality of teaching, are major contributory factors to students' very good academic achievement by the end of Years 9 and 11.
23. In the great majority of lessons observed, students responded purposefully and keenly to the work set by the teacher. They are motivated by the high expectations that teachers have. On the many occasions when students worked in pairs or groups they co-operated very well with one another and with the staff and had a mature approach to learning. In a Year 10 English class, for instance, students of different ethnic backgrounds and a wide range of attainment, including a few students with learning difficulties, collaborated very effectively in work in groups. As a result, they all gained a very good understanding of the plot, analysis, genre and underlying meaning of the ghost story that they were examining. These students, like those in most other classes observed, have developed very good and mature working habits. They could be trusted to work well even when not under direct supervision by the teacher. In many of the discussions observed in class, students listened carefully to one another and made many articulate and sensible oral responses. They contributed effectively and enthusiastically in the plenary and summary sessions that were a feature of most lessons. Students have a clear commitment to work hard and are pleased to try to do their best. They show a sense of enjoying the work in most lessons.
24. Behaviour has improved considerably since the previous inspection and is now very good both in lessons and around the school's site. It is another major contributory factor to students' very good achievement because it means that in the vast majority of lessons teachers do not have to waste time trying to get students to settle down. Bullying is a very rare occurrence. The school treats any instances of bullying seriously and has suitable procedures for anti-bullying. Most parents at the pre-inspection meeting indicated that any incidents of bullying were dealt with appropriately. No incidents of bullying were observed. The level of exclusions is below average and is much lower than at the time of the previous inspection. Last year there were 19 fixed-term exclusions and no permanent exclusions. This is a good reflection of the school's success in enabling students who have emotional or behavioural difficulties to feel valued. Students are orderly when moving from one classroom to another. They were noticeably dignified and sensible when entering and leaving a whole-school assembly, even though the stairs were very crowded. The very rare instances of inappropriate behaviour occurred in the very small number of lessons in which teaching was unsatisfactory. Students treat the school's accommodation and equipment with care and respect. There is hardly any litter around the site.
25. Relationships are very good among students and between students and staff. The school is justifiably proud of the way students of all ethnic backgrounds and different levels of attainment integrate well and support one another. There is an absence of racial tension. The school has a very friendly and purposeful atmosphere. Most students respect their teachers and find them supportive. Accordingly, students feel confident and safe. Students with special educational needs behave well and have very good attitudes to work. Bullying is a very rare problem. Students show tolerance and respect to the views of others.

26. Students' personal development is very good. In many lessons they take responsibility for their learning and carry out their own research. The provision for personal and social education has improved since the previous inspection and is satisfactory overall. It has a beneficial effect on students' social and life skills. The pastoral and support staff give close attention to students' individual needs. They provide sensitive and effective support to help students who are experiencing personal difficulties. Students have good access to a suitable range of extra-curricular activities and participate in reasonable numbers. Provision for extra-curricular music is excellent and enables many students to experience musical events and activities of high quality. Provision for extra-curricular drama is also a strength and helps to develop students' social and performing skills. Students in Years 9 to 11 play an active part in the running of the school and take responsibility, for example, in the year and school councils. They develop their citizenship skills through such activities as fund raising for charities.
27. The attitudes and behaviour of students with special educational needs are very good and help them to integrate well in and out of lessons. They appreciate the help and support they receive and are keen to make progress. In one-to-one withdrawal lessons, students with statements of special educational needs respond very well to the variety of structured activities planned by the teacher. Year 11 students value the extra support and guidance for the work they have missed in normal lessons because of the modified curriculum they follow. One Year 11 student said, "The school works very hard with special needs students and if there are problems there is always someone who will talk with you."
28. Attendance is above average and good. Unauthorised absence is below average. The school has raised its rate of attendance for students from 86.4 per cent at the time of the previous inspection to 92.8 per cent last year. Most students travel to school by bus or car. Punctuality is satisfactory. Most lessons start on time and few students arrive late. However, a sizeable minority of students arrive late to school in the mornings.

### **Sixth form**

29. In Years 12 and 13, students' very good attitudes and behaviour are important and positive factors in their good progress in most lessons. Students are keen to learn. They work hard and most make mature, enthusiastic and constructive contributions in discussions in class. They have good skills in organisation.
30. Discussions with students and analysis of their responses contained in the questionnaire completed for the inspection indicate that a high proportion of students enjoy their time at school. They feel that staff are accessible and that teaching is good. Inspection findings support these positive views of students. The sixth form is becoming increasingly popular, with more than 80 additional students on roll than at the time of the previous inspection. Students appreciate and value the opportunities offered to them. The great majority take their studies seriously and can be relied upon to work well on their own. Students behave very well in lessons. They are helpful, courteous and responsible. They talk openly and sensibly about their work and life in the sixth form.
31. Most students say that they are treated as mature and responsible adults and this helps them to enjoy their time in the sixth form. A minority say that they do not feel treated as adults and feel that there are too many restrictions on their activities.

Inspection findings are that students are treated as young adults to the same extent as that found in most schools' sixth forms.

32. There have been no exclusions of students from the sixth form. Very good relationships among students and between staff and students create a positive and purposeful climate for learning. As at the time of the previous inspection, students' concentration and interest are good and assist their learning.
33. The personal development of students is good. Relationships among students and with their teachers are very good. Students show respect for their teachers and for one another. They enhance their social development through active involvement in a good variety of social, fund-raising and charitable events. Many students broaden their education through participation in extra-curricular events and other activities for enrichment. They exercise responsibility through involvement in activities such as the sixth form council and in presenting sixth form assemblies.
34. Attendance in the sixth form is satisfactory, though the new computerised system for recording attendance is unreliable. A very small number of students do not attend regularly enough and do not achieve as well as they should. The rates of retention on the courses offered by the school are good with few students leaving their courses prematurely.

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

35. The quality of teaching has improved considerably since the previous inspection when it was unsatisfactory. The quality of teaching and the quality of learning are now good overall. They are good in Year 9, in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form. Much of the teaching in all years is very good. In three out of every four lessons observed, teaching was good or better. The proportion of lessons observed that were very good or better has improved from about one in eight to around one in three. The proportion of teaching observed that was less than satisfactory has declined substantially from one in every five lessons to one in every 50.
36. In the core subjects, teaching is very good throughout Years 9 to 11 in English and good in mathematics and science. Teaching is very good in Years 9 to 11 in geography and history. It is very good in Years 10 and 11 in design and technology, modern foreign languages and music. Teaching is good in other subjects except that it is satisfactory in personal, social and health education and citizenship in Years 9 to 11, in art and design in Year 9 and in physical education in Years 10 and 11. Students' achievement in Years 9 to 11 is often better than the overall good quality of teaching that they receive in the different subjects. This is because the vast majority of students have very positive attitudes to work and are very conscientious in completing the work to the best standard possible.
37. The quality of learning throughout Years 9 to 11 is good. It is often very good. Students of all backgrounds and levels of attainment respond positively to teachers' high expectations by working hard and with enthusiasm and determination. The vast majority of students are very keen to do their best. Very good relationships among students and with their teachers enable good progress to be made in most lessons. Students take a ready and active part in activities. They enjoy the good opportunities in many subjects to work independently and to think things out for themselves. Even when the teaching lacks sparkle, students concentrate well on the tasks set and complete the work at a good pace.

38. A very positive influence on students' very good achievement is the good use that most teachers make of information from assessment. This helps students to understand how well they are doing and to have realistic and challenging targets for improvement. Teachers have a good understanding of the capabilities of most students. Accordingly, they set work that is of appropriate challenge and difficulty to motivate them to work hard. However, because the procedures for identifying students with special educational needs are unreliable, teachers cannot be sure that the work set for students on 'school action' is entirely appropriate. Nevertheless, these students are making at least good progress overall compared with their levels of attainment when they joined the school. Teachers help students who are gifted and talented to make good progress in most lessons through the provision of extension work. At times, this work consolidates previous learning rather than prompts new and independent learning. These students make very good progress in the many lessons in which teachers provide additional work that stimulates them to think more deeply and to make their own decisions, as seen in a very good ICT lesson in Year 11.
39. Teaching has many strengths. In most subjects, teachers make very effective use of their good knowledge and expertise in the subject to motivate students and to conduct good 'question and answer' sessions and discussions. Good planning of lessons means that students quickly know the purpose and relevance of the work and carry out a good range of interesting and carefully timed activities. The very good improvements in external examination results since the previous inspection have increased teachers' confidence and have resulted in teachers and students having high expectations. Students know that they are expected to work hard. Accordingly, the climate for learning in the large majority of lessons ensures that work is productive and carried out at a good pace. In an excellent biology lesson in Year 11, enthusiastic teaching and extremely challenging work resulted in outstanding progress. Students in this lesson were highly motivated and responded very positively to the difficult work set. Excellent planning of this lesson meant that students, including the two for whom English is an additional language, enjoyed the wide range of activities and having to think for themselves.
40. Typical of the many very good lessons observed was a Year 9 English lesson that involved very good debate and discussion about moral issues arising from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. The teacher had taken great care to ensure that the work was of suitable interest and challenge for students of all levels of attainment in the class. Students with special educational needs received very good support from the teacher and the learning support assistant that enabled them to make very good progress. The teacher used a variety of teaching methods to help students to keep their concentration. These included a good balance between talking to the whole class and using group and paired work. The use of 'open' questions was very effective in encouraging students to join actively in discussions. The teacher's very high expectations in respect of students' use of language ensured that the quality of discussions was high.
41. Teachers make effective use of a generally good range of learning resources, often including ICT, to promote students' learning. They set homework of suitable amount and good quality. This helps students to improve their work through a good range of different learning activities that include revision, independent research and investigations.
42. In lessons in which teaching was satisfactory, several of the features of good teaching were present. However, a few shortcomings were also present. In a satisfactory mathematics lesson in Year 10, for example, students made satisfactory

progress but the teacher's control of the class was not always effective in ensuring that all students listened carefully and kept their focus on the work. In this same lesson, the teacher's explanations and narrow range of teaching methods caused a few students to misunderstand the work. In a Year 11 science lesson, learning was satisfactory but the teacher tended to direct the work and stifle students' initiative. In a Year 9 geography lesson, the teacher's enthusiasm for the subject motivated the students, but the lack of careful timing of the planned activities slowed learning, as seen when a few students lost interest during an over-long video presentation. In a few lessons, teachers did not make the most effective use of time so that a few activities went on for too long and reduced the effectiveness of the revision session usually held towards the end of lessons.

43. A very small amount of unsatisfactory teaching was observed in personal, social and health education and physical education in Years 10 and 11. In these lessons, the work lacked challenge, the pace was slow and there was an inadequate range of learning activities. As a consequence, students lost concentration and interest in the work and made unsatisfactory progress.
44. The teaching of students with special educational needs is good across the school. These students generally attend normal lessons and receive good support from learning support assistants in many of these. Teachers know the needs of students well, though the individual education plans do not always provide very clear information and guidance on how students should meet their learning targets. Learning support assistants provide effective help and support for students with special educational needs as well as for other students who ask for help. The quality of their support in English lessons is particularly effective. They work closely and effectively with subject teachers. In a Year 11 geography lesson, for example, the learning support assistant took notes about the video being watched but stood back during the discussion afterwards. The notes were then used to support the students in completing the written tasks. This ensured that the students with special educational needs were fully on task and understood what was required of them. In catch-up lessons, those Year 11 students who are following a modified curriculum receive effective and purposeful support. Teaching is good on the individual withdrawal sessions that assist students with specific learning difficulties.
45. The few students at an early stage of learning English make progress at the same rate as other students. This is largely because they receive an appropriate amount of specialist help that enables them to take full advantage of the teaching they receive in subjects. Teachers take good care to ensure that these students have work of suitable difficulty and that they understand what needs to be done. In physical education, for example, the head of department, who has experience of teaching students with English as an additional language, ensures students are helped by visual information through demonstrations and individual support in lessons. When appropriate, these students receive help in other subjects from learning support assistants, who have had awareness training in support of students at an early stage of learning English.
46. Students of different minority ethnic backgrounds achieve equally very well because staff make them all feel equally valued. Students of high attainment, including those who are gifted or talented, achieve well by the end of Year 11 because most teachers set work that stretches and motivates them to do well.
47. The teaching of literacy is good across subjects. The school has made good progress in the last year in implementing the National Literacy Strategy. Teachers in



most subjects encourage students to develop and extend fully their speaking, reading and writing skills. In all subjects, there is a strong emphasis on 'highlighting' new specialist vocabulary and encouraging correct spelling. Teachers in English, history, religious studies and science contribute particularly effectively to helping students to write in different styles for different purposes. They explain processes very clearly and encourage students to discuss problems and to make presentations to the class. In modern foreign languages, teachers use whiteboards effectively to develop language starter activities at the outset of lessons.

48. Teachers provide many opportunities for students to make effective use of their very good skills of numeracy to develop their work in many subjects including science, design and technology and geography. In mathematics, the good use of methods suggested in the National Numeracy Strategy enables students of all levels of attainment to improve their mathematical skills. Students apply their statistical and graphical skills well in subjects such as science and geography to analyse, interpret and display data.
49. The teaching of ICT across subjects is satisfactory. It is good in several subjects such as English, design and technology and art and design. However, in subjects such as mathematics and science, teachers provide few opportunities for students to use ICT to extend and enrich their learning.

### **Sixth form**

50. Teaching in the subjects inspected and sampled in Years 12 and 13 varies from satisfactory to very good. It is good overall. The quality of learning for students of all ethnic backgrounds and levels of attainment is good. The good quality of teaching and learning helps students to achieve well in the courses taken currently in Years 12 and 13. In three out of every four lessons observed, the quality of teaching and learning was good. It was very good in about one lesson out of every three observed. One unsatisfactory lesson was observed in personal, social and health education in which the teacher did not control the class well and did not enable the quieter students to participate fully in oral work.
51. In the subjects that formed the focus of the inspection, the teaching observed was very good in English and good in all other subjects apart from chemistry in which it was satisfactory. The quality of teaching has improved since the previous inspection when one lesson in every eight observed was unsatisfactory. The very few students with special educational needs in the sixth form make good progress because teachers encourage and support them well and set work that is of appropriate difficulty.
52. The small number of students for whom English is an additional language achieve well as a result of good support and provision of work of suitable challenge and difficulty, as seen in Year 13 in mathematics and design and technology lessons. In Year 12, good teaching of literacy helps students for whom English is an additional language to make good progress. These students are trying to improve their GCSE English grades to a level that will allow them to apply to university. In one lesson observed, for example, two students from Macao were making good progress in widening their vocabulary and use of English.
53. Learning is good in most lessons because students have very positive attitudes to work. Their willingness to work very hard in and out of class helps them to achieve well in most subjects. Students develop competent study skills because many

teachers encourage them to participate actively in the work. They use these skills of independent study and research well to assist their work in many, but not all, subjects. Students listen carefully in lessons. They usually respond enthusiastically to the tasks set. In many lessons, as seen in English, drama and history, students use their good speaking skills to debate and discuss their work in depth. Many students enhance and extend their work through the good use of ICT. Very good relationships between students and teachers help learning to proceed at a good pace in most lessons. Students enjoy solving problems and thinking things out for themselves, as observed in lessons in subjects such as biology, chemistry, mathematics and design and technology. In many subjects such as art and design, design and technology, English literature and ICT, students apply and develop their creative and investigative skills in a variety of learning activities.

54. Teaching in Years 12 and 13 has many positive features. Teachers have suitably high expectations for students of all backgrounds and levels of attainment. They plan lessons very well to provide all students in the class with work of suitable difficulty. Teachers make very good use of their expertise in the subject to motivate students, to help them to acquire good basic skills, to answer their questions well and to support discussions. Most teachers use good techniques of questioning to ensure that students play an active part in the lesson. In a Year 13 business studies lesson, for example, students responded very positively to the teacher's high expectations and the challenging tasks set. They had confidence in the teacher's good knowledge of the subject, particularly when they had to respond to probing questions. Teachers help students to prepare well for examinations by pointing out how best to tackle different types of questions.
55. Many of the features of the good or better lessons observed were present in a Year 12 lesson in English literature in which students were producing a detailed critique of a poem. Students had prepared their own presentation, including the use of videotape, to illustrate the background and imagery of a poem and to lead class discussion. Students listened attentively to each other to understand the interpretations and analyses of the work made. The teacher skilfully intervened with occasional prompts and suggestions only when appropriate and allowed students to do their own thinking. As a result, learning was very good. By the end of the lesson, students had a clear understanding of the different perspectives of a young daughter and a caring adult in the poem about a dying father.
56. In the lessons that were satisfactory, teachers did not always give students sufficient opportunities to become involved in their own learning. In two well-planned lessons in chemistry and biology in Year 13, for example, students made satisfactory progress but did not play a very active part because the teacher directed the work too much. A few lessons got off to a slow start as the class awaited the arrival of students from the cluster, as seen in a Year 13 business studies lesson. In this lesson, as in a few others that were satisfactory, there was too much reliance on students copying down notes rather than developing their note-taking skills.
57. Although students are achieving well in most subjects they do not always make the fastest possible progress. This is because teachers do not use assessment as consistently and effectively to promote students' learning in Years 12 and 13 as they do in Years 9 to 11. Consequently, in a few subjects, students are insufficiently aware of how well they are doing and what are the most realistic targets for future improvement and grades in examinations. This supports the views expressed by a minority of students in questionnaires completed for the inspection that the marking and assessment of their work were not informative or helpful enough.

58. The teaching of the key skills of literacy and numeracy is good in Years 12 and 13. Students have good basic skills to meet the requirements of the courses they are studying.

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

59. The quality and range of learning experiences are good throughout the school. The curriculum meets statutory requirements in Years 9 to 11. It is sufficiently flexible to meet the needs of students of all backgrounds and levels of attainment including those with special educational needs and those who are gifted or talented.
60. There has been good improvement in the curriculum since the previous inspection. Governors are now actively involved in planning and monitoring the curriculum. They know the school well and have good links with individual departments. Governors are involved at the early stages of any change and kept well informed of developments.
61. The timetable provides appropriate amounts of teaching time for the National Curriculum. Good curricular planning ensures that all students have equal access to subjects and that their learning needs are met. In Years 10 and 11, as well as building on National Curriculum courses students can follow their particular interests and strengths by choosing two modern foreign languages or three separate sciences. As at the previous inspection the time for a second modern language is low. However, the very good GCSE results show that does not affect standards adversely. The proportion of students studying two languages is high. The sizeable minority of students who have been disapplied from taking a modern foreign language in Years 10 and 11 have chosen, appropriately, to follow a GNVQ course in ICT. Sociology has been introduced since the previous inspection. Higher attainers make the most of their strengths by studying 10 or 11 GCSE courses. For students for whom a full programme of GCSE subjects is not appropriate, good alternative courses such as the key skills course provide a suitable education. A small number of students have their needs met through a 'new start' and work-related programme based in a local college.
62. Overall, provision for students with special educational needs is satisfactory and enables these students to have equal access to the curriculum. The deputy head teacher with temporary responsibility for special educational needs has ensured the effective introduction of the new Code of Practice. However, the procedures for the identification and assessment of students to ensure that they are placed correctly on the school's list of students with special educational needs are unreliable. There is insufficient analysis and monitoring of the needs of these students to ensure the most effective deployment of support to help them to meet their individual targets.
63. Provision for students for whom English is an additional language, and particularly those at an early stage of learning English, is good. This enables these students to integrate very well and to play a full and active part in all of the school's activities.
64. Provision for personal, social and health education is satisfactory and improving. Planning for the course is good and includes careful attention to sex education, relationships and drugs education. A new course in sex education and relationships has been successfully introduced in Years 10 and 11. The good use of school nurses on this course promotes good learning. Tutors have received training and the key stage co-ordinators monitor closely the effectiveness of provision. Teaching of the

personal, social and health education course lacks consistency and varies from unsatisfactory to very good.

65. Provision for the teaching of literacy and numeracy is good across subjects. Provision for teaching ICT has improved considerably and is satisfactory overall. Provision for citizenship is not currently as developed as it should be, because long-term staff absence has delayed the planned curricular developments.
66. Provision for careers education is good and is part of the personal, social and health education programme. In Year 9, students receive guidance on choices for courses in Years 10 and 11. A further development in Year 10 is a good programme of work-experience placements. In Year 11, students receive good guidance when considering post-16 options including opportunities offered in local colleges. They complete a record of achievement. Students have the good opportunity of an interview with an external personal adviser to assist them in making their post-16 choices.
67. The curriculum is enriched through a suitable range of well-attended, out-of-lessons activities. The outstanding provision in music and very good provision in drama not only ensure that students enhance their skills considerably in these subjects but place the school in a good position to support its bid for specialist performing arts school status. Elsewhere in the curriculum, including physical education and games, there is a satisfactory range of clubs, events, activities and visits.
68. Links with local partner middle schools are satisfactory. A common syllabus of work is in place to assist continuity and progression. Good links with local colleges and providers of alternative education courses support the learning of students of all levels of attainment. These good links ensure that students with very particular educational and social needs are placed on appropriate courses.
69. Provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The school's concern to promote students' personal development is very clearly emphasised in its statement on the curriculum. Teachers are aware of the importance of this aspect of students' education. There has been good improvement since the previous inspection. Assemblies, attended by students twice a week, make an important contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. They are lively, well-planned occasions, which help students to reflect on themes relevant to their own interests and experience. The statutory requirement for a daily act of collective worship is not met.
70. Provision for spiritual development is good. Subjects such as English, music, religious education and science provide students with good opportunities to develop spiritual awareness and insight. In a Year 11 biology lesson, for example, the teacher enthused students with her explanation of the dynamic nature of mitosis, which encouraged them to reflect on the wonder of the process. Assemblies also make a good contribution. In one very good assembly observed, students were encouraged to reflect on the amazing complexity of the world in the context of video images of plants and animals.
71. Moral education is very good. The orderly, calm ethos within the school successfully promotes very positive attitudes and helps students to distinguish right from wrong. Students consider ethical issues and moral dilemmas carefully in subjects such as history, ICT, English and science. Work in personal, social and health education and religious education helps students to clarify their own moral values and to think through some of the choices they will need to make in life.

72. Provision for social education is good. Students have many opportunities to develop social and collaborative skills in lessons, for example when working in pairs or small groups. Students have good opportunities to take on responsibility and show initiative. Year 9 students act as school receptionists and elected form captains take part in the student council. Tutor groups are responsible for planning and taking assemblies on a regular basis. This gives students the responsibility for preparing ideas and material, and helps them to develop self-confidence. Students frequently collect money for charity and organise a wide range of fund-raising activities.
73. Good provision for students' cultural development enriches their learning. The school provides good opportunities for students to develop an understanding of different cultures in many subjects, particularly in music, design and technology and English. However, in art and design, teachers miss opportunities to draw on the cultural traditions of different ethnic groups represented in the school. In assemblies, there are occasions, such as at Diwali, when students share aspects of their different traditions. The school's programme of extra-curricular activities in music, dance and drama gives students excellent opportunities to extend their interests and widen their horizons. A large number of students learn a musical instrument and take part in a very wide range of musical activities. Students enhance their cultural awareness through a good variety of educational visits, such as fieldwork in geography or museum visits in history. Foreign exchanges and visits are also arranged.

### **Sixth form**

74. The quality and range of learning opportunities to meet the interests and prior attainment of the great majority of students, are good. However, the school does not meet statutory requirements for the teaching of religious education in the sixth form. The courses provided by the school are extended usefully by a number of courses offered through the local cluster. This cluster arrangement generally works well apart from occasional problems of punctuality to lessons caused by transport difficulties. GCSE courses are continued through to AS-level and A-level with the addition of a small number of new subjects such as psychology. In addition, AVCE and vocational courses at advanced, intermediate and foundation level complete a good range of courses to meet most needs. Entry to sixth form courses is open to all students. As a result there is a wide range of attainment in the sixth form. The few students identified as having special educational needs have full access to the range of vocational and academic courses on offer in the sixth form. Most students follow AS-level and A-level courses. Students' timetables have a generally good balance of taught time and independent study time. A small number of students taking fewer courses have more time for personal study. Tutors check this carefully and a few students have work experience to supplement their studies. The productive use of students' personal study time on site is difficult because of limited provision of suitable study areas. Students can study off site if they demonstrate that they make productive use of this concession.
75. All students benefit from a well-planned course in personal, social and health education that includes careers advice and guidance. This is a very good improvement since the previous inspection. Students following AS-level and A-level courses take a general studies course to examination level. This course is planned and taught well and includes a good range of outside speakers. It contributes well to students' personal development through topics that consider moral, social and ethical issues. The teaching of key skills is effective within subjects. Students following vocational courses attend appropriate sessions of this general studies course.

Students in Year 12 can study for the Community Sports Leader Award but recreational sports are only available at lunchtime. Arrangements to bring all students to a suitable standard in the key skills of numeracy and communication are effective. Good links with local universities and businesses contribute to the general studies courses and students' knowledge of the world of work.

76. The provision for students' personal development is good. Subjects such as English, history, biology, art and design, and design and technology make a positive contribution to students' spiritual and moral development. In English, for example, students examine the concept of temptation when studying Marlowe's *Dr Faustus*. Assemblies, held twice a week, are lively, well-planned occasions, which help students to reflect on themes relevant to their own interests and experience.
77. A good range of opportunities supports and extends students' social and cultural development. Staff encourage students to become school officers and to take on responsibilities within the school. These include helping in departments, mentoring students in Year 9 and organising fund-raising for charity. The two school presidents of the student council co-ordinate meetings of the form captains in Years 9 to 11 and take up any issues raised by students in the main school. Sixth form students take part in the very good overall quality of extra-curricular activities provided in music, drama and dance. The school does not meet statutory requirements for the provision of a daily act of collective worship.

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

78. The school fulfils its aims to provide high standards of care. Form tutors and pastoral staff have a very good knowledge of each girl's individual needs and circumstances. They have a sensitive approach and provide very effective support, particularly to students who have emotional or family difficulties. The school makes good use of a wide range of support services available locally. Arrangements for child protection are appropriate. The school has a good awareness of those girls who are not looked after by their parents. Arrangements for health and safety are satisfactory although a shortcoming in the science area was reported to the school.
79. Since the previous inspection the school has changed from a house-based system of care to a structure in which heads of year and key stage co-ordinators are responsible for pastoral care. Very good systems and procedures have been established. The role of the form tutor is defined clearly and has been developed well. Standards of care, which were described as good at the previous inspection, are now very good. Form tutors know their students very well. The monitoring of personal development is now very good.
80. Improvement in the rate of attendance has, appropriately, been a priority since the previous inspection. The link between regular attendance and good examination results has been made very clear to parents. Rigorous procedures have been instituted to ensure that absences are investigated properly. The school values the effective support that it receives from its education welfare officer. Students are made very aware of the importance of good attendance and there are rewards for good attendance. Alterations have been made to the curriculum to provide some alternatives for the small number of girls who are starting to lose interest in school. Procedures for monitoring attendance have improved from unsatisfactory to very good. They have resulted in substantial improvement in the rate of attendance from unsatisfactory at the time of the previous inspection to good now.

81. The school has very good systems in place to promote good behaviour. However, the high standards of behaviour observed can also be attributed to the very high expectations of behaviour, the very good relationships between teachers and students and individual teachers' skills in managing behaviour in the classroom. Improvements have resulted in attitudes and behaviour improving from satisfactory to very good. The students' positive attitudes and very good behaviour help them to achieve very well in Years 9 to 11.
82. There has been very good improvement since the previous inspection in the way the school uses assessment to help students to improve. The school now has very effective procedures for assessing students' attainment and progress and for guiding curricular planning. It produces suitably challenging, individual targets for students in Years 9 to 11. On entry in Year 9, students are placed into tutor groups on the basis of a wide range of information, which the school receives from the middle schools. This includes the grades from students' cognitive ability tests taken in Year 8. The school then sets a challenging target, which becomes the student's minimum target grade until the end of Year 11. All progress is measured against this.
83. Procedures for monitoring students' overall academic progress and personal development are very good. Tutors use the minimum target grade and other assessment information when they monitor the progress of their students. They discuss these with students during mentoring sessions. Key stage co-ordinators monitor the mentoring appropriately and discuss students' performances with tutors. Target grades are raised if the student is achieving well. The student's wider achievements are also discussed in mentoring sessions. The school monitors effectively the progress of students by their ethnic background. Procedures for assessment are generally good within department. They are very good in English, history and modern foreign languages. The large majority of students understand how well they are progressing, because the feedback from teachers is good.
84. The identification and assessment of students to determine whether they should be on the school's list of students with special educational needs are unreliable. This has led to nearly one in four of the students being identified at the school action stage of the Code of Practice for special educational needs. The school recognises that this proportion is unrealistically high and has plans to improve procedures. Statements of special educational needs are reviewed annually. The reviews draw upon a wide range of professional opinion and consultation with parents or carers and the students themselves. This ensures the appropriate and regular updating of students' records. Individual education plans are in place for students on the school's list of those with special educational needs. These are reviewed twice yearly. Scrutiny of students' records indicates that targets have been insufficiently modified or changed. Targets set are generally too vague. For students with statements of special educational need, the targets are often simply copied from the generic targets written on the statements. Consequently, they lack clarity, conciseness and challenge. It is often not clear what students have to do to make progress towards their targets. On occasion, a few of the targets are addressed to teachers rather than being specific to the student.

## **Sixth form**

### ***Assessment***

85. The use of assessment to promote learning and to set suitably challenging targets is satisfactory and improving in Years 12 and 13. Procedures for assessment are not as

effective in raising achievement in the sixth form as they are in Years 9 to 13. Senior staff are aware of the need to improve assessment and are implementing suitable policies for improvement. The academic review, which takes place every ten weeks, was introduced at the beginning of the current school year. The school has, suitably, made this a priority in the development plan. Shortcomings in assessment are apparent in several subjects in which the tracking of students' progress is not rigorous or thorough enough. Marking and the recording and use of information about students' progress are inconsistent across departments. This supports the view of many students, expressed in the questionnaire completed before the inspection, that they are insufficiently informed about their progress and that their work is not always assessed well.

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

86. The quality of advice, support and guidance is good overall. A recent priority has been to improve support and guidance for the sixth form in response to views expressed to the school in surveys of students' opinions. Successful efforts have been made to establish a more adult, dynamic and purposeful ethos in Years 12 and 13 and to raise expectations of teachers and aspirations of students. A good induction procedure has been established. Information of good quality and taster lessons give students a clear idea of the requirements of each course. As a result, the rate of retention on courses is good. Students receive good personal support. Most have very good relationships with their tutors. Girls who have personal problems receive particularly good help and advice. Subject teachers provide students with effective support and guidance.
87. The recently introduced programme of personal, social and health education has suitable provision to meet students' needs and to assist their all-round and personal development. However, not all students recognise the full worth of the programme, mainly because the quality of teaching of these courses is of inconsistent, though satisfactory, overall quality. The programme includes careers education and a great deal of effort has been made to ensure that students receive appropriate support for applications to university. Nevertheless, sixth form students do not always have ready access to specialist careers advice.
88. The school introduced a new, computerised system of registration for sixth form students at the start of the current school year. This has not worked well and is unsatisfactory. The school is, therefore, reliant on registers from individual subjects to provide an overview of each student's attendance. Although several subjects provide very neat and accurate registers, a few registers are difficult to decipher. Therefore, despite the school's best efforts, at present there is a lack of a coherent and accurate overview of each student's attendance. The school intends to return to the form of registration used in the rest of the school. Provision for health and safety is appropriate.

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

89. The partnership between the school and parents is good. The school is popular and oversubscribed. Parents have positive views of the school. They recognise that their daughters are expected to work hard and to do their best. They feel that teaching is good and that their daughters are making good progress. Parents respect the head teacher and appreciate her role in establishing high standards in the school. They feel that their daughters get good support and that they are helped to become mature and responsible. Parents are aware that behaviour is very good. They are very comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem. The findings of the inspection support parents' positive views about the school. Students work



hard, respond very well to good teaching and, as a result, achieve very well. The head teacher is extremely effective and has established a school in which very good behaviour and responsible attitudes are normal.

90. Parents have recognised that frequent changes of teacher have disrupted learning in a few subject areas. The school minimised this disruption by providing temporary and supply teachers with very good support. Senior staff ensure that these teachers follow the school's procedures and support the ethos of the school. Although most parents felt that the amount of homework was appropriate, a small number of parents felt there was too little, but more parents were concerned that there might be too much. The school's approach to homework reflects its high standards and rigorous approach to raising standards. The quality and amount of homework are good and assist very good achievement. Most parents were satisfied with the information that they receive about their daughters' progress and how closely the school works with parents. A few felt that these areas could be improved. The inspection found that the school supplies parents with very good information, especially about academic progress.
91. A few parents felt that the school did not work well enough in partnership with parents and several parents were concerned about provision for students with special educational needs. Parents and carers are invited to attend the annual reviews of students with statements of special educational needs and almost all do. Their views are recorded and so they are involved and informed fully as to their daughters' progress towards the targets set out as part of the review process. However, a few parents and carers have commented that there have been difficulties in contacting the special educational needs co-ordinator. Since the end of December, there has been no co-ordinator in post. The school recognises there have been problems in the past about contacts with parents and has now taken action to rectify this. A deputy head teacher has taken temporary responsibility for special educational needs. Parents and carers of students with statements of special educational need have been informed by letter of this change.
92. There is good contact with parents of girls who exhibit behavioural or attendance problems or whose emotional needs give the school cause for concern. Parents receive letters informing them if their daughters are meeting or exceeding their academic targets. Parents are very supportive of the school and want their daughters to do well. Although many parents have not been involved in higher education they have good aspirations for their daughters. There is an active Friends Association established since the previous inspection that is involved in organising social and fund-raising events to support the school.
93. Parents get very good information. The prospectus and the governors' annual report to parents are of good quality. They contain all the information required by law. Frequent and regular newsletters are well presented and give parents details of the school's activities, visits and events. Reports have improved considerably since the previous inspection. They are now of very good quality. Reports are very well organised and very informative. National Curriculum levels and expectations for GCSE examination results are communicated effectively to parents. The tutors' statements supply a very well considered summary of each student's personal and academic progress. Students' own statements on each subject demonstrate their very good knowledge of their own learning. Their comments are usually very incisive. Most subject teachers tell students very clearly what they need to do to improve. Students' very good knowledge of their own learning and thorough understanding of what they need to do in order to improve contribute to very good achievement.

94. Students in the sixth form have positive views about the school. Students' questionnaires completed before the inspection and the many discussions that inspectors held with students show that the large majority of sixth form students are happy with nearly all aspects of the work and life of the school and would recommend it to prospective students. Inspection findings support students' positive views about the school. A sizeable minority of students did, however, raise a few concerns about the quality of assessment of work and advice about current progress and future options. They also wanted a wider range of extra-curricular activities. Several felt that they were not always treated as adults. Inspectors agree with students that they have not always been informed enough about progress and future options and that the use of assessment has not been as effective as it should have been. The school has already introduced procedures to improve these aspects. Inspectors disagree with students about the other points. The range of enrichment activities is satisfactory and contains excellent provision in music and very good provision in drama. Students are treated as young adults. However, a few students would like a relaxation in the school's close monitoring of their work, attendance and personal development.

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

95. The very good leadership and management are a considerable strength of the school. They have resulted in very good improvements in recent years. In particular, the outstanding work and high expectations of the head teacher have made a very important contribution to the school's substantial improvement in standards and in the quality of teaching, learning and behaviour. Attendance has improved considerably and is now above average. The previous inspection indicated that management at that time was ineffective and that there were weaknesses in many important aspects of the school's work. The vision, determination and dedication of the current head teacher, with strong and very effective support from the experienced and extremely effective deputy head and senior staff, have helped to turn the school around. The school has been transformed from a school with a falling roll and a poor reputation to one that is popular, oversubscribed and deservedly held in high esteem by parents and the local community.
96. The work of the governing body has improved considerably and is very good. Governors now have a very clear view of the school's strengths and areas for development. They fulfil their responsibilities very well apart from ensuring the provision of a daily act of collective worship, and religious education in the sixth form. They have a very good knowledge of the school's strengths and the areas for development. Governors understand the challenges that the school faces and play an important role in planning for the school's improvement. They manage the school's finances well. The school's improvement plan contains suitable priorities for raising standards further. The committees of the governing body work well in partnership with staff.
97. The head teacher has a very thorough understanding of the school and provides excellent educational direction. Very high expectations of students and staff, together with rigorous systems for monitoring and evaluating progress, have resulted in very good achievement for students of all ethnic backgrounds. Very prudent financial management in recent years has allowed the school to expand its senior leadership team. New members of the senior team have very clear roles and areas of expertise and have facilitated continued improvement. Their roles are well developed and each brings particular personal strengths. Members of the senior leadership team share a very strong commitment to raising standards.

98. The school meets its aims very well. It is justified in being proud of its success in helping students of all social and ethnic backgrounds to integrate well and enjoy equal opportunities. The caring and supportive environment encourages all students to make full use of their talents. The purposeful atmosphere places good emphasis on values of responsibility, honesty and respect. Consequently, students have very good attitudes to school and behaviour is very good.
99. The deficiencies in management noted in the previous inspection have all been corrected. Improvements on the key issues for action identified are very good. Standards in mathematics and science now indicate very good achievement by Year 11. Systems for tracking students' progress are now very effective in helping students of all backgrounds to realise their academic potential. Teachers' expectations are now much higher. Management is now very effective and has a consistent approach throughout the school. Development planning is no longer a weakness. It is effective in setting clear priorities for the school's imminent reorganisation into a school to include girls in all Years 7 to 13. Systems for performance management work well in conjunction with the school's other rigorous and effective procedures for the monitoring of teaching to enhance learning. The improved system of professional development and training has assisted the drive to raise standards. Reporting systems have been improved to include all National Curriculum subjects. Financial management is considerably better and is now very good.
100. The quality of leadership and management in subjects is good overall. Heads of department are now accountable for all aspects of their department's work and activities, especially students' achievement. The effectiveness of this particular change is one of the most prominent reasons for the increased performances in external examination results. At the time of the previous inspection, heads of faculty and heads of department were not held accountable for standards. Heads of department who are newly appointed and those who are responsible for departments that require improvement receive very good support from senior managers. The monitoring and promoting of teaching and learning by senior staff are very good. This is reflected in the proportion of good and very good teaching observed and the huge decline in the amount of unsatisfactory teaching. However, the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning within a few subjects are not consistently effective and have required the support and intervention of senior staff. Although management of art and design and physical education are satisfactory, improvements have not been made as quickly as in most other subjects. The key stage co-ordinators work hard, effectively and with commitment to ensure a very good quality of pastoral care.
101. The expansion of the senior leadership team has allowed the school to make further improvements in the induction process for new staff. Good procedures have been developed to help new teachers, including the newly qualified teachers and temporary and supply staff. As a result, the school keeps its standards high even when staff changes occur.
102. The school pays due regard to the Code of Practice for special educational needs and the list of students with special needs is up to date. Since the retirement of the co-ordinator in December 2002, a deputy head teacher has led and managed provision for special educational needs effectively. This situation is temporary and the school is seeking to appoint a new co-ordinator in September. Senior staff are well aware of the current deficiencies in the procedures for identifying students with special educational needs and are taking appropriate action to remedy these. An experienced governor provides an effective link and good support for the provision for

special educational needs in the school. Funding for special educational needs is used as it should be. There is no dedicated room or base for withdrawal work to support students with special educational needs. This detracts from the good overall ethos of support and provision for students with special educational needs.

103. The school's financial planning has improved since the previous inspection and is now very good. The school has reduced its debts and now has more freedom to plan how to spend its money effectively. Specific funds coming into the school are used for the appropriate purpose. The senior leadership team make very good use of local and comparative data to check how well the school and its departments are performing. Heads of department are making increasingly effective use of this data to improve standards further. The school tries to ensure best value and spends its money wisely. At the time of the previous inspection, the school provided unsatisfactory value for money. It now provides good value for money.
104. The school manages its good staffing and resources and adequate accommodation well. The number, qualifications and experience of the teachers generally match the needs of the curriculum. Long-term absences of staff have hindered the development of courses in citizenship. Provision of staffing to meet the needs of students with special educational needs is good. Learning support assistants have a good range of experience and expertise and have attended and are attending appropriate courses to enhance their professional development. This has a positive impact on their support for students with special educational needs and contributes to the overall good achievement made by these students.
105. Accommodation is satisfactory to meet the needs of the curriculum in Years 9 to 11. Most subjects have their teaching rooms close together. In science, accommodation is old and in need of some refurbishment. Many laboratories are small for the size of class using them. A few science lessons take place in ordinary classrooms and occasionally result in inefficient use of equipment and a limited range of learning activities. Good displays of students' work in many subjects in classrooms and around the school enhance learning.
106. The school library provides a welcoming study area for students throughout the school day. It is open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Students use it well for private study, homework, and general reading. It is also used for the teaching of key skills. General supervision is effective and the oversight is satisfactory. Although the library provides a very useful study centre for all age groups, the current stock of non-fiction and reference books needs to be brought up to date to provide better background support for students.
107. Resources for learning are of good amount and quality in most subjects to support learning well. However, students' use of ICT and access to computers vary across subjects. In departments such as English and art and design, students often make good use of ICT to enhance learning, but these opportunities are infrequent in subjects such as mathematics and science. In art and design, a few students are disadvantaged because of the need for students to buy their own sketchbooks.

## **Sixth form**

### ***Leadership and management***

108. Good and purposeful leadership and management in the sixth form have resulted in good improvements. The sixth form now provides an effective education for students of all levels of attainment and social and ethnic backgrounds. The governing body and the senior staff now have a good overview of the sixth form that is enabling students to achieve well. The school has correctly identified the need to raise expectations and standards further in the sixth form to match the very high expectations seen in the rest of the school.
109. The recently appointed head of sixth form receives very good and effective support from the experienced deputy head. Together with the head teacher, they have a very clear vision for all-round development and have instituted wide-ranging improvements. Close scrutiny of current practices, very thorough monitoring of teaching and regular surveys of students' views have informed the sixth form review. The associated improvement plan provides a very perceptive and well-planned programme for change. An appropriate course of personal, social and health education and careers education has been introduced. A new and suitable system designed to monitor students' attitudes and to improve academic progress has been established. The school has plans to enhance students' personal development and skills as independent learners. Senior staff are developing good procedures for assessment in order that students gain a very clear view of what examination levels they are achieving and how to progress further. Students benefit from the satisfactory management of the local cluster arrangements that extend the range of courses and facilities available to students. The school is developing a distinct and purposeful atmosphere for the sixth form. It plans to introduce more effective arrangements for monitoring attendance. It has the capacity and commitment to make further improvements in provision in the sixth form.

### ***Resources***

110. The school makes good use of the staffing, resources and accommodation available for the teaching of courses in the sixth form, both in the school and within the cluster. It applies the principles of best value effectively when determining expenditure on the sixth form. Staffing and learning resources are good. Teachers in Years 12 and 13 are well qualified and suitably experienced to teach the courses for which they are timetabled. The sixth form is cost effective in relation to the school's expenditure as a whole. The accommodation, though much is of good quality, is barely adequate to meet the needs of students. The accommodation available for students to use in order to develop their learning outside of lessons is inadequate because of the recent large increases in the school's numbers on roll. As a result, students do not have enough opportunities to use specialist facilities to enhance their work in many subjects. Lack of space for personal study restricts students' development and use of their skills of research and independent learning. However, sixth form students make very good use of the library for research, using computers, and general reading and writing. The lack of tutor bases restricts the development of even better relationships between students and their tutors. The sixth form common room is far too small to house the rapidly expanding numbers of students.

## WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

111. In order to improve students' very good achievement further, the school should include the following key issues in its action plan.

(1) Improve provision for students with special educational needs by:

- ensuring accurate and reliable assessment and identification of students at the school action stage of the Code of Practice for special educational needs;
- improving the consistency and quality of targets set on students' individual education plans so that students, parents and teachers clearly understand what is expected;
- involving parents or carers and students closely in the procedures for implementing and reviewing individual education plans.

(Paragraphs: 8, 38, 62, 84, 91, 102)

(2) Implement the full course in citizenship.

(Paragraphs: 6, 65, 147, 149)

In addition to the key issues above, the following less important weaknesses should be considered for inclusion in the action plan:

- Encourage the more widespread use of ICT across subjects to enhance learning. (Paragraph: 49)
- Meet statutory requirements for the provision of a daily act of collective worship. (Paragraphs: 12, 69)
- Deal with the health and safety matters drawn to the school's attention. (Paragraphs: 34, 88)

### Sixth form

(1) Raise achievement further by implementing more effective procedures for assessment and tracking of students' progress. (Paragraphs: 21, 57, 85, 219, 224, 231, 244, 257, 269, 281)

(2) Improve students' skills in independent learning and enhance their all-round development by:

- providing more opportunities for students to take responsibility for their own learning and reducing their reliance on the teacher;
- making ICT more easily accessible to promote learning in and out of lessons;
- increasing the availability of suitable accommodation for private study and tutorial work.

(Paragraphs: 21, 56, 74, 109, 110, 218, 230, 263, 268)

(3) Meet statutory requirements for the provision of religious education in Years 12 and 13. (Paragraphs: 74, 78)

In addition to the key issues above, the following less important weakness should be considered for inclusion in the action plan:

- Implement a reliable system for the recording and monitoring of students' attendance. (Paragraph: 78)

## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

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

Number of lessons observed	Years 9 – 11	131
	Sixth form	66
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students		84

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
<b>Years 9 – 11</b>							
Number	7	41	52	28	3	0	0
Percentage	5	31	40	21	2	0	0
<b>Sixth form</b>							
Number	3	21	28	13	1	0	0
Percentage	5	32	42	20	2	0	0

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

### Information about the school's students

<b>Students on the school's roll</b>	Y9 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of students on the school's roll	821	216
Number of full-time students known to be eligible for free school meals	56	31

<b>Special educational needs</b>	Y9 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of students with statements of special educational needs	13	0
Number of students on the school's special educational needs register	220	12

<b>English as an additional language</b>	No of students
Number of students with English as an additional language	87

<b>Student mobility in the last school year</b>	No of students
Students who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	8

Students who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving
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7
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## Attendance

### Authorised absence

	%
School data	6.8
National comparative data	7.8

### Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.4
National comparative data	1.2

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2002	0	270	270

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Girls	245	226	221
	Total	245	226	221
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	91 (86)	84 (79)	82 (81)
	National	66 (64)	67 (66)	66 (66)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	46 (62)	62 (51)	43 (43)
	National	32 (31)	45 (43)	33 (34)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Girls	253	243	237
	Total	253	243	237
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	94 (88)	89 (74)	88 (78)
	National	67 (65)	70 (68)	67 (64)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	52 (49)	61 (44)	55 (48)
	National	32 (31)	44 (42)	34 (33)

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	2002	0	276	276

GCSE results	5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G

Numbers of students achieving the standard specified	Boys	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Girls	185	267	276
	Total	185	267	276
Percentage of students achieving the standard specified	School	67 (47)	97 (94)	100 (99)
	National	50 (48)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per student	School	50.6 (41.6)
	National	39.8 (39.0)

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

Vocational qualifications	Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those students 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	0	54	54
	Average point score per candidate	n/a	21.2	21.2
National	Average point score per candidate	†	†	†

		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	n/a	49	49	n/a	10	10
	Average point score per candidate	n/a	21.9	21.9	n/a	5.2	5.2
National	Average point score per candidate	†	†	†	†	†	†

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

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

**Ethnic background of students****Exclusions in the last school year**

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of students on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	828	19	0
White – Irish	16	0	0
White – any other White background	13	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	12	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	5	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	8	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	13	3	0
Asian or Asian British - Indian	22	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	23	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	30	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	4	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	22	4	0
Black or Black British – African	2	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	7	0	0
Chinese	15	0	0
Any other ethnic group	4	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	13	0	0

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

## Teachers and classes

### Qualified teachers and classes: Y9 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	59.4
Number of students per qualified teacher	17.5

### Education support staff: Y9 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	32
Total aggregate hours worked per week	798

### Deployment of teachers: Y9 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	73
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### Average teaching group size: Y9 – Y11

Key Stage 3	27.2
Key Stage 4	25.3

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

## Financial information

Financial year	2001/2002
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	£
Total income	2 986 454
Total expenditure	2 992 651
Expenditure per student	3066
Balance brought forward from previous year	140 851
Balance carried forward to next year	134 654

## Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	14.6
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	24.2

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	2
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	1.5

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

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

**Questionnaire return rate**

Number of questionnaires sent out	1037
Number of questionnaires returned	478

**Percentage of responses in each category**

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	44	49	5	2	0
My child is making good progress in school.	46	49	4	1	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	38	55	4	1	2
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	27	56	13	4	0
The teaching is good.	36	56	5	1	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	28	54	15	3	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	54	41	3	2	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	68	29	1	1	1
The school works closely with parents.	30	49	18	2	1
The school is well led and managed.	50	45	2	0	3
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	49	46	3	0	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	44	45	6	1	4

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

### ENGLISH

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

#### Strengths

- Imaginative, well-planned teaching leads to well above average attainment by the end of Year 9.
- Very good motivation and preparation help students to gain well above average GCSE results.
- Teachers' thorough marking and assessment help students to achieve very well by Year 11.

#### Area for improvement

- GCSE results in English literature were not as high as in English in 2002.

112. In 2002, results in National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9 were well above the national average and well above the average for similar schools. They were above the national average for girls. Results have improved in recent years at a faster rate than the national improvement. Comparing students' performance in these tests with their average levels at the end of Year 6 shows that achievement is very high. In English, students' results were similar to those in mathematics and above those in science.
113. GCSE results in 2002 were well above the national average in English language with over three quarters of students gaining an A\*-C pass. English literature results were just above average. They were particularly strong at the highest levels at which almost a quarter of entrants gained A\* and A passes. A small proportion of students, however, did not achieve quite as well in English literature as they did in English language. In both examinations, students achieved better results than in 2001. Students achieved similar GCSE grades in English language and English literature as they did in their other GCSE subjects.
114. The achievement of students with special educational needs and of early stage English learners in National Curriculum tests and GCSE examinations is very good because teachers adjust the work to meet their particular needs.
115. Standards of work seen are well above average in Year 9. Achievement is very good because the teaching is challenging and students are very well motivated. The helpful practice of teachers sharing the aims of the lesson with students contributes to the purposeful nature of the learning process. Students speak fluently and listen carefully in whole-class and small-group discussions. In one lesson, students studying *Macbeth* discussed and argued in pairs or small groups about what were the ten key scenes or stages of the plot, after their preliminary introduction to the play. Their findings became part of a successful, whole-class and shared discussion on the structure of the play conducted without further reference to the text itself. Reading skills are well above average. Teachers provide frequent and regular opportunities for silent reading and for reading aloud in groups or, at times, to the whole class. Another successful lesson on *Macbeth* combined the development of reading and writing skills and required students to write a short letter from an 'agony aunt' in response to requests for guidance from Macbeth and his wife. The writers read first drafts of the replies aloud very well, with confidence and wit.

116. Writing develops well in Year 9 because it is a regular part of each lesson and because it is practised in many different styles. The writing in response to *Macbeth* included practice in letter writing, summarising, writing in character and interpreting moral issues within the text. Students' folders include well-written discursive essays on topics of importance and relevance to students of this age group. Handwriting and spelling standards are high because they are practised regularly. Students of all levels of prior attainment make very good progress because their particular needs are identified and are supported well. A weekly English club gives good support to any students needing extra help. The 'booster' classes arranged for Year 9 students helped many to practise and improve language skills before taking the National Curriculum tests in 2002.
117. The standards of work of students in Years 10 and 11 are well above average and represent very good achievement. Progress continues to be very good in the two years leading to the GCSE examination because teachers present challenging tasks and expect students to achieve very well. Students receive good guidance from teachers on how to develop written arguments and how to examine set texts in greater detail. Students' written work in folders shows clearly how well they develop the depth and quality of their writing. One student for example, starting with written work of grade C/B level in Year 10, produced final work of grade A quality in Year 11 when writing a detailed, empathetic account of a key character in *An Inspector Calls*. Students of all levels of prior attainment make very good progress with writing, and particularly so in response to their reading of texts such as *Romeo and Juliet* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Their ability to read poems, plays and novels closely and carefully helps them to interpret characters and to identify with important moral issues that emerge. Oral work is similarly of a high standard. In lessons in Year 10, students reading a ghost story critically, and students in Year 11 discussing language used in fairy stories, showed self-confidence and a wide vocabulary in small-group and whole-class discussion. The successful development of speaking skills is encouraged by teachers' skilful use of open questions and by providing regular opportunities for students to speak.
118. The quality of teaching and learning is very good throughout the English department. Teachers have very good expertise in the subject. They plan lessons imaginatively and, with great thoroughness, use time effectively. They ensure that students practise basic language skills at the same time as they cover new ground. In a Year 11 lesson, for example, the teacher reminded students, who were looking at ways of comparing and contrasting poems, about the use of connectives in framing written answers. Teachers prepare students successfully for examinations by involving them actively in their own learning. They do this through the use of group work, role-play and drama activities, and sometimes through independent learning when students use learning materials that they access from the school's ICT network. All teachers mark written work thoroughly and helpfully to ensure that students can improve upon their final drafts of writing to seek higher standards. Learning is very good as teachers encourage students to enjoy English lessons. The interesting displays of students' work on classroom walls demonstrate that teachers have their own individual approaches to the texts such as *Macbeth* and that they encourage students to find enjoyment in exploring these. Students' very positive attitudes and very good behaviour contribute to their very good progress in lessons.
119. The department is managed effectively and is led well. There is a strong sense of teamwork within the group of ten English teachers although many of the team have separate wider responsibilities. Particularly effective is the evidence of collaborative planning of the curriculum for English. As well as developing skilfully the new

schemes of work required for new examinations, the team has identified areas of the curriculum in Year 9 and in Years 10 and 11 that can be used to promote elements of the citizenship curriculum and the social and moral education of students. For example, teachers use the main text in Year 9, *Macbeth*, well as a basis for discussing patterns of government, including monarchies. They help students to examine the moral issues as Macbeth contemplates committing regicide. In Years 10 and 11, students discuss issues of man's shared responsibility for fellow men within the study of Priestley's *An Inspector Calls*. The department has made good progress since the previous inspection. Attainment is higher and the quality of teaching and learning is now more uniformly very good.

## Drama

120. Standards in drama in Year 9 are average. Students of all levels of attainment plan and perform their drama with an awareness of audience and purpose. They work collaboratively with their peers. The assessment of students' work is good and informs students of how well they are doing and how to improve. Teaching and learning are good overall and help students to achieve well. In a Year 9 lesson dealing with image and status, students responded well to the tasks of creating and performing because the teacher related the work to their own experiences. The teacher's sensitivity and good working relationship with the students enabled all students to participate in the activities and in the sharing of their work. At times, students relied too much on the teacher's ideas
121. Standards by Year 11 are average as reflected by the GCSE results in 2002. In work seen, students applied their previous knowledge well in practical exploration of play texts. They performed with confidence in front of their peers and worked collaboratively in groups. Teaching and learning are good overall and help students of all ethnic backgrounds and levels of attainment to achieve well. Students' very positive attitudes and good relationships with the teacher lead to good progress in lessons. Good demonstrations by the teacher enhanced students' understanding of the task of exploring sub-text in their group work on play texts. Five higher achieving students have good provision to study drama after school as an extra GCSE course. These students extend their work through good opportunities for taking responsibility for the direction of the drama, a feature less apparent in other lessons. A dance lesson within expressive arts assisted students' critical appreciation of their work and that of their peers. Students applied drama skills well and used conventions such as tableau effectively.

## MATHEMATICS

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

### Strengths

- Well above average attainment shows very good achievement by the end of Years 9 and 11.
- Students' very positive response to good teaching helps them to achieve very well.
- Teachers use their good knowledge of the subject to plan challenging and effective lessons.
- New and effective leadership provides clear vision to develop teaching and learning.

### Areas for improvement

- There is insufficient use of ICT opportunities to broaden students' learning.



- In Year 9, students do not always have clear enough targets for improvement.

122. Students' attainment on entry is broadly average. It is well above average at the end of Year 9 and indicates very high achievement when compared with students' performance in the national tests in mathematics taken at the end of Year 6. In 2002, results in the national tests taken at the end of Year 9 were well above the national average. They were well above the national average for girls and well above the average for similar schools. This indicates very good achievement based on prior attainment. Results in the national tests have improved steadily in the last three years and are rising at a faster rate than the national trend. Performance in mathematics in these tests is similar to that in English but above that in science. Students continue to achieve very well until the end of Year 11. GCSE results in 2002 were well above the national average. They indicated good achievement for students of all levels of attainment and ethnic backgrounds based on their prior attainment in the national tests taken at the end of year. However, in 2002, students generally had lower grades in mathematics than in the other GCSE subjects they took. GCSE results have improved over the past three years. All students in Year 11 enter for GCSE mathematics.
123. Standards seen in class and in scrutiny of students' work show that standards are well above average throughout Years 9 to 11. They represent very good achievement that is due to students' very positive attitudes and the overall good teaching that they receive. Students in lower attaining classes in Year 9 worked competently with ratios, constructed triangles using ruler and compasses and drew straight-line graphs accurately. In higher attaining classes students were confident and competent in work involving trigonometry, inequalities and simultaneous equations. In Year 11, higher attaining students solved complex quadratic equations by factorisation and used the quadratic formula effectively. In lower attaining classes, students solved straightforward problems using Pythagoras's theorem. Work seen in exercise books is of a very high standard. Students take care with their work and show initiative in note taking. They check spellings and make sure their work can be used well for revision and review by noting down the lesson's objectives and highlighting key points. Since the previous inspection attainment has improved in Year 9 and in Years 10 and 11.
124. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. A good proportion of teaching is very good. The achievement of students of all levels of attainment, including the highest attainers and those with special educational needs, is very good overall because they respond very positively to the good teaching and persevere very well to complete their work. In Year 9, teaching reflects the patterns of teaching and learning activities suggested in the National Numeracy Strategy. Teachers plan lessons well. The very good teaching is characterised by good knowledge of the subject, interesting and challenging introductions, fast pace and high expectations. Students respond well to the challenging work set. Teachers use a good range of teaching methods that are very effective in keeping students motivated and on task. Mental starting activities provide a good introduction to all lessons. They help students to recall previous work and set the scene for the main activity for the lesson. Teachers explain the main teaching points well to ensure that students know what to do. They use their good knowledge of examination techniques to plan and develop topics in small stages, building on students' previous knowledge. Very effective use of techniques for questioning assesses students' understanding at all stages of the work. Pace is good and teachers take care to make sure no one falls behind. Good use of plenary sessions in many lessons gives students and staff a chance to reflect on what has been learned. Teachers know their students well and respond to individual needs

whilst ensuring that other students maintain their progress. Most students are active and enthusiastic learners. They behave and concentrate very well, work very hard, have a keen interest in their work and, accordingly, achieve very well over time. Students' co-operative attitudes and good relationships with staff assist learning.

125. Teachers make effective use of students' high standards of literacy to develop their work in mathematics. They require students to spell mathematical words accurately and to use correct technical language. The use of word lists, spelling and encouragement to use correct language enhances students' skills in literacy. In one class observed, students explained mathematical processes to the rest of the class. Standards of speaking were very high and students were confident and articulate in their use of language.
126. Standards of numeracy throughout the school are well above average. Students are confident in the use of number and mathematical techniques. They use their good skills to enhance their learning in many subjects. In geography, Year 9 students used systematic point sampling to calculate the likelihood of flooding and made their own choice of graphical representation. Students plotted the course of a cyclone using bearings and latitudinal and longitudinal co-ordinates. In ICT, students used mathematical functions on spreadsheets competently to study the effect of altering parameters. In science, students used formulae well and had an intuitive grasp of inverse proportionality. In design and technology, students made effective use of skills in measuring and estimation and used appropriate terminology when describing geometrical shapes in product design.
127. The marking and assessment of students' work are improving. They are good in Years 10 and 11 and satisfactory in Year 9. They do not consistently set targets for individuals' progress in Year 9. At times, students do not have enough specific and focused advice on how to improve.
128. Management of the subject is very good. Teachers know what to teach and when to teach it. The department makes effective use of its generally good resources to support learning. However, there is little use of ICT, particularly for students in Years 10 and 11 attempting to do coursework on handling data. The recently appointed head of department has already had a very positive influence on the development of the department. The clear plan for improvement has the suitable aim of implementing and developing further the monitoring of teaching so as to improve target setting for students and the sharing of good practice. All staff are receptive to new ideas and are self-critical in a drive to improve performance. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good. Standards are much higher and the quality of teaching has improved considerably. Since the previous inspection management has had a significant effect on attainment and has led to a consistent approach to teaching across the department.

## SCIENCE

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

### Strengths

- Well above average standards at the end of Years 9 and 11 represent very good achievement.
- Good leadership and management of the department contribute well to rising standards.
- Students' very positive attitudes and very good behaviour assist their learning.
- Good teaching engages the students and holds their interest in most lessons.

### Areas for improvement

- Marking sometimes gives insufficient guidance to students about how to improve their work.
- Many laboratories are small for the size of classes using them and restrict learning activities.

129. Results in the National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9, in 2002, were above the national average and well above the average for similar schools. When compared with students' attainment on entry, the results indicate very good achievement. Over the four years between 1999 and 2002 there was a steady improvement in test results. They were below average in 1999. Science results in 2002 were not as good as those in English and mathematics.
130. GCSE results at grades A\*-C in 2002 in science subjects were, overall, above the national average. They were well above average for similar schools. Results in chemistry were well above average and all 55 candidates gained a grade in the range A\*-C. In 2002, the proportion of students achieving the higher grades was above that of the previous year. Students did not do as well in GCSE examinations in double-award science and physics in 2002 as they did in many of their other subjects. However, in biology and, particularly, in chemistry, students' grades were higher than in most of their other subjects. The school had staffing difficulties in science with the result that several classes were taught by supply teachers. Standards are now rising faster because of the effective work of the head of science, supported well by a stable team that includes two new teachers.
131. In the work seen, students' standards of attainment by Year 9 and by Year 11 are well above average. These standards reflect the attainment in recent tests, but represent an improvement over GCSE examination results in 2002. Students enter the school with levels of attainment that are broadly average. Their achievement by the end of Year 11 is very much better than might be expected in relation to their earlier attainment.
132. Throughout Years 9 to 11, lower attaining students, including those with learning difficulties, are achieving very well. This is because teachers have high but realistic expectations. They produce suitably difficult tasks and activities and work well with learning support assistants to provide effective support. Students for whom English is an additional language receive very good support that enables them to make very good progress. A small number of higher attaining students, particularly in Year 9, though achieving well, are not achieving quite as well as they could because work is not always sufficiently demanding. They have few opportunities to research appropriate information, think critically about it and produce original extended writing. Students of high attainment achieve very well by Year 11 because they receive suitably challenging and difficult work.
133. Teachers pay careful attention to the development of students' literacy skills so that most students have confidence and competence in using scientific terminology appropriately and accurately. The standard of presentation and the legibility of students' writing across the whole range of attainment are good. The writing up of methods of experiments by a small number of average attaining students is often confused, with results being described qualitatively whereas quantity is required. Most average attaining students, however, write very detailed and accurate methods. However, they do not always make predictions, produce enough results or make conclusions or evaluations. The use of mathematics is developed well and graphical

skills are particularly good in all years. Skills in ICT, although improving, are less well developed because of the lack of opportunity to use computers.

134. Year 9 students are acquiring a very good knowledge of the topics they are studying. Students of all levels of attainment know how light and sound travels. Higher attaining students apply their knowledge well. They know how to measure the speed of sound accurately and explain the law of reflection in terms of the angle of incidence and angle of reflection. Overall, students' investigative skills of predicting, planning and evaluating experiments, though good, are not as good as in the knowledge-based aspects of science, because they do not have sufficient opportunities to practise these skills for themselves.
135. During Years 10 and 11, students make very good progress overall. They use and extend the knowledge and understanding developed in Year 9. By Year 11, higher attaining students have a very good understanding of wave theory. They communicate confidently using terminology such as frequency, wavelength and amplitude. They understand the quantitative relationship between the speed, frequency and wavelength of a wave. In a lesson about the atmosphere, all students, including girls of average and below average attainment, understood that air contained oxygen, nitrogen, carbon dioxide and water and explained where the water came from. Higher attaining students in the same class understood very clearly the changes that took place in the atmosphere, over time. Teachers pay good attention to experimental and investigative science in most classes, throughout Years 10 and 11, so that standards in this aspect of science are above average overall.
136. The quality of teaching and learning is good throughout Years 9 to 11. Teaching ranges from excellent to satisfactory. The difference in the quality of teaching between lessons produces marked differences in students' response. The very good and excellent teaching was found in lessons in which teachers were teaching their own particular science specialism. In these lessons teachers had a very good knowledge and understanding of their subject, and were confident in the material they were required to teach. Planning was very good with a wide range of interesting activities. As a result, the students became fully engaged in all the activities provided, enjoyed the lesson and learned quickly and efficiently. This was seen, for example, in a Year 11 lesson about cell division in the human body. In the few satisfactory lessons there were some weaknesses in subject planning. This was mostly a direct consequence of a lack of in-depth knowledge of the subject and National Curriculum requirements by teachers teaching outside their own specialism. This meant that students were much less interested in their work and made satisfactory rather than better progress. Most teachers mark work frequently, and in encouraging ways. However, they do not always give students a clear enough indication of how well they are progressing, and what they need to do in order to improve.
137. Students' achievement over time is very good because they respond very positively to the overall good teaching. They work very hard, have very good attitudes, behave consistently very well and persevere to complete the work set. They respond particularly well when presented with challenges that require them to apply their knowledge to new situations and to make decisions. They work very well in groups.
138. Good and enthusiastic leadership and management ensure that teachers and technicians work well together as a team. Staff follow the department's clear and well-understood aims in successful attempts to raise attainment. There is a need for more effective monitoring of teaching by the department to achieve more consistency so that the very good practice is more widespread. The science curriculum currently

provides insufficient opportunities for students to use ICT to gather, handle and display scientific information. Health and safety issues concerning the storage of chemicals were brought to the attention of the school and were acted upon. Accommodation is old and in need of some refurbishment. Many laboratories are small for the size of class using them and have layouts with little flexibility. A few lessons take place in ordinary classrooms. These factors prevent efficient use of equipment and limit the range of teaching styles that can be used. The department has made good progress since the previous inspection. Standards are higher and the quality of teaching has improved.

## ART AND DESIGN

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

### Strengths

- Students in Years 10 and 11 achieve well as a result of good teaching.
- Good relationships between staff and students support learning.

### Areas for improvement

- Marking is of inconsistent quality.
- Lack of sketchbooks and structured homework hinders development of drawing skills.

139. Students' attainment on entry in Year 9 indicates a wide range of prior attainment and is close to average overall. In 2002, teachers' assessments of students' work at the end of Year 9 indicated that students were attaining well above the national average and higher than the national results for girls' schools. Work seen does not support these assessments. Standards in Year 9 currently are average. By Year 11, standards have improved slightly but remain average and represent satisfactory achievement.
140. GCSE results in 2002 matched the national average for all schools and were slightly below the national average for girls nationally. They indicate a considerable improvement when compared to the school's below average results in art and design for the previous three years. Students attained lower GCSE grades in art and design in 2002 than in most of the other subjects they took.
141. Students' achievement compared to prior attainment in the subject is satisfactory in Year 9. Students work in two and three dimensions and start to develop skills of planning and research. They look at the work of David Hockney and produce good work in his style. Most students know the names of a few artists but do not put them in the context of time or place. Many students do not make good progress because they do not have sketchbooks and do not have homework frequently enough to develop their skills in the subject. Drawing skills are weak, particularly drawing from direct observation.
142. Achievement, relative to students' prior attainment in the subject, is good overall in Years 10 and 11. Students of all backgrounds and levels of attainment, including those with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language, achieve equally well. Students take more responsibility for their work and produce well-researched contextual studies on the work of artists, as seen in a very good project on minimalism. Students are self-motivated and prepared to experiment with a range of materials. Although the end result is occasionally striking, such as the papier-mâché pots in Year 10, the work is often based on weak drawing and simplistic images. Drawing and painting skills from direct observation and from the figure are underdeveloped. Many sketchbooks are developed to a high standard but a

few are not because teachers' expectations for homework are not always high enough. The current situation of students having to supply their own sketchbooks is unsatisfactory and at times has a negative effect on the learning of several students.

143. Students respond well to the good learning opportunities. They have a positive attitude to their work and are keen to talk about what they are doing. The teaching of literacy is good. Key words are emphasised and students are starting to use the specific language associated with art and design. The use of numeracy is effective in assisting learning as, for example, in work on proportionality and perspective. Behaviour is good and students are interested in their work. Students with special educational needs are making satisfactory progress in Year 9. They make good progress in Years 10 and 11 because they benefit from support from the technician and from a visiting designer. There is no variation in attainment between the students of different ethnic heritage. Gifted and talented students achieve well in Years 10 and 11. They achieve satisfactorily in Year 9 but teachers do not always give these students enough stimulating and individual work. In Years 10 and 11, the course meets the needs of students well because there are more and good opportunities for individual work.
144. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. It is good in Years 10 and 11 and satisfactory in Year 9. In the best lessons seen, teachers used a variety of teaching styles and drew much of the information from the students. In a Year 9 lesson, in spite of limited space, good teaching and organisation enabled students to construct low-relief models based on their previous architectural drawings and prints. In a Year 10 lesson, the teacher encouraged students to find decorative solutions to the pots they had made. In a Year 11 class, most students were self-motivated and developed their own individual projects with the help of the teacher. Students' learning is good because they use ICT effectively for research and make good use of a selection of art reference books in the library that includes texts on women artists, but little on modern black or Asian artists.
145. Procedures for assessment are good and are often used well to help students to improve. However, teachers do not always use marking and assessment consistently enough for all students to understand fully how well they are doing. Although work in sketchbooks is assessed, it is rarely marked with a comment that tells students how to improve their work.
146. Leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory overall. However, the monitoring of teaching and learning is not as effective as it is in most other subjects in ensuring the spread of good practice. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory. Extra-curricular visits to museums and galleries are starting to be developed and ICT is being introduced in many lessons. The distance of the kiln from the art department means that opportunities for clay work remain limited.

## CITIZENSHIP

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

### Strengths

- Parts of the citizenship course are taught in a carefully planned way in several subjects.
- Students experience aspects of citizenship in whole-school and extra-curricular activities.

### Areas for improvement

- Full implementation of the citizenship course has been interrupted through staff absence.
- Students are not aware of their progress in developing citizenship skills.

147. Attainment in citizenship matches national expectations for students in Years 9 to 11. Achievement is satisfactory. However, procedures for assessing attainment are insufficiently developed so that most students are unaware of their standards and progress in the subject. As the school has not defined the levels of attainment expected at the end of Years 9 and 11, students do not know what is expected of them and teachers cannot assess them. Much of students' learning occurs in subjects such as history, religious education and personal, social and health education and through the school's programme of extra-curricular events and activities such as the school council and fund raising for charities. Because the long-term absence of a teacher in another department has necessitated the temporary deployment of the citizenship co-ordinator to other important duties in the school, the full implementation of the new curriculum for citizenship has been delayed.
148. The school prepared well for the introduction of citizenship in the current school year, by appointing a temporary acting co-ordinator with particular, specialist, qualifications and training in the subject. All teachers have attended a training day in citizenship and a follow-on day is planned. Appropriate systems are being developed for the assessment of students' work and to enable students to gain credit for the development of their citizenship experience in records of achievement. Students enhance their knowledge and understanding of citizenship through the 'outreach' activities within the community, such as work experience, projects for charity and participation in a basic skills programme.
149. A small number of lessons were observed in English, history and personal health and social education in which aspects of citizenship were discussed. Students increased their awareness of issues surrounding citizenship during discussions and in writing. For example, they considered such matters as the political dilemma of post-war settlements and the ethical problems facing doctors when they have to protect the confidentiality of patients, who are clearly in breach of the law. In these lessons and in a very good Year 9 assembly, students used role-play, discussion and debate to understand the points of view of others regarding relationships. Students have satisfactory skills of enquiry and communication. They participate well in lessons and learn how to be responsible for their actions. However, their knowledge and understanding about becoming informed citizens through these subjects are inadequate, as they are not aware that they are learning about citizenship at all. The learning objectives and outcomes for citizenship are not given to them.
150. The management of citizenship is satisfactory and has conducted two reviews of provision. Once the school's current staffing difficulty is resolved, the department has the capacity to make good improvements.

## DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

### Strengths

- GCSE results are well above average and show very good achievement.
- Good teaching motivates students to want to do well.

- Students design and make products of very good quality.

**Areas for improvement**

- Students have few opportunities to develop skills in computer-aided manufacture.
- The use of assessment to track students' progress is inconsistent within the department.

151. Students enter the school in Year 9 with varied experience, but average attainment in the subject. Students of all levels of attainment and different ethnic backgrounds make rapid progress and by the end of the year achieve standards that are above average. In Years 10 and 11, all students build on prior learning. They make very good progress in the skills of designing and making. GCSE results in 2002 were well above the national average with an above average number of the higher grades A\*-C. Students' grades were similar to those they gained in the other GCSE subjects they sat. Over the past three years GCSE results have shown a steady improvement.
152. Students achieve well in Year 9. They work safely with a range of tools and materials. They acquire good skills in designing and making through a wide range of well-structured modules. Students apply their skills well in a variety of situations. In food technology, they design and make products that have an edible casing, bringing to bear varied cultural influences to make widely diverse products. A very good feature of the work in Year 9 is the use of sophisticated design software to produce designs of high quality such as those for chess pieces. The system of rotating classes between the material areas has a slightly detrimental effect on progress at times. Interruptions to the school timetable for a variety of reasons result in a few modules becoming shortened and written work is sometimes left unfinished.
153. In Years 10 and 11, students make rapid progress. By the end of Year 11, students of all capabilities are achieving very well relative to their prior attainment. Students who have special educational needs and those who have English as an additional language make similar progress to other students because teaching meets their needs. Students in all material areas use a design process to make products of high quality. Coursework folios are of a very high standard and are presented well. Gifted and talented students have good opportunity to achieve their potential through individual coursework tasks. Students' very good literacy skills enable them to communicate their decisions for design clearly. Teachers encourage them to make good use of technical vocabulary. Students are good at generating ideas in response to a design brief. They use ICT effectively as a tool for various purposes in their work but rarely use ICT to manufacture products. Students develop their research skills well, particularly regarding analysis of existing products. Students have very good numeracy skills that are appropriate for the needs of the subject and apply them competently when necessary. Currently students in resistant materials use only a very limited range of materials and do not consider enough other possibilities when designing and making.
154. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. It is good in Year 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11. The teachers are recently appointed subject specialists. Teachers make effective use of particular and individual strengths such as their experience in industry or artistic skills to motivate the students and to assist their progress. This expertise is not always shared effectively across all teaching groups to ensure that all students benefit. Good features of the teaching include effective planning so that lessons are interesting, move at a brisk pace and contain a variety of activities. Teachers put on display and use in their lessons many examples of students' work. This serves to celebrate success and to show other students what



can be achieved. Students achieve very well by Year 11 because they respond very positively to the good teaching they receive, are enthusiastic for the subject and behave very well. The high numbers of students who attend after-school sessions demonstrate their very good attitudes. Teachers mark students' work well and give good feedback on their performance. However, there is inconsistency between teachers in the way they assess work and track students' progress throughout the school. Teaching makes a satisfactory contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural education of students, but it is incidental and is not included in planning. The three technicians in the department make a very positive contribution to the standards achieved. As well as ensuring that all the necessary resources are available to enable lessons to progress smoothly they are competent to help students when practical activities are taking place.

155. Leadership and management of the department are good. The newly appointed head of department is continuing the good work already begun to move the department forward. Effective monitoring of the work in the department has correctly identified priorities to raise standards further. Strategies are being put in place for further development and to draw the department together as a team. There has been a very good improvement since the previous inspection when standards were low.

## **GEOGRAPHY**

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

### **Strengths**

- Very good teaching helps students to achieve very well.
- Students develop very good skills of enquiry and decision making.

### **Area for improvement**

- The range of applications of ICT is limited.

156. Standards attained by students at the end of Year 9 are well above average. The number of students who take geography in Years 10 and 11 has been low and is rising. GCSE results are improving and in 2001 and 2002 were well above the national average. Students attained similar GCSE grades in geography as they did in the other subjects they sat in 2002. Standards of work seen in Years 10 and 11 currently reflect the well above average standards attained recently in GCSE examinations. Results of Year 11 students, who all took a GCSE module in Year 10, indicate well above average attainment.
157. Achievement is very good in all years. Students with special educational needs, gifted and talented students and students for whom English is an additional language receive good support in class and make very good progress. Higher attaining students receive work that is suitably challenging and difficult. All groups of students make very good progress in lessons and learn very well. In Year 9 this is because teachers help students to reinforce their geographical skills and show them how to study and to carry out investigations. Students improve their skills of independent learning throughout Years 9 to 11. Students analyse evidence and draw conclusions from it well. For their GCSE coursework in Year 11 students set their own hypotheses competently. The standard of GCSE investigations produced by students is high relative to their prior attainment.
158. Students have very positive attitudes to their work and behave very well. Students discuss their work well in pairs and contribute confidently to whole-class activities.

They settle to individual written tasks quickly and keep up their concentration throughout the lesson. This is helped by lesson planning that sets a brisk pace. A few students in Year 9 explained how they found the issues and variety of activities stimulating. The number of students continuing with geography into Year 12 increased in 2002.

159. The quality of teaching and learning is very good throughout Years 9 to 11. Some excellent learning took place in Year 11 lessons, as seen, for example, in the feedback session after different groups of students had taken the role of particular economically developed or underdeveloped countries in a trading game. The teachers in these lessons not only helped students to sum up the results but also led them to project further outcomes and reviewed the process by which students had learnt. Teachers' enthusiasm for geography passes on to the students and engages their interest. Relationships between students and teachers are very good and contribute to a very good learning atmosphere in most lessons. Teachers plan very thoroughly with attention to learning skills and examination technique, as well as ensuring good coverage of the subject content. They make the aims of lessons clear to students so that they have clear guidelines for learning. Marking of students' work is usually very informative and helps them to make very good progress. Arrangements for assessing and monitoring students' progress are effective in helping students to improve. Good liaison between teachers and learning support assistants ensures that students with special educational needs receive appropriate work and support.
160. The enquiry-based approach of the curriculum in geography helps students to enhance their skills in investigation and decision making. This is a major and positive change since the previous inspection that has helped to raise standards. Fieldwork and use of ICT are important learning activities in all years. Students make good use of the Internet for research and use ICT effectively to present their work. In Year 9, for example, students compare the impact of different volcanic eruptions. The use of ICT is developing, but the range of applications is still limited. For example, students rarely carry out data logging and analysis. The department makes a good contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education. Teaching of literacy and numeracy in geography is well planned. In a Year 9 lesson, students had used point sampling to assess the risk of flooding in Bangladesh and were plotting the path of a tropical cyclone in the Bay of Bengal using co-ordinates of latitude and longitude.
161. Very good leadership shows good vision and embraces the high expectations and values of the school. Teachers work closely as a team and have made very good improvements to the curriculum. There has been a very good improvement since the previous inspection. Aspects of the curriculum identified as areas for improvement have been resolved very well. The quality of teaching has improved considerably. Standards were previously about average and are now well above average.

## HISTORY

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

### Strengths

- Students achieve very well as a result of very good teaching and learning.
- Students respond very well in lessons and enjoy the subject.
- Very good leadership and management have contributed to the very high standards.

### Area for improvement

- Students do not have enough opportunity to use ICT to enhance their work.

162. Standards of work of Year 9 students are well above average. Students demonstrate a very good understanding of historical topics in class. In written work, for example, they showed very clearly how life had changed in Britain between 1750 and 1900. They use and evaluate historical sources successfully. They can explain different points of view about historical events. For example, in work on the Versailles Peace Conference after the First World War, students demonstrated a very good appreciation of the viewpoints put forward by the leaders of different countries. They research and organise information well to produce very good historical writing. Students of all ethnic backgrounds, including those with special educational needs, achieve very well. They master new topics quickly and make rapid progress in developing relevant skills
163. Results at GCSE have improved year by year since 1999. In 2002, results were well above the national average with around one in five candidates attaining A\* grades. Students tend to perform better in history than in their other subjects. Standards of work of Year 11 students are well above national averages. They use historical sources very effectively, as seen in work evaluating the career of General Custer. They are also mastering the content of the course very successfully. In work on the history of medicine, students explain changes and development over time, for example, in the provision for public health in 19th century England. Overall, the achievement of students from all ethnic backgrounds and of different levels of attainment is very good. Students become more confident in their use of sources. Their writing becomes more focused on the demands of the examination questions.
164. Teaching and learning are very good. They help to explain students' very good achievement. Teachers plan lessons very thoroughly. They take great care in providing appropriate work for students of different levels of attainment. In a Year 9 lesson on the Versailles Peace Conference, the teacher ensured that different tasks matched very well the learning needs of both the highest attaining students and those with special learning difficulties. This meant that all students made very rapid progress. Teachers use a good variety of methods to involve all students fully in the work. In a Year 11 lesson, for example, a challenging task on changes in public health in 19th century England, followed by probing questioning, led to very effective learning. The teaching of literacy is effective. Teachers give very good attention to helping students with the structure and organisation of their written work. Marking is very good. This all helps students to improve their work. Teachers manage students very well. This ensures very good behaviour and very positive attitudes. Students respond very well in lessons. They enjoy the subject.
165. A new head of department came into post at the beginning of last term but went on long-term sick leave after half a term. The previous head of department has resumed the role on a temporary basis. This has ensured that any disruption to students' learning in history has been kept to a minimum. Overall, the leadership and management of history are very good and systems for monitoring teaching and learning work well. There has been good improvement since the previous inspection. A good programme of educational visits helps to extend students' learning in Years 10 and 11. The use of ICT to enhance students' work is underdeveloped but there are plans to address this issue.

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

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

**Strengths**

- Innovative teaching and learning help to improve standards.
- Good use of assessment informs students about achievement and sets suitable targets.
- Students use ICT well to support learning in several subjects.

**Areas for improvement**

- The limited time available for teaching the short GCSE course leads to below average results.
- Access to ICT is insufficient for students to apply their computing skills in a few subjects.

166. Teachers' assessments in 2002 showed attainment to be above the national average at the end of Year 9. Work seen in Year 9 indicates standards are well above average currently.
167. ICT is now taught as a separate subject to all students in Year 9 in response to a key issue from the previous report. Year 10 students opt for a one-year ICT course or a two-year GNVQ intermediate course. In 2002, students who took the GCSE short course in ICT at the end of Year 10 attained below average results at grades A\*-C but above average results at A\*-G. GNVQ results indicated slightly below average attainment. Overall, the results on these courses represented satisfactory achievement.
168. Students enter the school with a wide range of ICT experience. They make good progress in Year 9, consolidating and extending their understanding of previous knowledge. Achievement by the end of Year 9 is very good. In work on marketing a chocolate bar, students used the Internet competently to extend their knowledge about the product. Students raised thought-provoking ideas on what constitutes fair trade and purchasing products from underdeveloped countries. It caused them to think carefully of their own role as informed citizens and consumers. Students are good at developing ideas and making things happen with ICT. Good planning ensures students practise and develop their skills in a good variety of interesting activities. They work well on spreadsheets, controlling movement and using databases and multi-media applications for presentations to specific audiences. Application of ICT in many subjects reinforces learning.
169. In Years 10 and 11, achievement is good relative to students' prior attainment. Improved management of the subject has led to improved achievement. Students consolidate their skills further. Standards on the GNVQ course are average by Year 11 and indicate good achievement. The 'on-line' framework for the course motivates students to do well. The interactive nature of the work assists independent learning and enables students to work at their own suitable pace. They gain good knowledge of elements of business such as letters, flyers, leaflets and logos. Discussion in groups and peer and group evaluations challenge students to think carefully and provide good opportunities for suitable competition. Students have a clear understanding of the influence of ICT on their lives. Standards on the GCSE short course are below average overall because there is a limited amount of time for teaching the course and many students have difficulties meeting deadlines for coursework.
170. Students with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language achieve very well in ICT. They receive good support from the teacher that enables them to keep their work in line with their peers. Gifted and talented students make good progress through useful extension work.

171. Teaching and learning are good overall. Effective monitoring of teaching and good in-service training have assisted students' learning. Good and consistent planning of lessons establishes high expectations for students' achievement and behaviour. Homework is set regularly and extends thinking skills. Teachers use a good variety of teaching methods to motivate students. They use assessment very well to involve students as partners in learning and to show them how to improve. Students learn from each other during evaluations of group and individual work.
172. Good leadership and management have resulted in good improvement since the previous inspection. Areas of concern identified previously have been corrected. A very responsive technical team ensures that the equipment is maintained well to support students' learning. The previous report found little evidence of cross-curricular work. The present situation has improved. Teachers in all subjects have received training in how to use ICT to support teaching and learning. The Assistant Head has planned the teaching of the subject carefully so that aspects of ICT are taught in different subjects. The teaching of ICT across subjects is good when access to the computing facilities is direct, as in design and technology and English. However, in areas such as mathematics and history, the minimal access to ICT facilities hinders students' development and application of their ICT skills to enhance and extend their work in those subjects. Not all students in Year 11 have their full entitlement to ICT and so standards are below average overall. Provision in Year 10 currently meets requirements.

## MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Overall, the quality of provision in modern foreign languages is **very good**.

### Strengths

- Very good teaching leads to very high achievement in French, German and Spanish by Year 11.
- Teachers make very good use of assessment to help students to improve.
- Many students in Year 10 and 11 learn two languages.

### Area for improvement

- Few students use the foreign language when they need to ask for help.

173. In 2002, the proportion of students attaining GCSE grades A\*-C in French, the schools' main modern foreign language, was well above the national average for all students, and well above the average for girls nationally. This represents an improvement on the results of 2001 and 2000. The proportion of students attaining the higher grades of A\* and A matched the national average. All candidates attained a grade at A\*-G.
174. German and Spanish are the school's second modern foreign languages. Students on these courses are those who have an aptitude for languages and numbers are smaller. All candidates in German attained grades A\*-C in 2002, significantly above the national average. A well above average proportion attained A\* or A grades. The proportion of students attaining grades A\*-C in Spanish was also well above the average for girls nationally. All students attained a grade in the range A\*-D. Students attained higher grades in modern foreign languages than in most of the other GCSE subjects they sat.

175. Teachers' assessments of students' work at the end of Year 9 show an upward trend over the last three years in the number of students attaining levels 5 and 6, which matches the national trend. The assessments in 2002 indicated that students' overall level of attainment by the end of Year 9 was average.
176. In work seen, students' overall attainment in French in Year 9 is average and represents good achievement for students of all ethnic backgrounds and levels of attainment. Students have a good understanding of gender and of the vocabulary of topics studied. In two different classes, students used vocabulary correctly in conjunction with food and drink. They identified the different parts of French grammar from cassette and noted them accordingly. They spoke accurately to describe what they like eating and drinking. Higher attaining students write with confidence about leisure activities and household tasks, using past tenses well. Other students are less competent in writing.
177. Students begin the study of German and Spanish in Year 9 with one lesson every week. All students are making good progress, with a few making very good progress, despite the limited allocation of time. In German, students speak and write in the language to invite each other to activities and answer with different responses. They know the accusative case, use adjectival endings correctly in descriptions and use inverted word order correctly. In Spanish, students ask and answer questions about leisure activities competently from memory. Higher attaining students in both languages receive work of challenge and suitable difficulty.
178. Students' overall levels of attainment in French, German and Spanish by the end of Year 11 are well above average. In French, students have a good knowledge of the vocabulary of the topics studied, which enables them to complete different tasks. In Year 11, for instance, students used French to say what was wrong with the car and asked for help in a role-play. In another lesson, students asked for petrol or diesel, air and water at the service station. In a listening exercise, all students answered all the questions correctly. In Year 10, students have a good knowledge of the French vocabulary associated with household tasks, which enables them to talk about pocket money. Pronunciation varies. In two Year 10 classes, it is sometimes only approximate. Students write at length and with reasonable accuracy about pocket money and holidays, using a variety of tenses.
179. In German, students in Year 10 talk about the daily routine and link phrases to the appropriate pictures correctly. Students in Year 11 use their knowledge of shops and different articles to note successfully the information they hear on cassette. Students practised appropriately a shopping role-play with the assistant, using prompts. Pronunciation is generally good, but a few have difficulty with long words. Using word cards, students form short sentences in the past and future tenses to practise correct word order. They write at length about holidays, using the past tense quite accurately and with some subordinate clauses, but they are not always consistent with word order.
180. In Spanish, Year 10 students talk quite confidently about the school subjects they like or dislike and about their school. They extract with reasonable success information they hear on cassette. They have produced interesting brochures about their region. Students in Year 11 use the past tense to say what they did last week and to note information that they hear on cassette, but they are not yet fully confident and accurate in its use.

181. The achievement and rate of progress are good in Year 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11. Students learning a second language do particularly well in view of the limited time that they have at their disposal. Over time, students acquire the necessary vocabulary for the different topics and the tenses and grammatical constructions to use with it. The department makes a good contribution to students' literacy as seen in the use of spider diagrams to show different tasks for earning pocket money. In two French lessons, students increased their confidence in speaking because the teacher made them speak up. Teachers provide good opportunities for students to read aloud in order to gain confidence and competence in speaking the foreign language. In a Year 10 German lesson, the whole class read aloud in chorus after the teacher. Teachers provide opportunities to use and develop numeracy. In a Year 9 French lesson, the teacher used numbers to test the class on food. Students with special educational needs and minority ethnic students integrate well into their classes and make very good progress. Teachers know the gifted and talented students well and provide them with suitably challenging extension work so that they make very good progress.
182. Students' very good behaviour and very positive attitudes contribute to their very good achievement by Year 11. Students respond well to the teachers and work co-operatively in pairs or independently.
183. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. It is good in Year 9 and is very good in Years 10 and 11. Teachers have a very good knowledge of their subject and use the foreign language well to challenge the students in most lessons. However, they do not always ensure that students use the foreign language when they need help, thereby making the foreign language the language of the classroom. The teaching of basic skills is good. Teachers plan lessons well, with different activities and different skills, so that students maintain their interest and concentration. Students know what they have to learn, because they receive the objectives of every lesson at the outset. Most lessons have an effective starter activity. Occasionally, teachers miss opportunities for students to read aloud. They do not always challenge students sufficiently after chorus work or in the evaluation at the end of the lesson. Teachers know their students well, and they expect much of them.
184. In many lessons, teachers use flash cards effectively to introduce new vocabulary or in games to develop oracy. Two teachers used mime successfully to demonstrate household tasks. Teachers use chorus work effectively to consolidate vocabulary. Worksheets complement the textbook in many lessons. Teachers share examination criteria with their students, so that students are aware of the standards that they have to reach. Students' booklets include the examination board's instructions. Students enhance their learning through assessing each other in oral work in pairs. The frequent and regular setting of suitable homework extends learning. Good marking of students' work, usually with helpful comments, shows them how well they are doing and how to improve. Very good relationships among students and between staff and students assist learning.
185. The two subject leaders provide good direction for the subject and manage the department very well. They make very good use of assessment to track students' progress. Teachers' assessments are thorough and accurate. The department makes a good contribution to students' social and cultural development. Many students have good contact with the two foreign language assistants. The number of students studying two languages in Years 10 and 11 is nearly four times the national average for students in comprehensive schools. Improvement since the previous inspection is very good, particularly in Spanish.

## MUSIC

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

### Strengths

- Very good teaching promotes students' very good achievement by the end of Year 11.
- GCSE results are well above average and have improved over the last three years.
- Students extend their experience through outstanding extra-curricular opportunities in music.
- Very good leadership and management ensure that music is a strength of the school.

### Area for improvement

- Students have few opportunities to use ICT to enhance their work in music.

186. Students' attainment on entry is broadly average. Teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2002 indicated that attainment was above average. In work seen in Year 9 standards are currently above average.
187. Attainment by the end of Year 11 improves to well above the national average. Over the last three years GCSE results were well above average and improving. In 2002, four out of every five candidates gained A\*-C grades and nearly one half gained A\* or A grades.
188. Achievement in Year 9 is good, and by Year 11 it is very good. The achievement of students with special educational needs, those for whom English is an additional language and the gifted and talented students matches that of other students. A number of specially gifted students have reached very high standards.
189. Most students in Year 9 read musical notation and play electronic keyboards well. A large number of students play another instrument. Many of these benefit from good tuition in the school. Their fluency in these skills means that they can perform at a high level, both individually and together. This gives them good resources for composing and they produce attractive and well-structured work. Most students have good knowledge of a wide variety of musical styles and structures. They develop good listening, analytical and evaluative skills.
190. This good balance of practical skills and experience, combined with developing understanding, means that students who choose to continue to study music in Years 10 and 11 start with a distinct advantage. All these students play at least one instrument. Several play at a high level. In their listening and analysis, they demonstrate an impressive grasp of structure and style and their effect on the emotional aspects of music. Students evaluate well the quality of what they hear, using appropriate technical language. Students' overall good levels of literacy, through writing, understanding and speaking, contribute strongly to their very good progress. Most students' compositions show that they have the technique to realise successfully their creative ideas. The original work of a few gifted students is very sophisticated.
191. The quality of teaching and learning is good in Year 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11. The very good overall quality of teaching and students' mature and enthusiastic attitudes are responsible for their high levels of achievement and attainment. Teachers use their very good knowledge and practical skills in music to enthuse the



students. They explain difficult concepts in ways that students of all levels of attainment can understand. Students know what they have to do in lessons because teachers explain the work and its purpose clearly. They do well because teachers structure tasks progressively to build on and develop their skills. Students receive good support and are becoming self-sufficient in learning skills such as improving and refining work. They respond enthusiastically to challenging tasks and are mutually supportive in group activity, in which the higher attainers help those who are less confident. Teachers always reinforce learning by probing questions during and at the end of lessons. Students are keen to respond and answers are normally correct. The very good system for assessment ensures that students know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve further. GCSE target grades and actual grades are close enough to show that teachers know their students' strengths and weaknesses well.

192. Some excellent teaching and learning was observed in Years 10 and 11. Here students are working more widely and deeply than the examination syllabus requires. For the whole of a double lesson, lasting for one hour and 40 minutes, students in Year 11 demonstrated impressive concentration. Their perception and their ability to transfer and apply skills from one task to another were promoted by most rigorous and demanding teaching.
193. Music makes a very good contribution to students' personal development. Effective team skills and personal responsibility produce good group activity in the classroom and in music ensembles. Very good relationships among students mean that they are mutually supportive and value each other's efforts and views. Their cultural awareness is nurtured in the curriculum, which covers a wide variety of ethnic music and in extra-curricular activities, such as the rock and jazz groups and the steel pan ensemble.
194. The very good curriculum for music in Year 9 and its progression into Years 10 and 11 provides an extensive range of learning opportunities for students of all backgrounds and levels of attainment. The outstanding provision for instrumental lessons and ensemble experience provide excellent enrichment and enhancement. More than 200 students learn instruments and are encouraged to enter practical music examinations. The school subsidises the cost of buying in the services of 13 visiting staff. The standard of teaching is very good and ensembles are coached at a professional level. This considerable investment not only attracts students with an aptitude for music to choose the school, but also means that the school plays a prominent part in the musical and cultural life of the area. The concert band, organised jointly with the local boys' school, has a well-deserved national reputation for music of high quality.
195. Leadership and management are very good. The director of music promotes a high profile for the subject. There is a strong commitment to improvement through frequent monitoring, evaluation and review. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. The management of the many complex and sometimes difficult organisational challenges is efficient. In every area of music, the focus for development is the desire to provide better opportunities for students and to raise standards. However, students still have few opportunities to use ICT to extend their work in music. The development of ICT to support teaching and learning is recognised by the department as a priority for the subject.

## **PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

Overall, the quality of provision in physical education is **satisfactory**.

**Strengths**

- Good teaching in Year 9 enables students to achieve well.
- Good use of ICT is helping to raise standards in GCSE.

**Areas for improvement**

- The work in Years 10 and 11 does not always sufficiently challenge all students.
- Teaching is too variable and existing good practice in the department is not shared effectively.

196. In 2002, GCSE results matched the national average and were a considerable improvement over the previous year. The proportion of A\* and A grades was above the national average. Despite this there was underachievement. Students did not do as well in physical education as in their other examinations or in relation to their prior attainment. The school is taking positive action to tackle this underachievement including good use of ICT. At the end of Year 9 in 2002, teachers' assessments indicate standards were above the national average.
197. In work seen in Year 9, standards are average. Students arrive in the school with a wide range of experience of physical activities and slightly below average standards in the subject. During Year 9 the majority have a satisfactory level of performance. This is good achievement for students of all backgrounds and levels of attainment and is the result of good teaching. In swimming, students are confident in the water and demonstrate a good body position when swimming front crawl. More capable swimmers breathe correctly and with ease. In dance, they understand the principles of movement such as spatial awareness. They create effective dances in small groups. This group work makes a positive contribution to students' social development. When given the opportunity, students demonstrate satisfactory skills of observation and evaluation. They identify what to do next in order to improve. When led by the teacher they prepare safely for activity but do not readily do this for themselves.
198. By the end of Year 11, standards on the general course taken by all students are average overall. They indicate satisfactory achievement for students of all levels of attainment. In badminton, students play a singles game and have sufficient knowledge of the rules to act as officials. When trampolining, they demonstrate simple routines. Higher attaining students show progression through better position in flight and more advanced actions such as swivel hips. In outdoor education, students' skills are below average because they do not receive enough sufficiently challenging tasks. Students remain dependent on the teacher to help them to prepare for activity. Teachers pay insufficient attention to helping students to understand the effect of exercise on the body and how to plan a programme of activities to improve fitness. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory. Students of all ethnic backgrounds and levels of attainment build up their knowledge and understanding of activities started in Year 9, and make a satisfactory start on new activities. School basketball and trampoline teams play to a good standard in regional and national competitions.
199. In the GCSE course, standards are average as observed in lessons and students' work. Compared to what they achieve in other subjects students underachieve in physical education. The scrutiny of students' work shows folders are organised well and homework is generally complete. Students' have good skills of numeracy and literacy that are not always exploited fully in written work. Marking is regular and generally helpful. Higher attaining students produce coursework of a good standard. In

theory lessons, teachers do not always give sufficient attention to planning for the range of attainment in the group and use too many worksheets. However, progress was good in Year 10, when students were learning the names and functions of groups of muscles because teachers used a variety of methods including group discussion.

200. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. Teaching is variable with a small proportion that is unsatisfactory and some that is very good. Teaching and learning are better in Year 9 than in Years 10 and 11 and are good. Teaching is characterised by variability and the lack of a consistent approach. In Year 9, teachers have high expectations for good behaviour and lively participation. Students respond well to this, have good attitudes and work hard. They make good progress in lessons. In Years 10 and 11, teaching is more variable and expectations are not always so high. In many lessons in Years 10 and 11, a small but persistent minority of students did not take part. Planning is generally satisfactory. When teaching was unsatisfactory the tasks did not challenge students to think and work hard. The pace of some otherwise satisfactory lessons was slow, allowing inattention from a few girls and behaviour was satisfactory rather than the good or very good behaviour usually observed in the school.
201. The best lessons involved students in their learning and tasks were matched well to the different capabilities of the students. In a Year 9 swimming lesson, all students were working on front crawl but the tasks varied according to their ability. Accordingly, students of all levels of attainment made good progress, including those with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language.
202. Satisfactory leadership and management are bringing about steady improvement. The department is supported well by senior managers who are checking the quality of teaching to seek improvements. The position of subject leader has been clarified since the previous inspection. Schemes of work have been rewritten and levels of participation improved. Teachers use information well to check progress both in general physical education lessons and in GCSE examinations. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory but held back by the variable quality of teaching.

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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

### Strengths

- Students learn well as a result of good teaching.
- The introduction of the GCSE short course has contributed to improved standards.
- Good leadership and management have led to very good improvements.

### Areas for improvement

- Students do not always understand how their work is assessed.
- Students have insufficient opportunity to use ICT to enhance their work.

203. Standards of work of Year 9 students are above the level expected by the agreed syllabus. Students have a good knowledge of Christianity and aspects of other religious traditions. In work on beliefs about life after death students demonstrated a good understanding of what Christians and Muslims believe. They drew successfully on their own experience when writing about environmental issues. Students use religious language correctly. They discuss questions of meaning and purpose

thoughtfully, giving well-argued reasons for their views. Students of all ethnic backgrounds, including those with special educational needs, achieve well. They make clear gains in their understanding of different religious traditions. They make good progress in thinking through issues of belief and practice.

204. Since 2000, all students have been entered for the GCSE short course examination. Results improved in 2002 to standards that are above the national average. Standards of work of Year 11 students are also above the national average. Students have a generally good knowledge and understanding of the key teachings in Christianity and Buddhism. In a Year 11 revision lesson, for example, students demonstrated an above average understanding of the Apostles' Creed in Christianity. Students have a thoughtful appreciation of a wide range of religious and ethical topics. These include arguments for and against belief in God, issues of war and peace, and attitudes to animals. Most students produce relevant evidence and appropriate arguments to support and evaluate different points of view, both orally and in writing. Overall, the achievement of students from all ethnic backgrounds and of different levels of attainment is good. Their understanding of the issues becomes clearer and their written work improves.
205. Teaching is good, and sometimes very good. Students learn well as a result. Teachers' enthusiasm for the subject helps to motivate students and to engage their interest. Their good understanding of GCSE requirements means that students are prepared well for examinations in Years 10 and 11. Teachers prepare and structure lessons well. This gives good direction to students' learning. Occasionally, teachers leave insufficient time at the end of a lesson to highlight issues and to consolidate learning. Teachers use a good variety of methods so that students become involved fully in their work, as observed in a Year 10 lesson on the nature and impact of conflict. Very well prepared input from the teacher, followed by a closely timed activity in pairs, made for very effective learning. Students' written work is always acknowledged. However, students do not always receive enough guidance on how to improve. Teachers manage students very well. This ensures good behaviour and positive attitudes.
206. Good leadership and management have ensured very good improvement since the previous inspection, when provision was unsatisfactory. The successful introduction of the GCSE short course has contributed to improved standards in Years 10 and 11. Good progress has been made in developing assessment practice. However, teachers do not share the criteria used for assessment sufficiently with students to help them to improve their work. Teachers do not provide enough opportunities for students to use ICT to enhance their work. The department has the capacity and commitment to make further improvements.

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

In the inspection, 13 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 2002.

***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	6	67		33		1.8	
Chemistry	12	67		17		1.7	
Biology	10	60		10		1.8	
Design and technology	1	100		0		2.0	
Business studies	16	75		0		1.1	
Graphic products	5	60		0		1.4	
ICT	21	57		5		1.1	
Art and design	11	91		45		2.9	
Drama	3	67		0		1.3	
Performing arts	3	100		0		1.7	
History	14	93		21		2.4	
Psychology	11	73		18		1.8	
Sociology	19	53		5		1.1	
English language	17	82		12		1.9	
English literature	11	100		64		3.8	
English language and literature	12	92		42		2.8	
French	16	94		13		2.2	
Spanish	3	100		0		2.0	
General studies	2	50		0		1.0	

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

### **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	3	33		33		2.7	
Chemistry	5	100		40		6.4	
Biology	10	90		30		4.4	
Design and technology	5	100		40		6.8	
Business studies	3	100		0		4.0	
Business studies AVCE	8	100		25		6.4	
ICT	8	75		13		3.3	
Art and design	7	71		43		5.4	
Music	4	100		0		5.0	
Performing arts	6	100		33		5.7	
History	6	100		33		7.0	
Psychology	16	100		25		5.5	
Sociology	18	100		72		7.6	
English language	9	100		22		5.6	
English literature	15	100		60		7.5	
English language and literature	8	100		88		7.8	
French	2	100		50		8.0	
Spanish	1	100		100		8.0	
General studies	27	96		52		6.6	

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

### **Intermediate vocational qualifications**

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		% gaining distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Business studies	4	100		50		0	
ICT	10	100		40		10	
Health and social care	10	80		0		0	

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

## SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

### MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

The focus was on mathematics, chemistry and biology.

#### Mathematics

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

##### Strengths

- Very good attitudes to mathematics assist students' learning in Years 12 and 13.
- Teachers use their good knowledge of the subject to plan lessons well.

##### Area for improvement

- A/AS-level results have been below average.

207. The department provides AS-level and A-level courses in mathematics in Years 12 and 13 and a GCSE re-sit course in Year 12. Two students are currently following a further mathematics course in Year 13. The take-up of students on the main AS-level and A-level courses has been low. Numbers taking the AS-level in Year 12 increased this year. Most students who begin the AS-level course in Year 12 and the A-level course in Year 13 complete them.
208. A-level results in 2002 were below the national average for 2001 but the small numbers entered make valid comparisons inappropriate. In 2000, when 11 students were entered, results matched national averages. AS-level results in 2002 were below the national average for 2001 and indicate satisfactory achievement based on students' prior GCSE attainment. Achievement in the GCSE re-sit examination has been satisfactory.
209. In work seen in Years 12 and 13, standards are average. Year 12 students worked accurately with quadratic equations and had good knowledge of surds. They formed and solved equations when working with moments of non-uniform beams. In Year 13, students solved logarithmic and exponential equations. All students are confident with algebraic and numerical techniques, although a lack of mental arithmetic skills occasionally hinders progress when solving problems. Achievement in Years 12 and 13 is satisfactory.
210. The Year 13 class has only seven students, four of whom have English as an additional language. In one lesson observed, the teacher patiently encouraged these students to articulate their ideas and methods using appropriate technical language. This promoted and enhanced the achievement of these students.
211. Teaching is good. Teachers use their good knowledge in the subject to plan lessons that build on students' previous skills and knowledge. All teachers use good techniques in 'question and answer' sessions to develop students' ideas and to assess their understanding. They take particular care to emphasise the important steps of mathematical processes. Students taking AS-level mathematics have a wide range of prior attainment at GCSE. Teachers take care to do their best for all students and make sure that no one falls behind. Good relationships between students and

teachers assist good learning. Teachers use their good knowledge of students' capabilities to check understanding and to ensure good progress.

212. Learning is good. Students have very good attitudes, are very attentive and work diligently to ensure that they understand new ideas. Students have a tendency to be passive learners but are encouraged to discuss work among themselves. In two lessons observed, students presented solutions to the whole class. This gave them confidence in the use of mathematical language and encouraged precision and logical solutions. As a result, students learned good techniques for answering examination questions well.
213. New and good leadership and management enable teachers to work co-operatively in planning lessons. Improvements in management and recent developments in teaching are leading to higher standards and achievement. Teachers share good practice and ensure that work proceeds at an appropriate pace to meet the needs of students and the requirements of the examination syllabus. The frequent and regular assessment of students' work gives students good guidance on how well they are doing and what they need to do to get the best grade possible. Regular meetings between staff and students to discuss progress motivate students to work hard. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory. The department now has the capacity and commitment to make good improvement.

## Chemistry

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

### Strengths

- Achievement of AS-level students is good because of the good teaching they receive.
- Higher attaining students achieve well because they have good mathematical skills.

### Areas for improvement

- Achievement is sometimes hindered by over-reliance on the teacher.
- Lower attaining students' work is hampered by lack of good mathematical skills.

214. Chemistry is taught at AS-level and A-level. Numbers have risen over the last two years and it is now a popular choice in the sixth form. The number of students who do not complete the courses is very low.
215. In 2002, A-level results were above the national figures for 2001. Because the numbers entered for the examination have been small in some years recently, it is inappropriate to describe trends. AS-level results in 2002 were below national figures for 2001.
216. Standards of work currently in Years 12 and 13 are average overall. Work seen in Year 13 is below average and reflects accurately the capability and prior attainment of the group. Higher attaining students use their good mathematical skills effectively to enhance their work. Average and lower attaining students understand concepts and chemical principles but find calculations and work involving formulae difficult. This is where they lose marks in tests. Work seen in Year 12 is above average overall. Higher attaining students manage most areas of learning well. However, the practical skills of all students are underdeveloped. Average and lower attaining students are not always confident in calculation. In Years 12 and 13, most students' folders are well sequenced with key concepts highlighted. The folders of a few students are untidy and unsuitable for purposes of revision.



217. Achievement in external examinations in chemistry is satisfactory overall. Recent A-level and AS-level results show satisfactory achievement compared with students' GCSE results. Higher attaining students achieve well in the examinations because their skills in calculation are good. In work seen, students' achievement is currently satisfactory in Year 13 and good in Year 12. Students who have English as an additional language make similar progress to other students.
218. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. It is satisfactory in Year 13 and good in Year 12. In all lessons, teachers make effective use of their good knowledge and understanding of chemistry to ensure that students learn accurate information. In a Year 13 lesson on thermodynamics the teacher skilfully and accurately explained the concept of increasing disorder and ensured that students were well prepared for demanding follow-up work. Teachers give good individual help so that all students work at an appropriate level. In the best lessons, as seen in Year 12, students were very well challenged and motivated by the work because teaching was enthusiastic and demanding. In an organic chemistry lesson, Year 12 students worked enthusiastically to assemble three-dimensional models of a variety of alcohols that they then classified successfully. In these best lessons, students are developing a real responsibility for their own learning through many good opportunities for independent work and to carry out peer and self-assessment. In Year 13, students do not always have sufficient responsibility for their work. Their over-reliance on the teacher hinders achievement.
219. Students' attitudes in chemistry are good. Although many find the subject difficult they enjoy the challenge. They value the new progress reports that keep them up to date with their study. They appreciate the good individual and class help they receive from all teachers. The AS-level students benefit from the added challenge provided by the tutorial session. All students find the regular tests helpful but are not sure how to relate the marks to potential grades at examinations.
220. Good leadership and management are helping to raise achievement and have resulted in good improvement since the previous inspection. Because teachers use marks frequently to check students' progress, standards are rising. Test marks are being reviewed to see which topics are successful and how marks in others can be improved. In response to information gained from assessment, the department is, appropriately, planning more lessons aimed at improving students' practical and ICT skills.

## Biology

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

### Strengths

- Teaching is good and encourages a positive attitude towards the subject.
- Good use of assessment in Year 12 shows students clearly how well they are doing.
- Rates of take-up and retention are good.

### Areas for improvement

- A-level and AS-level results have been below average recently.
- Marking of students' work does not sufficiently identify targets for improvement.
- There is little use of ICT, particularly data logging, to support teaching and learning.

221. A-level results for 2002 were below the average for 2001. Three of the 10 students that were entered achieved the higher grades, A and B. These results were slightly down on the previous year when they were average, and well below the 2000 results, which were above the national average. Overall, when account is taken of the students' GCSE grades at the start of the course, their achievement was good. AS-level results in 2002 were below the national average of the previous year. In 2001 they were above average. The numbers taking the subject are rising and rates of retention are good.
222. Standards of work seen in the current Year 13 are below average. They represent good achievement when compared to the grades that the students achieved in GCSE examinations. This small group was observed during a lesson on the structure and function of the nervous system. They developed a good understanding of how the nervous system collected, processed, integrated and acted upon information received and thus co-ordinated all the organism's activities. Higher attaining students explained the structure and function of the neurones, and the transmission of impulses. The standard of students' practical work is below average. The very best work makes hypotheses explicit and conclusions consistent with a raft of results and good critical evaluations.
223. Standards of work seen in Year 12 are above average. They reflect the intake that has a higher level of prior attainment than the Year 13 group. Students have a good knowledge and understanding of the structure and function of various components of living cells and of cell division by mitosis and meiosis. In a lesson on plant adaptations to the environment, students drew on their prior knowledge and understanding of leaf structure and osmoregulation to observe structural features of a variety of plants. All students classified the plants in relation to their environment and identified structures for survival. Higher attaining students understood the mechanisms by which the various groups of plants maintained their water content at a steady state.
224. Teaching is good overall. The quality of teaching varied from very good to satisfactory. The best teaching is characterised by careful planning in which teachers make good use of clear learning objectives to set clear targets for students' attainment. They provide well-chosen introductory material and effective direct teaching and presentation to motivate students. Systematic and helpful intervention by the teacher promotes pace and sustains the students' progress. Teachers use their very good knowledge of biology to answer students' questions well, to inform discussions and to help students to achieve well. The marking of students work does not always give them a clear enough indication of how well they are progressing and what they need to do in order to improve.
225. Students learn well. They are attentive, work productively and respond well to the supportive teaching and different learning styles that they experience. The level of mutual respect amongst students is evident in the open way they interact with one another and the staff. Lower attaining students are not confident in offering ideas in open discussion. Teachers encourage and support these students in question and answer dialogues. The independent work that students undertake is well prepared. The tasks set complement the content of the lessons well. Students obtain information from books and compile their notes carefully. They have insufficient

opportunities to enhance their learning through the use of ICT for research and for gathering, handling and displaying scientific information.

226. Good leadership and management ensure effective curricular planning to support the good teaching and learning. Systems for monitoring teaching and learning are helping to raise achievement. There is a commitment to building on what has already been achieved and to improving standards. Target setting, based on an analysis of students' performance in tests, is being established in Year 12 and is working well. Overall, there has been satisfactory improvement since the previous inspection.

## **ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING**

The focus was on design and technology.

### **Design and technology**

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

#### **Strengths**

- Students design and make products of good quality, some of which are outstanding.
- Students have very good research skills.
- Coursework folios are produced to a high standard.

#### **Areas for improvement**

- A few students in Year 12 are too reliant on the teacher.
- Coursework topics offered to students do not always match their interests.

227. In 2000, GCE product design was offered to students in resistant materials or graphics at AS-level and A-level to replace the traditional A-level in craft, design and technology that was offered previously. Until the current Year 12, numbers on courses have been low but boosted with students from other schools in the cluster. A big rise in numbers on the Year 12 course occurred this year and currently there are no students from other schools. Rates of retention have been good for the students on both courses. The department does not provide any vocational courses.
228. Results for the full A-level course in 2000 for six students were average when compared with schools nationally. In 2001, results for three students were above average. In 2002, compared with 2001 averages, results for the five students concerned were well above average and represented good achievement based on prior attainment for these students.
229. 2001 was the first year of AS-level results. The small group of students attained below average results that indicated satisfactory achievement relative to prior attainment. In 2002, AS-level results were below the average for the previous year but represented at least satisfactory achievement for these students based on prior attainment.
230. Current standards in Year 12 and 13 are above average overall. A few students, particularly in Year 13, are attaining high standards. Achievement is good for students of all capabilities including those who have special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language. Teachers have a good understanding of students' needs and provide good individual support. In design and making activities, students display good problem-solving skills. They carry out extensive research including interviewing experts, identifying user preferences and analysing existing

products. They use evidence from their research to focus design ideas. They communicate these ideas effectively, including design developments in well-presented coursework folios. Students make models and exchange comments to test out initial ideas. Although outcomes of the work are good the initial design brief is sometimes too narrow to be interesting to all students. A few students in Year 12 do not take sufficient responsibility for their own learning. They are reluctant to think for themselves and want the teacher to provide all the answers.

231. The quality of teaching and learning is good throughout Years 12 and 13. Students have more than one teacher to cover different aspects of the course. Good planning of the work makes maximise use of teachers' different expertises and gives students different perspectives on design problems. Visits to the design museum help to increase students' awareness and understanding of the topics studied and to provide them with valuable additional knowledge, which they utilise when designing and making their own products. A few of these products are designed and made so well that they have been on display nationally. Teachers give good feedback to students undertaking coursework and provide good advice on what needs to improve. However, students do not always receive sufficiently detailed information about the criteria used for assessment at the outset of a piece of work and, in particular, what they need to do to obtain full marks. Students make rapid progress on both courses. They build on prior learning and acquire new knowledge and skills through concentrating very well on the interesting and challenging tasks set.
232. New and good leadership and management of the sixth form work are continuing the good improvement since the previous inspection. Procedures for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning are effective in raising achievement. A recent review of the work in the department has, correctly, identified areas for improvement such as the setting up of a multi-material bay in which students can work independently. Sixth form courses in design and technology were not offered at the time of the previous inspection.

## **BUSINESS**

The focus of the inspection was on business studies.

### **Business studies**

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

#### **Strengths**

- Teachers use their good knowledge of the subject well to extend students' learning.
- Good management has a positive effect on standards.
- Good analyses of course results help to improve the standards.

#### **Area for improvement**

- Little use is made of industrial links to promote the vocational aspects of business.

233. The school currently offers GCE and vocational (AVCE) courses at AS-level and A-level in business studies. Around 30 students take up the subject in Year 12 with half the students following a GCE AS-level course and the others GNVQ and AVCE. Currently, there are 50 business studies students in the sixth form. Rates of retention on these courses are good. Business studies' courses are growing in popularity. Many students are continuing with the subject when they leave school.

234. A-level and AVCE results in 2001 and 2002 matched the national average for 2001 overall. AS-level results were below average. The strategy of taking tests early in the course brings about a gain in A-level results at the expense of the earlier AS-level results. AVCE results are consistently above average. Irregular attendance by a few candidates contributes significantly to GNVQ results being below average. However, in relation to their GCSE results, students of all backgrounds and levels of attainment achieve well.
235. In work seen in Years 12 and 13, standards reached by current students, on AS-level, A-level, GNVQ and AVCE courses, are above expectations for this stage of the course. Scrutiny of work in students' folders indicates a rise in standards from those attained in external examinations recently. In a Year 12 lesson on motivational theory and practice, students competently related the theories of Maslow, Mayo, Taylor and Herzberg to local industry and local issues. The teacher used his commercial and industrial experience well to assist students' understanding by making constant references to the workplace. Students were developing good evaluative skills and worked effectively together to produce a consensus of opinion. All were keen to contribute and were good at arguing their case in class discussion.
236. Teaching is good and students learn quickly as a result. Teachers use their good knowledge and enthusiasm in business studies to motivate students, to provide informed answers to their questions and to assist discussions and investigations. A purposeful atmosphere for learning exists in lessons. Teachers prepare their work thoroughly. However, not all teachers place the same good emphasis on the vocational aspects of the course or pay close enough attention to students' individual learning needs as most do. Teachers do not sufficiently develop industrial links to exemplify topics being covered in lessons. The good range and variety of teaching methods help students to develop different ways of working. The good organisation and use of assessment assists students' learning. Teachers make effective comments on students' written work so that they know how well they are doing and how to improve their work further. Students work very well with their peers. They value and respect each other's contributions. One very good Year 13 lesson challenged students to think about free trade and the common market. After locating the member countries, students produced articulate arguments both for and against the introduction of the euro currency. Activities were timed suitably to develop students' skills in management of time. The purposeful atmosphere in the lesson encouraged all students to participate fully.
237. Good leadership and management ensure that all staff share a common priority in raising achievement. The aims and values of the school are clear and equality of opportunity is emphasised strongly. Teachers monitor and evaluate students' achievements frequently and regularly to ensure progress is suitable. Information on students' progress and achievements is accurate and accessible to all. It is used effectively to improve performance. Teachers analyse course results well in order to raise standards. The purchase of new resources of very good quality supports learning very well on the AS-level courses.
238. There has been satisfactory progress since the previous inspection, when the department was identified as making good progress with good teaching, good standards, and good attitudes to learning and good assessment. These are true of the department today.

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

The focus was on information and communication technology.

### Information and communication technology

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

#### Strengths

- Standards are improving because of the introduction of the 'on-line' AVCE course.
- Good teaching helps students to become independent learners.

#### Area for improvement

- Skills such as annotation are insufficiently developed.

239. The department currently provides AS-level and A-level courses in computer studies and the AVCE course in ICT. This is the first occasion that the AVCE course has been provided and the response has been good. Students have a variety of ICT experience. A few have had no teaching in ICT since Year 9, several completed the GCSE short course by Year 10 and others have GNVQ intermediate experience. Rates of retention have been unsatisfactory. Half the students moving into Year 12 in 2001 withdrew early in the course mainly because they found the work too difficult.
240. AS-level and A-level results in 2002 were below the national averages for 2001 and indicated satisfactory achievement overall compared with students' prior attainment at GCSE.
241. Standards in the new AVCE course in Year 12 indicate average attainment. Students have completed units to time and are making good progress in their studies. Students use ICT confidently and competently for presenting information and designing spreadsheets. They have a good understanding of the applications of ICT to serve its business users. Students clearly enjoy the opportunities offered by work 'on-line'. However, they do not annotate their work well or evaluate evidence rigorously enough to extend their learning.
242. Standards on the GCE AS-level and A-level courses are average and indicate good achievement. Students have made good progress from their prior learning. They create good notes on screen while being taught. The design and development of ICT solutions to business problems are very successful aspects of students' work in Years 12 and 13. They discuss the testing mechanisms, keeping a close focus on the needs of the end user. Students are confident in the systems they are developing because of the relevance and context of the work to real-life situations.
243. Students of all ethnic backgrounds and levels of attainment have very positive attitudes to their work that assist their progress in lessons and over time. They are confident and mature in discussion. They make good use of the dedicated sixth form computer network in the library to enhance their work although there are few texts available to support learning in ICT.
244. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. Some of the teaching is of high quality. Teachers use their wide range of skills and experience to give students confidence to achieve well and to provide good support, guidance and enrichment to assist them in their work, projects and career aspirations. They plan lessons very well to provide students with good opportunities to develop their skills of independent learning. They ensure that the time available is used productively and target carefully those students who lack sufficient skills or who have inadequate previous knowledge

and understanding of various aspects of the syllabus. Teachers' interest and enthusiasm pass on to the students and have a positive influence on learning. Students' good attitudes to work and very good relationships with staff assist their good progress in lessons. Marking is generally good and often provides suitable advice to students about how to improve. However, the criteria used for assessment of work lack consistency across the department and lead to variations in the quality of feedback to students.

245. Good management and leadership have a clear focus on improving standards and have implemented some good curricular initiatives. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. Systems for monitoring the effectiveness of teaching and learning are helping to raise achievement.

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

246. This area was not a focus of the inspection. Work was sampled in physical education. Teaching and learning are good in the small sixth form group taking the Community Sports Leader Award. Students are enthusiastic and independent learners because of the variety of teaching methods employed. These students confidently organise their own work, make decisions in groups and delegate responsibility effectively.

## **HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE**

The focus was on health and social care.

### **Health and social care**

Overall, the quality of provision in health and social care is **good**.

#### **Strengths**

- Teachers use their good expertise to motivate students to achieve well.
- Good planning is effective in providing work suited to students' individual needs.
- Students receive good support to extend their learning and to achieve their targets.

#### **Area for improvement**

- Unsatisfactory attendance of a few students affected examination results adversely.

247. Health and social care is an increasingly popular subject in the sixth form. In Year 12, there are 14 students currently following the AVCE double-award course but none in Year 13. A further 10 students in Year 12 are studying the AVCE single-award course and five students follow these courses in Year 13. The department also offers the GNVQ intermediate award and 15 students are following this in Year 12 and three in Year 13. Rates of retention on courses have been satisfactory. In 2002, there was also a GNVQ foundation course.
248. Results in the AVCE course are consistently average. Over the past three years, all students have achieved well in relation to their GCSE results. GNVQ results at foundation and intermediate level are below those expected nationally. Results were affected by the poor attendance of a few students. However, all students did complete successful periods of community service in a wide range of placements.

249. Students work at a level at least appropriate to their capability. The needs of students from unconventional backgrounds are recognised and met. The department forms a supportive community in which learners take responsibility for their own and others' welfare. Staff provide a good quality of support and guidance to students about current work and future options. Many students progress onto higher education or into full-time employment.
250. Standards of work seen are average in Years 12 and 13 and indicate good achievement. Students' knowledge and understanding of topics currently being studied are competent. Students in Years 12 and 13, on all courses, are beginning to express themselves clearly when evaluating their findings. Year 12 students distinguish between the social and emotional factors that affect health. Year 13 students use case studies well to demonstrate how the care value base is implemented in day-to-day work. All students apply their knowledge and understanding well to real work situations.
251. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Students of all ethnic backgrounds and different levels of attainment make good progress in lessons as a result. Teachers use their good knowledge and genuine enthusiasm for health and social care to encourage the students to work hard. Students value the good teaching they receive and enjoy the different styles of their teachers. Teachers make particularly good use of questioning as the lesson goes along to ensure that students understand fully what they have been taught so far. The planning to meet the individual needs of students is effective and efficient. Many students receive additional support to extend their learning. This enables them to exceed their personal targets and achieve their desired goal. Teachers mark students' work in good detail so that they know how their answers could be improved. During a Year 13 lesson on peptic ulcers, students gave a clear description of the signs and symptoms. When describing the physiology of the disorder, they related this to the diagnosis. They identified clearly the primary, secondary and tertiary processes of care through which a client progresses. In their assignments they outlined efficiently the reasons for treatment and care. They described well the different investigations and measurements that are then taken to diagnose and monitor clients.
252. Good management of the department provides effective support and guidance to both staff and students. The monitoring of teaching is effective in improving the consistency of good learning experiences for students. The effective revision and reorganisation of departmental documentation and procedures have resulted in a rise in the standards of work produced. There were no specific references to health and social care in the previous report.

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

The focus was on art and design, and drama. Work was sampled in music. In the Year 12 class observed, which also included students from the cluster schools, standards were above average, students had positive attitudes to the work and the quality of teaching and learning was very good. Scrutiny of students' written work in music in Years 12 and 13 indicated above average standards.

### **Art and design**

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

<b>Strengths</b>
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- Gifted and talented students produce work of high quality.
- Courses in sculpture and textiles enrich the curriculum and improve standards.
- Good teaching and planning promote good learning.

**Areas for improvement**

- Students have few opportunities to visit art galleries or for contact with the world of art.
- Learning activities are restricted as sculpture and textiles share the same workspace.

253. The department provides AS-level and A-level art and design courses, including an art and design endorsed textiles course in the sixth form. Rates of take-up in Year 12 are good and students usually complete the AS-level course. A few students choose not to continue their study into Year 13. Rates of retention for those who continue the A-level course in Year 13 are good.
254. The overall standard of work in art and design in the sixth form is above average. In Year 13, attainment is slightly higher than average. The AS-level results in 2002 for art and design and for art/textiles matched the national average for the previous year. The A-level results in 2002 for both courses were below the national average for 2001. Results at AS-level and A-level indicated good achievement when compared with students' attainment at GCSE examinations.
255. Achievement is good in Years 12 and 13. Students of different levels of attainment start to self-direct their work within the confines of the units of study. They experiment with varying scale and materials. A few students have arranged their own visits to galleries and to evening classes in life drawing. The positive effect of these outside influences on their work demonstrates the benefit of such visits on standards. Preparatory studies are mostly thorough, though a few of the preliminary sketches and finished work do not demonstrate a high standard of drawing skills. Portfolios of work in art and design show that students have carried out thoughtful investigation and explored a range of ideas. Students are prepared to experiment with a variety of materials. They develop good skills and techniques in both sculpture and textiles. They make effective use of ICT for research. Students are very positive towards the subject and talk about their work with knowledge and enthusiasm. Learning activities are restricted as sculpture and textiles share the same workspace.
256. Teaching and learning are good overall and in a few cases very good. Project briefs are well designed so that students are fully aware of the course requirements and deadlines for completion. Teachers work hard to overcome the limitations of small numbers and manage to inject an energy and challenge into their lessons that encourage students to take risks and work at a good pace. Students concentrate well and persevere with their work. In a textiles lesson, several Year 12 students presented their work, which included interpretations of Monet's *Westminster* and churches in German expressionist style, to the rest of the group. This not only inspired the others but helped students to consolidate their own learning. Gifted and talented students achieve well as seen in a highly inventive sculpture based on a dandelion being gently blown during a Year 12 lesson. Work of good quality in a Year 13 lesson involved a personal response to bereavement that incorporated natural forms, imagery and poetry.
257. Teachers monitor students' work thoroughly. Suitable procedures for assessment are in place to support learning. Teachers were observed giving good individual advice and ongoing verbal evaluation to help students to develop their work. However, not all

students find the written assessments helpful as they do not receive good enough information on how to improve their work.

258. Management of the sixth form in the department is satisfactory and has resulted in adequate improvement since the previous inspection. The monitoring of teaching and learning by the department is satisfactory. Courses are planned well. The introduction of courses in sculpture and textiles has enriched the art and design course and improved standards. However, learning activities are restricted as sculpture and textiles share the same workspace. The accommodation for art and design is barely adequate, resources are limited and students often have to provide their own basic materials. Students have few opportunities to enrich their learning through visits to art galleries or contact with the world of art.

## Drama

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

### Strengths

- Good teaching helps students to achieve well on the course in Year 12.
- Numbers enrolling on the course in Year 12 are rising.
- Students enhance their skills through very good extra-curricular activities in drama.

### Areas for improvement

- Students sometimes rely too much upon the teacher for ideas.
- The sharing of good practice in teaching is not fully effective.
- The assessment of written work does not always set clear targets for improvement

259. The department provides AS-level and A-level courses in drama. It has recently changed the syllabus so that a new course was introduced that is due for examination at A-level for the first time at the end of the current school year. Only two students study the course in Year 13 but numbers have risen to 14 on the Year 12 course. One of the three students who studied the course at AS-level did not continue into the Year 13 drama class.
260. AS-level results in 2002 indicated satisfactory achievement compared with the prior attainment of the three candidates, two of whom attained passes at grades C and E respectively.
261. Standards of students in Year 13 are below average overall but represent at least satisfactory achievement compared with their previous performance at GCSE and AS-level. Standards observed in Year 12 are above average and indicate good achievement at this stage in the course for students of all different levels of attainment in the group. Students in both years integrate theory and practice through creative approaches to the work. In a Year 12 lesson, through careful sequencing and productive intervention by the teacher, students gained a good understanding of the concept of minimalism. This was a new concept for them but they applied it well in their work on *The Crucible*. The ability to apply their knowledge about theatre practitioners to work in process was evident in students' written work, for example in their analysis of Brechtian approaches to *Top Girls* by Caryl Churchill.
262. Students' very positive attitudes and enthusiastic responses assist their learning in drama. The broad curriculum provides good opportunities for students to develop their interest and expertise in design and lighting skills as well as in performing.

Assessment for learning is a feature of the work. Extra-curricular provision is a strength of the department. Students enhance and enrich their learning through making good links with local theatres and through joint projects with professional actors and the local community. A few Year 12 students develop their producing and directing skills by taking responsibility for running an extra-curricular session for Year 9 students. Students improved their all-round skills in drama in supporting the recent production of *Oliver* at the local theatre.

263. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. Teaching is characterised by thorough planning, clarity of objectives, high expectations of behaviour and work, and effective use of time, space and resources. Students contribute much to their own learning through concentrating well and working productively and at pace. Through the use of an overhead projector, music and lighting, students in Year 12 mixed different elements of theatre to support their stylised performance of significant moments from *The Crucible*. They enhanced their learning through good evaluations of their own work and that of their peers. Students are occasionally over-reliant on the teacher to produce the ideas rather than to think for themselves.
264. Satisfactory leadership and management of the sixth form courses have resulted in satisfactory improvement since the previous inspection. The introduction of the new A-level course has been productive in attracting more students. The use of assessment to promote learning and to set targets for improvement is satisfactory. The monitoring of teaching and learning within the department is satisfactory. Teachers provide good support, guidance and encouragement to students about their work and aspirations in drama. Resources and accommodation for teaching drama are good but there is limited space for storage of students' ongoing work.

## HUMANITIES

The focus of the inspection was on history and sociology. Work was also sampled in geography and psychology. In the Year 12 lesson observed in geography, standards were above average, students had excellent attitudes towards their work and very good teaching enabled students to make very good progress. In a Year13 lesson in psychology, standards were above average. Good teaching, high expectations and very good relationships between the teacher and the class ensured good learning. Students used their research and investigative skills to good effect to produce arguments for and against different theories relating to the function of sleep.

### History

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

#### Strengths

- Students learn well as a result of good teaching.
- Students' very positive attitudes promote good achievement.
- Good leadership and management have ensured good improvement.

#### Area for improvement

- The progress of individual students is not recorded and tracked sufficiently closely.

265. The inspection covered the AS-level and A-level courses taught by the school. The number of students taking history has been low in the past but numbers in Years 12 and 13 are much higher. History is now a popular subject. Virtually all students who start courses in history complete them.
266. In 2002, A-level results were above the national average for 2001. Students achieved as expected when compared with their prior attainment at the end of Year 11. AS-level results in 2002 were below the national average for 2001. Students did less well than expected. The long-term absence of an experienced sixth form teacher in 2001-02 had an adverse effect on the continuity of provision for students during the year.
267. Standards of work seen in Years 13 are average. Students' achievement since the start of Year 12 is good. All students have a good grasp of the topics they are studying. They understand the political and social concepts involved in the course. They use historical sources successfully, as seen in work on the Russian Revolution. Students have more difficulty in analysing historical issues and trends, such as factors making for improvements in housing conditions in 19th century Britain. They have to work hard to organise and structure their essays in answer to analytical questions. Standards of work seen in Year 12 are average. Students master new content and ideas quite quickly, such as the movement for tariff reform at the beginning of the 20th century. They research and evaluate historical material effectively, as seen in work on social unrest following the end of the French Wars in 1815. The achievement of students of all levels of attainment within the group, thus far, is good.
268. Teaching is good overall. At times it is very good. Students learn well as a result. Teachers' good expertise and enthusiasm for history successfully motivate students and encourage them in their learning. Teachers plan lessons very thoroughly. They highlight and emphasise key themes and ideas effectively, as seen in a lesson on the decisions taken by Lenin after the October 1917 Russian Revolution. Teachers use a good mix of methods so that students are involved fully in the work. In the best

lessons, a good range of tasks and activities ensures very good pace and rapid learning. In the few lessons in which there is less variety of learning activities, students' progress is satisfactory and they rely greatly on the teacher. Good marking helps students to improve their work. Very good relationships encourage students' participation and debate in lessons. The attitude of students to their work is very positive. They are well motivated and keen to succeed. This helps to explain their good achievement in the subject.

269. Good leadership and management of sixth form history have ensured good improvement since the previous inspection. The planning of AS-level and A-level courses is good. The close monitoring of teaching is effective in promoting learning. Teachers analyse students' performance in examinations carefully to set suitable targets and to determine the content of teaching. Teachers provide good support for students. Procedures for assessment are good, but the recording of data on the progress of individual students and tracking their performance are not as effective as they should be.

## Sociology

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

### Strengths

- Good teaching results in good learning and achievement by all groups of students.
- Students' good attitudes result in a positive learning atmosphere in lessons.
- Effective use of ICT provides good support and guidance to students.

### Area for improvement

- Students are not informed early enough of the syllabus requirements for assessment.

270. The AS-level and A-level sociology courses are popular among students. This year, for example, there are two groups in Year 12. Rates of retention are good.
271. A-level results have generally been well above average. Although they declined in 2001, A-level results in 2002 were well above the national average for the previous year. They represented good achievement in relation to students' GCSE performance. In 2002, the AS-level results at the end of Year 12 declined from the previous year and were below the previous year's national average.
272. Standards of work seen in Year 13 are average. They are lower than those indicated in last year's A-level results and indicate the lower levels of prior attainment of students in current classes compared with those of the previous year. Students have a good knowledge and understanding of sociological perspectives of crime and deviance. They are aware of different sociological theories and are developing their knowledge and understanding of the feminist perspective of the sociology of religion. However, in discussion, their recall of examples of contemporary research is only satisfactory. They are developing their skills of independent learning and research well through, for example, preparing group presentations using ICT. Students have good communication skills in writing. Higher attaining students produce well-argued essays. Students of all levels of attainment improve their knowledge and understanding of statistical analysis through the use of data response tasks. Achievement is good in Year 13, particularly as many students had not studied the subject before joining the sixth form. Year 12 students have made a good start to the AS-level course. They have a good understanding of the sociology of the family and

households as well as different sociological and theoretical perspectives such as phenomenology.

273. The teaching of sociology is good. It results in effective learning and good progress by all groups of students. Crisp and effective starts to lessons ensure all are quickly on task. The teacher makes the learning objectives clear so that students know what is expected of them. Good working relationships and students' very positive attitudes to sociology help to promote a good learning atmosphere in lessons. In a Year 12 lesson, students engaged in a lively discussion and listened maturely to one another's views when discussing the new right's views of marriage and divorce. Teachers use their good knowledge of the subject very well to ensure that there is a suitable focus both on established and contemporary research studies. This prepares students well for their examinations. Effective use of questioning by teachers challenges students' intellectual capacities as well as helping them to clarify and consolidate the issues being discussed. This was the case in a Year 13 lesson considering feminist approaches to the sociology of religion. However, on occasion, the teacher does not ensure that all students respond to the questioning or that all pairs and groups have the opportunity to feed back their views. Students receive very useful study guides that help them to deepen their knowledge and understanding of the units of work being studied. They receive good support and guidance in note-taking techniques and essay writing. Marking is good and ensures students know what they have to do to improve. However, students are not informed early enough in the course about the criteria used to assess their work.
274. Good management of the department has identified appropriate areas for improvement including better results in AS-level examinations. Sociology makes a very good contribution to students' all-round development and relationships. The monitoring of teaching and learning within the department is satisfactory. The previous report did not evaluate provision in sixth form sociology.

## **ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION**

275. The focus was on English literature and French. Courses in English language and English literature were sampled. In 2002, A-level results were above the previous year's national average in English language and literature and average in English language. In both subjects, standards observed were average. Students had very positive attitudes to work and the quality of teaching and learning were very good overall. Teaching and learning were good in a lesson to support a few early stage English learners. Work was also sampled in Spanish. AS-level and A-level results in Spanish in recent years for very small groups of students have been above average. Two lessons were observed and the teaching was good. A *PowerPoint* presentation of Spanish architecture contributed well to students' spiritual and cultural development.

## English literature

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

### Strengths

- Well above average A-level results represent very good achievement in English literature.
- Very good teaching ensures that work matches students' needs very well.
- Students' enthusiasm and very positive attitudes help them to achieve well.

### Area for improvement

- Assessment, monitoring and recording of students' progress lack consistency.

276. The school provides courses in English language, English literature and English language and literature for the GCE AS-level and A-level courses. Nine students are completing the A-level course in English literature in Year 13 and 46 students are studying the AS-level course in Year 12. Smaller numbers start the AS-level courses in English language and English language and literature but similar numbers study the A-level course in Year 13. Few students leave the courses early and attendance is good.
277. In 2002, AS-level and A-level results in English literature were well above the national average for the previous year. The proportion of students gaining A and B grades in both stages was also well above average. The results indicated good achievement based on students' prior attainment at GCSE.
278. In work seen, standards in English literature are above average overall in the three AS-level groups in Year 12 and the A-level group in Year 13. Achievement in all classes is at least good compared with their prior attainment at GCSE. This is due mainly to teachers' very thorough and imaginative planning and to the enthusiasm of well-motivated students. Students on the AS-level course read the U.A. Fanthorpe poems analytically and discuss them critically. They are not afraid to make speculative judgements in class discussion because they know that all views are listened to sympathetically. Two students led the whole group in a presentation of the poem *On worms and being lucky*. This demonstrates their willingness to research and analyse an unseen poem in considerable depth and a confidence to present information visually and to guide their peers through a series of relevant learning activities. Other Year 12 groups starting their study of Marlowe's *Dr Faustus* enjoyed exciting well-planned introductions to necromancy and the Prologue. Students showed their ability to read rhythmically as a chorus and to discuss and speculate about the temptation of Dr Faustus. Students' written work develops well through the course. One of the reasons for this is that teachers guide them carefully through the required criteria for the courses and indicate the differences between GCSE and AS-level essay writing. Students in interviews felt that this had been a great help. Samples of writing at AS-level show students making very creditable critical comments about Shakespeare's viewpoint of an ideal wife in *The Taming of the Shrew* and a detailed critique of three of the Fanthorpe poems. These essays indicate the potential for high grades in the AS-level examination.
279. The A-level students in a relatively small group in Year 13 were articulate, responsive and uninhibited in their approach to *The Merchant of Venice* and to the background work to the study of Blake's poems. Their shrewd exploration of the character of Morocco in one lesson observed was helped by the teacher's determination to make them think and develop their own ideas. Students have identified the important links in

drama between the author, the director, the actor and the audience in defining and interpreting character. The current work here, and within their early examination of the London of William Blake, indicates that achievement is very good. They are succeeding well because teaching is very good and because they are well motivated. Their written work shows increasing maturity from the levels of the previous year.

280. The quality of teaching and learning in AS-level and A-level English literature is very good. Teachers know their subject very well, communicate their enthusiasm for the subject well and show a clear awareness of students' learning needs. They plan very thoroughly to use time effectively and to ensure that there is a variety of activities within the lesson. Students frequently present their own research to the whole group using a wide variety of source material including information from the Internet and the school's database. Often, students work in pairs and small groups to discuss and analyse aspects of a topic and then contribute their findings to the whole group. An exciting introduction to *Dr Faustus* in a Year 12 lesson included a short activity requiring students to work quickly in groups to research the background and history of Faustus and then to present his story in a dramatised 'This is Your Life, Dr Faustus', format. All students contributed actively, with enjoyment, and absorbed the details of the central character's background in a very short period of time. The attention to detail in planning all English lessons ensures that learning is a brisk activity and that it is rarely dull. It succeeds in stretching most students very well. The observation of a support lesson in English for early stage learners showed that well-structured, purposeful teaching is helping students to make good progress in language acquisition.
281. The leadership and management of sixth form English are very good. Teachers collaborate well to discuss the new syllabuses and plan effectively their contributions to the different courses. They share ideas well and provide good support for incoming teachers. Students speak highly of the ways in which they are supported. Improvements could be made, however, to the methods of monitoring and recording students' progress during the time they are in the sixth form. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. Standards are higher and the quality of teaching and learning has improved.

## French

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

### Strengths

- Good teaching of grammar helps students to enjoy learning French.
- Students know how well they are progressing.

### Areas for improvement

- Few students study modern foreign languages in Years 12 and 13.
- Erratic attendance of a few students hinders progress in Year 12.

282. The department provides AS-level and A-level courses in French. Over the last four years, low numbers of students have been entered for A-level French. In the A-level examinations in 2002, the two candidates both attained grades that were above the national average of the previous year. Students achieve well. The results of 17 students in the AS-level examinations in 2002 were below the previous year's national average for all schools. Seven of these students have continued with their studies to A-level.



283. In work seen in lessons and in students' files, attainment in Year 13 is average overall. Students achieve well compared with their previous attainment at GCSE. Oral competence varies, but, in one lesson, all students put forward their views in favour of and against mobile phones in a mini-debate. They had progressed well during the lesson in acquiring the new vocabulary with the help of a reading passage and a home-produced vocabulary sheet. Over time, students acquire the relevant vocabulary to enable them to read and write appropriately about different topics, such as transport, immigration and hooligans in society. Teachers introduce grammar effectively into every lesson and students enjoy this aspect and learn well. For example, in a starter activity, students responded positively and accurately when called upon to complete the agreement of past participles in a topic on poverty.
284. Attainment in Year 12 is average. Students are progressing well, although the erratic attendance of a few students impedes their rate of progress. For example, in a test on the conditional tense, one of these students used the future tense instead through missing previous work. Oral responses tend to be short and students are not yet confident speakers. However, they receive much support from the teacher, who ensures that every student contributes orally to the lesson. In another lesson, students used prompts to ask each other about their working habits. They then wrote a short paragraph to consolidate this, using some of the adverbs that they had learned in the lesson.
285. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers plan the lessons methodically and use the foreign language consistently and almost exclusively. They teach grammar well so that students enjoy their work. Teachers use authentic materials and guide students to web sites for their independent research. Relationships are good and have a positive influence on learning. Effective management of the subject helps to improve standards and the quality of teaching and learning. As a result, improvement since the previous inspection is good. Teachers make good use of assessment to show students how to improve and to ensure that students know how well they are doing. Students spoke very favourably about the constructive feedback that they receive from the teachers.