

INSPECTION REPORT

JOHN TAYLOR HIGH SCHOOL

Barton under Needwood

Burton on Trent

LEA area: Staffordshire

Unique reference number: 124394

Headteacher: Mr M Osborne-Town

Reporting inspector: Mr T Comer
15109

Dates of inspection: 16 –20 September 2002

Inspection number: 249685

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 pupils:	11 – 18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Dunstall Road Barton under Needwood Burton on Trent Staffordshire
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr D Lees
Date of previous inspection:	November 1996

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30941	Mr K Brammer	Team inspector	English English as an additional language	
18676	Mr R Meakin	Team inspector	Mathematics	
21866	Dr D Tracey	Team inspector	Science	
22985	Mrs J Sparkes	Team inspector	Biology Health and social care	
31680	Mr P Redican	Team inspector	Art and design	
31779	Mr V Harrison	Team inspector	Design and technology	
13623	Mr J Waddington	Team inspector	Business education Pupils with special educational needs	
14841	Mr P Duffey	Team inspector	History (6 th form) Information technology	
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23709	Mrs A Powell	Team inspector	Modern languages	
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

John Taylor High School is a large and expanding secondary school which is well established and has a good reputation. The school educates 1344 boys and girls in broadly equal numbers, including 260 in the sixth form. The majority of the pupils are drawn from Barton and other nearby villages but the remaining third come from districts in and around Burton on Trent, including some areas of disadvantage. The pupil population comprises a broad social mix and most are from supportive home backgrounds. The proportion of pupils entitled to a free school meal is below average. Pupils are predominantly of white UK ethnic origin but twenty seven pupils come from minority group backgrounds. Pupils whose home language is not English are bilingual and none is at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils on the school's register of special educational needs is below average but the school has an average proportion with formal statements of need. Most of the pupils on the register have learning difficulties, such as dyslexia, but a few have physical impairment, and a few have emotional and behaviour difficulties. Test scores indicate that the attainment of the present Years 10 and 11 was average when they joined the school but that of the present Years 7, 8 and 9 was above average. The attainment of the annual intake to the sixth form is broadly average.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a very good school. Main school pupils and sixth-form students achieve well above average standards because they have very good attitudes to work, because the teaching is good and because the school is very well led and managed. The school gives very good value for money. It is efficient and has a very good and cost-effective sixth form.

What the school does well

- Well above average standards throughout the school
- Very good GCSE results in art and design and in English
- Very good and effective sixth form
- High standards in the sixth-form in art and design, English, drama and theatre studies, science subjects and geography
- Good teaching and learning
- Well motivated and confident pupils
- Pupils' good basic skills of literacy and numeracy
- An exceptionally wide range of out-of-school activities

What could be improved

- The match of work to pupils' differing attainment levels
- Teaching of French in Years 7 – 11 and of science in Years 10 and 11
- Teaching of information and communication technology (ICT) in all subjects
- The planning of the curriculum

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in November, 1996. Since that time, the school has sustained its very good examination results. Although the GCSE results dipped to average in 2001, they rose strongly in 2002 and were the best ever. A-level results are consistently well above average. Boys' test and examination results are still below those of the girls but the gap has narrowed at GCSE since the previous inspection. The school has made a good improvement with most of the points for action set by the previous inspection. The provision for personal, social and health education (PSHE) has improved. The provision for ICT is better in Years 7, 8 and 9 but it is unsatisfactory in Year 11. The school is short of computers, particularly for the sixth form. The school's management has improved and now has clearer aims and targets.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	Compared with				<i>Key</i>
	All schools			Similar schools	
	1999	2000	2001	2001	
GCSE examinations	A	A	C	D	well above average A above average B average C below average D well below average E
A-levels/AS-levels	A	A	A		

Pupils and sixth-form students make good progress throughout the school and achieve well above average standards. Pupils confidently apply their basic skills in new situations. They are very articulate and understand their work well. Their good numeracy skills enable them to cope well with the mathematical demands of all subjects, especially in geography, science and technology. Pupils with special educational needs also make good progress and most of these pupils pass their examinations.

Years 7, 8 and 9

The results of the national tests taken by Year 9 pupils were well above average in 2001 and were similar in 2002. They were above average in English and well above average in mathematics and science. The improvement in results over the past five-year period matched the national trend. Overall, girls outperformed boys to a greater degree than nationally in each of the three subjects. The overall standard of the present Year 9 pupils is well above average and represents a good achievement for these pupils in relation to their attainment when they joined Year 7. Standards are average in music and satisfactory in view of the single weekly lesson given for the subject.

Years 10 and 11

The GCSE examination results are usually well above average but were only average in 2001 and they did not meet the targets set by governors. The results greatly improved in 2002: they were the school's best ever and comfortably beat the governors' targets. The girls' GCSE results tend to be better than those of the boys but the difference is less than was found at the time of the previous inspection. The results over a period of years show a similar degree of improvement to the national picture. The overall standard of the present Year 11 pupils' work is well above average and represents a good achievement for these pupils. The strongest subjects are art and design and English. The weakest subjects are ICT, science and French. Year 11 pupils are underachieving in ICT because they are not taught to use computers systematically in all subjects. Standards of speaking and writing should be higher in French. Some pupils are underachieving in science.

The sixth form

The A-level results have been consistently well above the national average for some years and were similarly high in 2002. The school took its first AS levels in 2001 and the results were very good. The sixth form results over a period of years show that girls tend to outperform boys. The standards of work of the present Year 12 students are above average. This represents a good achievement in relation to the students' overall attainment when they joined the sixth form. The standards of the Year 13 students' work are well above average and represent a very good overall achievement. The strongest subjects are art and design, English, chemistry, biology, drama and theatre studies, and geography. There are no weak subjects although there are some points for improvement.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Pupils comply with expectations. They work hard and complete their work diligently and on time.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good overall. There is very little unsatisfactory behaviour. A very small minority of pupils sometimes misbehave when the lesson fails to interest them or when discipline is not firm enough. Pupils are very well behaved outside of lessons.

Personal development and relationships	Very good overall. Relationships between pupils from different backgrounds are very good and pupils make friends easily. Their relationships with the school staff are also very good. They are mature and responsible and accept responsibility willingly. They are eager to take part in team games and other out of school activities.
Attendance	Above average.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

The teaching is good in the main school and very good in the sixth form. Very little of the teaching is unsatisfactory and some is very good and some is excellent. The strengths of the teaching are the teachers' very good subject knowledge, good lesson planning and management of their pupils. The strengths of the pupils' learning are their good literacy and numeracy skills, which underpin their work in all subjects, their willingness to work hard, and their good progress in lessons. Literacy skills are well taught in English and in most other subjects. Numeracy skills are well taught in mathematics, and also in science, technology subjects and geography.

Teaching meets the needs of all of its pupils reasonably well. However, teachers of a number of subjects need to match the work set for pupils more accurately to their different attainment levels. This is the case not only for pupils with special educational needs, but also for average and higher attaining pupils.

Although the teaching of the specialist ICT teachers is good, teachers of other subjects need to make more effective use of ICT in their lessons throughout the school. Pupils would make better progress in French if teachers placed more emphasis on developing the pupils' speaking and writing skills.

The best teaching is in art and design where it is excellent, both at GCSE and at A-level. The English teaching is good overall and very good in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form, which accounts for pupils' very good achievement at GCSE and at A-level. In mathematics, the overall quality of teaching and learning is good and has improved since the previous inspection. In science, teaching is good in Years 7 to 9 and satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. In the sixth form, the teaching of the sciences is very good.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum has some good and very good features but it is unsatisfactory overall. Statutory requirements are not fully met because half of all Year 10 pupils do not follow a course in design and technology. The planned provision for ICT in Year 11 is also unsatisfactory. The time given for some subjects in Years 7, 8 and 9 is more generous than for others. For example, pupils have one music lesson but two for art and design, and the difference in provision is reflected in the standards achieved. The teachers work hard to provide an outstandingly broad range of out-of-school activities, including sport, music and drama, and many pupils participate.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Satisfactory overall. Learning support assistants are deployed well. Individual education plans are in place and pupils' targets are appropriate, clear and measurable. However, the latest national code of practice is not yet embedded into the school's work.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	The school has no policy or special arrangements for teaching pupils whose home language is not English. Neither does the school analyse these pupils' test and examination results in order to ensure that they do at least as well as

	other pupils.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good overall. Pupils' social development is very good; their moral and their cultural development are good and their spiritual development is satisfactory.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Satisfactory procedures are in place for child protection and welfare and to ensure health and safety. Pupils' academic progress and their attendance, behaviour and personal development are carefully checked by subject and form teachers. Careers guidance is very good in the sixth form and good in the main school. The school enjoys a good partnership with parents.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good. The headteacher and senior staff are an effective team, improving teaching and raising standards. The sixth form is very well led and subject departments are well managed.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governors know the school well. They play a very significant part in shaping the direction of the school and they set demanding but realistic targets for improvement. They discharge nearly all of their responsibilities very well; however, the statutory requirements are not met in full for the curriculum and the provision of collective worship.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Very good. The management of teachers' performance is good and the quality of teaching is very rigorously monitored. The work of subject departments is rigorously evaluated. The school compares its performance with that of other schools, nationally and locally, and takes action to ensure that it is competitive.
The strategic use of resources	Very good. The funding is below the average for Staffordshire schools but is managed efficiently and money is spent wisely and effectively in support of the school's aims and targets.

The governors and senior staff apply the principles of best value very well in their management of the school. Staffing is adequate. Overall, resources for learning are adequate but the school does not have enough computers and other modern technology for its needs, especially in the sixth form. The accommodation is unsatisfactory overall. Some of the classrooms are cramped or dilapidated.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school is well led and managed • Their children are expected to work hard and to do their best • The teaching is good • Their children make good progress • Their children like school • The school is very approachable • Their children become mature and responsible young people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The partnership between home and school • The quantity of homework • The standard of behaviour

Inspectors agree with the parents' positive views but not with all of their concerns. The partnership with parents is a good one. The school consults with parents, listens to them, and does its best to work closely with them. For example, when parents were dissatisfied with the arrangements for consultation evenings because they could not meet with subject teachers, the school changed the arrangements to comply with parents' preferences. Although teachers do not keep to the homework timetable, inspectors found that pupils have sufficient homework. Although behaviour is very good overall the inspectors agree that a very small minority of pupils do misbehave in some lessons.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

This is a large sixth form with 260 boys and girls on roll in roughly equal numbers. The majority of students are former pupils of the main school but increasingly the sixth form attracts young people from further afield. Students enjoy equality of opportunity and are free to take any course for which they are qualified. This means that there are some large classes. The sixth form offers courses in 22 different subjects. Students take a range of subjects at AS level in Year 12, and usually concentrate on three subjects at A-level or AVCE in Year 13. There are also vocational courses at Intermediate GNVQ level. Course completion rates are high. Additionally, some Year 12 students take GCSE courses in English, mathematics and science to improve the grades they achieved in Year 11. Throughout the sixth form, all students take general studies, and many sit A-level examinations in this subject.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

This is a very good sixth form and a credit to the school. Overall, it meets the needs of its students very well despite some shortages of computers and shortcomings in its accommodation. There are some excellent or very good subjects and there are no weak subjects. The teaching is very good; students, therefore, learn very effectively and achieve well above average standards, which are reflected in the examination results. The sixth form is very well led and managed and is cost-effective.

Strengths

- Well above average standards
- Very good teaching and achievement
- High standards in art and design, English, sciences, drama and theatre studies, and geography
- Very good leadership and management

What could be improved

- Provision of computers and the use of them in lessons and private study

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

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

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

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	Good provision Standards are well above average. Students are well taught and make good progress.
Chemistry	Very good. Standards are well above average. Teaching is very good. Students make very good progress and achieve very well.
Biology	Very good. Students achieve very well and standards are well above average. Teaching is very good.
Design and Technology	Good. Teaching is good, and students learn and achieve well. Standards are average but are good for the particular students who take this subject. Although few students achieve the highest grades the results were above average in 2001 and all candidates passed the A-level examination in each of the past two years.
Business Studies	Satisfactory. The examination results are below average but represent a satisfactory achievement for the students who take this course. Standards are

	rising because of good teaching and students' good attitudes.
Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Health and Social Care	Good. The teaching is good and students learn and achieve well. Standards are above average.
Art and Design	Excellent. Students achieve very high standards because teaching is excellent.
Drama and Theatre Studies	Very good. Students achieve very well because of very good teaching and learning.
Geography	Very good. Teaching and learning are very good. Students achieve very well and reach well above average standards.
History	Good. An improving subject. Good teaching and learning are now bringing about higher achievement. Standards are above average.
Psychology	Good. This is an improving subject. Students' achievement is satisfactory but improving because of good teaching. Standards are now above average.
English Literature	Very good. Teaching and learning are very good. Students achieve very well and standards are well above average.
French	Satisfactory. There are no Year 13 A-level students this year. The present Year 12 students are making satisfactory progress and teaching and learning are satisfactory.

Lessons were sampled in a range of other subjects not inspected in depth. These subjects were further mathematics, physics, environmental science, economics, physical education, religious studies, German and music. Overall, the teaching in these subjects is very good and students learn effectively. Inspectors consider that the overall provision for science subjects is a particular strength of the sixth form.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Good. Students settle very well into the sixth form. They receive good advice and guidance about sixth form courses and careers advice is very good although many students find the timing of interviews is too inflexible.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	The sixth form is very well led and managed. Students enjoy equality of opportunity. Students' progress is monitored effectively by their form and subject teachers, and by the head of the sixth form. The quality of teaching and learning is monitored by the members of the senior leadership team, including the head of sixth form, and by heads of subject. This is generally well done though there is some inconsistency amongst subjects. The financial management of the sixth form is very good. The accommodation is unsatisfactory and the school is short of computers.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The sixth form is enjoyable. • The induction process is very effective. • Their work is assessed well and they know how to improve. • They are treated as adults. • The range of enrichment opportunities is very wide. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The accommodation is unsatisfactory. • Private study facilities are inadequate. • The provision for physical activities is limited. • It is difficult to gain access to careers advice. • There is limited access to computers.

- | | |
|---|--|
| • The quality of teaching is very good. | |
|---|--|

The inspectors agree with the students' positive opinions. They also agree with students about what could be improved. Although the quality of careers advice was found to be very good, students feel that they do not have ready access to advice when they need it. The school should take steps to resolve this problem. It is true that access to physical education facilities is restricted and the study and social accommodation is inadequate for the number of students on roll. The inspectors agree with the students about access to computers.

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 pupils' achievements

Years 7, 8 and 9

1. The overall results of national tests taken by pupils at the end of Year 9 are consistently well above average and are rising in line with national trends. These results have been well above average in mathematics and science for the past four years. The English results are above average, but they are not as high as those in mathematics and science. The results over the past three years show that girls tended to outperform boys to a greater degree than found nationally in each of the three subjects. In view of the fact that the attainment of those pupils taking the tests was average when they joined Year 7, the test results indicate good value added.
2. Standards of the current Year 9 pupils' work are similar to those indicated by the national tests. They are well above average overall and pupils achieve well. Standards are above average in English, and well above average in mathematics and science.
3. Pupils with special educational needs are generally taught in the same classes as other pupils and take a full part in lessons. They make good progress towards the targets set for them, mainly because they have good attitudes towards their learning. In a number of subjects tasks are not specifically adapted to these pupils' needs. Although special needs pupils make good progress in most subjects, their progress is only satisfactory in science, design and technology, geography and music.
4. In English, standards of speaking and listening are well above average. Pupils listen attentively to their teachers and to other pupils, and their articulate and confident speaking underpins their ability to learn. Reading and writing skills are above average. A small number of Year 7 pupils take literacy progress units to improve their basic skills and this is a particularly good and effective feature which helps the pupils concerned to catch up and make very good progress.
5. In mathematics, pupils experience a good balance of consolidation and new learning. All pupils cover the same topics although at different levels of difficulty. Pupils have good numeracy skills, which result in well above average overall standards in calculation involving fractions, decimals and percentages. Because they have good basic skills, the pupils make rapid headway in mathematics.
6. In science, standards are well above average because of good teaching, good attitudes and because pupils' good numeracy and literacy skills enable them to make good progress.
7. Standards are well above average in art and design and this is a good improvement since the previous inspection. Pupils' work in this subject is exciting, lively and vibrant, and is a credit to the school.
8. Standards of work are above average in design and technology, geography, history, information and communication technology (ICT), German, physical education and religious education. Standards are average in music and French.
9. In French, pupils' achievement is no better than satisfactory and some pupils should be reaching higher standards. Although they make good progress in their reading comprehension, speaking and writing skills could be better and pupils do not do enough extended writing. By contrast with French, standards are above average in German and both boys and girls achieve well. They make good progress, building a secure foundation of grammar and vocabulary. Their speaking and listening skills are well developed because they have many opportunities to practise. Because they hear German spoken consistently in lessons they make good progress in listening and understanding what they hear.

10. Pupils could achieve higher standards still in music if more teaching time was given for the subject. Although pupils are quick learners, their performing skills could be improved. A shortage of essential ICT equipment also affects standards in music.

Years 10 and 11

11. GCSE results are usually well above average; however, they fell in 2001 to average. It is important to understand that the overall attainment level of the 2001 Year 11 was *below average* when they joined Year 7. Nevertheless, their results did not meet the governors' targets. In 2002, the results rose considerably and were the school's best ever and exceeded the governors' targets by a considerable margin.

12. The results show that the girls tend to do better than boys at GCSE, but less so than was found at the time of the previous inspection. This is because the school has taken effective steps to reduce the difference in performance, particularly through monitoring pupils' progress and setting targets for individuals. The school does not make any analysis which would allow for a comparison of the achievement of pupils from different ethnic backgrounds.

13. The attainment of the present Year 11 was average when they joined Year 7. These pupils' overall standards of work are well above average and represent a good achievement. Standards are well above average in English and also in English literature, which is taken by the vast majority of pupils. Pupils achieve well in mathematics and reach well above average standards. In science, standards are above average but below those in English and mathematics and could be higher still with better teaching.

14. In both English and in English literature, the pupils' written work and their speaking and listening are well above average and many pupils reach very high standards.

15. In mathematics, the highest attaining pupils have a thorough grasp of arithmetic, algebra, geometry, trigonometry and statistics, which provides a good basis for studying mathematics at advanced level.

16. In science, pupils' achievement is satisfactory and some average attaining pupils are underachieving. This is because the teachers are not expecting enough from these pupils, especially in their theoretical work, which is less good than their practical work. This underachievement is, of course, reflected in the GCSE results. However, the results improved considerably in 2002, particularly those of the boys.

17. Pupils with special educational needs make good overall progress and achieve well. Most of these pupils with learning difficulties achieve GCSE successes at the lower grades. The success of the pupils owes much to their very good attitudes and efforts.

18. Standards are very high in art and design. They are above average in geography, German, history, music, physical education and religious education. Standards are average in French and in design and technology subjects. Standards are below average in ICT

19. The strongest subject is art and design in which pupils' achievement is excellent. This is an improvement since the previous inspection which mirrors a similar improvement in this subject in Years 7, 8 and 9. GCSE results reflect strongly rising standards and are very high, both for boys and girls. Pupils make excellent progress in all aspects of the subject

20. Year 11 pupils are underachieving in ICT because they are not taught systematically through all of the other subjects. The current Year 10 pupils have just begun a course in ICT which will be assessed at the end of Year 11. This change should help to raise standards but teachers of all subjects need to make more use of computers in lessons.

21. There are clear differences in what pupils achieve in French and German. In French, most pupils have good reading and listening skills but speaking and writing skills tend to be weak. This is particularly the

case with some of the more capable pupils, who should be achieving more highly. Written work lacks attention to detail and pupils need more opportunities to practise their speaking. However, pupils with special educational needs are making satisfactory progress and are on course to pass GCSE. In contrast, pupils are achieving well in German. Pupils speak and write well and standards are above average and rising.

22. In music, a lack of computers means that pupils do not learn how to use information technology as a composing tool.

Sixth form

23. At the time of the inspection, the Year 12 students are only two weeks into the start of their course. Nevertheless, their work indicates that they are reaching above average standards, and are making good progress and achieving well. Students usually finish the courses they start (a high overall retention level). The 2001 AS examinations were taken in a number of subjects and the results were good. More students took AS examinations in 2002 but national results are not yet available for comparison.

24. The A-level results are well above average and have been so for some years. In 2001, they were also well above average and were similar in 2002. Girls tend to outperform boys. The highest results in 2001 were in English literature and chemistry, in both of which subjects they were well above average. The results were above average in art and design, design and technology, biology, geography, and physics. They were average in history, mathematics, physical education and religious studies. They were below average in environmental science and psychology. The results of the vocational courses were well above average in health and social care and below average in business education.

25. Standards of work of the students currently in Year 13 are well above average, overall, and show that these students are achieving very well in relation to their GCSE results on entry to the sixth form. Current standards are very high in art and design and are well above average in English literature, mathematics, chemistry, biology, and in geography. Standards are above average in drama and theatre studies, history, health and social care, and psychology. Standards are average in design and technology and in business education. Although physics was not inspected in depth, the 2001 examination results were well above average and the overall provision in science is a strength of the sixth form.

26. In no subject is achievement less than satisfactory but there are some points for improvement. Establishing links with organisations in France, for example, through work experience could greatly help to improve the students' speaking of the language. To improve the examination results in business education, the attendance of some students needs to be better.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

27. High standards have been maintained since the previous inspection and parents are very satisfied with their children's personal development. All but a very small minority of pupils have very positive attitudes towards school and enjoy almost all of their experiences. They are well motivated, work conscientiously and try to do their best. They are confident in their teachers and take a full part in all that the school offers. Participation rates in extra-curricular activities are high. Pupils' attitudes contribute very much to their academic success.

28. Pupils with special educational needs generally have positive and very mature attitudes towards school and work. These positive attitudes are an important reason for their good progress and achievement.

29. The large majority of pupils behave very well in lessons. They show respect for their teachers, sustain concentration in lessons and seldom waste time. Some parents are concerned about the behaviour of a minority of pupils and it is true that a small minority of pupils occasionally misbehave in lessons when the work does not interest them or when discipline is not effective. This was the case, however, in only two of the 200 or so lessons inspected.

30. Pupils behave responsibly when moving from one part of the school to another and at break times. They conduct themselves so well that very little supervision is needed, although teachers and other staff are always on duty. Exclusion is rare.

31. Relationships between pupils are particularly strong and contribute much to the calm and orderliness that pervade the school. Relationships between pupils of different ethnic and social backgrounds are harmonious; pupils make friends easily, respect the efforts of their peers and are mutually supportive. The school's recent consultation with pupils about their views indicates that, although incidents of anti-social behaviour and bullying do occasionally occur, such incidents are swiftly and effectively dealt with.

32. The pupils are very mature and responsible young people who are a credit to their parents and their school. They are aware of the progress that they are making and help to decide their own targets for improvement. They become confident and express themselves very clearly, both in speech and in writing. They develop their own set of values and an appreciation of moral, social and cultural issues and take responsibility willingly and effectively, for example, as school council representatives. They participate keenly in competitive sport; they learn to appreciate their own culture and that of others. They empathise with others less fortunate than themselves.

33. Attendance is good and is above the average for secondary schools. Unauthorised absence is low. Almost all pupils arrive in good time for the start of the school day and also attend lessons punctually.

Sixth Form

34. Students' attitudes, values and personal development are very good. Students very much enjoy the sixth form and value the teaching, support and guidance that they receive. The students are very well motivated to achieve as well as they can and have clear ambitions for their future. Students go about their studies very conscientiously and use their private study time responsibly and productively. However, their study accommodation is unsatisfactory and private research is often made difficult for them because of limited access to computers.

35. Relationships between students and between students and tutors are founded on respect and co-operation. Behaviour is always very good or excellent. Attendance is good, overall, but could be improved amongst business education students.

36. Students' personal development is very good. The students appreciate the very wide range of enrichment experiences available to them in the sixth form. Their educational experience in the sixth form as a whole makes a very full and substantial contribution to their continuing spiritual, social, moral and cultural development.

37. The students involve themselves fully in the life of the school. They initiate and organise various events and activities under the leadership of five senior students. They take responsibility for their own community through the sixth-form council. A substantial number of students act as guides and mentors to younger pupils. A new project is under way whereby students support gifted and talented and underachieving pupils in Year 8. All students undertake community service, for example, by helping in a hospital, a home for the elderly or in their own or local schools or playgroups. They take part in schemes such as Young Enterprise, Young Engineering and exchange visits with schools overseas.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS AND STUDENTS TAUGHT?

38. The teaching is good in the main school and very good in the sixth form. Very little of the teaching is unsatisfactory and there is some excellent teaching.

39. Teaching and learning are good in English, overall. Teaching is good in Years 7, 8 and 9, but very good in Years 10 and 11, which accounts for pupils' very good achievement at GCSE. In mathematics, the overall quality of teaching and learning is good and has improved since the previous report. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall in science: teaching is good in Years 7 to 9 and satisfactory in Years 10 and 11.

40. The most successful teaching is in art and design. It is very good in Years 7, 8 and 9 and excellent in the GCSE course. Teaching methods are adventurous and pupils learn to use different materials in exciting ways and produce excellent work.

41. The main overall strengths which characterise lessons are the teachers' strong subject knowledge and expertise, good lesson planning, and their effective management of the pupils and good relationships with them. Because the pupils are confident in their teachers they respond positively in lessons and learn effectively. Pupils make good progress because they have secure basic skills; they complete their work on time, try hard and work at a good pace. These strengths of teaching and learning are evident in most subjects.

42. A weakness of the teaching is the match of work to pupils' attainment levels. This is the case for average and higher-attaining pupils and those with special educational needs. This is done well in mathematics and ICT lessons but needs more attention in English, science, design and technology, geography, music and physical education. There are no significant weaknesses in pupils' learning although occasionally pupils fail to sustain concentration.

43. Teachers generally ensure a brisk pace and lively atmosphere by using a range of strategies that involve the pupils. They use a variety of teaching styles, for example, in English and mathematics, which adds interest to the lesson. In mathematics, teachers strike a good balance between revision of previous work and new topics. In modern languages, well-chosen resources catch pupils' interest and stimulate their learning.

44. In most lessons, teachers set work for their pupils which challenges them and helps to create a purposeful ethos for learning. In religious education lessons, for example, pupils are nearly always actively involved in their own learning, either through discussion, research or analysis. Despite high overall expectations, there is sometimes a lack of challenge for the most able in science and design and technology lessons, when all pupils are given the same task irrespective of their capability. Higher attaining pupils are not pushed hard enough in French and more could be expected of them. In music lessons for younger pupils, tasks are not adapted to match different attainment levels and some pupils do not therefore make as much progress as they could. In physical education, more emphasis should be given to the needs of pupils of different levels of attainment and teachers should be clearer about the tasks and resources needed to cater for both higher and lower attaining pupils.

45. The teaching of pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory overall but is inconsistent between subjects. Teachers plan to meet the pupils' different needs well in some subjects, especially mathematics. These pupils have specific targets in mathematics and their teachers provide the support that pupils need to make good progress. In ICT lessons, the teachers ensure that pupils with special educational needs can cope with the work set for the class, sometimes with the assistance of the ICT technician working in support. In some other subjects, such as geography, teachers do not pay sufficient attention to the needs of these pupils when planning their lessons. Pupils with special needs make good progress in English because of the praise and support which they receive from their English teachers and learning support assistants; however, there are few occasions when work is planned specifically for them in mixed ability classes for English in Years 7, 8 and 9. In geography, pupils with weak reading skills find difficulty reading the texts and do not always have the special support they need. The school's facilities are accessible to all pupils with physical disabilities because they are adapted where necessary.

46. The school does not yet identify its gifted pupils or those with special talents. Although there are many opportunities available to pupils out of school hours to exercise their talents, the teachers rarely plan extension activities for the most gifted pupils in lessons.

47. Teachers make no special arrangements in their lesson planning for pupils whose first language is other than English. This is because there are few such pupils, all of whom are bilingual, and it is likely that the teachers are unaware that extra care needs to be taken to ensure that this minority can achieve as well as possible.

48. Aims of lessons are usually made clear to pupils at the outset and, at the end of the lesson, pupils discuss with the teacher what they have learned. These good features help to consolidate and reinforce pupils' learning. However, in some science, mathematics and religious education lessons, insufficient explanation at the beginning means that opportunities are sometimes missed to explore pupils' responses to questions and to correct misunderstandings. In mathematics particularly, this increases the necessity for individual explanations during the course of the lesson, which in turn results in a loss of pace and enthusiasm. Although lessons are generally well planned, targets for groupwork in music are not sufficiently clearly defined, with the result that too much time is wasted.

49. The teaching of literacy skills is good overall but more could be done to embed literacy in the work of some subject departments. Pupils have few problems with reading, writing and speaking but some technical mistakes in spelling, punctuation and grammar go unchecked in some subjects. Teachers could do more to encourage pupils to be creative with language, for example, to write in a wider variety of styles. Some of the best teaching of literacy occurs in geography lessons. The science teachers make demands on the pupils' good literacy skills; for example, they teach pupils to skim and scan scientific articles to identify key facts. In religious education lessons, however, greater attention should be given to the development of pupils' basic skills of literacy.

50. The teaching of numeracy is good overall but, like literacy, it is not yet fully embedded in the work of all subjects. However, pupils' good arithmetical skills enable them to deal with the mathematical demands of all subjects and make a positive contribution to their learning as a whole. In geography, pupils construct and interpret a range of graphs. In science, pupils make accurate calculations and handle formulae skilfully. In design and technology, pupils measure accurately, estimate quantities and have a good grasp of scale drawing.

51. ICT is well taught in Years 7, 8 and 9 and the quality of teaching is a considerable improvement on what was found at the time of the previous inspection. The teachers can take credit for standards being as good as they are, because the timetabling of the lessons is ineffective. However, teachers do not use ICT enough in most subjects to enhance pupils' learning and this leads to underachievement, especially in Year 11. In mathematics, although higher attaining pupils use graphical calculators effectively, learning through computers is generally neglected. Although the application of ICT is well planned to support pupils' learning in geography it is often difficult to gain access to computer rooms.

52. Religious education lessons make a very good contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral and cultural development. In their lessons, pupils see the value of what they do and want to learn. Pupils' learning is enhanced by a wide range of outside visits to places of worship, including churches and cathedrals, mosques and temples.

Sixth form

53. Overall, the quality of teaching and students' learning is very good and accounts for the students' very good achievement. Two particular strengths characterise lessons: the teachers' thorough command of their subject and the very good relationships that have been established between teachers and students. Teachers are well aware of the examination requirements, and can help and advise students very effectively when preparing them for their coursework assignments.

54. A weakness is the uneven use of ICT, which is compounded by the difficulty of gaining access to computer facilities. There is also a lack of essential data-logging apparatus for science subjects, such as temperature probes. Design and technology students are at a disadvantage because they have no experience of computer-aided manufacture. These deficiencies adversely influence the quality of the students' learning and the standards that they can reach.

55. Teaching is excellent in art and design; it is very good in chemistry and biology, drama and theatre studies, geography and English literature. It is good in design and technology, mathematics, business studies, history, psychology, and health and social care. Teaching is satisfactory in French.

56. Teaching and learning are satisfactory in French but the work set for the students does not take sufficient account of the wide range of ability in the class.

57. The marking of students' written work is thorough and appropriately annotated, giving clear guidance on areas for improvement, with good use of praise and encouragement. In the health and social care course the teachers' marking of written work is thorough and prepares students to work towards the examination board's criteria for internal assessment, clearly showing how students can improve their grades. A good feature of mathematics lessons is the way the teachers skilfully turn incorrect responses to teaching points which are used to analyse and correct misconceptions.

58. The design and technology teachers use their industrial experience effectively to relate schoolwork to the world of industry, for example, through studies of consumer profiles and market research methods. The Engineering Education Scheme and Young Engineer of Britain Award greatly advance students' experiences, both educationally and socially. However, the design and technology students would benefit from visits to industrial design offices and workshops. The health and social care course has strong links with local nurseries, hospitals and care homes where students undertake work experience. In geography, fieldwork on urban structure, flooding and the management of coastal environments enhances students' learning and last summer, it was well timed to take place just before the AS examination. The annual week-long biology field-course has a very high take-up rate; it is enjoyable and raises students' motivation and subject interest.

59. Students are independent learners: they use local libraries and the internet for research and to extend their knowledge. Students have many opportunities to develop their independent learning skills in the sciences through small research projects, for example, in biology.

60. In mathematics, work needs to be done to bring some Year 12 students' competence in algebra up to the mark at the beginning of the course. In history, introductory work on politics would assist some students to bridge the gap between GCSE and advanced study. Some students begin the Year 12 French course with an insecure grasp of basics in the language.

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

61. The curriculum is unsatisfactory because it fails to meet statutory requirements for design and technology. In general, the National Curriculum requirements are not met for the application of ICT across the subjects of the curriculum. However, the curriculum does have some good and very good features.

62. In Years 7 to 9, the curriculum includes all the National Curriculum subjects as well as religious education, drama and personal, social and health education (PSHE). The provision for religious education and PSHE has improved since the previous inspection. More than half of pupils take a second modern language in Years 8 and 9 but the benefit is questionable because very few pupils continue with two foreign languages to GCSE.

63. In Years 10 and 11, the great majority of pupils take nine GCSE subjects. All pupils take English literature, dual award science and a foreign language, usually the pupils' choice of French or German, though a small number take both languages. Some other pupils who have been unsuccessful with their study of a foreign language make a fresh start in Year 10 with Spanish. Some pupils take a practical course which successfully combines history with ICT.

64. The school fails to meet the statutory requirement to provide a design and technology course for all pupils because only half of the present Year 10 pupils are taking a course in this subject. The governors have no plans or intention to redress this situation.

65. The time allocations in Years 7, 8 and 9 for art and design, physical education and religious education are generous and contribute to high standards achieved in these subjects. However, the time given for music, one lesson a week, is half that given for art and the difference is reflected in the standards achieved. Timetabling arrangements for ICT lead to a fragmented experience and some lack of continuity in the pupils' learning in Years 7, 8 and 9. The school's evaluation of the curriculum has identified some imbalances of time given to subjects, including ICT, but has not considered giving more time for music.

66. Literacy and numeracy skills are good and are taught well. Nevertheless, the school's strategies for teaching literacy and numeracy skills are at an early stage of development and more could be done to ensure better consistency between the subject departments, for example, with the marking and correction of spelling and grammar.

67. The curriculum provides equally for boys and girls. Pupils have many opportunities to extend their studies through its exceptionally wide range of out-of-school activities. These opportunities are offered, for example, in public speaking, music, drama, and in team games. However, the school does not formally identify its gifted and talented pupils and does not make special planning for these individual pupils.

68. Overall, the curricular provision for pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory. The great majority of pupils with special educational needs, including those with physical disabilities, take the full range of National Curriculum subjects although eight pupils are 'disapplied' from some subjects. A small number of Year 7 pupils take special units in English to improve their basic literacy skills. This is effective and results in very good progress. In Years 10 and 11, nearly all of these pupils take the full range of GCSE subjects. For the small numbers who struggle to cope with the workload, there are courses accredited by the Youth Awards scheme.

69. The range of out-of-school activities is an excellent feature of the curriculum, which involves most of the teachers and all subjects of the curriculum. This provision does much to extend and enrich the learning experiences of many pupils. Subject teachers provide extra help after school and guidance for examination coursework. The school has a tradition of annual productions involving drama and music. The music department holds a concert each term and many pupils have instrumental lessons. There is a very wide range of clubs and an active debating society. Many visits and trips are arranged locally, nationally and abroad, for educational and recreational purposes. The provision of extra-curricular team games, which is exceptionally good and has a high participation rate, includes inter-school competition in nine different sports. Pupils achieve high standards and achieve considerable success, both locally and regionally.

70. The school provides a satisfactory programme of PSHE and this is an improvement since the previous inspection. The course is well planned, has recently been evaluated by staff and parents, and includes drugs and sex education as well as incorporating aspects of the new National Curriculum subject of citizenship. There are inputs from the police, other visiting speakers and drama groups.

71. The careers education and guidance programme is good. The course is part of a modular programme in Years 10 and 11 and is taught by specialists. The careers service effectively supplements the work of the school and offers a careers advice interview to all Year 11 pupils. All Year 10 pupils undergo a week of work experience: this is very successful and involves job applications, interview feedback and evaluation.

72. The community makes a very good contribution to pupils' learning, especially in PSHE and the work experience programme. Pupils use the locality and the community to gather data, for example, in geography fieldwork. Visitors include professional speakers and theatre companies who develop pupils' social awareness and extend their understanding of English literature. In art, pupils have designed a banner for a civic festival and a mural for an arboretum.

73. The relationships with primary schools are now good and promote the progression of pupils' learning. Curricular links are starting in English, mathematics and science, and primary pupils visit the school for music and drama productions and art exhibitions. There is an informative open day in the autumn term for Year 6 pupils and effective 'taster' days in the late summer term.

74. Provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is good overall. Spiritual development is satisfactory. Religious education, personal and social education, history, geography, music and drama all make a valuable and important contribution to pupils' values and beliefs but more could be achieved and opportunities are missed. Assemblies and morning form-times sometimes have a spiritual dimension but usually there is little time given for reflection. The absence of a daily act of collective worship for all pupils, including the sixth form, is a statutory breach.

75. The school makes good provision for pupils' moral development and has high expectations of pupils that they will behave responsibly, have regard to the feelings of others and take responsibility for their own actions. Pupils rise to the school's high expectations of them which are translated into practical action, for example, in the way younger pupils fulfil anti-litter duties, and the pupils' commitment to organisations such as Amnesty International. The school encourages pupils to express their personal views and to make decisions through the School Council and the Debating Society. In Years 7 to 11, drama lessons are planned to have a moral dimension, and pupils are placed in situations where they must make choices between right and wrong. In physical education lessons, pupils learn to play by the rules and to accept the referee's decision as final. Although there is a behaviour code to guide pupils on what is expected of them, it lacks detail in important areas such as racial harassment.

76. Opportunities to develop social skills and values are very good. The school has a clear sense of community and pupils are encouraged to collaborate with one another in lessons and to take part in shared activities, for example, in extra-curricular activities. Pupils have very good opportunities to exercise leadership and to take responsibility. The teachers and other staff, by their example, help pupils to develop qualities of thoughtfulness, independence and self-respect. Subjects such as religious education, drama, music, geography and physical education enable pupils to work successfully as members of a group or team. The PSHE programme, and drama lessons, provide opportunities to understand and debate matters which are important to young people, such as sex education, citizenship, drug and alcohol abuse and the dangers of smoking.

77. Pupils are encouraged to explore the values and beliefs of their own culture and have good opportunities to participate in drama and musical events. The senior and junior book clubs extend pupils' use of cultural imagery and language. The wide range of outside visits to theatres, museums and craft centres reinforces the school's cultural values, as shown in displays and posters. Understanding of other cultures is well developed through art and design and in religious education lessons when pupils develop an appreciation of religious beliefs and values of other cultures such as the Hindu and Muslim religions. There are visits to a Hindu temple and a Muslim mosque as well as local Christian churches and cathedrals. In English, Year 10 and 11 pupils study the poetry of other cultures, for example, of South Africa and the Caribbean. However, still more could be done to develop the pupils' understanding of the ethnic and cultural diversity of modern Britain.

Sixth form

78. The quality and range of learning opportunities are very good. The school has successfully implemented the recent curriculum changes and a wide range of courses provides a high quality of education for all the students.

79. The school offers courses in more than 20 subjects at AS, A-level and AVCE (Advanced Vocational) courses in business and health and social care. These vocational subjects are also taken at Intermediate GNVQ level. In Year 12, there are GCSE retake classes for English, mathematics and science and all students take a key skills course in ICT. Throughout the sixth form, all students take general studies and the results in 2001 were well above average. The quality of information and advice about subjects and combinations of subjects is very good and is a key feature of the effective induction process at the start of the sixth form. As a result, course completion rates are high.

80. Departments have planned work to meet the requirements of the new specifications and time allocations in the timetable are sufficient for all subjects. Curriculum planning is at least good in most subjects enabling the students to progress well building on their GCSE work. Class sizes are viable and sufficient for meaningful debate and the effective sharing of ideas. Some classes are too large for the size of the rooms in which they are taught, and for the resources available, for example, in psychology. Vocational courses include very good work experience.

81. The curriculum generally meets the aspirations and interest of the students. There is an appropriate amount of private study time, which is supervised and is effective in promoting high standards.

82. There is an excellent range of enrichment activities. In addition to sport, music and drama the range includes community service, Young Enterprise and engineering schemes and a senior book club. These activities make a very good contribution to the personal development of students.

83. The school's personal development programme extends into the sixth form where it includes health education and study skills. For example, all students in Year 13 have a sex education and relationships course which is taught effectively. The programme provides very good careers advice and support and guidance for higher education.

84. The provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development continues to be good in the sixth form. Students have many opportunities to take responsibility for younger pupils, for example, by helping them in lessons, acting as mentors to Year 7 pupils, and by looking after younger pupils generally.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

85. The arrangements for pupils' welfare are effective. The procedures for monitoring and supporting pupils' attendance, behaviour and personal development are good. First aid is provided in case of accident or to deal with pupils who are unwell or need medical treatment. Satisfactory child protection procedures are in place. Health and safety procedures are satisfactory.

86. The school keeps records of progress, personal development and behaviour for every pupil. Individual education plans for pupils with special educational needs make a positive contribution to the pupils' progress. The plans are drawn up in collaboration with parents, and progress towards the targets is reviewed jointly. A system of rewards recognises good work, effort and conduct.

87. The procedures to assess pupils' attainment and to monitor their progress are satisfactory but, at present, the school does not have a whole school policy for assessment. Teachers know the test results achieved by new Year 7 pupils, and this assists in the setting of targets. Pupils who fall behind are helped to catch up by their form teachers and also by sixth-form students acting as mentors. In Years 10 and 11, test data are used effectively to identify underachieving pupils. The data are also used to set target grades for GCSE.

88. The school has a small but important number of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds, including some whose first language is not English. There is no evidence that pupils from minority backgrounds achieve differently from other pupils; however, the school does not analyse its performance data to check that this is the case and, as yet, there is no policy for teaching these pupils. Although the annual action plan refers to gifted and talented pupils, these are not yet formally identified and subject departments make no special provision for them.

89. Teachers and support staff help pupils to feel valued. They help new pupils to settle into school. Sixth-form students meet new pupils while still at primary school and are their guides and mentors during their first few weeks in the school. Form teachers and year heads check attendance and keep track of reasons for absence. Form registers are well maintained.

90. Pupils are strongly encouraged to report incidences of bullying which are promptly and effectively dealt with. A survey of pupils' opinions suggests that some minor bullying goes unreported and this has led to an investigation by the senior staff who are determined that the school's culture will be one of zero tolerance of unacceptable behaviour towards others.

Sixth form

Assessment

91. The students' work is assessed rigorously. They know how to improve because the school sets target grades for examinations and maintains records of students' progress. These are discussed with parents and students on at least three occasions during the two-year course. In addition, end-of-year formal subject reports are well supplemented by an interim assessment in the first term and the continuing support and monitoring of the form tutor. However, target-setting needs to be more formal in biology.

Advice, support and guidance

92. Students settle very well into the sixth form because of the very well structured and thoughtful induction programme which the school has devised and the high quality of the sixth form prospectus.

93. The students receive good advice and guidance about what they might do in the sixth form. Overall, the quality of careers education is very good. The Careers Service provides individual careers interviews for students, but many students find that the timing arrangements of the interviews are too inflexible for them. Careers education is an important ingredient of tutorial periods, led by form tutors and other senior staff. The registration periods in the mornings afford good opportunities for interaction between form tutors and students. The students also benefit from the range of visits organised for them to visit higher education institutions, from a variety of outside speakers, from opportunities for mock interviews with professionals from commerce and industry, and from experts in financial matters, such as students' grants and loans.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

94. Parents have positive views about the school's work and the school has a good partnership with them. These are similar findings to those of the previous inspection. The results of the parents' questionnaires show that parents are pleased with the quality of education and care that the school provides; they think that the school is well managed and the staff are approachable. They believe teaching is good, and that their children make good progress and are expected to work hard and do their best. They say that their children like school and become mature and responsible young people.

95. At the meeting held by the registered inspector with parents, some said that they were unhappy that, at parents' evenings, they could meet only with form tutors and would like the opportunity to speak with subject teachers as well. The school has now changed its arrangements to accommodate the parents' wishes. Some parents say that homework is not set consistently; it is unpredictable and, in some subjects, it

does not usefully complement the work done in lessons. However, the Inspectors found that homework is sufficient and is set regularly, although it is true that it does not always follow the homework timetable. Some parents are also concerned about behaviour but the inspectors found behaviour very good overall; it was very rarely unsatisfactory during the inspection and then only when there was a loss of interest or when the teacher's discipline was ineffective.

96. The information provided for parents is good overall. The school's newsletters are very informative and communication through individual contacts and through meetings is generally good. The annual school reports are also good: they are clear about progress in each subject and indicate what the child should do to improve, and they include evaluations of progress in personal development as well. The school also provides parents with a helpful interim progress report. The school arranges meetings for parents to learn about and discuss subject options for their children, careers and higher education prospects and choices.

97. Parents' involvement in the life and work of the school and their children's learning is good. Parents support the parents' association and the school frequently consults with the members as representatives of the parent body. Parents' attendance is high at parents' meetings and pupils' public performances and many parents turn up to support their children at after school activities. Parents help their children with their work at home and comply with the school's systems for homework diaries. They write promptly to notify the school of reasons for absence.

98. Parents of pupils with special educational needs are involved in the assessment and review of their children's progress. Some parents provide work experience opportunities for pupils and for sixth-form students. At times, some parents take part in a lesson, sharing their expertise or experiences relevant to the subject. In all of these ways, parents make a valuable contribution to the school's work.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

99. The aims of the school are simple, clearly expressed and well understood by staff, parents and pupils. The school benefits from the very strong leadership of the new headteacher, who has been in post since September, 2001. He enjoys the full support of governors and also of the parents, who express great confidence in him. The parents say that they appreciate that he consults them when proposing to make changes and that he is taking appropriate steps to improve what they believe is already a very good school.

100. The previous inspection found some important matters for improvement. In particular, the school's planning did not sufficiently focus on improving teaching and raising standards; the monitoring of the school's work was weak at all levels and management responsibilities lacked clarity. Since the previous inspection, steps have been taken to deal with all of these points.

101. The school is well placed to move forward with its plans. The leadership group comprises the headteacher, two deputy headteachers, and four assistant headteachers. These senior staff are very effective; they work very well together as a team and share a common vision for the direction of the school.

102. Procedures for monitoring the performance of subject departments have greatly improved since the previous inspection and provide the headteacher and senior leadership team with effective means to determine what needs to be done to improve the school's overall quality of educational provision and to raise standards.

103. The members of the senior leadership team have clearly defined responsibilities and this is a considerable improvement since the previous inspection. They set exacting professional standards as examples for other staff to follow; for example, in their teaching and by undertaking supervisory duties at break and lunchtimes.

104. The monitoring of the school's work has greatly improved since the previous inspection. The members of the leadership team each undertake line management responsibilities for a small number of subject departments. Each term, at least two subject departments undergo a rigorous review, conducted by two or three members of the leadership team working together. This is all new. Performance management of individual teachers, which involves heads of subject, reinforces these reviews and evaluations of subjects, and teachers are observed teaching twice each year and receive feedback. A full subject report follows and the recommendations are included in subject department improvement plans. It is understood that, in due course, the reports will be presented to the governors.

105. Middle management comprises heads of subjects, special educational needs and year heads. The middle managers carry out their duties effectively. They plan the subject curriculum, ensure that resources are available and that training is provided when necessary. They play an important part in the performance management of their teaching staff.

106. The governors know their school well. They work hard to support the school through their committee work. Their work in the area of finance is very good, as was also found at the time of the previous inspection. They fulfil most of their responsibilities very well. However, some statutory requirements are not met for the curriculum and for collective worship.

107. Governors set challenging targets for GCSE. The targets were not met in 2001 but the target for 68 per cent of Year 11 pupils to achieve five or more grades C or better at GCSE was comfortably exceeded in 2002.

108. The school compares its performance with that of other schools both locally and nationally. GCSE and A-level results are analysed for each subject. Target levels for Year 9 pupils and target grades for GCSE pupils are made on the basis of the pupils' earlier attainment and valid and reliable statistical data and analyses. The school consults pupils, the school council, and the parents about its school's effectiveness.

109. The effectiveness of the school's improvement planning has improved very considerably since the previous inspection. The improvement plan is a strategic document which covers a three-year span and includes annual action plans and a whole-school review of the curriculum. The annual plan for 2002–2003 says a good deal about teaching and learning and its priorities have emerged from the senior leadership's performance review and lesson observation. Teachers are expected to ensure that learning objectives are made clear to pupils in every lesson and this is proving successful. Teachers are expected to ensure that pupils of all abilities, including gifted and talented pupils and those with special educational needs, are enabled to make the progress that they should. The inspection shows that the school still needs to work on this in a number of subjects. Teachers are expected to set target grades for GCSE and target levels for Year 9 tests. Homework is to be set weekly, using homework diaries for records and for communication with parents. National strategies for raising standards in Years 7, 8 and 9 are expected to be implemented in lessons, including the strategies for literacy, numeracy and ICT. Heads of department are expected, in turn, to ensure the implementation of these specific points in their departments. It is a considerable undertaking, in a school of this size, to succeed with all that the school has set itself to do to improve teaching and learning in a single year.

110. The school's policy for the management of pupils with special educational needs has not been updated for some years and is not based on the current national Code of Practice. Nevertheless, the overall provision for these pupils is satisfactory, though there are some points for improvement. The pupils have well-constructed individual education plans but in most subjects the teachers do not adapt work well enough to the pupils' needs and some further training is needed. Each subject has a link teacher who liaises with the learning support department. Learning support assistants are generally deployed where they are needed but, to be fully effective, they need more training from link teachers in what they should do in the different subject lessons.

111. Overall, the school has a sufficient number of suitably qualified and experienced teachers, who are generally well deployed. The strategy for Performance Management of teachers is in place and the school provides a good induction programme for newly-appointed and newly-qualified staff. The professional development of teachers is given high priority by the headteacher. The school generally has a satisfactory complement of educational and technical support staff. The school's administration is very efficient and the office staff are hard-working and approachable.

112. The accommodation for the main school is unsatisfactory. Despite some recent new building, it is necessary to use a range of temporary classrooms, some of which are dilapidated, and a wooden scout hut. Many rooms are small and too cramped for the large classes which use them. The learning support department's rooms are not well enough adapted to the range of activities.

113. Learning resources are satisfactory in most respects. Resources for ICT have been improved considerably since the previous inspection, but are still inadequate for the school's present needs. The Resource Centre offers a welcoming and pleasant environment for research and private study, with a reasonable range of books, fiction and non-fiction, and of computers. It is an advantage that it is attached to the local public library, affording access to a wider range of books and computer equipment. Audio-visual equipment is stored strategically around the school to provide ease of access from most classrooms.

114. The budget was broadly balanced at the end of the previous financial year, with a carry forward of four per cent of the budget. The financial management and strategic use of resources are very good, despite a below average overall level of funding. Senior staff and governors monitor the budget rigorously. They are fully committed to the principles of best value, as exemplified by their entrepreneurial approach to catering and the commissioning of building work. Specific grants are spent on the purposes for which they are intended. The school makes great efforts to seek additional sources of income, for example, through links with commerce and industry. When everything is taken into account, it is evident that the school gives very good value for money and the sixth form is cost-effective.

Sixth form

Leadership and management

115. The school's large and expanding sixth form is managed very well. It is becoming an increasingly popular choice for young people, many of who are prepared to travel from some distance to benefit from what this school offers them. The choice of subjects is very wide and the teaching is very good.

Resources

116. The staffing of the sixth form is good and teachers are well qualified in the subjects they teach. However, the sixth form's expansion has resulted in some large classes, for example, in health and social care and in biology. The accommodation is unsatisfactory. The students' common room is far too small for the numbers who must use it and the private study areas are inadequate. Learning resources are generally adequate, with the exception of ICT facilities. Although students make good use of computers in the Resource Centre and the public library, in general it is difficult for students to gain access to ICT facilities when the need arises, and this affects standards adversely in nearly all subjects.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

117. In order to improve teaching and to raise standards further, the governors, headteacher and senior staff should take the following action.

Main school

- (1) Ensure that teachers match work more accurately to pupils' differing attainment levels, particularly in Years 7, 8 and 9.
(*Paragraphs 3, 42, 44, 109, 110, 124, 151, 155, 168, 174, 214 and 228*)
- (2) Raise standards in modern languages, science and ICT:
 - in French, by placing greater emphasis on speaking and writing skills;
(*paragraphs 9, 21 and 204 -207*)
 - in science in Years 10 and 11, by bringing the standard of the pupils' theoretical work up to that of their practical work; (*paragraphs 13, 16, 39 and 152*)
 - in ICT by improving ICT resources (*paragraphs 169 and 202*)
 - and in ICT by making better use of computers in all subjects throughout Years 7 – 11. (*Paragraphs 20, 51, 157, 159, 169, 191 and 200*)

Sixth form

- (1) Improve the ICT facilities available to sixth formers and make better use of them.
(*Paragraphs 34, 54, 116, 246, 250, 256, 258, 262, 280, 307 and 314*)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	144
	Sixth form	62
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		83

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 7 – 11							
Number	1	38	64	39	2	0	0
Percentage	1	26	44	27	1	0	0
Sixth form							
Number	3	16	33	9	0	0	0
Percentage	5	26	53	15	0	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1084	260
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	39	-

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	33	3
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	165	4

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	27

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	18
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	41

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	8.9
National comparative data	8.1

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.7
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2002	110	101	211

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	65	91	95
	Girls	86	83	88
	Total	151	174	183
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	72 (70)	82 (79)	87 (82)
	National	n/a (64)	n/a (66)	n/a (66)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	39 (41)	64 (57)	57 (50)
	National	n/a (31)	n/a (43)	n/a (34)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	72	88	91
	Girls	86	89	87
	Total	158	177	178
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	75 (81)	84 (80)	84 (80)
	National	n/a (65)	n/a (68)	n/a (64)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	42 (43)	58 (59)	59 (37)
	National	n/a (31)	n/a (42)	n/a (33)

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2002	88	110	198

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	57	83	87
	Girls	85	110	110
	Total	142	193	197
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	72(55)	97(94)	99 (96)
	National	n/a (48)	n/a (91)	n/a (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	48 (40.6)
	National	- (39.0)

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

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

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2002	58	55	113

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	20 (18.7)	22.6 (20.1)	21.2 (19.9)	2.2 (2.4)	2.9 (0.5)	2.6 (0.9)
National	N/a	n/a	n/a (17.4)	n/a	N/a	n/a (17.4)

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

Vocational qualifications	Number	% success rate
Number in their final year of studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	33 87.5
	National	n/a

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	1317	37	0
White – Irish	0	0	0
White – any other White background	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	0	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	4	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	17	4	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	0	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	2	0	0
Black or Black British – African	0	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	0	0	0
Chinese	4	0	0
Any other ethnic group	0	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	0	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Financial information

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	81.6
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.5

Education support staff: Y7– Y13

Total number of education support staff	26
Total aggregate hours worked per week	512

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	76.2
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	25.2
Key Stage 4	20.7

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial year	2001
	£
Total income	3880093
Total expenditure	3886701
Expenditure per pupil	2880
Balance brought forward from previous year	159180
Balance carried forward to next year	152572

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	20.7
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	23.4
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	1
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)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1354
Number of questionnaires returned	146

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	28	60	10	0	2
My child is making good progress in school.	36	57	7	0	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	10	61	17	3	9
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	12	61	21	6	0
The teaching is good.	16	72	6	0	6
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	13	54	28	4	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	28	60	8	2	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	38	57	5	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	6	54	27	5	8
The school is well led and managed.	27	60	3	1	9
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	17	71	8	1	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	25	50	14	0	11

Other issues raised by parents

Some A-level classes are larger than 20.

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

ENGLISH

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

Strengths

- The very good GCSE results, both in English and English literature
- Pupils' achievement, particularly in Years 10 and 11
- The achievement of Year 7 pupils taking the literacy Progress Units
- Pupils' attitudes to their learning
- The quality of teaching and learning

Areas for development

- The match of tasks to the pupils' attainment level
- Lesson planning in Years 7 – 9
- The use of National Curriculum levels and criteria to show pupils what they need to do to improve in Years 7 – 9
- The boys' results, especially in Years 7 – 9
- Consistency amongst English teachers in the use of ICT

118. Standards of the current Year 9 pupils' work are above average and pupils are achieving well. Between 1997 and 2001, results in the national tests taken at the end of Year 9 have fluctuated but have been similar to the teachers' assessments. Results were above the national average for all schools but below those of schools taking pupils from similar backgrounds. The results for 2002 were similar to those of the previous year. Pupils do not do as well as they do in mathematics and science, and girls tend to do better than boys, to a greater degree than they do nationally.

119. Pupils achieve very well in Years 10 and 11. Standards of the current Year 11 pupils' written and spoken work are well above average and many pupils reach very high standards. This progress is due to some high quality teaching and to the level of commitment and enthusiasm of many pupils, particularly in Years 10 and 11. In English at GCSE, boys' and girls' results are consistently well above the national average. In English literature they are very high. Most pupils take GCSE in both English subjects. In 2001, ninety per cent of girls who took GCSE in English literature gained a grade C or above, as did over seventy per cent of the boys though some boys did not take the literature examination. The 2002 results were even better. However, the difference in girls' and boys' achievement at GCSE still remains.

120. Standards of speaking and listening are well above average. Most pupils speak confidently and use their good speaking skills effectively to solve problems, negotiate, make decisions and share, refine and extend their ideas. Throughout the school, pupils listen well and support and encourage each other very effectively in their lessons.

121. Pupils' reading comprehension is above average. In Year 9, most pupils can draw inferences and predictions based on their reading of a good range of fiction, poetry and other texts, and all have opportunities to read for enjoyment and to seek information in lessons and for homework. Both boys and girls readily volunteer to read aloud in lessons. In Year 11, many pupils read fluently, widely and with good understanding of the text and a large proportion of them are achieving standards which are well above those nationally.

122. The standards of writing in Year 9 are above average. They improve steadily and are well above average by Year 11. The teachers stress the importance of accurate and neat presentation and encourage

all of their pupils to develop and use a wide vocabulary. Pupils are often set challenging and interesting tasks which enable them to experience and explore a variety of written forms, such as diaries, travel writing, magazines and instruction manuals, as well as being given descriptive and creative opportunities.

123. Lower attaining pupils in Years 7 – 9 write simple but interesting stories, poems, interview questions, newspaper accounts and responses to literature; whilst higher attaining pupils show confidence in using complex sentences, and attempt successfully a wider range of writing, including convincing play scripts, brochures and advertisements. They can also sustain written argument, write persuasively, and justify their opinions. The most able Year 11 pupils often make useful notes, unprompted by their teachers, and their books and coursework folders show a wide range of writing, discursive and reasoned, creative and original, as well as carefully-considered and sensitive responses to literature and media texts. Most pupils understand the technical terms of literary criticism and media analysis, and use them appropriately in their writing because they have learned to use them lower down the school.

124. A small number of Year 7 pupils take special units to improve their basic skills (Literacy Progress Units). This is a strength of the English department. These pupils are making very good progress, as did those who followed the course last year. Their individual progress is carefully monitored, lesson plans accommodate all needs and the pupils are sensitively supported in lessons. Other pupils with identified special needs also make good progress because of the consistent and effective praise and support which they receive from their English teachers and the Learning Support Assistants, their own positive attitudes and determination, and the help of other pupils. There are, however, few occasions when work is planned specifically for them in mixed ability classes in Years 7, 8 and 9. No extension activities for the most able in these years were planned during the week of the inspection.

125. Most pupils have positive attitudes to the school and to their own learning and this is a significant reason for their good progress. They are usually very co-operative and conscientious about the quality and handing in of their work. They answer eagerly in class and enjoy their lessons. They have opportunities to develop well as independent learners, particularly through the use of ICT (information and communication technology). All pupils use computers as part of their English course throughout the school, but the range of their experiences with ICT is largely unplanned and depends upon which teacher they have.

126. Teachers carefully monitor pupils' progress and the standards they reach. Work is generally well marked and teachers' written comments are usually helpful, particularly in Years 10 and 11. However, in Years 7 – 9, there are few references to National Curriculum criteria or what pupils need to do to reach a higher level. The levels, and how pupils are to achieve them, are not always taken into consideration when teachers draw up their lesson plans and some plans, especially in the lower years, indicate what pupils will be doing rather than what will actually be learnt.

127. The English curriculum is very good. All pupils do drama in Years 7–9; however, the time for English is reduced in Year 9 and this reduction means that the school's national test results are lower than they could be. The teachers are looking for creative ways to overcome this difficulty; for example, by collaborating with the drama department to cover the National Curriculum programme of work on Shakespeare. There is an excellent programme of enrichment activities, such as drama productions, public speaking, poetry competitions, book clubs and visits, which all considerably enhance pupils' learning.

128. Teaching is good overall and there is no unsatisfactory teaching. Pupils make good progress and learn effectively in Years 7–9. Teaching and learning are very good in Years 10 and 11, which accounts for pupils' very good achievement at GCSE. The teaching is characterised by impressive subject knowledge, high teacher expectations, a variety of teaching styles, the setting of challenging and interesting tasks, which fully engage all pupils, and class management which creates a supportive, purposeful and enjoyable work atmosphere. In some lessons with shortcomings, pupils' learning objectives are not always made clear and there is sometimes a lack of challenge for the most able, particularly when no choices are offered and all pupils are given the same task irrespective of their ability.

129. The management of English is good. There are regular meetings, very good communication, and responsibilities are appropriately delegated. Clear direction and motivation are given to an experienced, conscientious and hard-working team whose love of their subject is infectious. The department is well organised and resources are satisfactory. Teaching and standards are effectively monitored; however, longer-term teaching plans, particularly those for Years 7 – 9, lack clarity for the skills to be taught and other important matters, such as the pupils' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development, the use of ICT, the development of numeracy, remedial or extension activities or assessment.

130. The subject has made a good overall improvement since the previous inspection. Standards remain well above the national average by Year 11, and a significant number of pupils now achieve very high GCSE results. However, the needs of the full ability range are still not being met adequately and the difference in the performance of boys and girls remains, though it is less than before.

Key Skills across the curriculum – Literacy

131. Standards of literacy are good and improving owing to teachers' greater awareness of its importance in raising standards in all subjects. Because pupils generally have good skills, few have problems with reading, writing and speaking. Presentation is usually good, but some pupils often make technical mistakes in spelling, punctuation and grammar which go unchecked in some subjects. The teachers of some subjects could do more to give pupils the opportunity to be creative with language, to write in a wider variety of styles, and to discuss or debate. Although all teachers have displays of key subject words and refer to them regularly in lessons, there is a lack of consistency in their planning for the development of literacy at a higher level and the development of literacy is not yet fully embedded in the work of all subject departments.

132. Some of the best teaching of literacy occurs in geography lessons; for example, in an enjoyable Year 8 lesson, pupils wrote impressive poems about typhoons, which gave both a clearer understanding about the natural phenomenon and an opportunity to respond imaginatively to it.

133. The management of the National Literacy Strategy has recently been made the responsibility of an assistant headteacher. This new appointment emphasises the importance of literacy and has led to some beneficial training for all teachers. However, teachers have yet to harness ICT to raise the already good standards of literacy even further.

Drama in Years 7-11

134. Pupils achieve well in drama. All pupils take drama in Years 7 – 9 and standards are above average. Standards are also above average in Years 10 and 11 in which drama is an optional subject to GCSE. Some of the pupils' work is impressive, for example, when Year 8 pupils worked collaboratively to produce a moving bridge to rescue others in 'a sinking boat'. This lesson was particularly noteworthy because of the pupils' high standard of problem-solving and decision-making, and also because pupils with special educational needs made significant contributions to the lesson.

135. Year 10 and 11 pupils use tableaux and mime effectively and understand the importance of voice, tone and pace. They present confidently and explore body language, grouping, properties, settings and costume in order to persuade and convince their audience. One high-attaining Year 11 pupil portrayed an elderly grandmother so effectively that the whole class felt a sense of awe.

136. A particular strength is the Year 10 and 11 pupils' objective evaluation, both of their own and of others' performances, using GCSE examination criteria to help make valuable and constructive suggestions for improvement.

137. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Lessons have clear objectives and are enjoyable. Teachers assess pupils' work continuously to show the progress they are making and what is necessary to achieve higher grades. Teaching is often challenging and it is this, together with the positive attitudes of all

pupils, which accounts for the good learning. However, in a few lessons, time is not always used efficiently and, occasionally, teachers do not allow pupils to develop their own ideas fully.

138. The department is strongly and imaginatively led. Undoubtedly, drama makes a considerable contribution to the positive and supportive ethos of the school, both through the important issues which pupils explore in class, and through the excellent relationships between pupils, and also between pupils and adults, which the subject encourages.

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths

- Pupils achieve well and standards are well above average
- Teaching is good and pupils make good progress in their learning
- Good standards of basic numerical skills
- Pupils' positive attitudes towards their work

Areas for improvement

- The difference in boys' and girls' test results in Year 9
- Use of monitoring to achieve better consistency in teaching and learning
- The application of ICT to improve learning further
- The consistent application of pupils' good numerical skills in other subjects

139. The school's results in the national tests taken at the end of Year 9 have improved since the previous inspection. The 2001 results were well above the national average. Nevertheless, they were lower than those of most schools taking pupils from similar backgrounds. Results in mathematics were similar to those in science and were slightly better than those in English. The girls' results were higher than those of the boys, in contrast with the national picture in which boys and girls achieve equally. Although the school's results dipped slightly in 2001, against an otherwise continuously rising trend, they rose considerably in 2002.

140. All pupils take GCSE examinations in mathematics and almost all of them passed in 2001. The results were well above the national average, and a particularly high proportion achieved a grade in the range A* - C. The proportion who obtained an A* grade was more than twice the national average. Girls' results were higher than those of the boys. On the whole, pupils did as well in mathematics as they did in their other subjects. As in the Year 9 national tests, 2001 GCSE results dipped slightly but the 2002 results restored the trend of improvement and the proportion that achieved a pass within the A*-C grade range was the school's highest ever.

141. Overall, the pupils achieve well in Years 7 – 9. The Year 9 pupils' standard of work is well above average. This is because in most lessons there is a good balance of consolidation and of learning new knowledge and skills. All pupils cover the same topics but at different levels of difficulty; for example, higher attaining pupils solve simultaneous equations both graphically and algebraically, whilst average pupils tackle equations involving brackets, and lower attaining pupils can solve simple equations. Pupils' good basic number skills result in well above average standards of arithmetic, and pupils confidently handle problems involving whole numbers, fractions, decimals and percentages. These good skills support the work in algebra, geometry and statistics effectively. Written work is usually well structured and most pupils systematically tabulate information and draw diagrams and graphs accurately

142. Pupils also achieve well in Years 10 and 11. The standards achieved by Year 11 pupils are well above the national average. The highest attaining pupils produce a very high quality of work which is

consistent with GCSE grades A* and A. These pupils have a thorough grasp of algebra, as seen, for example, in their work on quadratic equations. They understand and apply a wide range of statistical measures and competently use graphical calculators to investigate curves, for example, the properties of cubic equations. Their work is academically rigorous and forms a good basis for studying mathematics in the sixth form. Average attaining pupils are working at levels that, for most, will result in GCSE grades B and C. Their above average standards in arithmetic and algebra support their work in all aspects of the subject. For example, they apply their good understanding of algebra in their work on trigonometry when calculating unknown angles. Some pupils experience difficulty with recalling facts and, therefore, make elementary errors, but standards of work of the lowest attaining pupils are above that required to pass the GCSE examination.

143. Pupils with special educational needs are taught in the same classes as other pupils and take a full part in lessons. They have specific targets for mathematics and teachers ensure that these pupils receive the support that they need to make good progress. In consequence, these pupils make good progress and generally gain GCSE grades.

144. The pupils' very good behaviour and positive attitudes are key reasons for the purposeful working atmosphere found in almost all lessons. The high overall quality of presentation found in exercise books shows that most pupils take a pride in their work. When given the opportunity to work in pairs they do so effectively. Pupils are confident and secure with their teachers and willingly join in discussions when they have the opportunity to do so. A good feature of these sessions is the attention and respect accorded by pupils to those asking or answering questions. In lessons, there is no evident difference in the quality of boys' and girls' work but the department needs to work harder to pinpoint the reasons for the difference in the Year 9 test results.

145. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good and has improved since the previous report. Teachers' expectations are mirrored in the high aspirations of the great majority of pupils. Teachers generally ensure a brisk and lively atmosphere by using a range of strategies that involve all of the pupils. Lessons move at a good pace because the teachers impose realistic deadlines for the completion of work which is well-matched to the attainment level of the class. Teachers strike a good balance between revision of previous work and new topics.

146. Pupils are busy and confidently apply their knowledge to new situations; they are very articulate and when they speak in class they show through their explanations that they understand their work well. Although higher attaining pupils use graphical calculators effectively, computers are not routinely used to support and extend pupils' learning in this subject, and this is a matter for improvement. In some lessons, a weakness is that there is insufficient dialogue at the beginning, with the consequence that explanations are then necessary for individual pupils. This is inefficient learning and results in a loss of pace and enthusiasm and opportunities are missed to explore pupils' incorrect responses and to use them to advantage to correct misunderstandings. In some of these lessons, the teacher follows the textbook too closely and some pupils find the work uninteresting. Marking of work is inconsistent: it varies from thorough, with helpful and encouraging comments, to lacking sufficient detail. Teachers grading systems are inconsistent and this restricts the use of the data for comparison.

147. The department's leadership and management are satisfactory and have improved since the previous inspection. The head of department works hard to establish a positive, team ethos. However, departmental documentation and procedures are too informal and lead to inconsistency, for example, in marking and grading. Again, a lack of clear guidance for teachers leads to the under-use of ICT to enrich and support pupils' learning. Lessons are observed and teaching is monitored but the outcomes of this monitoring are not yet being used to raise the quality of pupils' learning.

Basic skills – numeracy across the curriculum

148. Overall, the teaching of numeracy is effective and pupils have good skills. The teachers have not received the training which is expected nationally but the national strategy for numeracy has already had a

healthy effect on the way mathematics is taught in Year 7. Numeracy is not yet a part of every subject but there is some good work, particularly in geography. In geography lessons, pupils apply their data-handling skills to construct a range of statistical graphs to illustrate their work, and read, tabulate and interpret graphs competently. In science, pupils make accurate calculations and handle formulae skilfully. In design and technology, pupils apply their skills of measurement and estimation competently and have a good grasp of scale drawing.

149. Although the use of numeracy skills in other subjects is patchy and unplanned, pupils' fluency in arithmetic and number enables them to cope confidently with the mathematical demands of all subjects and makes a positive contribution to their learning as a whole.

SCIENCE

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

Strengths

- Well above average standards by Year 9
- Good teaching throughout Years 7 – 9
- Practical science throughout the school
- Good management of pupils' behaviour

Areas for improvement

- Standards in Years 10 and 11 and the GCSE results
- Theoretical work in Years 10 and 11
- The match of work to pupils' attainment in Years 10 and 11
- The use of ICT in lessons
- Consistency in the quality of the marking of pupils' work

150. Currently, standards are well above average in Year 9 and pupils achieve well throughout Years 7, 8 and 9. In 2001, the results of the national tests taken by pupils at the end of Year 9 were also well above average and pupils tended to do better in their science tests than in mathematics and English. The results have been rising slowly, matching the national trend. Boys at this school tend to do slightly less well than girls in these tests in contrast to the national picture in which boys' and girls' performance is equal. Standards in biology, chemistry and physics are well above average, assisted by good numeracy and literacy skills. Higher attaining pupils are competent at writing formulae and balancing simple molecular equations. In biology, an average pupil can describe relatively complex ecosystems, for example, with reference to food chains. The lowest-attaining pupils have not yet reached the standard expected at their age; nevertheless, these pupils have a good factual understanding of important principles such as photosynthesis and respiration, gained in their study of biology. As a result of the teachers' increased emphasis on practical work, all pupils are improving their capability for planning, carrying out, and analysing the results of experiments, and this is an overall strength.

151. Standards of the Year 11 pupils' work are improving and are currently above average. This represents a satisfactory achievement for these pupils, overall, but some of the average pupils could do better. This is because the teaching fails to challenge the full range of attainment. The GCSE results were average in 2001 and followed a steadily downward trend over recent years but improved considerably in 2002. Overall, pupils tend to do less well in science than in their other subjects. Over a period of years, girls have tended to do better than the boys; however, the boys' results more than matched those of the girls in 2002.

152. The highest attaining pupils show a good understanding of electricity in their work in physics which is consistent with the highest GCSE grades, and average pupils have a good knowledge and understanding of biology. Even the lowest-attaining pupils develop their investigative and practical skills well. A weakness is

that standards achieved in theoretical science tend to be lower than the pupils' well above average practical work.

153. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress towards the targets set for them. When they receive special help and support in class, these pupils make the same progress as other pupils. However, their work is often untidy and disorganised and the pupils would benefit from guidance to set out their work in a more methodical way.

154. Pupils' attitudes to their work are very good and have a positive effect on the quality of pupils' learning. They sustain concentration very well in lessons. When given the opportunity they collaborate well with each other when doing practical work. They are very well behaved.

155. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Teaching is good in Years 7 to 9 and satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. Teachers have a very good knowledge and understanding of their subject. Teachers have high expectations of the younger pupils who respond to these expectations and achieve well. However, in some lessons for Year 10 and 11 pupils, expectations are not high enough and pupils do not make progress as rapidly as they could. For example, a Year 10 class worked hard in a biology lesson on global warming, but the level of the work was below the pupils' capability and was more suited to younger pupils.

156. In most lessons, what pupils are to do is made clear at the beginning and what pupils have learned is checked and summarised at the end. When this is done well, it helps pupils to learn effectively, make progress and know what they have learned. However, in some lessons for Year 10 or 11, the aims were unclear. The marking of pupils' written work is inconsistent. It is often very well done, with comments which help pupils to improve their work but it often falls short of this standard.

157. The teachers provide good opportunities for pupils to apply and extend their good mathematical skills, particularly in physics lessons. The teachers also make similar demands on pupils' good literacy skills; for example, they teach pupils to skim and scan scientific articles to identify key facts. However, teachers do not use ICT sufficiently to support and extend pupils' learning in science. Teachers manage pupils' behaviour very well and this helps pupils' progress. The systematic assessment of pupils' investigative and practical skills is particularly effective, and the subject department has established accurate procedures for measuring and recording pupils' attainment and progress. Pupils are gaining a good insight into the effect of science on the environment through the discussion of ethical problems, such as pollution.

158. Overall, the leadership, management and organisation of science are satisfactory. The subject has made a satisfactory improvement since the previous inspection, particularly with regard to the teaching of practical science. A good start has been made in the monitoring of teaching and learning but more needs to be done, in particular to improve the GCSE results.

ART AND DESIGN

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

Strengths

- Very high standards, especially in the GCSE course
- The teaching and pupils' learning
- A vigorous and exciting approach to the use of different materials
- A very good contribution to pupils' cultural development

Areas for improvement

- The use of ICT

159. The results of the teachers' assessments of the previous Year 9 pupils were well above average. The standards of the current Year 9 pupils are also well above average, and pupils are achieving very well in relation to their starting points at the beginning of Year 7. This is a good improvement since the previous inspection. Pupils make very good progress in their skills in drawing and painting, in three-dimensional work, and in using mixed media and textiles. They create lively and expressive sculptures in wire and plaster, based on a study of the work of Giacometti. These sculptures are well made and capture the wide variety of shapes seen in the human figure in action. Pupils make very good progress in their skills of observation, and produce detailed drawings in pencil and coloured pencil from seashells, which are very accurate. Their work in mixed media is carefully composed, with card, wire and string used to create pleasing effects. All work is informed by the study of a wide range of past and contemporary artists; for example, Naum Gabo and Tony Cragg. Pupils with special educational needs make very good progress, because lessons are very active, teachers often give very clear demonstrations, and materials are used in exciting and vigorous ways. ICT is sometimes used well, for example, to manipulate images, and to create patterns, which are bright and bold. However, more frequent use of ICT could give further support for pupils' work.

160. The achievement of pupils taking the GCSE course is excellent, and in Year 11 standards are very high. This is an improvement since the previous inspection. GCSE results have shown considerable improvement over the last three years, and reflect strongly rising standards, from a level that was already well above average. Results in 2001 were well above average, and improved again considerably in 2002. This trend has been sustained, and the work is now of a very high standard. Boys and girls achieved equally and did much better than the national average. Pupils make excellent progress in all aspects of their artwork. They build on their skills of observation, using a variety of materials and methods which achieves harmonious effects. They produce rich fabric hangings using wire, sacking, netting and wood which show a high standard of sewing and joining techniques, and a highly developed sensitivity to textural and tonal qualities. Their research skills are very good, and sketchbooks show lively and imaginative work and are very well used for experimenting with materials and developing personal ideas.

161. Pupils' attitudes are good in Years 7 to 9. This is because lessons are active and well structured, interest levels are high, and pupils achieve success. Attitudes are very good in Years 10 and 11 because pupils enjoy the opportunities for increased development of personal ideas.

162. Teaching and learning are very good in Years 7, 8 and 9 and excellent in Years 10 and 11. Materials and methods are exciting and the use of them is vigorous, and this produces high levels of engagement and very good levels of interest; for example, in a Year 10 lesson investigating the work of James Rosenquist, pupils used diffusers to spray brightly coloured inks onto large sheets of paper to make graded and textured effects and went on to draw boldly in oil pastel over their ink work. Lessons are very well structured, and teachers often use questioning sessions and short demonstrations which lead to a very rapid pace of learning. In a Year 8 lesson based on the observation of sweets and cakes, pupils first compared colours and shapes seen, made coloured washes, and then cut out shapes to create collages. Each stage was clearly explained and demonstrated, and this maintained a very good pace, and pupils' learning was very effective.

163. Improvement since the previous inspection has been excellent. Standards have risen from well above average to a very high level in Year 11, and recent examination results show considerable further improvement. Leadership and management are excellent and successfully pursue very high standards. The subject makes a very good contribution to pupils' cultural development, and a very wide range of artists and designers are studied to extend pupils' understanding of the world of art. In addition, the art of other countries, for example, Japanese and Indian art, is frequently used to inform and initiate pupils' own artwork. This helps them to appreciate the richness and diversity of other cultures.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

Overall, the quality of provision is **unsatisfactory**.

Strengths

- Rising standards
- Consistently good standards in GCSE systems and control.
- Practical work in Years 10 and 11

Areas for improvement

- Presentation, drawing and modelling skills
- Teachers' match of work to pupils' different needs
- The use of assessment to plan lessons
- ICT facilities

164. Standards of work of the current Year 9 pupils are above average in the areas of design and technology studied; however, pupils do no work with textiles. The standards seen during the inspection are consistent with the results of the teachers' assessments of the previous Year 9. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory throughout Years 7, 8 and 9, overall, although there is some underachievement. Pupils with special educational needs undertake the same work as other pupils and make similar progress. Practical work is usually good and the better design folders are neatly presented. Pupils make good use of graphs and charts in their work and show good model-making skills as seen, for example, in Year 8 pupils' effective use of computer-aided design (CAD) software in their projects to make photograph frames. Year 7 pupils' work shows that they can make accurate sketches and that they annotate their work well, for example, in their food project. Weaker work is characterised by a lack of research ideas, incompleteness, drawings made inappropriately in pen instead of pencil, and poor evaluations of the project, and these weaknesses lead to underachievement on the part of the pupils concerned.

165. About half of the pupils take a design and technology course in Year 10 and all Year 11 pupils are taking a short course leading to GCSE. Standards of work of the present Year 11 are average overall and represent a satisfactory achievement. The overall GCSE results were well below average in 2001 but improved in 2002. The results of the systems and control GCSE course are consistently good. Although the home economics results were well below average in 2001, they improved very considerably in 2002. Pupils tend to do less well in design and technology than in their other subjects but standards are improving. Good work can be seen in all of the technology subjects. A systems and control project in Year 11 reveals a good depth of research, use of colour, drawings and photographic evidence. Similarly, good work is being done in a lighting project in graphics. In home economics food and nutrition, examples of good work include a project on alternative protein dishes and convenience foods and good use of labelled drawings looking at the effect of diet on tooth decay.

166. Pupils' practical skills are good. However, poor presentation and modelling skills, drawings not explained and untidy or incomplete work all need attention throughout the school. Pupils apply their good literacy skills effectively. They read confidently and speak well in lesson discussions. Pupils are competent in numeracy skills and they apply them well in measuring, costing, weighing and in scale drawings. Pupils use ICT for research in their project work.

167. Pupils have good attitudes to work. They respond well when challenged and work well together in groups and respect each other. There are some instances of inattention but most pupils concentrate well and make a positive contribution to lessons. Generally, relationships between pupils and adults are good and pupils enjoy their lessons.

168. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall and there is some good teaching. A good Year 9 lesson in food technology on healthy eating and dietary goals successfully developed pupils' knowledge. A good Year 10 graphics lesson successfully developed pupils' skills in orthographic projection and, in a good Year 11 home economics lesson, pupils made good progress in their understanding of the effects of additives used in food production. These good lessons moved at a good pace; the lesson objectives were clear to pupils and pupils were well managed. In some other lessons, the planning fails to

take account of different pupils' needs, which leads to underachievement. Sometimes the pupils were bored by over-long introductions and this leads to slower pace.

169. The leadership of the subject is satisfactory and has tackled a number of issues raised at the time of the previous inspection. The head of department has guided the department through a period of staff changes. There is now a closer working relationship with home economics. The curriculum does not meet statutory requirements for all pupils to study a technology subject in Years 10 and 11. Pupils do no work in computer-assisted manufacture (CAM). There is a shortage of ICT hardware, especially in food technology.

170. The subject has made a satisfactory improvement since the previous inspection. Target-setting for individual pupils has been introduced and standards are rising; however, there is still some underachievement. Accommodation has improved but the hand tools should be refurbished or replaced. There are no safety floor lines around machinery in the workshops and no facility for hanging coats and bags safely in the food technology room.

GEOGRAPHY

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

Strengths

- Above average standards and good achievement
- Improved GCSE results in 2002
- Good teaching and learning
- Very good teaching of basic skills of literacy and numeracy
- Effective leadership and management of the subject

Areas for improvement

- Match of work set to the range of attainment in some classes
- Use of assessment data to monitor progress in Years 7, 8 and 9

171. The standards of pupils' work in Year 9 are above average and are reflected accurately in the teachers' assessments. In relation to pupils' average standards at the start of Year 7, the standards they have reached by Year 9 represent a good overall achievement. Pupils increase their knowledge and understanding of different places, locally and globally, and develop their skills of map-reading and photograph interpretation well. In Year 9, different groups of pupils match photographs and climate graphs to different ecosystems successfully and the average and higher attainers can, for example, describe and explain the relationship between vegetation and climate. Lower-attaining pupils make good progress and reach average standards in their extended writing. The work of the higher attainers is of a very high standard and shows depth of understanding. All pupils make good progress in their skills of collecting, presenting and analysing data in fieldwork when, for example, investigating whether or not Barton is a good place in which to live.

172. At this early stage in Year 11, standards of pupils' work are above average overall and the pupils are achieving well. In 2001, the GCSE results were above average and improved considerably in 2002. Boys' results are similar to those of the girls. Pupils understand the issues related to pollution and the exploitation of fossil fuels. Higher-attaining pupils' work shows a good knowledge and understanding of settlements as seen, for example, in their written reports on the development of science parks and shopping centres in a study of Cambridge are detailed and of a high standard. Lower attainers achieve well and reach average standards in their understanding of the cause of natural phenomena such as earthquakes, and account briefly for the differences in the effects of these in countries with different levels of economic development.

173. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very good. The high level of interest in their learning enables lessons to proceed quickly. The presentation of their work shows determination to achieve well. In Year 11, there are some very impressive notebooks and completed past examination questions that provide a very good base for revision.

174. Teaching and learning are good throughout the school and no unsatisfactory lessons were seen. Teachers have a very good knowledge of what pupils need to do to achieve well in GCSE examinations. Lessons are well planned and classes well managed so that pupils maintain a good pace of learning. The variety of teaching methods holds the pupils' interest and concentration. For example, in a very good lesson on sources of power, pupils were led rapidly through a series of tasks before preparing group presentations for the class. Some lessons, though otherwise satisfactory, lack resources matched to different attainment levels, so that some pupils, especially those with lower reading and comprehension skills, struggle to make the good progress that they should. Explanations are sometimes not carefully matched to all pupils' needs and this leads to unequal progress.

175. The basic skills of literacy and numeracy are very well taught in geography. Technical language is gradually developed and pupils use a very wide range of writing styles, including diaries, reports, letters, imaginative stories, newspaper articles and poetry. Pupils use a variety of graphs competently to illustrate their work. ICT is well planned to support pupils' learning but it is often difficult to gain access to computer rooms.

176. A few pupils with special educational needs whose literacy skills are weak find difficulty reading all the texts. Although their overall achievement is satisfactory, there are occasions when they cannot read the words necessary to cope with classwork, or structure their writing, when there is no special support for them in the lesson. When they have this support, they make satisfactory progress.

177. The time given to geography in Year 9 is reduced to one lesson per week and this restricts what can be done and limits the development of, for example, fieldwork.

178. Leadership and management of the department are very good. The department's plans concentrate on raising standards. Teaching and pupils' work are monitored very well and assessment data is being used effectively in Years 10 and 11 to track pupils' progress. Although the quality of assessment data has improved in Years 7, 8 and 9, its use to check the individual progress of pupils is not yet in place. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good, overall, most notably in the increased use of fieldwork and the attention to literacy, numeracy and ICT.

HISTORY

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

Strengths

- Good teaching
- Standards are above average in both Year 9 and Year 11
- GCSE results are above average
- Pupils behave well and have positive attitudes to their work

Areas for improvement

- The use of ICT

179. Pupils achieve well in history. They join Year 7 with above average attainment and sustain these standards throughout the school. In 2001, the results of teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 are again above national averages. Current Year 9 pupils are reaching above average standards.

180. The standard of Year 11 pupils' work is above average. Both boys and girls achieve well. The highest attaining pupils make rapid progress. Those pupils selecting the subject are mostly of above average ability in Year 9. GCSE results over the past five years have been above average. The number of students achieving the highest grades A* and A increased in 2002, and four out of five students entered for the examination achieved at least a grade C. Boys and girls achieved similar grades and four out of ten pupils gained at least an A grade.

181. Pupils have very good attitudes to learning. They show high levels of motivation and self-discipline, are very well behaved in lessons, and complete homework conscientiously. Pupils respond well to the expertise and professional care they receive from experienced teachers. Boys and girls work well together and are equally well motivated to do well. All pupils are encouraged to contribute and contributions receive a suitable response from teachers.

182. Support for those with special educational needs is effective and ensures that these pupils make good progress and take full part in lessons. In previous years, girls have achieved higher GCSE grades than have boys, but the 2002 results are closer.

183. The quality of teaching is good and in some lessons is very good. Pupils respond positively to the teaching and learn rapidly. In Year 8, skilful questioning and presentation of material encouraged pupils to understand the work of monasteries and their impact on lives of local communities. This stimulated pupils to discuss the social impact of the institutions and to judge the importance of different sources of information.

184. Good discipline ensures that all pupils take part in discussions. Texts and other learning materials are well matched to the different levels of pupils' attainment in the class and this ensures that all pupils are sufficiently challenged. This is reinforced with praise and support given for homework or classwork. Pupils take pride in their studies, as is shown in their progress and increasing interest in the subject. They enjoy history, are attentive, and respond well to the teachers' requests. Pupils talk and answer questions with confidence and listen to other views. History is a popular option at the end of Year 9 with over half of the students choosing to take it to GCSE level.

185. Considerable attention is given to developing vocabulary and challenging pupils to extend this by explaining new words. By Year 9, pupils use their knowledge and understanding well to describe past events and begin to make links between the different historical periods. Most pupils are comfortable in using a variety of sources but they do not always evaluate their effectiveness. There is some application of ICT, but this tends to be the occasional word-processed submission or project work from the visits made to historical locations. Displays relating to past periods and methods of historical investigation are used to good advantage and enhance both the learning process and the environment. Effective use is made of cartoons and other diagrams which represent specific historical periods. Homework is set regularly, and marked and the teachers' comments relate not only to content but presentation, spelling and grammar. This is reinforced particularly in Years 7 and 8 with merit marks. Written work is generally well presented. Pupils understand the marking system and the grades, which are given both for content and effort. The literacy strategy is very effective and can be seen in the support, guidance and subsequent progress that pupils make.

186. Learning targets are shared with pupils. A range of tasks and exercises is set which require them to think and write carefully. For example, Year 11 pupils considered the state of medical understanding following the decline of the Roman Empire. Another group were introduced to the medical knowledge in ancient Greece. Appropriate knowledge of the subject and of examination requirements is evident. Teachers encourage pupils and reinforce the work through support and guidance. Pupils' verbal contributions are not always as forthcoming because, at the start of the course, there is less confidence in their levels of knowledge. Pupils' work indicates that by the end of the year most have a sound understanding of the past and can use sources critically and place them in their historical context. Written work is well presented and suitably marked. Topics on the family organisation of the Plains Indians provided an opportunity for the higher attaining pupils to explore accommodation, family roles, economics and the care of the elderly. Sources and information were identified and evaluated. Lower attaining pupils

give brief descriptions of family life but do not explore this. In most cases the work is well organised, neat, with clear handwriting and attention paid to punctuation and spelling.

187. The pace of lessons is rigorous and pupils concentrate on the tasks. Homework is set to consolidate or extend knowledge and teachers ensure that all pupils complete it.

188. A practical history course caters for pupils who wish to study a non-examination history course. Those pupils, many with special needs, undertake a local project covering a topic of local interest; for example, a Year 10 class considered the Fauld Explosion. Pupils interviewed a local person who recounted some first hand experiences of the impact of the explosion on the village.

189. Teachers encourage pupils' writing and speaking skills by providing a range of challenging tasks and make suitable use of literacy, especially in Years 7 to 9. The emphasis is having an impact as written work in a variety of modes clearly improves and vocabulary is extended through the use of, for example, Arabic words and their English equivalents. There is little evidence of measures to extend numeracy skills other than through graphs or time charts. Field projects involve the use of ICT in the writing up of the project as seen with some interesting projects relating to the visits to Tutbury Castle. The use of ICT is being developed but more regular access to computers would help in this.

190. Leadership and management are good. There is a shared determination by teachers who have worked together for some time to ensure that pupils succeed. Individual education plans are carefully used and teachers know their pupils well. However, the teachers do not make a systematic analysis of examination results and trends. The ethos of the department is extremely positive. Suitable professional development is undertaken and is used to improve further the quality of teaching. Learning resources are adequate containing an appropriate range of materials. However there is a need for greater access to computers to provide access to CD-ROMs and the internet.

191. The previous report contained few areas for improvement. Since 1998, the subject has made a good improvement. Standards have risen and numbers choosing to study history have increased substantially. Pupils' behaviour and motivation remain high and the quality and variety of teaching and learning continue to be good. However, the issue about the limited use of ICT remains.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

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

Strengths:

- Good teaching in Years 7, 8 and 9
- Standards are above average by Year 9

Areas for improvement

- Underachievement of Year 11 pupils
- Ineffective monitoring of teaching of ICT in other subjects
- Lack of continuity of learning in Years 7, 8 and 9
- Inadequate resources for learning

192. Pupils begin Year 7 with above average attainment overall. In 2001, the results of the teachers' assessments of pupils at the end of Year 9 indicated that the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standards was well above average. Girls' results were higher than those of the boys. These results were a significant improvement on those of the previous two years, when they were well below average. However, very few pupils reach the higher levels. The standard of the present Year 9 pupils' work is

above average and this represents a satisfactory achievement for these pupils. However, standards could be higher still with better timetabling of the subject. The timetable causes a lack of continuity which makes it difficult for pupils to master the higher levels of skill. Over the course of Years 7, 8 and 9, the time given for ICT is about half of one lesson per week. Because of the way the timetable is organised, it is possible for a pupil to have ICT in terms one and two in Year 7 and then not again until term three of Year 8.

193. Current standards achieved by Year 11 pupils are below average and pupils are underachieving because they are not taught systematically through the other subjects of the curriculum. Year 11 pupils express disappointment regarding the little time that they have had for ICT. The current Year 10 pupils have just begun a course in key IT skills which will be assessed at the end of Year 11. This change should help to raise standards.

194. Pupils' attitudes to their work are positive and they enjoy using computers. They listen well and follow instructions; they work independently at their workstations and also work well in groups. Pupils help one another quietly when the teacher is occupied with others. Pupils complete their homework on time.

195. Teaching is unsatisfactory overall. It is generally good in lessons for Years 7, 8 and 9 pupils and the quality of these lessons is a considerable improvement on what was found at the time of the previous inspection. In Years 7, 8 and 9, pupils understand the aims of lessons, instructions are clear, expectations are high and pupils think for themselves and work independently. Teachers take care to ensure that pupils with special educational needs can cope with the work set for the class, sometimes with the assistance of the ICT technician working in support to make sure they undertake the common tasks set and make progress. Similar attention is given to extension work for higher attaining pupils; for example, in Year 7, some pupils completed simple programming procedures to draw squares, rectangles and triangles whilst higher attaining pupils completed more intricate designs. In the construction of holiday brochures, higher attaining pupils included temperature graphs, making effective use of spreadsheets and pictures downloaded from the Internet.

196. Teaching in Years 10 and 11 is unsatisfactory and pupils are not making the progress that they should. Year 11 pupils have a total of five hours teaching for the whole year and had less than 10 hours of ICT over the whole of their time in Year 10. The standards of pupils' work on a multi-media presentation was below what should be expected at their age. Year 10 pupils have just begun the key skills course and are consolidating skills learned in Year 9.

197. The planning of homework is a strength. Work at home is carefully planned to complement classwork and helps to make the most effective use of the limited teaching time. Work is marked regularly in line with subject policy. Positive comments and effort grades are used consistently. National Curriculum levels and points for improvement are clearly identified. Insufficient attention is given, however, to correcting pupils' spelling in their written work, and despite the use of a spellchecker, pupils' errors can pass unchecked.

198. Assessment of individual pupil's work is not used to plan lessons sufficiently well. The planning assumes that pupils start from the same level of experience whereas this varies considerably. The consequence is that in some lessons pupils are taught skills they already possess.

199. The management of the ICT department is effective. The handbook is up to date. Schemes of work and resources offer good support and guidance for teachers and the monitoring of teaching and pupils' work ensures that standards are sustained in Years 7, 8 and 9. The practical aspects of ICT are also well managed. A technician has been in post for nearly a year and this has improved the day-to-day functioning of computers as well providing a source of advice for less-experienced users. The computer suites are networked and effectively maintained. Internet access by pupils is controlled and monitored. Software is licensed and resources catalogued.

200. The overall improvement since the previous inspection is unsatisfactory. The use of ICT in other subjects is a weakness. It is not monitored and this leads to repetition and duplication of tasks; for

example, co-ordinates are taught in ICT lessons before they are taught in mathematics. Geography makes use of spreadsheets in Year 8 but pupils do not learn to use them in ICT lessons until Year 9. Only in design and technology and English are any assessments made of pupils' ICT capability. Training has had a minimal effect on the use of ICT across the curriculum.

201. Although most of the teaching is done by specialist ICT teachers with very good subject knowledge, detailed, step-by-step planning enables non-specialist teachers to cover the same ground.

202. A lack of resources for ICT was identified in the previous report. Whilst there have been some improvements since that time, the current ratio of computers to pupils is considerably below the average for secondary schools. Some subject departments find difficulty in gaining access to computer rooms. One of these computer suites is timetabled as a classroom for business studies lessons which means that it is not often used by other subjects.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Overall, the quality of provision in modern languages is **satisfactory**

Strengths

In German:

- Good teaching and learning
- Rising standards

In modern languages as a whole

- Very good leadership and management

Areas for improvement

In French:

- Pupils could achieve higher standards in speaking and writing skills

In German

- **Some unsatisfactory teaching owing to occasional lack of class control**

In modern languages as a whole

- **Marking and use of assessment**

203. The school offers diversified provision in modern languages from Year 7 with half of the intake beginning French and the other half taking German. Most pupils begin a second language from Year 8 but very few pupils study two languages in Years 10 and 11.

French

204. Standards of work in Year 9 are average. Overall, pupils achieve satisfactorily and make good progress in developing comprehension skills. However, many pupils, particularly the more able, do not develop speaking and writing skills to a high enough level for their age. Most read aloud confidently and repeat what they hear with good pronunciation. However, pupils do not readily produce sentences of their own without relying on written support and this often adversely affects pronunciation. Although they progressively build up their knowledge of grammar structures and tenses, they often have difficulty manipulating the language successfully. Pupils do not do enough extended writing and their work often lacks attention to accuracy. Some pupils are capable of reaching higher standards and achievement is no better than satisfactory overall.

205. Standards of work of the current Year 11 pupils are average, overall, and represent a satisfactory achievement although standards of speaking and writing could be higher. In 2001, GCSE results in French fell to average, reversing the good improvement made over the previous three-year period. Girls and boys did significantly less well in French than in their other subjects and the proportion achieving the higher A*

or A grades was below average. Results in 2002 rose sharply, in line with other subjects, but the proportion achieving the higher A* or A grades remained low. Girls' results were better than those of the boys. Reading comprehension skills continue to develop well, as do listening skills, especially when pupils have good opportunities to hear French regularly in lessons. However, speaking and writing continue to be weak, most notably among the more capable girls and boys who should be achieving more highly in these two skills. Pupils make progress in learning more vocabulary and more grammar structures but many have difficulty applying the rules correctly. Many do not use the perfect tense correctly in either speaking or writing and there is considerable confusion with verb forms. Written work in general lacks attention to detail. Pupils lack confidence orally and need more opportunities to practise speaking, for example in pairs. By contrast, lower ability pupils and pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress and are on course to achieve a GCSE pass.

206. Pupils' attitudes towards French are satisfactory overall. Many pupils lack enthusiasm for the subject though they are compliant and behaviour is generally good. Higher attaining girls and boys often find lessons boring because the pace of learning is too slow and they are not always suitably challenged. Consequently, they tend not to listen hard enough and to stray off task too readily. However, where teaching is stimulating and of good quality attitudes are good.

207. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. There is some good teaching, though during the week of the inspection the proportion seen was lower than is often found. Teachers have good subject knowledge, they plan lessons well and objectives are clear. However, some teachers do not speak French consistently in lessons and many pupils are not getting the exposure to French they deserve in order to develop listening and speaking skills fully. Activities sometimes fail to catch the pupils' interest and drag on for too long and some teachers dominate the speaking, which causes pupils to switch off. Although classes are generally well managed, inattentive and restless pupils are not always brought back on task swiftly enough and time is lost. Higher attaining pupils are not pushed hard enough and more could be expected of them.

German

208. Standards of work in Year 9 are above average and closely match the teachers' assessments. Boys and girls achieve well and they build up their knowledge of grammar structures and vocabulary and they learn how to refer to past and future events. More able pupils write pieces of increasing length and accuracy. They develop speaking well because they have many opportunities to practise in class. They hear German spoken consistently in lessons and this contributes to the good progress they make in listening. They can skim and scan printed texts and pick out details. Pupils with special educational needs respond well to praise and encouragement and generally make progress at a similar rate to other pupils in the class.

209. In 2001, GCSE results were average and continued the steady rise over the past five years. Girls and boys did as well in German as in their other subjects although the proportion achieving the higher A* or A grades was below average. Results in 2002 improved slightly but the proportion achieving the higher A* or A grades fell. Boys' and girls' results were equal. Pupils are achieving well. Standards achieved by the current Year 11 pupils are above average and continuing to rise. Pupils continue to build up their knowledge and understanding of how the language works and to develop each skill well. They speak and write at more length with increasing confidence and accuracy. In response to very good teaching, some dual linguists, most notably boys, reach standards that are well above average. They give confident and fluent oral presentations in which they express and justify their opinions and write extended pieces with a high level of accuracy.

210. Attitudes towards German are good overall and pupils generally behave well. However, a small minority of pupils, mainly boys in Year 9, lose concentration easily and waste time. When this is not dealt with effectively, poor behaviour can disrupt the learning of others in the class. Most pupils enjoy their lessons and come prepared to work hard. They work well together to practise speaking and solve problems and they learn much from each other.

211. The quality of teaching and learning in German is good overall. It is consistently good in Years 10 and 11 but more variable in Years 7, 8 and 9. This is largely due to poor classroom management, which results in inattention and instances of inappropriate behaviour, which slows pupils' progress. Teachers have good subject knowledge and are fluent. There is a consistent team approach to lesson planning, with well-timed and well-sequenced activities. Well chosen resources catch pupils' interest, stimulate their active involvement in their learning and increase their knowledge and understanding. A good example was a Year 9 lesson in which pupils were learning the parts of the body. A video clip of a song not only helped pupils to deduce how to form plurals and to apply the adjective endings rule correctly but also improved their confidence and pronunciation and helped them commit new words to memory fast.

Spanish

212. In 2001, all pupils entered for Spanish GCSE achieved a pass in the range A*-G. Standards in Year 11 are well below average and closely match GCSE results. Considering the degree of disaffection with which pupils began the course in Year 10, most are achieving satisfactorily and benefit from being given the chance to make a fresh start with a new language. A significant number of boys in the class are difficult to manage and do not achieve as well as they should because of their inappropriate behaviour. Pupils make most progress in reading comprehension but progress is very limited in speaking and listening. In-class support is used most effectively and teaching overall is satisfactory.

213. Leadership and management of modern languages are very good. This is clearly an improving department though there is still a long way to go. Since the appointment of a new head of department, many changes have been introduced. Through formal monitoring, team teaching and shared good practice there is now a determined team approach to improving the quality of pupils' experience in the classroom and to raising achievement. Close monitoring has already led to some improvement in teaching style and quality but more is needed. The main priorities are to eliminate the unsatisfactory teaching in German and to raise the overall quality of teaching in French so that pupils learn more quickly and achieve more highly. Across all languages, assessment data need to be used more effectively to set targets in order to drive up standards. In marking, more written comments to support pupils in their learning would help them understand more clearly what they need to do to move on faster. The department is poised to increase the opportunities that already exist for pupils to use and develop ICT skills in their lessons.

MUSIC

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

Strengths

- Good standards in Year 11
- Very good GCSE examination results
- The contribution to pupils' cultural and social development

Weaknesses

- Tasks not matched well enough to pupils' different attainment levels
- Clarity of targets for groupwork
- Provision for ICT
- Procedures for assessing pupils' attainment
- The monitoring of teaching and learning

214. The Year 9 pupils' standards of work are average but more could be achieved throughout Years 7, 8 and 9 if tasks were better matched to the full range of pupils' attainment. As was also the case at the time of the previous inspection, pupils have only one music lesson per week, and standards achieved would be higher if more time was given for the subject.

215. Most pupils join Year 7 with average attainment in music, and some are experienced musicians. They have a secure sense of pulse and can repeat rhythmic patterns and simple melodic phrases accurately. In lessons, they understand new concepts and learn quickly, but they do not have sufficient time in which to develop the techniques for effective performing skills. Older pupils do not listen sufficiently carefully to ensure that they are creating a satisfying musical effect. Pupils sing well but the tone quality is coarse.

216. In Years 10 and 11, pupils who choose to study music to GCSE achieve well, and the overall standard of the current Year 11 pupils' work is above average. Over the past three years, the GCSE results have been average. In 2001, the GCSE results in music were just below average; however, the most recent (2002) examination results improved considerably and were very good. There is no significant difference between boys' and girls' results.

217. Higher attaining pupils have well developed aural and performing skills. One or two pupils play at a standard well beyond that required for the GCSE examination, and their composing is imaginative and well structured. Most other pupils perform competently. In composing, although they know how to use different musical devices, they do not listen critically enough to the outcomes or refine their work imaginatively enough. Year 11 pupils understand a broad range of technical terms and correctly recognise the features which distinguish the music of different periods. Because of a lack of computers, pupils do not learn how to use ICT as a composing tool.

218. The achievement of pupils with special educational needs is similar to that of other pupils, although one or two who do not have work adapted to their particular capabilities make unsatisfactory progress. There are no procedures for identifying pupils who may be gifted or have special talents for music.

219. Pupils have good attitudes to their work. They settle quickly to work, collaborate with one another, and make productive use of their time when working independently. Overall, pupils behave well in lessons because the teachers manage them well and create very good relationships. However, a small number of pupils, both boys and girls, waste time, and some pupils can be insensitive when sharing space with others and make too much noise.

220. In lessons, the quality of teaching and learning in Years 7, 8 and 9 is satisfactory. However, targets for groupwork are not sufficiently clearly defined, with the result that too much time is wasted. Because tasks are not adapted to match different attainment levels, some pupils do not make as much progress as they could. The quality of teaching and learning in Years 10 and 11 is good and better than in the earlier years because of better use of time and matching of work to pupils' capability. In general, teachers have impressive musical expertise and by communicating their enthusiasm for the subject to the pupils they provide very good examples for them to follow. Teachers have high expectations of pupils' achievement and this has an evident effects on pupils' learning; for example, in a Year 7 lesson, the challenging method of teaching rhythmic notation successfully reinforced and extended pupils' aural skills and musical memory. Similarly, Year 9 pupils learned to devise swing rhythm and add 'blue' notes to the twelve-bar blues chord scheme.

221. The overall improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory. The management of the department is satisfactory but procedures for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning are not sufficiently rigorous. The assessment system for GCSE pupils informs pupils of their progress but assessing the pupils in Year 9 is not properly linked to national criteria and is inaccurate. The accommodation for music has improved significantly since the previous inspection, with sufficient separate spaces for groupwork. However, furniture in the main classrooms takes up too much space and prevents pupils from moving around unobtrusively. Many keyboards are in need of repair and the lack of music-dedicated computers reduces opportunities for pupils in Years 10 and 11 and prevents the department from fully meeting the requirements of the National Curriculum for music and ICT.

222. Many of the increasing numbers learning to play instruments take part in activities during the lunch hour and after school. Members of the department give generously of their own time to the organisation of these activities and pupils achieve high standards of performance. The girls' choir, the four-part mixed-

voice choir, the orchestra and the jazz band rehearse weekly; there is an expanding programme of concerts and recitals, and the jazz band is a popular attraction at a number of local events. The school's musicians take part in local events in prestigious venues, such as Lichfield Cathedral and the Royal Albert Hall. The annual musical production involves around one hundred and fifty pupils.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Overall, the quality of provision for physical education is **very good**.

Strengths

- Pupils' good overall achievement
- Well above average and improving GCSE results
- Good teaching and learning
- Very good assessment procedures
- Leadership and management are very good
- Excellent provision for extra-curricular opportunities for boys and girls

Areas for improvement

- The match of work to the full range of pupils' capabilities and attainment levels

223. Standards in physical education are above average overall and represent good achievement by boys and girls throughout the school. Pupils' very positive attitudes and good learning skills combine with good teaching to ensure that they learn effectively and make good progress as they move through the school.

224. The teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 indicate that standards in physical education are above average for both boys and girls. This is confirmed by the inspection and standards of work of the current Year 9 pupils are above average. By Year 9, the vast majority of pupils are reaching expected standards, including those with special educational needs. They are developing a secure understanding of the effects of exercise on the body at this stage, and can prepare themselves appropriately for physical activities. Year 7 pupils show very keen interest and enthusiasm for their work. The boys' handling skills in rugby are above average, whilst the girls show good basic footwork and passing skills in netball. By Year 9, standards in netball are well above average. In a very good lesson, girls not only showed very good technical ability but also analysed their work and, as a result, initiated improvements. In this lesson, the higher attaining girls showed mature tactical awareness, whilst the lower attainers made good progress in improving their dodging techniques.

225. The overall standard of the current Year 11 pupils' work in the GCSE course are above average, with strengths in the theoretical elements of the course linked well to the practical work. This was seen in a Year 10 football lesson in which pupils improved their skills, for example, to make lofted passes and to take a free kick. This linked approach is effective in ensuring that pupils develop well above average levels of knowledge and understanding which they are able to apply successfully to their practical performance in physical education. Additionally, GCSE pupils demonstrate good literacy skills in their oral and written work. Lower attainers are reaching at least average levels here, whilst the written work of the higher attainers is often exemplary. The GCSE results have improved significantly since the previous inspection. In 2001, all candidates successfully completed the course, with a well above average proportion achieving grades A*-C, and an above average proportion achieved A* or A grades. The course is a very popular option for both boys and girls, and their results are very similar. Many pupils do significantly better in physical education than in their other GCSE subjects. The most recent results in 2002 were very good and show that pupils sustained the high standards of previous years with 84 per cent gaining grades A* - C, and there was once more an overall 100 per cent pass rate. In 2002, girls outperformed the boys at GCSE.

226. Elsewhere in Years 10 and 11, the standards in the core physical education programme are good and are above average by Year 11, as pupils consolidate and extend their work done in previous years. Both boys and girls have a good understanding of fitness and health principles.

227. Pupils, including those with special educational needs, make good progress in physical education. Learning skills are well developed and are sharpened by the good use of homework across the school. Pupils are extremely co-operative and very well behaved. Their levels of interest and enthusiasm for the subject are high, and their participation rates in lessons are very good. Pupils' commitment and physical effort are noteworthy, and are complemented by a considerable maturity and willingness to accept responsibility. They enjoy physical education.

228. The quality of teaching and learning are good throughout Years 7 – 11. Important strengths of teaching are the very good relationships and management of pupils, linked to high expectations, which combine to create a co-operative atmosphere for learning. As a result, from a very early stage, pupils learn correct techniques and make good progress; for example, in a Year 7 netball lesson, girls made very good progress in improving their footwork technique. A key feature in the most effective teaching is the frequent questioning of pupils to check their learning and understanding. When this is also combined with opportunities to take responsibility for planning, organising, and reviewing the effectiveness of their work, pupils' progress is good. This was the case in Year 11 football, where small groups of boys successfully created their own ball-control practices; their gains in skill and understanding were accompanied by recognisable improvements in teamwork, leadership, collaboration and self-confidence. Areas for development in teaching include ensuring a closer match of work to pupil needs: whilst planning is a strength, more attention should be given to the needs of pupils of differing levels of attainment, matching the resources and the tasks set more accurately to cater for both the higher and lower attaining pupils within classes.

229. Leadership and management are very good. Since the previous inspection, arrangements for monitoring and evaluation have been strengthened. Curriculum planning is very good. National Curriculum requirements are met well, with very good assessment procedures that fully reflect the conceptual areas of the subject. In Years 10 and 11, the programme for boys and girls is enhanced by efficient use of off-site leisure facilities to extend the range of choice and specialisation available.

230. The subject has improved well since the previous inspection. The quality of teaching and learning has been sustained and GCSE results have considerably improved. The excellent range of extra-curricular activities has been sustained. They are popular amongst boys and girls, and help to raise standards; they provide very good opportunities for pupils to achieve very high standards, both individually and in their teams.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- Good teaching and learning
- Pupils achieve well, standards are improving and are above average
- GCSE results are well above average
- Lessons are interesting and pupils enjoy and value them
- Pupils with special needs make good progress
- Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very good
- Homework is well planned and makes a significant contribution to pupils' progress

Areas for improvement

- Contribution to the development of pupils' literacy skills

- Pupils do not always know the aims of the lesson
- Few boys take the GCSE course and they tend to achieve less well than girls
- No special arrangements are made for gifted pupils

231. Standards in religious education are above average. Pupils achieve well, largely as a result of good teaching but also because of the very good attitudes they bring to their work.

232. Current standards in Year 9 are above average and have improved since the previous inspection and pupils achieve well. They have an above average knowledge of the religious beliefs and practices of the main world religions, particularly Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism. They have good insights into why people worship different Gods and can recognise similarities in religions, for example, in the importance of pilgrimage. They can articulate their views well and can discriminate between fact, opinion and belief. They have good communication skills and can pose interesting hypotheses for discussion and debate, for example, whether God can really see us as we go about our daily lives.

233. Overall standards in Year 11 are also above average and show that pupils are achieving well. Standards of work in Year 11 GCSE classes are well above average and pupils have a very good factual knowledge of the main tenets of Christianity and other world religions. GCSE results in 2001 were well above average and results over the last few years have been consistently above average. In 2002, the girls' results were higher than those of the boys. A greater proportion of Year 11 pupils were entered for GCSE in this subject than in most schools, nationally, although very few boys took the course. Pupils tended to do better in religious education than they did in their other subjects but boys did less well than did the girls. Pupils who do not take the GCSE course have a good knowledge by Year 11 and display high levels of skill in questioning and evaluating different beliefs and practices, from fundamental issues such as why some people believe in a god and others do not, to the role science plays in relation to whether or not God exists. Pupils achieve well because their teachers make the subject interesting and teach effectively.

234. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress as they move through the school. They improve their factual knowledge and understanding of religion because their teachers understand their difficulties and make special arrangements to ensure they can read the text-books and understand what is required of them when set written tasks. Pupils with physical disabilities achieve as well as other pupils. They are well supported by learning assistants, are fully involved in lessons and take an active part in out of school visits. Talented or gifted pupils are not identified and nothing special is planned to take account of their particular needs.

235. Teaching and learning are good throughout the school. The good overall quality of teaching enables all pupils to learn effectively and to make good progress. Pupils benefit from being taught by a small number of experienced, well-qualified and enthusiastic teachers who are very effective classroom managers, have good subject knowledge and who make lessons interesting and worthwhile. Pupils are nearly always actively involved in their own learning, either through discussion, research or analysis of source materials. Teachers have empathy with their pupils and relationships are very good. Pupils see the value of what they are asked to do and want to learn and please their teachers who make a very valuable contribution to pupils' personal development. Homework is set regularly and is a valuable tool in preparing pupils for forthcoming lessons, for example, in preparation for one lesson Year 7 pupils had been asked to think about and come up with ideas on 'life's ultimate questions'. Books are marked regularly and with helpful comments and analysis. Assessment procedures are good and pupils know where they are at and what they have to do to improve. Teaching would be even better if learning objectives were always shared with pupils at the beginning of lessons and greater attention was paid by teachers in the development of pupils' basic skills, particularly literacy skills. Pupils' learning is enhanced through a good range of outside visits to places of worship, including churches and cathedrals, mosques and temples.

236. Pupils enjoy their religious education lessons and can see their importance in helping them develop their own set of values and beliefs. Pupils' attitudes are overwhelmingly positive. They collaborate with each other and their teachers and the standard of behaviour in lessons is very good.

237. The leadership and management of religious education are good. There has been a considerable improvement since the previous inspection. Statutory requirements for the subject are now fully met, standards are higher and pupils' attitudes are better. GCSE results have remained consistently above the national average. A strong team ethic has been fostered which, through the quality of its teaching and relationships, helps underpin the school's ethos. Although the department has tried various strategies to encourage more boys to take a GCSE in religious studies, these have had limited success.

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

238. 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 2001.

GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	41	83	62	37	15	2.4	1.5
Chemistry	44	93	43	23	5	2.4	0.8
Biology	26	100	84	69	34	3.9	2.6
Environmental science	8	88	n/a	50	n/a	2.8	n/a
Physics	23	87	52	52	4	3.2	0.9
Design and technology	11	91	86	18	32	2.4	2.5
Economics	14	100	87	71	42	3.6	2.9
Art and design	28	100	86	68	43	4.0	2.9
Physical education	20	100	88	75	25	3.9	2.4
Music	5	100	84	20	29	2.8	2.4
Drama and theatre studies	13	100	95	8	40	2.9	3.0
Geography	29	100	91	59	38	3.7	2.9
History	29	93	94	38	41	2.9	3.0
Religious studies	10	90	85	20	26	2.1	2.4
English Literature	38	97	93	39	35	3.3	2.8
French	6	67	89	0	40	1.0	2.9
German	13	85	90	8	39	1.9	2.9

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	33	67	87	45	43	5.0	5.8
Chemistry	25	96	90	64	43	6.9	5.9
Biology	32	100	88	31	34	5.7	5.3
Physics	20	85	88	60	40	6.6	5.7
Environmental Science	15	100	90	7	30	4.1	5.2

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
Design and Technology	3	100	91	33	30	6.7	5.4
Business Studies V	16	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	8.3	10.5
Economics	12	92	89	25	36	5.0	5.3
Physical Education	16	94	92	25	25	5.1	5.1
Health and Social Care V	5	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	14.4	10.8
Art and Design	9	100	96	56	46	7.1	6.6
Music	3	100	84	0	33	3.3	2.4
Geography	26	100	92	58	38	6.5	5.7
History	19	89	88	32	35	5.0	5.4
Psychology	7	86	87	14	34	4.0	5.3
English Literature	23	100	95	52	37	7.3	5.9
Communication Studies	10	100	93	40	31	6.6	5.9
German	1	100	90	0	37	6.0	5.5

Intermediate vocational qualifications

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		% gaining distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
GNVQ Business	12	58	n/a	0	n/a	0	n/a
GNVQ Health and Social Care	6	100	n/a	83	n/a	0	n/a

Note. In the tables n/a signifies that the national comparative data was not available at the time of the inspection.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

239. The main focus of the inspection in this curriculum area was on mathematics, biology and chemistry but lessons in further mathematics, environmental science and physics were also sampled. The A-level examination results in mathematics and sciences are generally good.

240. In the further mathematics lesson seen students' enthusiasm and aptitude for the subject were reflected in the high standard of attainment. In environmental science students were making good progress in their knowledge and understanding of the effect of solar radiation on the biosphere as a result of good teaching. In the physics lesson, good teaching led students to improve their experimental and investigative skills in an exercise controlling the factors affecting the period of a pendulum.

241. In addition to A-level and AS courses in mathematics, the school offers a GCSE course in the sixth form aiming to improve the grades of students who failed to achieve a grade C or better at the end of Year 11. This course is offered on two evenings per week and therefore avoids clashes with students' commitments in the daily timetable. There is a positive and purposeful atmosphere in these sessions and the teacher tailors and adapts the content of lessons to meet students' requirements.

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- Well above average standards achieved in Year 13
- Teachers' thorough command of the subject
- Students' mature and constructive attitude to study
- The positive relationships between students and teachers

Areas for improvement

- Some Year 12 students' competence in algebra
- The consistency of grading students' work
- The use of ICT to enrich learning and raise standards
- Monitoring and evaluation to improve the consistency of teaching and learning

242. A-level results over recent years have generally been sustained at above the national average. The exception to this pattern was in 2001 when the pass rate fell to the average level. This was contrary to the school's usual pattern in this subject; a significant number of students failed the examination and some of the students in that particular year tended to do less well in mathematics than in their other subjects. However, one third of the students achieved grade A passes. The difference in performance between boys and girls varies from year to year but, in 2001, boys' results were in line with the national average whilst girls' results were above. The A-level results in 2002 improved and were broadly similar to those prior to 2001.

243. The 2001 AS examination results were very high when compared with the national average. In 2002, four out of every five students attained pass grades at AS.

244. A number of last year's Year 12 students terminated their sixth-form mathematical studies at the end of their AS course. Those now pursuing the course to A-level are a very able group of Year 13 students. Standards of current Year 13 students' work are well above average and the students are achieving well. The great majority of students are producing work consistent with the highest A-level grades. The quality

of notes and of exercises is generally very high and the students are extremely well organised. Presentation is well structured and systematic and the work is rigorous and thorough. Marking is regular and thorough, and usually includes extensive correction notes and pointers for improvement. However, there is no consistent system of grading and it is not always clear how well a student is performing in relation to A-level grade criteria.

245. The present Year 12 students have only recently begun their AS course. Although most are coping confidently with work at this level, the progress of a minority is impeded by a lack of proficiency with essential algebraic skills.

246. Teaching and learning are good overall at both AS and A-level. The quality ranges from satisfactory to very good. Two particular strengths characterise lessons: the teachers' thorough command of their subject and the very good relationships that have been established between teachers and students, particularly in Year 13. The combination of these two factors and the students' positive attitude to study ensure that lessons are productive and move at a brisk pace. Students' views of the subject and the progress they feel they are making are very positive. In the best lessons seen, the teacher's enthusiasm for mathematics was caught by the students. The teachers skilfully turn incorrect responses to teaching points which analyse and correct misconceptions and dialogue between students and teacher leads to very good progress. In a few less successful lessons, this is not the case: lessons lack the same degree of enthusiasm and students do not therefore engage in as much dialogue during the topic's exposition. In these lessons, learning is passive and there is an inadequate sharing of ideas. The teachers and students make very little use of ICT, and this is a weakness.

247. The subject is well staffed and six members of the department teach at AS and A-level. The teachers are equally committed to do their best for their students; however, they need to share their good practice more than they presently do. More effective monitoring of teaching and learning would help to put the department in a better position to make improvements and raise standards further.

Chemistry

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

Strengths

- Very good teaching
- Well above average A-level examination results
- Very good relationships between students and teachers
- Very well developed investigative skills
- Effective monitoring of teaching and learning

Areas for improvement

- Provision of ICT and modern technology such as interactive whiteboards

248. A-level examination results in 2001 were well above average and were similar in 2002. Over the past four years, results have been consistently good. This is a popular subject and students generally finish their courses.

249. Standards of work seen during the inspection were well above average in Year 13. These standards represent very good achievement, owing to very good teaching combined with positive students' attitudes. For example, in one lesson, students built well on their understanding of equilibrium of solutions gained from their earlier AS level work and extended it to gaseous systems. As a result, they achieved well above average standards in this topic area. In Year 12, students are achieving above average standards. They are only a little way into the AS course but have already made a good start in their study of the subject.

For example, they have studied in detail the main features of a mass spectrometer and understand the chemical and physical processes involved.

250. Teaching and learning are very good overall. Teaching in preparation for coursework elements is particularly effective. Teachers have very good knowledge and understanding of their subject and this is important in ensuring that students carry out chemical experiments safely. A major strength of teaching is the very good relationships between students and teacher. Teachers explain complex theories clearly; for example, the difference between geometrical and stereo isomers was discussed using molecular models constructed by the students from kits, giving a clear link between theory and practice. The main weakness in teaching is the uneven provision of ICT in chemistry lessons which is dependent upon which particular class a student belongs to and ICT needs to be more carefully incorporated into lesson planning. In some lessons, the lack of classroom technology equipment, such as interactive white-boards, is a drawback. For example, a lesson on spectroscopy could have benefited from computer animation and could have resulted in a fuller understanding of the principles involved.

251. Students have mature attitudes to their work. This is seen in the quality of their written work, particularly practical investigations. As a result of very good relationships between students and teachers, students feel confident that they can get help and advice about areas of chemistry they find difficult. As a result, they make better progress. Students have very positive views of chemistry and are grateful for extra help outside the normal timetable, for example, the 'revision weekend'.

252. The subject is well managed and organised. There is an effective system of monitoring teaching and learning that helps raise standards. Assessment of coursework is accurate and contributes to the high standards achieved. Since the previous inspection, the department has maintained high standards.

Biology

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

Strengths

- Very good teaching and learning
- Well above average standards and very good examination results
- Students' high degree of motivation

Areas for improvement

- The rigour of target setting
- Outdated equipment
- Access to computers

253. For some years the examination results have been above or well above average. Students generally finish their courses. GCSE A-level results were above average in 2001 and all students passed. In 2002, the A-level results were higher still: all students passed and over half of them achieved A or B grades. The AS level results for 2001 were above average, and all students achieved a pass. At AS-level in 2002, 97 per cent achieved a pass and two-thirds of them achieved A and B grades.

254. Standards of work are well above average and these standards are achieved because of very good teaching. In relation to their GCSE results at the start of the sixth form, students achieve very well. Their positive attitudes mean that they make very good progress as they move through the sixth form. There is no significant difference in the achievement of boys and girls.

255. Year 13 students make very good progress in lessons. They answer complex questions on commercial biotechnology and describe aseptic techniques used in the handling of bacteria. Students show competence in the handling of statistical data and appreciate its relevance to their recent fieldwork course. Year 12 students are building effectively on work previously covered at GCSE level and identify cell

organelles, such as mitochondria, from electronmicrographs and can explain their function accurately. They can also use electronmicrographs to calculate the sizes of various cell parts.

256. Teaching and learning are very good overall. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and give clear explanations of facts. Teachers are enthusiastic about the subject and their enthusiasm is caught by the students and helps to motivate them. Lessons are well planned, have a brisk pace and include a variety of teaching and learning styles to maintain students' interest. Aims are made clear at the beginning of lessons and students know exactly what they are to learn. Reviews at the end of each lesson help to consolidate learning. Students share their ideas and generally help each other. They have many opportunities to develop their independent learning skills, for example, through small research projects, and they are encouraged to read scientific journals and the Internet to retrieve information. Teachers have high expectations and they question students frequently during lessons to establish and reinforce knowledge and understanding. Working relationships between teachers and students are pleasant and constructive and students feel able to ask questions when they need to. More effective use could be made of ICT in lessons but there are problems of access to computer rooms, relating to the school's booking system, and there is no specialist data-logging apparatus for A-level biology, such as temperature probes, which are really essential. The marking of students' written work is thorough and appropriately annotated, giving clear guidance on areas for improvement, with good use of praise and encouragement. Homework is set and marked regularly and extends and reinforces the work covered in lessons, often comprising past examination questions. Assessment takes place through regular testing, although target setting could be used more effectively, through setting targets and negotiating them with the students.

257. Students learn very well because of the teaching, and also because they are mature and highly motivated. Many of them intend to continue with biologically related studies when they leave school. They respond well in lessons and rise to challenges, as shown during question-and-answer sessions, and are keen to contribute to class discussions. They work well together in both theory and practical lessons, help each other, and share ideas in a mature and sensible way. The annual week-long fieldcourse has a very high take-up rate and is enjoyable, which helps to motivate and interest the students.

258. The department is very well led and managed and the high standards seen during the previous inspection have been maintained. There is a good team ethos within the department and teachers benefit from good technical support. All members of staff support each other and share information and expertise, meeting regularly to discuss departmental issues and review progress. There is a clear, shared vision for the direction of the subject and a commitment to the continued achievement of good examination results. Monitoring of teaching and learning takes place both formally and informally. Assessment and record keeping are good. All staff are biology specialists so that they can teach lessons at this level with confidence. The accommodation is good and resources are satisfactory, but some equipment is now outdated and the growing class sizes mean that access to some of the larger equipment is difficult. Access to computers is insufficient owing to competition from other subjects.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

259. The school provides courses at both AS and A-level in design and technology. These courses were inspected in depth.

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

Strengths.

- Good teaching
- Students achieve well
- Students have good attitudes to the subject

Areas for improvement.

- Completion of coursework on time
- The teaching of computer-aided manufacture (CAM)
- The use of external visits to design centres and workshops

260. Few students study this subject in the sixth form but those that do usually complete their course. The A-level design and technology results have been above average taken over a period of years. They were above average in 2001 and all students successfully passed the examination. The 2002 results were not as good as usual; there were no A or B grades but all students passed.

261. The standard of Year 12 and Year 13 students' work is average and represents a good achievement in relation to their attainment at the start of the course. Year 13 students are investigating a range of projects for their final piece of course work. Some interesting projects show good problem solving and analytical skills, together with good precise written work, for example, a design for teaching aids. The work generally shows imaginative solutions to design problems. The Year 12 AS work is satisfactory. Current Year 12 students are looking at the advantages of using computers in the design (CAD) of their products. Students have good attitudes to the subject

262. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers use their industrial experience effectively to relate schoolwork to the wider world, for example, consumer profiles and market research methods. Some students need to ensure that their work is completed on time; some students have difficulty with the work on materials and processes. The involvement with the Engineering Education Scheme and Young Engineer of Britain Award greatly advances students' experiences both educationally and socially. The students themselves are very positive about this scheme. However, the students are at a disadvantage because the use of computer-aided manufacture (CAM) does not feature in their school experience. Students would also benefit from visits to industrial design offices and workshops.

263. Improvements since the previous inspection include a gradual increase in the number of students taking the subject and the inclusion of a graphics bias.

BUSINESS

264. The department offers business studies vocational courses at advanced (AVCE) and GNVQ Intermediate levels. AS and A levels are also offered in economics. Business education at AVCE and intermediate levels was inspected in depth but two economics lessons were also visited.

265. The A-level examination results in economics for 2001 were above average showing further improvement in 2002. Students perform better than expected considering their GCSE examination results. Two lessons were observed. Teaching and learning in these lessons were very good. In both lessons, the teachers' good subject knowledge, economic understanding and clear demonstration of modern industrial/commercial practice led to students increasing their understanding of coursework objectives as well as widening their ability to work in teams. Students are committed to producing their best work. They are co-operative and contribute willingly to research exercises. Students' oral contributions are clear and coherent. They undertake extension work when mastery of a core area has been shown. In both of the lessons seen, the quality of teaching was very good. A feature of the lessons was the students' very good attitudes to their work, in particular those of the Year 13 students, which were excellent. Students' social awareness is developed through a good number of activities in the local business community.

Business Education

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

Strengths

- Good teaching and learning
- Students' understanding of what they to do to improve
- Effective use of ICT
- The increasing popularity of the courses

Areas for Improvement

- Enrolment only of students who can cope well with this course
- The examination results in the AVCE course.
- Attendance of some AVCE students
- The use of work experience

266. The previous inspection did not include business studies. The subject has now become an increasingly popular option and numbers have increased sharply. More boys than girls take these courses. A satisfactory proportion of the students complete their courses though a small proportion leave early to take up other educational and employment opportunities, when they are presented, and some students drop out. A small proportion of Intermediate students proceed to the Advanced course and this reflects satisfactory progression for the students concerned.

267. The results of the GNVQ Intermediate course were satisfactory in relation to the students' GCSE results achieved at the age of 16 but there are no national results in this course for comparison. The results were broadly similar in 2002.

268. The 2001 results were below the national average in the AVCE (Advanced Vocational Certificate) course and the 2002 results were broadly similar. It is important for the department to work to raise the examination results further.

269. The standards of work of the current students are better than the previous examination results would suggest. This is because of improved teaching and learning, which are now good. Overall standards are now average, and the students are achieving well in relation to their GCSE results, which tend to be below what is usually required for sixth-form study. However, the management of the department should question whether the course is too difficult for some of the lower attaining students. For example, many of them find the mathematical aspects of accounting difficult although they are generally more confident in their essay work and presentation.

270. The students' good progress is reflected in their project work. Their written work is often well presented and shows evidence of original research, including effective use of the Internet. Some good work done by the AVCE students included, for example, a study of social responsibility in business, in which the students analysed the conflicts between profit and ethical behaviour, and began to see the difficulties involved in corporate image-building.

271. The progress of some Year 12 AVCE students has been adversely affected by poor attendance. However, attitudes and behaviour are generally good and help to create a positive climate for learning, reinforced by good class management. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Girls generally produce extended writing of a higher standard than seen in the boys' work but standards are otherwise similar. Teachers have a good knowledge and understanding of the subject and lessons are stimulating and result in effective learning. Teachers make efficient use of ICT; for example, work on international business and marketing was introduced through the good use of the Internet.

272. Students feel well supported by the teaching and the willingness of staff to give extra academic support and guidance when needed. Students have a good understanding of their progress as a result of the teachers' effective marking of written work and target setting. Teachers know their students well and the quality of oral and written feedback is good, including the setting of short and medium term targets. Homework prepares students for class discussion and deepens their understanding of the subject, for

example, of accounting procedures. Lesson planning is sometimes a weakness, for example, in financial and management accounting.

273. The subject is well led and managed. The management shows a clear vision for the development of the subject. Students take part in a Young Enterprise scheme, which has a strong business focus, but work experience could be used more effectively to add depth to the students' applied knowledge and understanding of business. Resources and accommodation are adequate although some lessons take place in a science laboratory.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

274. The school provides courses at AS and A-level in physical education. These courses were not inspected in depth but two lessons were seen during the inspection, one for Year 12 and one for Year 13. A-level results in physical education have been in line with the national average since the previous inspection and results in 2002 show improvement, with all Year 13 students passing the A-level examination and nearly all of the Year 12 students at AS level. At each level, a good proportion of students achieved the higher A and B grades. In the Year 12 lesson, the teaching of the anatomy of physiology was good, students learned well and reached average standards. In the Year 13 lesson, the teaching of the critical evaluation of performance was good and students learned effectively.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

275. The school provides courses at both Advanced Vocational Certificate (AVCE) and GNVQ Intermediate level in health and social care. These courses were inspected in depth.

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

Strengths

- Good teaching and learning
- Students achieve well
- Students are highly motivated.
- Good links with external agencies

Areas for improvement

- Cramped accommodation
- Provision for ICT
- Insufficient resources for the needs of the increased size of classes

276. The results for AVCE health and social care were well above average in 2001, with two-thirds of the students gaining a pass with either a merit or a distinction. The results have improved yearly since the last inspection. The grading system changed in 2002 and is now similar to A-level and all students achieved a pass, although none achieved the higher grades. This is a popular subject and students usually complete the course.

277. The standards of work seen during the inspection are above average. The students have mature and positive attitudes towards their work and are achieving well in relation to their previous attainment at GCSE. Year 12 students, although only two weeks into their course have made a promising start on their assignment on communications, by studying body language, and developing counselling skills through role-play. Year 13 students have produced comprehensive assignments on child development, early years' services and physical aspects of health and development. Their work is well presented and shows evidence of the use of a wide variety of information sources. Students put forth ideas during class discussions in a clear and mature way and help to formulate hypotheses. In preparation for their next research assignment, they are studying statistical correlation between variables; they can explain the difference between positive and negative correlation and interpret the evidence that the statistics show.

278. The teaching is good and enables the students to learn well. Teachers have good subject knowledge and are well aware of the course requirements, so they can help and advise students on their coursework assignments. They encourage them to undertake personal research and make use of local facilities, of which there are many in the area. There are strong links with local nurseries, hospitals and care homes where students undertake work experience. Students are encouraged to help each other and share ideas, which also helps them to learn. Teachers take care to ensure that all students become involved in discussions and that they all make an active contribution to lessons. Students express their own ideas confidently, because these are expected, and because of the friendly working relationship during lessons. Teachers' marking of written work is thorough and adheres strictly to the criteria laid down by the examination board for internal assessment. The assessment feedback sheets clearly indicate areas for improvement so that students can improve their grades. The nature of the course means that most of the students' written work consists of their research assignments. Students develop good independent learning skills and their assignments are well presented. The work which is awarded the higher grades shows clarity and depth of thought.

279. Students are very well motivated. They respond well in lessons and show interest in the wide variety of topics covered. Most of them intend to follow a career in the health or care services and appreciate the relevance of their course to their future work. They take pride in their written work, as shown by their coursework assignments, which show that students explore a wide variety of avenues when undertaking their research. The students help each other and work well together, sharing ideas in a mature and sensible way. During discussions they show respect for each other's views.

280. The department is well led and managed. The teachers are keen to continue to improve the examination results. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good overall. There is a good team ethos amongst the teaching staff who are all experienced and well qualified. Regular staff meetings review progress and discuss departmental business. In-service training takes place through local network meetings. The accommodation is satisfactory, but is cramped due to an increase in class sizes. Larger classes are putting a strain on resources. The accommodation is situated away from the main school so that access to computers is awkward.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

281. The school provides courses at AS and A-level in art and design, music, and in drama and theatre studies. The art and design courses and the drama and theatre studies courses were inspected in depth. The numbers taking these courses are too small for valid statistical comparison of the results with those of other schools. However, all A-level students who have taken music in recent years passed the examination. No Year 13 students are presently studying music at A-level but a Year 12 AS music lesson was visited. This was a practical, instrumental session, the first in which the students had played together. Their attitudes were very good and, with very good collaboration, they were achieving well above average standards of playing by the end of the lesson. A sample of the Year 12 music students' work was examined and discussed with them. All of these students began their study of music with higher grades at GCSE and are well equipped to undertake the AS course. Their performing skills are good, and most have a good general knowledge of the subject. However, they are less confident in aural work, composition and harmonic writing. From discussion with them it is clear that most students feel that the lack of a recording studio, and of computers for music, are significant disadvantages.

Art and Design

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

Strengths

- Very high standards and excellent achievement
- Excellent teaching and learning
- Teachers' very high expectations
- Teachers' excellent subject knowledge and expertise
- Vigorous and imaginative use of materials

282. This is a very popular course. The results of the A-level examination in 2001 results were above average, and in 2002 they were considerably higher. In the AS examinations in 2002, results improved upon those in 2001, and students did better than expected. These improvements have been sustained in the work of current students, which is of a very high standard. This represents excellent achievement when compared to students' results in the GCSE examinations, before they began their sixth-form course.

283. The Year 12 students' achievement is excellent. They have only just started their course, but are already working at a standard that is much better than would be expected from their GCSE grades. They use charcoal and graphite confidently to represent and accentuate the sculptural forms seen in nature, for example, of peppers or walnuts. Their work in mixed media, based on the study of fish, is exciting, and they use fluid ink washes to contrast with thicker plaster. These interesting contrasts of texture very effectively explore the effects of water and the play of light.

284. The Year 13 students' achievement is also excellent and the standards of their work are very high. They draw vigorously and freely in charcoal and produces striking effects in this work, for example, when using sandpaper to create a textured surface. They use a variety of construction techniques to make sculptures from scrap materials, which are based on birds and animals. These are informed by the study of the work of Picasso, and they very effectively, and humorously, capture the essential qualities of their subjects. Students also make imaginative body decorations and headpieces, which use exquisite beaded decoration to create jewel-like qualities. They paint confidently, and their acrylic paintings from still-life groups are of a very high standard and show a very thorough understanding of the principles of Cubism, for example.

285. Teaching and learning are excellent. Teachers have very high expectations, excellent subject knowledge, and strong relationships with students. In a lesson based on a recent visit to a London art gallery, the teacher's excellent relationships with the students created a positive learning atmosphere. Students confidently delivered prepared talks on the work of Picasso, which were listened to intently. There was intense discussion on the nature of drawing and the search for integrity, which raised expectations to a very high level. The teacher was also able to expertly sum up the significance of the painting *Guernica* relating it to the events of the Spanish Civil War and the poetry of Lorca. This extended students' knowledge and understanding, made them think, and helped them to appreciate and feel the emotional impact of the painting. All of these factors created excellent levels of engagement and involvement with the work.

286. Students' attitudes to the subject are very good. They increasingly appreciate the way that the course extends their skills and knowledge, and challenges them to attain very high standards. They rise to this challenge very successfully.

287. Improvement since the previous inspection has been excellent. Standards have risen and are now very high. The quality of teaching and learning has improved and is now excellent, and students' achievement is excellent as a result.

288. Monitoring of standards is very good, and teachers also take positive steps to improve their own subject knowledge by attending study courses and gallery visits. This means that they keep up to date with the work of contemporary artists and designers, and this helps them to maintain their very high expectations and communicate them to the students.

Drama and Theatre Studies

Overall, the quality of provision in drama and theatre studies is **very good**.

Strengths

- Very good teaching and learning
- Very good achievement and well-above average standards
- Very good accommodation
- The programme of extra-curricular activities and theatre visits

Areas for improvement

- The monitoring of teaching and learning

289. Examination results from the AS course in 2001, the first year of the course's existence, were average. A good proportion of the AS students continued to study the course at A-level in 2001-2002, of whom 40 per cent achieved grades A or B; all others attained a pass grade, almost all with grade C. These results are comparable with those of other departments in the school. There is no difference in attainment between boys and girls.

290. The current Year 13 A-level students are achieving very well and their standards of work are well above average. All of these students understand the effects of voice, pace, gesture and facial expression in communicating to an audience and bring these to bear in all their characterisations and scene settings. Higher attaining students perform with sensitivity and insight. In setting the formal enquiry scene in Brecht's *Alberto Ui* their decision to portray group identity through a hostile, expressionless gaze was both compelling and chilling. Most students' writing is carefully researched, with clear understanding of roles and themes, consistently drawing, for example, from the original inspiration of Sophocles' *Antigone*. However, the written responses of lower attaining students are not sufficiently analytical or detailed.

291. Almost all students have studied drama at GCSE and build effectively on skills acquired previously. Their understanding of the concepts and dramatic conventions of the subject is secure and their performance skills are good. They improvise readily, speak fluently and eloquently in a variety of registers, and sustain character convincingly. They recognise the importance of the impact of posture, grouping and height in communicating strength and weakness. They adopt an open-minded, independent and imaginative approach, and are prepared to search the text for contextual clues in order to create a convincing interpretation of individual characters.

292. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is very good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge; lessons are generally well planned; objectives are clear and expectations are high. Students are constantly challenged to justify their responses in terms of dramatic requirements. Assessment is individual, continuous and thorough, and students know how they can make progress and further improve their work. Occasionally, planning is insufficiently rigorous and this results in inefficient use of time.

293. Most students learn very well. They enjoy the high level of intellectual challenge offered by the range of texts which they study, and draw on their critical and analytical skills to add depth to their investigations of character and the underlying motives of the author. They are willing to reflect and evaluate their own work and that of other students, and readily accept critical comment and guidance for further improvement.

294. The leadership of the subject is very good. The scheme of work put in place at the introduction of the course in drama and theatre studies two years ago is constantly reviewed and refined, in consultation with all members of the department, to ensure that students' individual needs are met. Students are regularly assessed, both informally within lessons and formally at the end of each topic. Written work is thoroughly marked, with extensive comment to ensure students know how to make further progress. Students are constantly involved in evaluating their own and others' performances. The quality of teaching and learning is monitored regularly, although more needs to be done to ensure consistency in lesson planning and use of

time. Accommodation is very good, and resources are good, although as yet the department has not incorporated the use of information and communications technology into its activities. Opportunities provided for students to see professional productions and be in contact with members of the profession are excellent. In addition to regular trips to local theatres students and staff travel over a wide area in order to see productions of texts currently being studied. Workshops with professional actors take place in school, and students become involved in all aspects of the annual dramatic production.

HUMANITIES

295. The school provides courses in geography, history, religious studies and psychology to both A-level and AS level. History, geography and psychology were inspected in depth and one religious studies lesson was also visited.

296. The A-level results in religious studies are satisfactory and were average in 2001. The sole candidate for AS in 2001 passed the examination. In 2002, the 10 candidates for the A-level examination in religious studies all passed and four of them achieved A or B grades. In the lesson seen, good teaching enabled Year 13 students, all girls, to learn effectively about rewards and punishment.

Geography

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

Strengths

- Well above average standards and students achieve very well
- Very good teaching and learning
- Improving examination results – many students gain the highest grades
- Students' very good attitudes towards their learning
- Very good leadership and management
- Well-planned fieldwork

Areas for improvement

- The range of modern technology available in geography classrooms

297. The A-level examination results have improved significantly over the last five years. In 2001, they were above average overall and the proportion achieving the higher A and B grades was well above average. The AS level results were well above average and two thirds of the students gained the higher A and B grades. All students passed the examinations and course completion rates were high. The 2002 A-level results improved further but the AS results fell slightly. Value-added analyses indicate that most students achieved better results than expected in relation to their earlier attainment at GCSE.

298. The standards of the current Year 13 students' work are well above average and represent very good achievement. Higher-attaining students map, describe and explain the changing patterns of urban land use in detail, for example, when comparing and contrasting the quality of life in Birmingham and Mexico City. In this work, the students are making very good progress in their knowledge of economic development and its impact on the environment. The students made very good progress in their descriptions of the features of river channels and in their explanations of the processes that have created them; however, the lower-attaining students find it difficult to explain the detail, such as the changing size of deposits in relation to velocity in different parts of river channels.

299. Year 12 AS students have settled quickly to the demands of advanced work. Standards at this early stage are average but the students are developing a much more detailed knowledge and understanding of the complex relationship between physical and human geography and the impact of each on different landscapes, for example, in their comparison of hydrographs from different environments. Higher-attaining students explain these in detail and with confidence. Although the lower-attaining students tackle these questions adequately, their answers tend to be hesitant and they make fewer links between the components of the environment and the shape of the graphs.

300. Teaching and learning are very good and consequently the students achieve very well. Teachers prepare lessons carefully and plan learning sequentially in student booklets, for example, on river environments. These and their expert explanations enable the students to learn at a good pace. Teachers have high expectations, to which the students respond and reach high standards. The teaching was excellent when there was a clear focus on independent learning; for example, in work on earthquakes, when students worked in pairs on case studies and made presentations to the class. They made very good use of ICT for research and word processing. The quality of their presentations was limited only by the lack of modern technology in the geography rooms, and this is a handicap. Another very good feature of the teaching is attention to examination technique and advice and guidance given for coursework. Marking is accurate and shows students how to raise the standard of their work. Fieldwork on urban structure, flooding and the management of coastal environments enhances students' learning and is well timed to take place just before the AS examination.

301. Students are very interested in their studies and talk enthusiastically about their work in geography. Their very mature attitudes and responses in lessons underpin the quality of their learning.

302. Leadership and management of the subject are very good. Effective management has brought about a very good improvement since the previous inspection. Standards are now higher and examination results have improved steadily over recent years. The new courses have been very well planned and the quality of teaching and learning is monitored so that further improvements can be made. Students have target grades and their progress is checked rigorously. Fieldwork is now much more closely related to the syllabus and teachers give their time to help students after school and at weekends.

History

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

Strengths

- Good teaching and learning
- Rising standards
- Good interaction and relationships between teachers and students
- Good resources

Areas for improvement

- Use of GCSE data to assess students' potential and to plan the curriculum
- Attention to the needs of the slower students
- Bridging the gap between GCSE and advanced study

303. The 2001 A-level results were in line with the national average. Results in 2002 were similar to those of 2001 though few students achieved grades A or B. On the basis of their very good GCSE results, the students should achieve high grades at A-level. The AS results in 2002 were good; nearly all students passed and nearly half of them achieved the higher grades of A and B.

304. The explanation for the underachievement in the past at A-level lay in long-term absence of teachers through illness. Other teachers, who covered the A-level workload, were overstretched, and this inevitably affected the results.

305. Standards of the current Year 13 students' work are above average and represent a satisfactory achievement for these students in relation to their good GCSE results. Now that the subject has a full complement of staff once more, teaching has improved and standards are rising. The Year 13 students are studying Reformation Europe, for example, the religious policies of Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain. The majority of the students understand complex ideas, for example *patronato*, *convivencia*, heretic and monastic orders. The standards of students' written work is inconsistent. One of the essays on Luther was of a particularly high standard but some other students do not organise their work well and their note-taking is poor.

306. The Year 12 students are only in the third week of the course. It is evident that the transition from GCSE was difficult for these students. Their previous studies have included the history of medicine and of the American West at GCSE, but have given them very little grasp of political history. Their current standards are no better than average and their achievement is only satisfactory. When the teacher was trying to compare the current political scene with that of the court of Henry VII, particularly the role of the Exchequer and the Privy Council, it became clear that Year 12 students have little knowledge of the contemporary situation and no knowledge of different forms of taxation.

307. The students are mature and confident. They enjoy history and like to make contributions in lessons. They like the way their teachers relate history to events in the present. They find it difficult, however, to gain access to ICT.

308. Teaching is now good and students learn effectively and make good overall progress. The marking of students' written work is good; it is detailed, informative, illuminating and helps students to raise the standard of their work. Students are independent learners: they use local libraries and the internet for research and to extend their knowledge. Resources are very good and up to date. The teachers are expert in their subject knowledge. They work hard to make lessons interesting and look for opportunities to relate the past to the present day. A good example of an adventurous approach was the study of a situation involving a loan from the Merchant Adventurers to Northumberland which led to a discussion of the role of big business in politics at the present time. The students were preparing to debate this scenario taking roles as contemporary members of the Northumberland Council. Students read set texts in preparation for classwork. When they return to the classroom, the teachers question the students to explore their understanding of what they have read and make outline notes, recording the outcomes, on the board in the form of spider diagrams or lists. This methodology makes sure that the students have done their reading and understood the material. The Year 13 students are familiar with this approach but Year 12 students, who are new to it, are reluctant to participate in the discussions. It is evident that the transition from GCSE is difficult for many of these students and more time needs to be given to basic political concepts to help students bridge the gap from GCSE to advanced study.

309. The inconsistency in standards of Year 13 students' writing is in part due to teaching methods. The recording of the outcomes of discussions directly onto the whiteboard can lead to a very messy set of notes. Although higher-attaining students work on their notes after lessons and make sense of them, other students are less successful at this and are at a disadvantage without a well-organised and comprehensive set of notes for revision.

310. The subject is well managed. In difficult circumstances, the teachers have been able to maintain their commitment to high standards and have been willing to shoulder extra teaching responsibilities. Monitoring of pupils' work is effective and there has been some evaluation of teaching in line with the school's policies and expectations. However, the department makes little use of students' GCSE examination data in their planning or target-setting.

Psychology

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

Strengths

- Good teaching and high expectations
- Good monitoring of progress
- Students' ability to take responsibility for their own learning
- Students' good attitudes and commitment to hard work

Areas for improvement

- The quality of learning resources and teaching accommodation
- Examination results

311. Standards of work of the current Year 12 and 13 students are above average and represent a satisfactory overall achievement in relation to the students' overall attainment at the start of the sixth-form course. The examination results in recent years have tended to be below average but are beginning to improve. The 2001 A-level examination results were below average: the pass rate was below average and the proportion of students achieving A and B grades was well below average. The results of the new AS examination taken by Year 12 students were also below average in 2001. The 2002 A level results were better than those of the previous year. Current standards are higher than the recent examination results indicate because better teaching is resulting in faster progress. Most students complete their course in psychology.

312. Virtually all written work is good; it is well researched and contains accurate scientific measurement. There are no apparent differences between the standards reached by boys and girls, nor identifiable underachievement. The ablest students' work is consistent with A-level grade A standard and most written and oral work in class shows flair, which enables students to score good marks. All can make informed judgements of the value (positive and negative) of the psychology topic area they are working on, based on systematic analysis. The quality of writing varies but most students produce good, extended writing, using specialist vocabulary effectively. A good example of this was the Year 12 lesson on 'The Authoritarian Personality' and students' critical thinking was revealed in their answers to questions about Zimbardo's research work. Carefully structured teaching builds upon students' understanding of both empirical and theoretical knowledge. This was seen in a lesson in which students examined the key approaches to the study of psychology, working on theories of prejudice. Students discussed dreams and Freudian slips to collect objective and verifiable facts; the teacher skilfully questioned them to build on their answers in order to get them to clarify their thinking. This focused their attention and aided their learning.

313. Students' use of the scientific process is thorough. They make observations and absorb facts. The ablest can construct a theory to account for a set of related facts and move on to generate hypotheses from the theory. Year 13 students are more able to collect data to test expectations and to adjust their theories in response to the data collected. The good relationship between the teacher and students and the encouraging manner of the teacher means that the students gain in confidence in their own observations. Students can interpret the main characteristics of psychology and can, for example, explain psychodynamic, behaviourist and humanistic approaches.

314. Teaching is good and results in good learning and rising standards. The teacher's expectations are high and the pace of lessons is good. Information and assessment are used effectively to track students' progress. Lessons are well planned and key skills are identified and developed. A key strength of the teaching is the detailed and accurate knowledge held by the teacher which enables lessons to be focused and well prepared. The teacher engenders a positive attitude and interest in psychology which encourages structured learning. Lessons become progressively more difficult and more demanding as students work their way through questions. All lessons start with a simple recall of previous learning and then require more elaborate description of a study or theory. Students are required to analyse their evidence related to a

specific issue. Students, both Years 12 and 13, spend fruitful time explaining, in simple terms, what is meant by 'obedience' and 'conformity' and outlining why people conform to majority influence. The teaching methods involve whole-class teaching, with an appropriate amount of the application of number and information technology. Students are encouraged to put their ideas across to other people, collect data and use up-to-date technology in their work. However, the students' access to materials, ICT, the community and quality resources to maximise and stimulate learning is insufficient for this level of study. These deficiencies adversely influence the quality of the students' learning and the standards that they can reach.

315. Students have positive attitudes to work and are generally conscientious and attentive. Their work is well organised and presented. A few struggle to communicate their understanding of psychology in clear and effective English but all students are responsive when answering questions.

316. The leadership and management of the subject are good and the subject has improved in a number of ways since the previous inspection. For example, students now take more responsibility for their own learning. Schemes of work now show an improved use of psychological research and scientific observation.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

317. The school provides courses at AS and A-level in English literature, French and German. The courses in English literature and French were inspected in depth and German was sampled.

318. There were no A-level or AS level candidates in German in 2001 but, in 2002, nine candidates sat for German at A-level and eight at AS level. The results were satisfactory and all students passed. In the lesson seen during the inspection, Year 13 students were analysing and making responses to the question 'What makes a nation?' The teaching was very good and the students were making very good progress.

English Literature

Overall, the provision for English is **very good**.

Strengths

- Very good achievement and well above average standards
- Very good teaching and learning
- Well-structured written work
- Students' positive and mature attitudes

Areas for development

- Strategies to develop greater independent learning, especially in Y12

319. The results of the A-level examinations in both 2000 and 2001 show considerable improvement on those of the previous two years. They were well above average in 2001 and similar in 2002. Few boys take the course, but they achieve grades comparable with those of the girls.

320. Students achieve very well in relation to what would be expected on the basis of their GCSE results. Standards of Year 12 and Year 13 students' work are well above average. A strength of their work lies in well-structured essays. Students talk about their set texts and discuss and debate themes and topics, which arise from their studies, in a mature and impressive way. They also listen carefully to each others' expressed viewpoints and use talk very effectively to form and refine their opinions, both in and out of lessons. Written work is done conscientiously and students welcome the choices, both in topics and approaches, which they are given in the sixth form. Coursework is planned carefully and done thoroughly. The highest achieving students produce writing which is both perceptive and personal and shows a very good understanding of writers' themes and style. Those who do not achieve such high standards usually

show a good understanding and a personal response to texts, but instead of being analytical and evaluative, their writing is often in an inappropriate narrative style, and writers' language is paraphrased, rather than analysed.

321. Teaching is very good and students learn very effectively. Teachers have a high level of experience and scholarship and have high expectations of their students. They have good relations with them and set challenging and interesting tasks to which the students willingly respond. Teachers also give very good advice on how work can be improved in their marking. In the best lessons, students have the opportunity to discuss a range of social and moral themes and to link what they are studying with their personal experience, their other A-level subjects, such as history and art, and present-day events. The students' ability to work independently is an area for improvement. In some less successful lessons, teachers tend to act as the providers of knowledge, rather than facilitators, and there is undue emphasis on teacher-produced information and worksheets. This is especially the case in Year 12, but it also occurs in Year 13. When this is the case, it is at the expense of the students' own research, particularly in connection with the text and the writer's language. A further consequence is that some students become so concerned with historical and biographical details that they do fail to develop the critical and analytical or independent research skills needed to achieve the top grades.

322. Students' progress and attainment are monitored very well through regular, standardising meetings. The team-teaching approach adopted by the department also provides very good opportunities to share resources and strategies and to monitor teaching and learning and to make improvements.

323. Improvement since the last inspection is very good. Standards are now higher, even though classes are larger as more students choose to study the subject. Boys are now doing as well as girls.

French

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

Strengths

- Teachers' good subject knowledge and fluent command of French
- Students have good attitudes and enjoy their work

Areas for improvement

- Challenging the most able students
- Speaking and writing
- Links with schools or other organisations in France
- Some students begin the course with an insecure grasp of basics

324. No students sat for A-level French in 2001, reflecting the steady decline in numbers over the previous three years. At AS level in 2001, there were six entries and results were well below average. Three students continued to A-level in 2002; two students passed, one achieved grade D and the other grade E. The 2002 AS results were similar to those of 2001 and none of these four students have continued with French in Year 13.

325. Eight students are currently enrolled in Year 12. Their standards of work are close to average overall and represent a satisfactory achievement in relation to their GCSE results. Some of the students cope well with the work but some have embarked on the course with an insecure knowledge of basic grammar, which shows in very elementary mistakes they make in speaking and writing. Speaking is the main weakness. Many students lack confidence; they do not always understand the questions they are asked and a few struggle to produce a simple sentence correctly. Students do not have regular opportunities to talk with native speakers and the school has no established links with any organisation in

France, for work experience, for example, which would greatly help students to develop their speaking and listening skills.

326. The students clearly enjoy the subject and have very good attitudes. They are keen to improve but need to be encouraged to work independently to develop their listening skills, for example, by listening regularly to tapes, particularly as many said they found this aspect hard. They are beginning to use Internet web sites to read French newspapers as an introduction to the study of the media in France.

327. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Teachers have good subject knowledge and speak French fluently although practice is a little inconsistent across the department. Good working relationships are already established and teachers are taking steps to improve areas of weakness. For example, the use of mini-whiteboards by each student to practise specific grammar points is proving very effective in helping them to learn quickly from their mistakes. Overall, students are making satisfactory progress. However, some activities do not take sufficient account of the wide range of ability in the group and the most able students are not being challenged or moved on fast enough.