

INSPECTION REPORT

MILL HILL SCHOOL

Ripley

LEA area: Derbyshire

Unique reference number: 113001

Headteacher: Mr D Anstead

Reporting inspector: Mrs E Charlesworth
19532

Dates of inspection: 31st March – 4th April 2003

Inspection number: 249687

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:	Foundation
Age range of pupils:	11 to 18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Peasehill Ripley Derbyshire
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr Peter Roberts
Date of previous inspection:	10/03/1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
19532	Mrs E Charlesworth	Registered inspector	Equal opportunities Educational inclusion	What sort of school is it? The school's results and pupils' achievements How well are pupils taught? How well the school is led and managed
11077	Mrs J Harrison	Lay inspector		Attitudes, behaviour and personal development How well the school cares for its pupils Partnership with parents
30941	Mr K Brammer	Team inspector	English	
32167	Mr M Sumner	Team inspector	Mathematics	
22985	Mrs J Sparkes	Team Inspector	Science	
30901	Mrs S Schofield	Team inspector	Art	
10340	Mr J Lockett	Team inspector	Design and Technology	
32248	Mrs S Kerley	Team inspector	Geography	
32122	Mrs J Straw	Team inspector	History Religious Education	
27803	Mr J Clark	Team inspector	Information technology	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
32173	Mrs B Brown	Team inspector	Modern Languages English as an additional language	
11975	Mrs T McIntosh - Clark	Team inspector	Music	
32157	Ms P Stringer	Team inspector	Physical Education	
15678	Mrs J Radford	Team inspector	Special educational needs	
20270	Mrs J Tracey	Team inspector		

12895	Dr N Carr	Team inspector	Psychology Business Studies	
2959	Mr BL Leek	Team inspector		
23926	Mr D Howorth	Team Inspector	Citizenship	The Sixth Form

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Mill Hill School is a larger than average-sized comprehensive school with sixth form for pupils and students aged 11-18. There are 1322 pupils and students, including 153 in the sixth form. It is the only secondary school to serve the community of Ripley and Codnor and as such admits nearly all pupils from this area. The school is oversubscribed and overcrowded, with much of the fabric of the building in a poor and deteriorating condition. Although the number of pupils claiming a free school meal is average there is a great deal of low-waged employment in the area and the number of pupils from homes where adults have been in higher education is lower than nationally. Attainment on entry is below average. There are very few pupils who do not have English as their first language, or who are from ethnic minority background. There are fewer pupils with special educational needs than the national average but the number with statements is broadly average.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Mill Hill School is a good school, with a number of very good and excellent features, providing a good standard of education for its pupils and students. The headteacher and deputy headteacher provide outstanding leadership and with excellent support from the governing body work extremely well together in leading the school. Teaching throughout the school is good, promoting good achievement. The proportion of pupils gaining 5 A*-C grades at GCSE is above average and rising steadily, in line with national results. However, the average points score is only average because the proportion of highest grades, A* and A, was lower than nationally in most subjects, and a small number of pupils did not obtain any GCSE qualifications. In the sixth form, A-level results were above the national average in 2001 and were the best ever in 2002. The school has a very good curriculum which includes GCSE and vocational courses. Pupils' personal development is very good, supported by very good educational and personal guidance. The school is poorly funded and as a result accommodation and resources are unsatisfactory. Despite this all the staff work very hard and successfully to overcome these difficulties. The school provides very good value for money.

What the school does well

- The proportion of pupils gaining A*-C grades is rising and is above the national average.
- The pastoral care and assessment of pupils' work is very good.
- Teaching is good.
- The leadership of the headteacher and deputy headteacher is outstanding.
- Management of very limited financial resources is very good.
- The very good curriculum includes excellent extra-curricular provision and links with partner institutions.
- Provision for personal development is very good, promoting very good attitudes and relationships.
- The Open Learning Centre provides very good support for pupils.

What could be improved

- Attainment of boys and most able pupils at GCSE
- Creating an excitement about teaching and learning
- Resources including computers

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 March 1997 and has made good progress in dealing with the issues raised. Rigorous self-evaluation is now a strength of the school's management. A new business and community manager has been appointed, which has improved the management of the school's limited funds. Underachievement of boys has been successfully tackled in the lower school and sixth form, but results lag behind those of girls at GCSE. The effective learning working party is charged with implementing ways to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Courses which more closely match boys' learning have been introduced as part of the continuing work in raising boys' achievement. The proportion of good teaching has increased since the last inspection from two-thirds to three-quarters.

STANDARDS

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

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

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

The average points score of pupils' GCSE results was average in 2002 but not rising at the same rate as nationally. The proportion of pupils achieving five A*-C grades, 57 per cent, was above average, and has been steadily rising in line with national results. Girls do better than boys in most subjects. Higher attaining pupils did not do as well as they could, by gaining fewer A* and A grades in most subjects compared with nationally. Only in design and technology and English literature did the A*s match the national average. The strongest subject was art where boys gained the highest grades, with five times the national number of boys gaining A*s. Results in English and mathematics were broadly average, while in science they were above average. About ten pupils left with no qualifications, a higher proportion than nationally. A few followed very useful alternative courses, preparing them well for further education and training, but carrying no credit at GCSE and a further small number left school altogether before the end of the year. Standards in lessons are very similar to past results, with work in art and music well above average, science, design and technology, history, and modern foreign languages above average and English, mathematics and all other subjects' average. About half the pupils in Years 10 and 11 do not take the examination course in ICT and standards for them are below average. The school exceeded its target of 55 per cent five A*-C grades.

At the end of Year 9 in national tests in English, mathematics and science results were average, and are rising in line with results nationally. The proportion of pupils reaching Level 6 was above average in all three subjects. There is no difference in the performance of boys and girls. The good achievement, particularly of higher attainers is not followed through to Year 10 and 11, where, although achievement is good overall there are elements of underachievement particularly among boys and higher attainers. Achievement overall from Year 7 to Year 11 is good.

Standards in the sixth form are above average when compared with national results in 2001 and have improved considerably since the time of last inspection. In 2002 results rose significantly to be the school's best ever. There is very little difference in the attainment of male and female students.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Pupils have very good attitudes towards the school and their work. They are very keen to take part in the many after school clubs.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good. Pupils behave well in lessons and around school and most pupils respond well to teachers' firm discipline.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Pupils form very good relationships with each other and with teachers, which is a great strength in promoting good learning.
Attendance	Well above average.

Pupils enjoy coming to school and show this in their high level of attendance and punctuality and the eagerness with which they take part in school activities. The school council, very ably led by a Year 11 pupil, allows them to experience at first hand the change and influence in their community which comes with reasoned discussion. The school is a thoughtful and caring community where pupils not only get

on very well with each other but also go out of their way to help others through extensive charitable fund-raising. Older pupils and students help younger ones and all of them appreciate the time and effort made by staff to help them fulfil their potential. The number of exclusions last year was higher than in similar-sized schools, but a successful behaviour management policy and the new Open Learning Centre are already doing much to help pupils to deal with their own difficulties and to reduce the number of exclusions.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Teaching throughout the school is good, characterised by very good subject knowledge, planning and management of pupils. Teaching in mathematics is good, but pupils' achievement is held back by the inadequacy of access to ICT. Pupils learn well in English and science as a result of good teaching. The best teaching is in art, where almost three-quarters of the lessons seen were very good. Throughout the school only three lessons were unsatisfactory, the main reason being that teachers were not clear about what they expected pupils to learn. They were outnumbered by the number of excellent lessons where teachers showed real flair and enthusiasm for their subject, inspiring pupils to achieve very well. The introduction of features of good practice from the National Strategies is helping teachers to plan very well and to share with pupils what they expect them to learn. The good behaviour throughout the school is brought about by the very hard work of teachers in promoting self-control and discipline in order to create an ethos for good learning. However, although teaching is good, only in the best lessons is there an excitement about learning. Teachers pay good attention to the teaching of literacy and this is having a marked effect on the raising of standards across all subjects. The teaching of numeracy is at present largely confined to the mathematics department, and is satisfactory. The teaching of pupils with special educational needs is good, because their needs are recognised and they are given the right support. The needs of more able pupils and those identified as gifted and talented are less well met because of a lack of challenge in many subjects. This is seen most tellingly in the lack of A* and A grades at GCSE. Gifted and talented pupils learn well in the Wednesday morning club, but the fostering of higher order thinking and learning skills is not promoted routinely in lessons.

Teaching throughout the sixth form is good. Teachers know their subject very well and as a result students find learning challenging and stimulating. There is good pace and a variety of activities. Students learn how to improve their work because of the quality of teachers' marking and assessment, a major plank in improving the standards of coursework and in preparation for examinations. The independence which teachers foster is held back by the lack of resources for research, particularly access to computers.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Very good. The good schemes for developing literacy, which include separate drama lessons, are helping pupils to make good progress. The range of extra-curricular activities is excellent.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. Very good support and advice continues as they move through the school. Targets are not specific enough to individual subjects.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Good. The very small number of pupils who have English as an additional language are well provided for. They are supported in class and make good progress.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good. It underpins the strong sense of community which is central to the philosophy of the school, providing firm support for pupils' personal development. Pupils are becoming mature, responsible adults in a caring and harmonious community.

How well the school cares for its pupils	Very good. Pupils receive very good support for their personal and academic development.
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The school and parents work well together. Parents appreciate how well they are kept informed about their child's progress, not only when things go wrong but also the headteacher's commendations for good work. Excellent working relations with primary school and further education mean that pupils have a smooth transition into the school. Alternative, often vocational, courses are arranged for pupils who cannot cope with the full range of GCSEs. Despite recent investment in new computers there are still not enough to teach the required statutory curriculum for ICT, but an imminent building programme will make this possible by September. The school collects extensive information about all aspects of pupils' personal and academic development which is central to the tutor's role in giving very good support to their pupils. A great strength of the school is the Open Learning Centre which provides a refuge for disaffected pupils and helps them to stay in school

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher and deputy give outstanding leadership to the school in promoting a vision for providing a high standard of education in which all pupils can achieve well. Senior managers, heads of department and heads of year carry out their duties well.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Excellent. The governing body has a clear vision for the school's future and has very strongly supported the headteacher in gaining the local authority's promise of a new school building.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Very good. Rigorous monitoring and support has resulted in an improvement in teaching and learning and given the senior managers an accurate picture of its strengths and the way to move forward.
The strategic use of resources	Finances are very well managed. The appointment of a business manager has resulted in a finely tuned finance system that links closely to educational priorities.

The well-qualified staff are well-matched to their teaching and support roles. They work very hard to compensate for the inadequacy of the resources and against the potentially demoralising effect of the deteriorating fabric of many parts of the building. The excellent way in which the governing body, together with the headteacher and deputy, work together has brought the school to a position where it knows 'where it's at', 'where it's going' and importantly, how to get there. The principles of best value are applied very well to all aspects of school life from the way competitive tenders are sought to the consultation of parents and pupils.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children like coming to school • Their children are making good progress • Teaching is good • Behaviour is good • They are kept well-informed about how their children are getting on and feel comfortable approaching the school • The school has high expectations and expects their children to work hard 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The amount of homework • The way the school works with parents

Inspectors agree with the positive comments of parents. They agree that homework is patchy and not set consistently in accordance with the timetable. Inspectors disagree with comments about the way the school works with parents. The school makes strong and effective efforts to involve parents, especially with special educational needs pupils, and actively seeks parents' views through questionnaires.

ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM

MILL HILL SCHOOL

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form is an average size with 153 students and the roll has fallen since 2000 when it was 199. In Year 13 there are nearly twice as many males as females but overall the gender balance is almost equal. There are three students from ethnic minority backgrounds but none have problems with English. There is a wide range of traditional academic advanced subjects. In addition there is an AVCE and a GNVQ intermediate course in business. Almost half of pupils in Year 11 continue their education in the sixth form and a very small number of students join from other schools. Students are expected to have a minimum of five grade Cs at GCSE in order to begin advanced courses and four GCSEs to follow the GNVQ course. Standards at the start of Year 12 are average overall.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The sixth form provides a good standard of education for its students and is a good place to learn. It is successful and cost-effective. Last year the results improved and were the school's highest ever. Standards are above average overall and the students achieve well because teaching and learning are good. Leadership is very good and at times inspirational. As a result most students complete their courses and move into higher education or are successful in finding employment.

Strengths

- Standards are above average and results are improving.
- Standards are highest in business, drama and theatre studies, economics, geography, psychology and sport studies.
- Teaching and learning are good and the students achieve well.
- Students have very good attitudes and contribute well to the school and the community.
- Leadership is very good and ensures that students receive effective advice support and guidance.
- Students respond well to being treated as young adults and their personal development is good.
- The procedures for tracking and supporting students' academic progress are very good.

What could be improved

- Standards in biology, chemistry and physics
- The facilities for independent learning
- Learning resources
- Enrichment activities

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

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

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

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
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Mathematics	Good. Results are above average. Teaching and learning are good and students have very good attitudes.
Biology	Satisfactory. Results were average in 2001 but declined last year. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Learning resources are limited and impact on standards.
Business studies	Good. Lively teaching promotes good achievement and confident learning. Case studies are used well and good use is made of the internet for research. Standards are above average.
Sport studies	Very good. Results were average in 2001 but improved last year. Standards are well above average and students achieve very well because teaching and learning are very good.
Art and design	Good. Teaching and learning are good and standards are rising. Independent learning is encouraged but is restricted by inadequate accommodation and resources.
Music	Satisfactory. Standards are average. Teaching and learning are good and students achieve well. The facilities for independent learning adversely affect standards.
Geography	Very good. Results are consistently well above average. Fieldwork and coursework are particular strengths. Teaching and learning are very good and students achieve very well.
Psychology	Good. Teaching is good and examination results that were average in 2001 have improved and are above average. Students have good knowledge and understanding of human behaviour.
English	Good. Results were above average in 2001 but lower in 2002. Good learning and achievement are promoted through good teaching. Students' independent learning is restricted by poor study facilities.

In 11 other subjects 13 lessons were seen. Teaching was very good in chemistry, design and technology, economics and history. It was good in English literature, general studies, ICT, physics and religious education and satisfactory in computing and key skills.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Educational advice, support and guidance are good. The academic progress of students is tracked very well and they receive good guidance for future courses in higher education. The advice for employment is adequate though less thorough.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	The leadership of the sixth form is very good and management is good. There is a very clear vision of the crucial role of support to enable all students to achieve their best alongside developing their self-responsibility and preparing them for the next stage of their careers. The evaluation of how students learn most effectively is in its early stages and not yet firmly established to raise standards and achievement further.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They appreciate the trust awarded • The very good relationships they have with 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The sixth form accommodation and the facilities for independent study and research

<p>teachers who treat them as adults</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The wide range of courses that match their needs • Good teaching and the willingness of teachers to help them • The friendly and welcoming atmosphere 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guidance with making choices about future courses and careers • The range of enrichment activities • Access to teachers outside lessons • The response of the school to their views
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Overall, students are very supportive of the sixth form and inspectors feel that students' positive views are fully justified. Inspectors agree that the facilities for private study are inadequate. They judge the effectiveness of guidance for higher education is good and advice for employment to be satisfactory. Inspectors agree that the range of enrichment activities should be increased. Financial restraints create a high teaching contact time and restrict learning resources. Students should understand that this situation is not the result of decisions made in the school.

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

1. In 2002, pupils' results in national curriculum tests at the end of Year 9 were average. They were average in English and mathematics and above average in science. In all three subjects the percentage of pupils reaching level 6 was above average. Results have been keeping pace with the steadily rising national results over the last five years. Compared with pupils who had similar results at the end of primary school they are above average, representing good progress. The new value-added measure confirms this good progress.

2. Similar standards of work were seen in lessons. Standards in Year 9 are average in most subjects, well above average in art and physical education and above average in music and science. Pupils' ability to handle some of the challenging concepts presented to them in history, geography, religious education and drama is good and they express themselves well both orally and in writing.

3. The attainment of pupils on entry in Year 7 is below average. Information obtained from national and standardised testing points to pupils' attainment on entry in the present Year 7 as being broadly average, but almost a third of pupils have a reading age which is two years below their real age, which is a serious impediment to their attainment early on in the school. Overall attainment on entry was confirmed as below average by the work which inspectors saw from the beginning of Year 7. A deliberate effort is being made to improve not only reading, but the technical aspects of writing: spelling, punctuation, grammar. The work of the literacy co-ordinator in providing a framework for all subject teachers is paying off in the overall improvements in pupils' standard of written English. As a result pupils' progress is good not only in English but also in those other subjects which rely on pupils having a good grasp of written and spoken English. Most pupils speak confidently and write in a range of styles for different purposes.

4. The attainment on entry in mathematics is average, and is average in Year 9. This represents satisfactory achievement. Pupils work competently with routine numerical concepts such as ratios while above average pupils handle statistics and algebra well. Below average pupils often need help to complete basic calculations. Standards of numeracy across the curriculum are also average. Pupils are competent in making calculations and producing graphs to help their work in science and geography but there is little number work in other subjects.

5. In science, standards of work seen during the inspection are above average in Year 9 and achievement of all pupils is good. While average ability pupils describe scientific processes, above average pupils explain the causes for instance in the variation in species and adaptations of animals such as the polar bear and camel to their surroundings.

6. Pupils achieved average results in 2002 in public examinations at the age of 16, with girls gaining better results than boys based on their average points score. The rate of improvement is not keeping pace with the increase in points scores nationally. One reason is the relatively small number, compared with the number nationally, of pupils who achieve the highest A*/A grades. The school has already designated the greater need to challenge higher attainers in its review of *'where we're at'* as a major priority. The second is that about 10 pupils did not complete the GCSE course. A small number left the school but remained on the roll or followed the alternative school-based awards course, gaining recognised qualifications, but not those which feature in GCSE statistics. The course is successful in preparing these pupils for further education at college or for modern apprenticeships. The open learning centre is having a beneficial effect on a number of pupils who are being encouraged and supported to finish coursework and to stay in school to the end of Year 11.

A vocational course in ICT was introduced in 2001, aimed partly at boys, as part of the school's aim of improving results at the end of Year 11.

7. In 2002 the proportion of pupils gaining grades five A*-G grades was average and has been for several years. The proportion of five A*-C grades is above average, and shows an improvement compared with 2001. This indicates that pupils of average ability do well in consolidating a firm base of GCSE results on which to build further learning.

8. Results in mathematics are broadly in line with national results. Results are above average in English language and well above in science. Only in English literature were A*s the same as nationally, and boys gained more than girls. Girls did better in science than boys but in mathematics their performance was broadly equal. In all three subjects the results are below the level of their results in other subjects. The poor access to ICT is holding back standards in mathematics.

9. Standards of work in English, mathematics and science lessons are similar to past results. Plans to increase lesson time in English and mathematics, together with more access to computers as a result of an imminent building programme are planks in the school's priorities for continuing improvement in standards.

10. In the most successful subject, art, as a result of very good teaching the proportion of pupils gaining A*-C is significantly higher than nationally. Boys excelled in the number of A*s, gaining more than five times the national average for boys. Similar well above average standards were also seen in lessons and work during the inspection. The number of pupils choosing music is too small to compare with national results, although standards in lessons seen were very high.

11. In most other subjects, as a result of the improvement in teaching which has come about through the observation and support for teachers by senior management and heads of department, standards in lessons are generally above average. Above average standards were observed in design and technology, drama, geography, history, examination ICT and modern foreign languages, physical education and religious education. For the pupils who do not take examination ICT standards are below average, but this is because access to equipment is severely restricted rather than due to weaknesses in teaching and learning.

12. Targets for GCSE five A*-C grades were based on standardised tests and in the light of the weakness in pupils' literacy on entry to Year 7 were challenging. In 2002 the five A*-C target was exceeded by two percentage points but the average points score fell behind by four points.

13. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress overall, in common with other groups of pupils. They make very good progress in mathematics and art and in music in Years 7 to 9. In all other subjects they make good progress. In public examinations pupils with special educational needs generally achieve well in comparison with their standards on entry to the school. Although they come in with low levels of literacy and numeracy, most of them gain a grade at GCSE.

Sixth form

14. Standards in the sixth form are above average and students achieve well. A-Level results have improved considerably since the previous inspection and in 2001 they were above average. They improved further last year and were the school's best ever. There is very little difference in the attainment of male and female students.

15. In 2002 the results were highest in geography and improved in business, drama and theatre studies, economics, psychology and sport studies. However, the results in design and technology and English language declined significantly. The results in the three sciences, physics, chemistry and biology, are the weakest. There was an improvement in

results in general studies. The overall pass rate per entry improved slightly and the proportion of passes at the higher grades A and B increased from a quarter to 30 per cent.

16. The results in the new advanced subsidiary examination at the end of Year 12 were below the national average points score in 2001. Results were similar in 2002.

17. In lessons and work seen standards are well above average in sport studies, above average in mathematics, business education, geography, psychology and English literature. They are average in biology, art and design and music. The main strengths are in students' capacity for independent research and study, although these aspirations are frequently hampered by a lack of space in which to work and access to computers. They build on and apply knowledge very well when drawing out inferences and making deductions, such as in pure mathematics, analysing challenging questions or comparing conflicting perspectives on the UK economy in business studies. Work in art and design is adventurous and of a highly individual character, linking students' study of established artists with their own creative work.

18. Students achieve well in general studies. The results are remarkable considering that students have only one lesson each week. Results have improved since the previous inspection and three-quarters pass at A-level. In Year 12 students were challenged to justify and analyse their answers in terms of subjective opinion and objective fact when considering statements, for example, 'men are by nature more aggressive than women'.

19. In 2002, 37 per cent of all the students gained a Level 3 qualification in communication but none passed the Level 3 test in ICT. This was the result of an administrative error and problems with software more than the shortage of curriculum time, one lesson per fortnight, or the quality of teaching and learning.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

20. Pupils have very good attitudes towards the school and their work. In the vast majority of lessons they are respectful, attentive and comply with their teachers' expectations. Pupils say that the teachers are friendly and encourage them to do their best. Pupils appreciate the range of after school clubs and are very keen to take part in them.

21. Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. A few parents expressed reservations about standards of behaviour, but the inspectors found that only in a few lessons did behaviour fall below the accepted standard, and this was often due to weaker teaching. Behaviour in all the lessons with the older pupils was at the very least satisfactory and more often good or very good. The school has excluded two pupils in the last year for unacceptable behaviour, a low rate of permanent exclusion. Boys were excluded more than girls in fixed period exclusions, which were higher than average, but are reducing with the effective behaviour management strategies in place.

22. Pupils with special educational needs behave well and have good attitudes towards their work.

23. Around the school pupils are friendly and helpful to one another and to visitors by for instance helping as school receptionists. As part of its anti-bullying strategy the school has trained several Year 9 pupils so that they can help their fellow pupils to resolve any conflicts and as a result bullying is rare. Year 10 pupils are mentors for Year 7 pupils, helping them with social and homework problems.

24. Pupils take an active part in school life. Representatives from each form take a responsible role in the school council which is vigorously led by a Year 11 pupil. By voting for representatives for the school council, pupils develop a sense of collective responsibility for issues that affect the school community. This sense of collective responsibility extends to the wider community through charitable projects. Harvest festival is marked by a collection of goods, and members of the school council nominate recipients and make the deliveries. The school council has recently undertaken a project to raise money for children in Romanian

orphanages, by purchasing paintings by disabled artists for display around the school. Significant sums are raised for national charities such as Children in Need and Red Nose Day, and the annual shoe-box appeal is very well supported.

25. Attendance last year was 93 per cent, which is well above the national average and is one per cent higher than the previously good levels at the time of the last inspection. Most pupils make a good effort to arrive at school and their lessons on time.

Sixth form

26. Students have very positive attitudes to the sixth form and their studies. They have a high regard for their teachers and relationships are very good. The students mix together well, both socially and academically. The ethos of the sixth form is very successful in inculcating self-responsibility in students, who respond well to the trust they are afforded. Attendance is good.

27. Students enjoy the very friendly atmosphere of the sixth form. They participate enthusiastically in organised activities outside lessons, and inspectors agree with their views that they would like a greater range of these. Students enthusiastically take part in Young Enterprise, Community Sports Awards, organising charity events and with helping younger pupils with reading, and in the primary schools. In lessons and tutor groups students maturely discuss local and international issues of the day; for example the siting of a local telephone mast or the war in Iraq. They initiate and pursue these discussions with or without their tutor present. They share views and respect other opinions. Students very willingly help in the local community and have recently conducted a survey in the local town on access for the disabled to produce a register. Students take responsibility for their own common room, with sensible arrangements to facilitate social and quiet activities. They have carpeted the sixth form areas themselves to improve its comfort and appearance.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

28. Teaching and learning throughout the school are good. The proportion of good teaching has increased since the last inspection from two-thirds to three-quarters. This is due in no small part to the careful monitoring and support by the headteacher and deputy, and the work of the 'effective learning group' in promoting good practice. The best teaching is in art, where almost three-quarters of lessons seen were very good. Excellent teaching was observed in drama, history, mathematics, modern foreign languages and music where pupils' sense of enquiry and capacity to think was stimulated. These excellent lessons outnumbered the very few unsatisfactory lessons in English and religious education.

29. Teachers know their subject very well and this arouses in pupils a desire to acquire new knowledge to increase understanding. This is a strong feature of art, drama, music and physical education where. Pupils are given clear explanations and techniques are expertly demonstrated, so that the creative demands on pupils take their learning further. There was a noticeable improvement in the learning of foreign languages when the lesson was conducted in the language with very little English spoken.

30. Teachers manage pupils very well and work hard to instil in them a responsible attitude to behaviour which fosters a good climate in which to learn. Good, firm discipline coupled with good pace is a strong feature of teaching, for example in design and technology, history, and physical education.

31. The quality of the work of certain teachers in science, mathematics, ICT and music has been recognised by the local education authority and these teachers have been appointed as leading teachers for the National Strategies. Through their influence and example many lessons throughout the school follow the good practice recommended in the Strategies. An attribute of this is very good planning and in most lessons the main aim of what pupils will

learn is clear, and, importantly, shared with pupils. However, the main feature of the weaker teaching is the omission at the start of the lesson of the sharing of these aims and it is in these very few lessons that pupils make the least progress.

32. The good care which teachers take over assessing and particularly of marking of pupils' work is central to their good progress. Giving immediate feedback to pupils in practical lessons such as music and physical education helps them to put into practice the very good advice they are given and to improve their performance. Because relationships with teachers are good pupils place their trust in them and willingly take their advice.

33. Although teaching is good, only in the very best lessons is it matched by the excitement for learning which the school has as its main priority. Pupils do not always feel a sense of challenge, urgency or excitement which promotes the highest standards. In music, art and physical education they exert great creative effort but this feature is lacking in many other subjects. Pupils in the Year 7 gifted and talented Wednesday morning club are learning, through the exciting and innovative projects, how to think for themselves, to research and present their findings and to solve problems. However, the promotion of problem-solving and thinking skills is not widespread. The school is very well-placed, through the 'effective learning group' to spread the best practice more widely throughout the school.

34. Pupils' attainment on entry in Year 7 is below average because of a weakness in reading and in coping with the technical demands of the English language. In most lessons, but particularly noteworthy in history, religious education and music as well as in English lessons, teachers build in activities which give pupils practice in reading and writing, and so improve the overall standard of work. This is carried through well to the marking of books, where teachers emphasise that the way something is written is as important as the subject content. As a result of this the teaching of literacy skills throughout the school is good.

35. The teaching of numeracy is satisfactory and is largely confined to the mathematics department. Skills in using number are taught as part of the National Curriculum in ICT, design and technology, art and science. However the systematic teaching of numeracy is not widespread across the whole curriculum.

36. The teaching of pupils with special educational needs is good overall. Pupils learn well because teachers have a good knowledge of their needs and are successful in matching their teaching methods and learning materials to pupils' particular requirements. In ICT for example, pupils make good progress because the methods used allow pupils to work effectively at their own pace, and in English and mathematics they respond positively to a variety of activities which include group-work and independent learning. In the most successful lessons pupils have a very good relationship with their teachers and enjoy their work. They benefit from a stimulating learning environment, a purposeful pace to the lesson, and from tasks that are well structured and challenging. Where teaching and learning are satisfactory rather than good, it is often because worksheets have not been modified to meet their needs.

Sixth form

37. Teaching throughout the sixth form is good with most of the lessons seen being good or very good. There were two excellent lessons in sport studies. Teachers know their subject very well and plan work which challenges and stimulates students. There is good pace and a variety of activities, particularly noted in business. Students in art and design benefit from the individual attention and knowledgeable advice which leads them to become independent. Students are also very well supported in practical work in music, where teachers' accomplishment as musicians supports their performance.

38. Teachers know the examination requirements very well. They use information about examination assessment supplied by the examination board when marking work and also for allowing students to mark their own work in order to understand how to improve. This was used very well in a music lesson. The quality of marking and assessment of students' work is a major plank in improving the standards of coursework and in preparation for

examinations. This is a strong feature of English teaching where students' learning is helped by the high quality of positive comments and suggestions for improvement.

39. The teachers' knowledge of examination requirements and use of good resources in general studies helps students to make good progress. In Year 13 a role-play situation of a planning enquiry involved all students in preparation and provoked a very effective debate. They made rapid gains learning about many social, economic and moral issues involved in the proposed industrial development of a local site in response to very good teaching.

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

40. The quality and range of the curriculum throughout the school are very good. In Years 7 to 9, all the National Curriculum subjects are taught, and it is only the lack of equipment that prevents the teaching of ICT to all years. The statutory requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship is not fully met in the main school or sixth form. Year 7 gifted and talented pupils are very well stretched and challenged through a special programme of stimulating and innovative activities, supported by the University of the First Age

41. In Years 10 and 11 the needs of all pupils are met through the wide range of choice they have. In addition to a very good range of GCSE subjects, there are vocational courses in ICT and leisure and tourism. Through its alternative curriculum provision, a special Awards course has been set up which provides a very valuable alternative to GCSE, linked with the local college of further education.

42. Provision for pupils with special educational needs is good. The school offers a good range of curricular opportunities for those requiring additional help. In subjects such as English and mathematics, pupils needing extra support benefit from being taught in small groups. Individual education plans provide clear information for subject teachers on pupils' strengths and weaknesses in basic skills and personal development. However, the lack of subject targets limits the scope in measuring progress. A reading recovery programme helps some of the less confident pupils in mainstream classes to develop their reading techniques, but the 'buddy' reading scheme where sixth formers help is restricted to Year 7 pupils.

43. There are excellent systems in place to ensure that pupils with special educational needs settle in successfully in Year 7. Pupils are also given very good support and advice as they move through the school, for instance in choosing appropriate courses for Years 10 and 11 and for further education. Pupils are involved in work related learning schemes, and special examination arrangements are negotiated for those who require them.

44. The very small number of pupils who have English as an additional language are well provided for. They are supported in class and make the same good progress as their peers.

45. The school gives a high priority to developing pupils' skills in literacy and arrangements for this are good. The National Literacy Strategy is being well implemented across the curriculum, following whole school training. Most departments have an effective literacy policy, correct pupils' technical mistakes and suggest how they can improve their writing, reading and speaking and listening skills. The success is seen in the good progress which pupils make during the first three years.

46. Arrangements for developing numeracy across the school are satisfactory. The mathematics department has taken a lead by looking at the contribution of other departments and found some good work was seen in ICT, design and technology, art and science. There is not, however, a co-ordinated approach to helping pupils, particularly those with low levels of numeracy, to develop these important skills.

47. Provision for extra-curricular activities is excellent, and is recognised by the 'Schools Extra' award. An extensive range of activities is on offer both at lunchtime and after school and pupils with special educational needs are actively encouraged to take part and to join out of school clubs. Some of these are traditional activities, such as sport, music, and after-school homework clubs, but others are innovative and not usually found in most schools, such as the games club and winter sports club. The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme is offered to Year 10 and 11 pupils and the take up is very good.

48. Overall, the provision for pupils' personal, social, vocational and health education is very good. The area has a high profile within the school, is very well led and managed, and is taught well by a team of specialists. Planning is of high quality at all levels. A programme of visiting speakers supplements what the school provides as does close work with the school nurse. The whole is co-ordinated to ensure good liaisons with the pastoral teams in school and there is a shared vision among the teachers. All the procedures are in place for careers, sex and drugs education. The challenge, pace and expectation observed in lessons during the inspection reflect the good overall teaching of the courses.

49. Links with the local business community are excellent and, in some cases, long standing. Not only have these links resulted in much needed financial support, through various acts of sponsorship, but also through representation on the governing body, and support for preparing pupils for work.

50. Links with partner primary schools and the programme of transition from primary school to secondary school are excellent. There are regular formal meetings at all levels and most subjects have developed very good joint units of work. Information about pupils' attainment at the end of Year 6 helps teachers plan Year 7 work based on pupils' knowledge and experience. There are excellent links with higher education institutions and because of the school's very good staff development it is well placed to provide places and support new teachers into the profession.

51. Careers education is very good and has received national recognition through the Careers Mark award. Careers education is taught through the personal, social and vocational education programme, providing pupils with very good guidance. Pupils are kept well-informed about career opportunities through the well-stocked careers library and by having an individual interview with a specialist adviser from 'Connexions'.

52. The school's provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. It underpins the strong sense of community which is central to the philosophy of the school, providing firm support for pupils' personal development.

53. Provision for pupils' spiritual development is good. There is no regular act of collective worship, though school assemblies usually include time for pupils to reflect on spiritual matters. Part of the school's stated aims is to create an excitement about learning, and in examples seen in lessons during the inspection pupils had frequent opportunities to reflect on the impact of their learning. This was particularly evident in music, as the atmosphere created by a group of pupils performing their impressionist composition captivated the rest of the class, and in a GCSE class in drama, where pupils interpreted the thoughts and feelings of victim and perpetrator of the Holocaust. Provision for spiritual development is strong in physical education, and in religious education. In each subject pupils learn the value of commitment to an ideal. Throughout the school year events as diverse as the annual Act of Remembrance, the Christmas service which takes place in the local church, and the annual Talent Show, which together involve around 25 per cent of all pupils, provide further support for this aspect of pupils' development.

54. The strong moral code by which the school operates provides very good support for pupils' moral development. Relationships are clearly based on mutual respect; pupils speak warmly of the friendliness with which they are surrounded in school. Moral issues form a significant part of the course in personal, social and vocational education. There are high expectations of pupils' knowing right from wrong, and abiding by rules, found extensively in

team sports, and in their commitment to regular music rehearsals. Pupils reflect on the moral dilemmas faced by different characters in English texts, in biology pupils and students in the sixth form discuss ethical questions associated with gene technology, and in geography pupils consider moral and environmental issues arising from land development, and from global trading practices.

55. There is very good provision for pupils' social development through the extensive range of extra-curricular activities both at lunch-time and after school and through the School Council. In addition to several musical, sporting and drama activities, games clubs such as "Dungeons and Dragons", homework clubs and the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme operate weekly. Field trips and visits to places of interest take place regularly, all helping pupils to learn how to live and work together. During lessons there are frequent opportunities for pupils to work in pairs and small groups, learning to make decisions and to work co-operatively.

56. Provision for pupils' cultural development is good. In art, English, French, mathematics and music they learn about their own culture and also about the diversity of European and non-European cultures. In religious education they visit different places of worship. Their involvement in the local festival of dance and drama brings pupils into contact with performers from other traditions.

Sixth form

57. The curricular provision is good in the sixth form. A wide range of academic subjects and vocational courses at advanced level provides a good quality of education for all students, giving them the scope to fulfil their potential in improving results which are above average.

58. The sixth form offers one vocational course in business at intermediate level although no student is at present taking up the option. Pupils are given good advice on the availability of intermediate courses at the local college. Thus, the sixth form complements other local provision and there are plans, in collaboration with other local schools and the college of further education, to promote these courses more widely.

59. Students select up to five subjects suitable to their needs and aspirations. In Year 12, most students take four subjects to AS level and in Year 13, most continue with their studies in three subjects to A-level. In addition all take general studies and have the opportunity to gain Level 3 qualifications in the key skills of communication and ICT. A disadvantage of having five options is that there is no time for a tutorial period or physical recreation. The arrangements for the provision of general studies and key skills are satisfactory at the moment but it is planned to increase their allocation of teaching time next year.

60. The school recognises the need to respond to the students' wishes to provide a wider enrichment programme, which at present is satisfactory. Included in the programme are Young Enterprise, the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme, musical and drama activities and working in the community. In the school students help younger pupils with their learning. However, there are few sporting activities and trips to the theatre, galleries and museums are rare.

61. Departments have planned work well to meet the requirements of the new examination specifications and to match the work to students' needs. Curriculum planning is good in all subjects and very good in many. This allows the students to progress very well building on their GCSE work. Time allocation is adequate and class sizes are viable allowing sufficient time for meaningful debate and the effective sharing of ideas.

62. The provision for students with specific learning difficulties is good and these students achieve well, successfully completing their courses.

63. Because of the low level of funding facilities for independent learning in private study time are inadequate. The library can accommodate up to 25 students comfortably but it is frequently in use for classes in the school and students have to use the dining area or the

common room. The former is like an open corridor, the latter has no proper working surfaces and neither has ICT access for research. These factors are impeding the independence which is a vital part of sixth form study.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

64. Pupils receive very good guidance and personal support is excellent. Parents spoke highly of the support given by the form teachers and pastoral team.

65. The school has good child protection procedures, the coordinator is trained and staff are given suitable guidelines, although these do not extend to training for all teaching and non-teaching staff. The governors' health and safety policy is up to date and effectively implemented. The school has sought suitable professional advice to minimise the risk to pupils in the current ageing wooden accommodation and a full risk assessment has been carried out, as required.

66. The school's good liaison with the local specialist services ensures access to a wide range of support and advice for pupils' different needs. Several external agencies regularly work with pupils to provide very good additional support. A counsellor from Relate is available on one morning a week and the school nurse holds a drop-in clinic to give practical advice to pupils. Most form tutors use form time very constructively in the morning and this helps them to secure the trust and respect of their pupils.

67. The school has very good systems for identifying and monitoring the progress of pupils with special educational needs. Pupils' progress in improving standards of work, behaviour and attendance is monitored on a regular basis by teaching and pastoral staff. Lack of progress is carefully investigated and appropriate action taken. The quality of the learning support team's work is very good. Support staff have a very good knowledge of the different ways of meeting pupils' individual needs, and a very strong commitment to giving their pupils the confidence to succeed. This is particularly evident in art and design, and in the small group lessons in English and mathematics. However, in subjects such as history and religious education there is not enough classroom support.

68. The arrangements for monitoring and sustaining good attendance work very well and have led to a recent improvement in the attendance figures. Pupils giving concern are closely monitored and the school contacts home immediately on the first day of absence of any of these pupils. Parents usually notify the school promptly of any reasons for their children's absence. Subject teachers routinely check attendance in lessons but because pupils enjoy school there is very little truancy.

69. The monitoring of pupils' personal development is excellent and underpins the very effective care and guidance given by the pastoral team. Up-to-date computerised records are kept for each pupil, which show for example, effort, level of work, homework completion, detentions and merits received. Through these records staff identify patterns of behaviour, and intervene when necessary or send home letters of praise accordingly.

70. The management of behaviour is very good and allows pupils to learn effectively. There are some potentially challenging pupils with complex needs. Through the efforts of the staff in consistently implementing the praise and sanctions policy, good standards of behaviour are achieved. A member of senior staff is on pastoral call to support with any problems. Pupils are clear as to the standards expected of them and respond well. The younger pupils like the recognition they get for good work with merits and prize draws; the merit system is not quite as motivating for the older pupils. Relationships are very good and the school's anti-bullying procedures are successful in keeping the incidence of bullying low.

71. Procedures for assessing pupils' progress are very good overall. At its best, the marking of pupils' work is regular and thorough and is closely linked to the requirements of examinations. At GCSE, pupils are often given an indication of the grade level achieved and

helpful comments indicate how it can be improved. Teachers' comments are positive and encouraging. In Years 7 to 9, teachers constantly refer to National Curriculum levels in lessons. However, pupils are not always sure about the standard of their work in relation to them. The school is currently in the process of moving to a reporting system that draws attention to levels/GCSE grades in all subjects. In a few subjects, teachers are not as secure as they need to be about interpreting the criteria to match the grade.

72. Pupils' progress is monitored well through a recording system that involves subject teachers and form tutors. This gives an overview to be kept of each pupil's progress so that any problems or underachievement can be quickly identified. The system works well; for example, in Years 10 and 11, some pupils have personal mentors who guide them into better work patterns and higher ambition. The information obtained from the assessment procedures is also used well to bring up to date curriculum and lesson plans.

The Open Learning Centre

73. The Open Learning Centre, very well managed by a member of the learning support staff, was set up two years ago with a grant from the local education authority. It provides for pupils who are not coping in some subjects, and also for those pupils whom the school has identified as being in danger of exclusion. Pupils continue with their normal work in the different areas of the curriculum, and the close liaison with subject departments ensures that pupils are not at a disadvantage when they return to their usual classes.

74. Pupils are very well provided for in the harmonious atmosphere in which pupils can achieve successfully because they feel at ease. The emphasis is on establishing effective work routines. This was evident in a session where four pupils were working independently on separate assignments ranging from completion of GCSE coursework to practical work on textiles. The pupils had positive attitudes to their work, and they made good progress because of the manager's dynamic approach, high expectations and skilful support. Observation of written work showed that pupils had made good gains over time in learning how to set out assignments neatly and write at reasonable length.

75. Management of the Centre is very good. The manager is well aware of the needs of the pupils who come into the Centre, and has their welfare at heart. Records are immaculately kept and pupils are monitored very closely for progress in work, personal development and attendance. Accommodation and resources are good: the stimulating learning environment boosts pupils' self-confidence and gives them the motivation to improve their work and behaviour. The Centre is very successful in its work. In the two years since it opened it has made it possible for about one hundred and fifty pupils to continue with their education and is an impressive example of the school's commitment to providing a high quality service to all in the local community.

Sixth form

Assessment

76. Assessment is regular and supportive and procedures are good. All students receive help when the need is identified. Marking is frequent, detailed and tells students how to improve their work. All teachers now use examination grades to inform students of their standards. They maintain a record of marks and grades that allows the progress of individual students to be carefully and accurately checked.

77. The diagnosis of and provision for individual learning needs is very good. The head of sixth form is very good at identifying and supporting students at risk. As a result students complete their courses successfully and progress into higher education.

78. Procedures for monitoring and supporting students' academic progress by tutors are very good. This responsibility is the key role of the form tutor. The head and assistant of sixth form quickly solve the few instances where there is inconsistency in the quality of tutors tracking and evaluating the progress of individual students. Students take on responsibility for their progress by being involved in the assessment process from the start of their courses. They use their GCSE results to negotiate general target grades with their tutors, which become specific to subjects as teachers and tutors review and update students' progress in formal reviews. In addition, monitoring forms from subject teachers outline any problems encountered by students at any time. Underachievement is very quickly identified and solutions sought, with staff, students and parents working together. Annual reports give a clear picture of students' progress.

Advice, support and guidance

79. Students receive good personal support and guidance. The information given to students provides a clear picture of what to expect in the sixth form. Students are generally pleased with the information they are given about the courses through the printed booklets, the post 16 evenings and through talking to the teachers. Most teachers give students good individual support, although the remoteness of the sixth form within the school means that students do not have easy access to teachers outside lesson times.

80. Students have a good induction into the sixth form. They take part in an orienteering course in their first week at Black Rock, which helps to bond friendships and show students that they are treated as adults. The ethos of trust and responsibility is well established in the sixth form and students respond well to it

81. There are good procedures to monitor and promote attendance, with clear expectations about the use of free study time, which is mainly spent on the school site. Relationships between the students and staff are very constructive and friendly. Individual students with particular problems are given close and effective attention by the head and assistant head of the sixth form.

82. Careers guidance is satisfactory overall. Students have easy access to the careers library and Internet to research options. The external careers service helps with a module in the key skills course on job seeking skills and is available for individual interviews if students need or personally request these. A few students report difficulty in gaining access to the external advisers. In practice about ten per cent of Year 13 students have individual interviews. Form tutors and the sixth form managers help students with university applications. In the last two years every student has been successfully placed by the Monday after the results day.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

83. Parents have positive views about the school and are pleased with the education and care their children receive. Parents believe that the school has high expectations of work and effort and that their children like school and make good progress. They find that the school is welcoming and are generally satisfied that any questions or concerns are professionally dealt with. Teaching is good and they are kept well-informed. The inspectors agree with parents' positive views.

84. Some parents felt that their children did not get a regular and appropriate level of homework. The inspectors agree that homework is patchy and not set consistently according to the timetable. Some parents indicated that they would like a closer partnership with the school. The inspectors disagree and consider that the partnership is good and that the school makes strong and effective efforts to involve parents constructively. The school actively seeks out parental views using questionnaires and builds these into school planning.

85. The school provides high quality information for parents. A new half-termly monitoring report has been introduced. Parents are sent a summary of information on their child's attendance, merits, headteacher's commendations and formal sanctions. These reports are first rate and increase home school dialogue. The annual reports on pupils' progress are good and present a clear picture of attainment.

86. The school has a good partnership with parents of pupils with special educational needs. Parents have high regard for the work of the learning support department. All parents contribute towards their children's annual and transitional reviews, and they are supportive of their children's efforts in improving academic work and behaviour. Parents are also appreciative of the many different ways in which the school helps their children to develop the self-confidence to take part in the wide range of school activities.

87. Several parents praised the new tutor review day, which is held in addition to the annual consultation evening with parents. This is excellent practice, over and above the minimum reporting requirements. It helps to raise attainment by involving parental support at an early stage in their child's academic year. The *Mill Hill News* is sent out every two weeks and presents interesting articles and photographs about school life. The prospectus and the governors' annual report are well presented and provide the requisite statutory information.

88. Most parents support their children's learning well at school and at home through help with homework, attendance and discipline. The vast majority of parents attend the annual consultation evenings to discuss their child's progress. Parents support the school through the *Ripley Mill Hill* association, which organises trips out for the children, school discos and a summer rock concert. The association raises funds for the school and also helps with a neighbourhood watch to protect the school. Parents give the school practical support, for example by taking children to sports fixtures and helping to run the Winter Sports Club and summer tennis. During the summer break about thirty parents worked alongside pupils and teachers to paint the corridors and rooms in the upper school.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

89. The leadership and management of the school are very good. The headteacher and deputy provide excellent leadership by the example they set to the rest of the staff who fully share their commitment to securing the best possible standard of education for the pupils and students. They are a strong and visible presence around the school and this is significant in assuring pupils they are known individually, and staff that they are well supported. Very good management systems are in place to evaluate the work of the school. Because there is such clarity about the strengths and weaknesses of the school development planning is based on evaluated need. The school improvement plan is a

powerful document which prioritises action, broken into short, medium and long-term planning. Raising standards is, rightly, at its heart. Weaknesses in the curriculum have been identified and links with the local college of further education have been strengthened to provide courses to help boys improve their learning and raise their standards in examinations.

90. Shortly after the headteacher took up his appointment two and a half years ago the two leaders monitored all teaching in order to establish rigour and consistency, and also to coach heads of department in good practice. As a result they have secure procedures for self-evaluation giving an accurate picture of the school's strengths and where its priorities lie, a vision that is fully shared and supported by the governing body. Where teaching was judged by the headteacher or deputy to be less than satisfactory support was given before a re-appraisal, which resulted in improvement. Their assessment of teaching matched very closely that of the inspection team during the week. Having established a base of good teaching they have already agreed, as reported recently to the governing body, that the next stage is to 'develop the learning culture to create an excitement about learning'.

91. There is good delegation to staff with management responsibilities who fulfil their duties well. Their work is very well monitored to establish ever better ways of working. Many departments already have good arrangements for evaluating their work and others are poised to take on this role with greater thoroughness. Accommodation and resources are inadequate and staff work very hard to overcome the difficulties they encounter because of this. The painting of classrooms and corridors and the displays put up by staff and parents all help to make the school attractive for learning, but the requirements for maintenance of some of the buildings are indicative of the need for a new building, already agreed with the local authority.

92. Management of the learning support department is good. The special educational needs coordinator, who has been in post for two terms, supervises the daily routines efficiently, and gives clear educational direction. The high quality of the departmental documentation and the good collaboration with the subject departments ensure a successful whole school approach to special educational needs. A strength of the department is the very good contribution to pupils' learning and personal development made by the team of well-experienced learning support staff. Statutory requirements in respect of pupils with statements of special educational need are met, and the specific grant is used well for its designated purposes. The accommodation is satisfactory and pupils benefit from a bright and cheerful learning area with good resources. Since the last inspection the school has made good progress in improving the provision for special educational needs. Teachers have received training on the revised Code of Practice and are more experienced in identifying pupils in need of extra help. The number of teaching assistants has been increased, and they play a greater part in lessons. Planned further development includes extending the reading programme for all pupils in Years 7 to 9 who need to improve their fluency in reading, and to make the targets on pupils' individual education plans more subject specific.

93. The excellent governing body, made up of members who are equally committed to a successful school within the community of Ripley, fulfil their statutory duties in providing a sense of direction. They have done all they can to provide resources, particularly computers, but there are still not enough for all pupils and students to have the access to computers they need to raise standards even further. Governors have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and also the challenges it faces. This is because they ask for and receive the information they need to monitor the work of the school and help shape its future. By working together with the headteacher they have secured from the local authority the promise of a new building, with a commitment meanwhile to substantial funds to help them overcome the worst of their accommodation and resourcing problems.

94. The school's finances are very well managed. The budget relates very well to the school's development plan and outcomes are evaluated regularly to check the effectiveness of the spending. Before last year, the control system was not as tightly monitored so there was no accurate measure of whether the school was obtaining best value from its limited

resources. The appointment of a business manager has resulted in a finely tuned finance system that links closely to educational priorities.

95. Overall, the school's funding and expenditure per pupil are very low. The result of this is the low level of spending on resources and accommodation. In order to improve the facility for ICT quickly, the school has negotiated with the local education authority a licensed deficit to be paid back by 2004. The inadequacy of resources restricts the facilities for independent learning which are unsatisfactory. The sharing of textbooks, and lack of resources in some aspects of practical work, hold back the otherwise good progress in a number of subjects.

96. The school practises best value principles very well in comparing itself with similar institutions, for instance in recognising its position as the school with second best GCSE results in the same free school meals band in Derbyshire. It is quick to take action where appropriate, such as when insurance costs were rising at an excessive rate. Taking into account the quality of education provided from a low level of funding, and the results achieved, the school provides very good value for money.

97. Both teaching and non-teaching staff are very loyal to the school and committed to providing a high standard of education which serves the local community well and provides a safe and happy environment based on mutual respect. All teachers are suitably qualified and readily share their own personal enthusiasm both in lessons and out of school. All staff are included in performance management arrangements and this strengthens the teamwork which is the hallmark of the successful relationships in school. A result of the poor funding is that teachers have more demanding timetables, including those newly qualified teachers, who do not enjoy the full extent of a reduced timetable in their first year. Arrangements for the induction of all new staff are very good. Newly qualified teachers feel very well supported through their regular meetings with mentors and this helps them to settle in and become effective teachers. Professional development for all staff is very good and links well the school's and individual's priorities.

98. The general state of repair and decoration of much of the school is unsatisfactory. Some of the rooms are pleasant and well looked after but in many areas there are leaking roofs and windows which will not open. The school is seriously overcrowded. Some specialist subject areas cannot be accommodated in specialist classrooms and occasionally lessons such as English have to take place in science laboratories, which affects the quality of learning. There are not enough offices and store-rooms, particularly for technical equipment, which increases the pressure on heads of department. Despite the best efforts of the maintenance staff, and volunteer help from pupils and parents in re-decorating, much of the fabric of the building is in a poor and deteriorating condition. Nevertheless the staff and pupils do all they can to make the grounds attractive and to keep litter under control. Most departments put up interesting displays of work in their classrooms and subject areas which does much to improve the ethos.

99. Good progress has been made since the last inspection. Rigorous self-evaluation including consistency in monitoring of teaching is a strength of the management. The underachievement of boys is still a concern but the school has already begun to put strategies in place to tackle this, at the heart of which is to build on the base of good teaching, which has improved since the last inspection.

Sixth form

Leadership and management

100. The leadership of this successful sixth form is very good, charismatic and often inspirational. The head of the sixth form relates very well to and motivates the students. During the inspection he enraptured them during an assembly on decision-making with a personal anecdote related to opportunities in higher education. The sixth form provides equal access to a wide variety of courses for all the students who meet its minimum entry requirements and fully reflects the school's ethos in its work.

101. Pastoral care is strong and monitoring students' progress is central to the role of the tutor. The leadership of the head of sixth form provides a clear sense of purpose and direction for students and staff. Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined but are almost redundant in the mutually supportive structure and practice. By promoting the self-responsibility of students the team create and manage an environment that is a very successful stepping-stone from Year 11 to the next stage of students' careers.

102. The management and administration of the sixth form are good. The examination results are analysed in detail and followed by subject reviews. As a result there is a clear vision for development with a focus on improving results and maximising the achievement of individuals. However, student targets have not yet been aggregated into class, subject and whole school targets. Teaching is monitored very effectively as it is in the school but evaluating the ways in which students learn most effectively is less secure. There is a willingness to do this through developing the responsibilities of the head of the sixth form.

103. The governors know the many strengths and few weaknesses of the sixth form and are active in their role as critical friends. They have yet to fulfil their statutory duty in providing for the teaching of religious education and a daily collective act of worship.

104. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good. Results and standards have improved from below average to consistently above average. The school has been successful in implementing the new curriculum and courses. The sixth form is cost effective.

105. The staffing of the sixth form is good and teachers are very well qualified for the subjects they teach. One of the strengths of the quality of teaching is the subject expertise of staff. The sixth form suffers like the rest of the school from the unsatisfactory condition of the accommodation and resources. Another strength is the determination and considerable success at overcoming these inadequacies.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

106. In order to raise standards further the school should:

(1) Raise attainment by:

- Extending the provision for gifted and talented pupils across the school (*paragraph 33*)
- Providing greater challenge in lessons and homework to ensure the more able pupils are stretched to work at the highest level (*paragraph 6*)
- Tackling the underachievement of boys in Year 10 and 11 through well-matched courses and teaching strategies (*paragraph 6*)

(2) Improve teaching and learning by:

- Creating an excitement about learning (*paragraph 33*)

- Sharing the best practice already recognised in the best teaching (*paragraph 33*)
- Implementing procedures for teaching numeracy across the curriculum (*paragraphs 4 & 35*)

In addition the school should continue with its efforts to increase its funding in order to improve the range and quality of learning resources and particularly computers

Sixth form

- (1) Improve standards in biology, chemistry and physics (*paragraph 15*)
- (2) Provide better facilities for independent learning (*paragraph 63*)
- (3) Improve and increase resources for learning (*paragraph 17*)
- (4) Increase the range of enrichment activities (*paragraphs 59 & 60*)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	124
	Sixth form	45
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		55

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
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Years 7 - 11

Number	5	41	50	25	3	0	0
Percentage	4	34	40	20	2	0	0

Sixth form

Number	2	14	26	3	0	0	0
Percentage	4	31	58	7	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.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll

	Y 7 – Y 11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1169	153
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	102	

Special educational needs

	y 7 – y 11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	38	1
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	150	2

English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	2

Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	10
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	37

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	6.9
National comparative data	7.8

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	.04
National comparative data	1.2

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

Attainment at the end of key stage 3 (year 9)

Number of registered pupils in final year of key stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2002	116	120	236

National curriculum test/task results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at national curriculum level 5 and above	Boys	73	85	84
	Girls	94	85	90
	Total	167	170	174
Percentage of pupils at national curriculum level 5 or above	School	71 (61)	72 (71)	74 (72)
	National	66 (64)	67 (66)	66 (66)
Percentage of pupils at national curriculum level 6 or above	School	34 (27)	50 (39)	41 (34)
	National	32 (31)	45 (43)	33 (34)

Teachers' assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	64	82	68
	Girls	86	85	83
	Total	150	167	151
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	65 (58)	71 (71)	65 (69)
	National	67 (65)	70 (68)	67 (64)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	16 (17)	50 (36)	28 (31)
	National	32 (31)	44 (42)	34 (33)

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2002	118	124	242

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	51	96	110
	Girls	87	119	121
	Total	138	214	231
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	57 (51)	89 (91)	96 (96)
	National	50 (48)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score Per pupil	School	37.7 (37)
	National	39.8 (39)

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and The percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	14	57
	National		*

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

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	35 (43)	28 (42)	63 (85)
	Average point score per candidate	18.5 (16.3)	19.5 (19.1)	18.9 (17.7)
National	Average point score per candidate	* (16.9)	* (18)	* (17.5)

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS examinations			For candidates entered for Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All	Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	40	40	80	3	1	4
	Average point score per candidate	16.2	18.7	17.4	12	18	13.5
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.9	17.4	9.8	11.4	10.6

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

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the annual school census
White – British
White – Irish
White – any other White background
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean
Mixed – White and Black African
Mixed – White and Asian
Mixed – any other mixed background
Asian or Asian British - Indian
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background
Black or Black British – Caribbean
Black or Black British – African
Black or Black British – any other Black background

No of pupils on roll
1299
0
0
3
0
4
6
1
0
0
0
0
0
0
0

Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
116	2
0	0
0	0
0	0
0	0
0	0
0	0
0	0
0	0
0	0
0	0
0	0
0	0
0	0
0	0

Chinese
Any other ethnic group
No ethnic group recorded

2
4
3

0	0
0	0
0	0

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

Teachers and classes**Qualified teachers and classes: Y 7 – Y 13**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	72.8
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	18.1

Education support staff: Y 7 – Y 13

Total number of education support staff	15
Total aggregate hours worked per week	414

Deployment of teachers: Y 7 – Y 13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	82.8
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Average teaching group size: Y 7 – Y 13

Key stage 3	25.4
Key stage 4	22.2

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	16.8
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	15.48

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	4.88
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2003
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	£
Total income	3,274,394
Total expenditure	3,286,982
Expenditure per pupil	2,486
Balance brought forward from previous year	-21,327
Balance carried forward to next year	-12,588

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1322
Number of questionnaires returned	223

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	29	60	6	4	1
My child is making good progress in school.	45	49	5	0	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	18	65	10	2	3
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	17	59	17	5	2
The teaching is good.	23	62	8	1	4
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	39	43	14	3	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	44	47	6	2	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	47	50	2	1	0
The school works closely with parents.	22	53	19	4	2
The school is well led and managed.	18	57	11	6	8
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	27	59	9	1	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	35	50	8	1	6

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

- Standards in national tests and GCSE examinations are average and improving.
- Pupils make good progress.
- Teaching is good.
- The leadership and management of the department are very good.

Areas for improvement

- The proportion of highest grades at GCSE
- Use of ICT to improve standards even further
- Progress units to improve the standards of literacy in Year 7

107. Standards attained, by both girls and boys, in the national tests for pupils aged 14 are in line with the national average and have been improving since 2000, especially in the percentage achieving Level 5 and above. Standards in 2002 have improved and are now equivalent to standards in schools taking their pupils from similar backgrounds.

108. Standards at GCSE in English and English literature are average. There has been an improvement over the past three years: however, although the overall percentage of pupils gaining A*-C in English was above average in 2002, that gaining the top grades, A* and A, was only half the national average. In literature, the percentage of A* and A grades awarded was also below average, but not as markedly as in English. Nearly all pupils are entered for both examinations. All who are entered gain a pass grade.

109. The standards of work seen are average and achievement is good, given pupils' below average level of attainment on entry. The school's figures indicate that about three out of ten pupils starting Year 7 in 2002 had a reading age two or more years below their actual age and that one in four, excluding those with identified special needs, qualify for additional literacy lessons or progress units to bring them to Level 4.

110. By the end of Year 9, standards in speaking and listening are average. There are frequent opportunities for pupils to develop their discussion skills in lessons and pupils speak confidently, willingly volunteer to read aloud in lessons and use talk effectively in group work to share and explore ideas. In Year 11, there is much useful and good quality collaborative work.

111. Reading is average by the end of Year 9. The department works very hard to encourage reading for pleasure: "book trails", reading records and library lessons all make effective contributions to the rapid progress made by many pupils in their first three years. By the end of Year 11, most pupils are readily able to make inferences, deductions and predictions based on their reading of a wide range of texts, including fiction, poetry, drama, media and other texts. All are able to use the Internet for research, though there are few opportunities in school owing to the lack of sufficient computers, and read to find information. Because nearly all pupils follow GCSE courses in both English and English literature, they read a wide range of challenging texts and do so well enough to gain a grade C.

112. The overall standard of pupils' writing is average in all years except in Year 7 where it is below average. However, because of the department's effective strategies to improve the technical features of writing, spelling, punctuation, grammar and vocabulary, pupils achieve well and are able to write effectively for a variety of readership by Year 8. By the end of Year 9 the most able pupils produce lively and interesting personal writing, including poems, stories and diaries, and experiment with language, such as in their use of imagery in their

descriptions of monsters or when writing the Doctor's thoughts about Lady Macbeth's insanity. The less able make reasonable attempts at creative writing, but have problems structuring longer pieces of informative writing and developing argument. In Year 11, many pupils write confidently and accurately, but they are also inhibited, more likely to write safely than to seize opportunities to show their flair and originality: hence they are restricting their chances of attaining the very top grades. The lower attaining pupils often offer description and narrative in their literature assignments instead of interpretations based on the writer's own words, but they are able to attempt the media and literature textual comparisons using the frameworks provided by their teachers.

113. Pupils who have special educational needs make good progress because they receive the help they need. Almost all make sufficient progress to be entered for both English and English literature at GCSE.

114. A broad curriculum allows everyone to study drama in Years 7 to 9, and have the choice of media and literature in Years 10 and 11. The department works well with the librarian to promote an annual 'Readathon', a Book Fair and Book Club and to give a high profile to reading; but there are few opportunities for pupils to use computers. Progress units designed to help pupils in Year 7 to catch up and gain Level 4 in the National tests have not yet been implemented, and this contributes to the below average standards of some in that year. The National Literacy Strategy (NLS) has been introduced in Years 7 to 9, but it is not yet fully embedded into the work of the department: for example, not all teachers regularly adopt the suggested lesson structure or use shared or paired reading strategies. The department contributes well to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, but would do so even more effectively if regular opportunities were planned in all units of work.

115. Teaching and learning are good overall. Nearly all teaching is good and some is very good, but there are some weaknesses. All marking is of high quality and teachers give very good advice on how work can be improved, especially in Years 10 and 11. The introduction of "I Can Do" booklets is involving pupils in their own target setting, giving the less able much-needed confidence and helping the more able develop as independent learners. In the best lessons, teachers clearly explain the learning objectives and carefully check that they have been achieved at the end. They also plan well, use a range of teaching styles and challenge all pupils. This was seen in a very good Year 11 lesson, when the teacher insisted that all pupils justified their opinions about the characters in Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* by always quoting the text. Thus, they learned that their own interpretations were valid, as long as they produced evidence to support them. In a less successful Year 7 lesson, pupils studying the ballad tradition were asked to write their own ballads. This proved to be too difficult for the majority because the instructions were not clear and also because many pupils were overwhelmed with the enormity of the task. Consequently, behaviour deteriorated and progress was unsatisfactory. Learning would have been much better if a task sheet had been prepared and the activity broken down into smaller, more readily achievable parts.

116. The leadership and management of the department are very good. Although the head of department only started this term, there has been a thorough review of its results, practices and resources and a good development plan, clearly linked to the school's priorities of raising standards, is now in place. Teaching and marking are monitored well and schemes of work have been brought up to date and newly written. Communication is good and responsibilities are appropriately delegated. The head of department is already setting a fine example of hard work, dedication and vision and is maintaining staff morale and looking for ways to improve teamwork and standards even further, in spite of some inadequate resources and accommodation.

117. Improvement since the previous inspection is very good. Standards continue to improve, development planning and monitoring of the department's work are very good, reading and speaking are given a high priority and assessment procedures are now a strength.

Literacy across the curriculum

118. Pupils speak confidently and well because there are frequent opportunities for them to talk, developing and extending their learning in pairs and groups. Some very good work takes place in history, drama and geography. In a Year 8 geography lesson, pupils described photographs of weather conditions to each other, thus showing both their subject knowledge and developing their observation, listening and descriptive skills. In almost all subjects, including mathematics, pupils are encouraged to evaluate their own and others' work and to make constructive suggestions for improvement: however, some opportunities are missed in art. Pupils also readily volunteer to answer and to read aloud in class.

119. Nearly all pupils read a variety of texts, including some Internet research and newspaper and magazine articles, to further their knowledge and to seek information but, in a few subjects, the reading opportunities rarely go beyond the textbooks used. Some of the best practice is in religious education, history and geography.

120. Standards of writing across the school are average and improving. Work is well planned and written by all but a few of the least able. These pupils are often provided with prompts and structured writing frames to help them with their extended writing. In a few subjects, pupils are encouraged to write imaginatively as well as discursively. There is some excellent work in history, especially in Years 7 to 9, in which pupils write a diary and letters from a Second World War concentration camp. However, pupils do not regularly write poetry, stories and newspaper articles or show creative responses to their learning, except in English.

121. The management and strategies for teaching literacy across the curriculum are good: however, practice and success vary, both across and within department, because not all heads of subjects are yet monitoring it fully. Links with the primary schools to give continuity to pupils' learning are being developed, but progress units have not yet been introduced in Year 7 to help pupils move up to Level 4 in the national tests in English.

Drama

122. The provision for drama is very good. Standards in Years 7 to 9 are average and achievement is good. In 2002, standards at GCSE were well above the national average, having been average the previous year. Standards of work seen in Years 10 and 11 are above average, though pupils of all abilities choose the subject.

123. The mixed ability groups in Years 7 to 9 enjoy drama and are keen to learn. Their ensemble work is good and they are developing their awareness of body language, space and levels and how these can be combined to produce effective presentations. Voice work and mime are less good because several lack the confidence and practice in projection and studied gesture or movement. However, all are acquiring the necessary discipline to develop their acting skills further, to work effectively in teams, to experiment with ideas and to support and help each other. In Years 10 and 11, the most-able are assured performers. They use light and sound to create atmosphere and show how their knowledge of practitioners, such as Brecht and Stanislavsky, influences their interpretations. The less able are more concerned with telling a story through drama, rather than interpreting themes, and do not always consider whether they are using the most effective techniques.

124. Drama makes an excellent contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness, to citizenship and to their personal development. Units of work identify such issues as leadership, disabilities, smoking and drugs, bullying, responsibility and racism. Pupils readily discuss these themes and many others for example, sensitive interpretations were seen in Year 7 work on an imaginary Akili tribe from Borneo whose forests have been destroyed by exploiters. Pupils showed a good awareness of the impact this had had on people's lives and traditions and made mature, thoughtful and critical observations through their group presentations.

125. Teaching is very good overall and much of it is excellent. Planning is exceptionally good and ensures rich and worthwhile learning in all lessons. Pupils' learning is also enhanced by their mature and positive attitudes to the subject and to each other.

126. The leadership and management of the department are excellent. Development planning and the curriculum are most impressive and, in spite of limited resources and accommodation, standards are improving in all years. Improvement since the previous inspection is very good.

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths

- The proportion of pupils gaining level 6 at the end of Year 9 is above average.
- Teaching is good.
- Special educational needs pupils are supported well.
- Good classroom relationships promote good learning.

Areas for improvement

- Standards at GCSE, particularly of higher attainers
- Use of ICT to meet statutory requirements
- The level of pupils' concentration throughout the whole lessons
- Marking and assessment of pupils' books
- The challenge presented through homework

127. At the end of Year 9 in 2002, the results of national tests were average. There was no significant difference in the attainment of boys and girls. Results were broadly in line with English and science.

128. GCSE results were broadly average. Results over the last three years have been stable. However, there is a significant difference in the attainment of boys and girls, with girls achieving above average and boys achieving below average at grade C and above. GCSE results in 2002 were not as good as those of science and English. Results at grades B and above are well below the national average.

129. Standards of work seen in Years 9 and 11 are average. In Year 9 above average pupils work well with statistical work and algebra. Average pupils work competently with routine numerical concepts such as ratios. Below average pupils often need help to complete basic calculations. Mental skills are satisfactory. In Year 11 above average pupils perform much of the range of GCSE topics adequately, such as a group applying circle theorems with some degree of success. Average pupils are fairly competent in number work, data handling and the shape and space concepts required for intermediate GCSE. The lowest ability pupils struggle with numerical manipulation, but are still making progress towards a possible grade G at GCSE. Mental skills are not as good as they are lower in the school where the National Numeracy Strategy has improved standards in recent years. Overall, pupils' achievement is satisfactory because they maintain the satisfactory standards seen on entry.

130. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress. Most are very well taught in small sets and receive excellent support from teachers and support assistants. This is a strength of teaching in mathematics because it builds confidence in these pupils.

131. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are generally good in all years. Work in exercise books is mostly presented well. Most pupils pay good attention; although some take the opportunity to drift off the task at hand when they are not being closely watched by their

teacher. Positive attitudes allow pupils to make satisfactory progress on the whole, but not as much as if they were kept stretched at all times. Pupils were seen to have good relationships with each other and with their teachers, which helps them make progress. Some lessons, particularly those with potentially high achievers in Years 10 and 11, lack the challenge to promote the highest grades at GCSE.

132. Teaching is generally good. The satisfactory lessons lacked pace, but at times teaching is very good and even excellent because teachers help pupils to develop their understanding of new concepts even when they find them difficult. Teachers' planning is mostly good in Years 7 to 9, although a comprehensive scheme of work for years 10 and 11 is yet to be developed. Mathematics staff know their subject well. However, ICT resources are not sufficient to broaden the approach, appeal and effectiveness of teaching. Nor are the full ICT requirements of the national curriculum met for all pupils. Curriculum time currently for the GCSE courses is below the national average and this limits the time teachers have to expand on the advanced topics associated with the highest grades. The school has recognised this and is taking steps to increase curriculum time for mathematics. Many of the key aspects of the National Numeracy Strategy have been incorporated into the scheme of work and this is helping improve standards. For example, a Year 7 class were seen enthusiastically tackling difficult number patterns in a three part lesson. Due weight is generally given to the learning of new and technical vocabulary which contributes to the school's literacy aims. A Year 11 class were observed learning the correct terms in angle analysis. Pupil attainment is tracked using information from results which allows teachers to monitor progress. The best marking includes useful comments to help pupils improve their performance in the future. However, not all teachers achieve this standard and the department's policy on marking is not used consistently.

133. Homework is not always set according to the school homework timetable and at times it is trivial and takes little time to complete. This is restricting teachers' active development of pupils' independent learning techniques and also limits the opportunity for the most able to study topics in a greater depth than is possible in class time. The environment in classrooms is generally bright and cheerful with pupils' work proudly displayed.

134. Management of the department is generally satisfactory. The mathematics teachers have developed the scheme of work for Years 7 to 9 as a team, and share their good practice in teaching. This requires good management. However, the monitoring of teaching and learning is not sufficient to ensure that standards and policies are consistently applied by all members of the department. This has led to the varied standards of practice observed during this inspection. Since the last inspection the department has made satisfactory progress. Numeracy and the application of mathematics are better than they were and other standards have been maintained.

Numeracy across the curriculum

135. Standards of numeracy on entry to the school are satisfactory. The department has adopted aspects of the National Numeracy Strategy in Years 7 to 9. However, the school has not yet introduced work for lower ability pupils who have not reached level 4, to allow them to catch up in readiness for more advanced work. The department has led a school-wide numeracy audit over Years 7 to 11. The contribution of other subjects varies, with some missing opportunities to develop a fuller appreciation of the use of number in context, although some good work was seen in ICT, design and technology, art and science.

SCIENCE

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

Strengths

- The proportion of A*-C grades at GCSE is well above average.
- Results of tests at the end of Year 9 are above average.
- Leadership of the department is very good.
- Teaching is good with very good features, resulting in good progress of pupils.
- Assessment and monitoring of pupils' progress is very good.

Areas for improvement

- Use of ICT in lessons
- Resources, equipment in specific areas and technical support

136. The national test results at the end of Year 9 were above average in 2002 and an improvement on 2001. The results were similar for boys and girls. GCSE results for 2002 were above average overall. The majority of pupils take the double award science examination and the number of pupils gaining the A*-C grades was well above average. Girls performed slightly better than the boys. These results were similar to those achieved in 2001. The results for pupils taking the single award examination were average with all pupils achieving a pass, although fewer pupils achieved A*-C grades than in 2001, with the boys performing slightly better than the girls.

137. Standards of work seen during the inspection are above average in Years 9 and 11. The achievement of all pupils is good in view of their average prior attainment. Higher attaining pupils in Year 9 explain the causes of variation in species and describe adaptations of animals such as the polar bear and camel to their surroundings. Other pupils in Year 9 describe how to test a leaf for starch and write word equations for the process of photosynthesis. Lower attaining pupils illustrate this process by means of a flow chart. Pupils in Year 11 explain Newton's First Law and perform calculations relating to speed and terminal velocity. All pupils show competence in drawing graphs and other numeracy skills. Their literacy skills are average or above in all years. The majority of pupils display competence in practical work and work co-operatively together, showing respect for each others' ideas and sharing tasks sensibly. They handle apparatus with confidence and pay attention to safety precautions. The attitude and behaviour of pupils during lessons are good in all years and they are well motivated. They listen attentively, are keen to answer oral questions and participate in class discussions, usually remaining on task during written work.

138. Teaching is good with some very good lessons in all years. Teachers work hard to cope with problems created by inadequate resources and accommodation. The schemes of work reflect the requirements of the National Curriculum and examination board. Lessons are well planned and organised and contain a variety of activities to maintain the interest of pupils. Teachers display good subject knowledge so that they are able to give clear explanations of concepts to pupils to help them learn. Pupil management is very good. Aims are clearly stated at the beginning of lessons so that pupils know exactly what they are to learn and reviews at the end of lessons help to consolidate learning. Different work is prepared for lower-ability pupils, with and extension to the main task to give greater challenge to higher attainers. A variety of practical work is carried out which re-enforces theory and helps to maintain the interest of pupils. Pupils write things in their own words, which helps them develop literacy skills and teachers emphasise key words relevant to the topic being studied. Numeracy skills are practised by the use of formulae and drawing of graphs necessary in the science curriculum. Lack of resources and access to computers limits the use of ICT in lessons. Social interaction takes place between pupils during practical lessons and moral issues are addressed by topics such as genetic engineering and the environment, but no evidence was seen of spiritual or cultural issues during the inspection week. Assessment and target setting are very good with regular end of unit tests in all years, the

results of which are held on a centralised database. Homework is set on a regular basis and is used to reinforce work covered in lessons. Pupils' work is carefully marked and annotated and graded with National Curriculum levels or GCSE grades. The excellent displays around the department are informative and promote learning.

139. The leadership of the department is very good and monitoring of teaching is excellent. There is a good team spirit among the teachers who are all committed to the continued achievement of good examination results. Assessment and monitoring of pupils' progress are very good. Departmental meetings take place regularly both formally and informally, so that expertise is shared. The high standards seen during the last inspection have been maintained. Links are being forged with primary schools with the aim of producing a joint teaching unit, in order to ease the transition for Year 7 pupils. The accommodation is satisfactory overall but inconvenient as it is spread over three sites. The laboratories in the upper school have been pleasantly refurbished but those in the lower school need attention. Another designated room is not yet equipped as a laboratory so that apparatus needs to be transported between the sites. Resources are barely satisfactory; basic equipment is becoming depleted and larger pieces of apparatus, such as microscopes, are in need of replacement or repair. Technical support for the department is good.

ART AND DESIGN

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

Strengths

- GCSE results are well above the national average.
- Improvements since the last inspection have been excellent.
- Teaching and learning are very good.
- The leadership and management of the subject are very good.

Areas for improvement

- Accommodation for the large GCSE classes
- ICT resources

140. Pupils' standards of work in Year 9 were well above average in the 2002 teacher's statutory assessments. Achievement was very good, both boys and girls exceeded national expectations. Pupils' results in GCSE examinations have risen significantly since the last inspection and the number of pupils gaining the grades A*- C have been well above the national average for the last three years. In 2002, all pupils entered for the examination gained a grade and over a third of the pupils gained the top grades of A* and A. Boys performed better than girls in gaining a greater proportion of A*s and both boys and girls did significantly better in art and design than in their other subjects and better than boys and girls nationally. The departments' results are the highest in the school.

141. In the work seen during the inspection, standards reached by Year 9 pupils are well above average and achievement is very good. Pupils are confident in art activities and show a sound understanding of visual expression. They apply technical skills very competently and show good developing knowledge of art and artists. In Year 9, pupils demonstrate a very good level of observational analysis when producing life drawings and use line and proportion very competently to portray the figure accurately. Higher attainers use foreshortening accurately when drawing from difficult angles. Lower attaining pupils successfully use techniques to represent the texture of the folds of clothing. Pupils confidently discuss the social issues they had chosen as their theme and demonstrate a good understanding of graphic design when considering how the message of their poster could be influenced by the composition. Pupils have a good knowledge of art vocabulary and use it well. The teachers plan for the use of ICT very well and the assessed standards reached in the limited time available are good. However there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to access resources and this is barely meeting statutory requirements.

142. Standards in Year 11 are well above average and achievement very good. Many pupils reach high standards when interpreting whole class themes and confidently use a range of materials and processes to express their creative ideas. For example, they demonstrated a good ability to explore and investigate when researching artists for a project based on 'Connections'. Pupils experimented successfully with painting methods used by artists such as Georgia O' Keeffe to influence the design of high quality cardboard sculptures by using colour and dramatic shapes. A strength of the department is the emphasis which is put on the pupil's personal response. In a project on illuminating words pupils illustrated text of their own choice, such as Martin Luther King's speech 'I have a dream' and produced distinctive work of a high standard reflecting an awareness of spiritual and social issues. Higher attaining pupils' work often shows a sophisticated understanding of concepts. The pupils work in a wide range of media and technical skills are very good, this results in the majority of pupils of all abilities producing work of a very high standard. Lower attaining pupils' strengths are channelled into successful outcomes and they frequently produce work of a similar standard to the rest of the class.

143. Pupils arrive in Year 7 with attainment, which overall is just in line with national standards. They learn quickly because the quality of teaching is very good and by Year 9 are achieving standards that are well above. The structured course followed in their first year gives students a very good understanding of the formal elements, such as the use of line, tone, texture and the use of colour and introduces them to a range of techniques. This is built on in Year 8 where pupils' increasing knowledge of artists and their styles helps them to relate it to their own work. After studying ceramics from areas such as Greek and African art, pupils translate their designs into papier-mâché vessels reflecting the style of the culture. In the Years 10 and 11 pupils are encouraged to take a more active part in their learning. They study past and contemporary art and the progressive structure of the course builds on their technical skills, giving pupils the confidence to develop work in their own preferred style. In Year 10 pupils gain a very good understanding of the work of artists such as Munch and study his style before producing masks of high standard inspired by his painting 'The Scream'. By Year 11 pupils' work reflects a high level of individuality. Pupils of all abilities including those with special educational needs achieve very well and boys and girls make progress at a similar rate. The wide range of activities offered by the department plays a significant part in raising boys' achievement.

144. The quality of teaching and learning are very good and a major strength of the department. Consequently pupils improve and develop their skill, knowledge and understanding consistently throughout the school and learning is at least good and frequently very good. The teachers' expertise, enthusiasm and commitment inspire and challenge students. They manage pupils very well, often in overcrowded conditions and their high expectations of behaviour creates a positive attitude in pupils, whose attitudes and behaviour are good. Pupils are lively and at times very demanding but teachers have developed clear procedures that result in very good use being made of time and resources. Teachers give clear explanations, demonstrate techniques and build in an element of humour to maintain pupils' interest that results in successful learning. Very clear introductions are given which give pupils strong direction on what they have to do to achieve with exemplars of good practice used to show how to achieve it. Lessons include a range of enjoyable and challenging activities for all levels of ability and learning is well supported by very good assessment and evaluation by the teacher. Teachers have a very good command of their subject. Projects are well planned with stimulating introductions that are often supported by the teachers' own resources. Homework is set regularly and used to develop pupils' technical skills but is underused to develop pupils' research skills. Literacy and numeracy strategies are well integrated.

145. This is a very good department that is jointly led by two members of staff. They have a very clear vision of the subject and its continuing development within the school and have put in very effective procedures that have driven up standards. Schemes of work and policy statements are clear and informative, regularly subject to review in response to changing demands. Assessment is very well structured and well used to plan the curriculum, which is

closely monitored and modified to increase the level of challenge. Improvement since the last inspection has been excellent, all areas have been addressed and standards have significantly improved. The department promotes a caring ethos and puts a high emphasis on the students' spiritual, moral, cultural and social development by building aspects into all projects. Accommodation is overall satisfactory but rooms are too small and cramped for large examination classes. The department uses what resources it has effectively but provision is poor. Provision for ICT is sparse; there is only one computer and one scanner and no digital camera. This limits the pupils' facility to use it to extend and research work, particularly in examination classes. The high quality of display in the classroom strongly supports learning and the ethos of the subject is promoted by the high profile of the department in the display of pupils' work around the school.

CITIZENSHIP

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

Strengths

- Leadership and management are very good.
- An excellent feature is the provision of special theme events.
- The course is very well planned and imaginative.
- Teaching and learning are good and pupils achieve well.
- The school council is an excellent feature.

Areas for improvement

- Assessment procedures
- The match of teaching materials and methods to pupils of different attainment

146. Standards of work seen throughout the school during the inspection are above average overall. These standards are reached because teaching is good. Pupils' achievements in relation to attainment at the start of Year 7 are good. A very imaginative teaching programme and a number of experiences of active citizenship also cause the quality of pupils' learning to be good. All pupils respond very well and make good progress as they move through the school.

147. An outstanding feature is the provision of special events like an equal opportunities theme week. This involved a local group taking assemblies and lessons to raise pupils' awareness of disabilities. Pupils listened with great interest and responded with spontaneous applause to the presentations. They developed their knowledge, understanding and respect learning about the everyday problems that people with disabilities face. As a result some pupils are now learning sign language in extra-curricular time. Another very good feature is the use of assembly and tutorial time to explore citizenship topics such as different cultures and racism. Discussion of these is well matched to pupils of higher-attainment but is less effective for those with lower literacy skills and other learning difficulties.

148. Overall teaching is good. In general, lessons are very well planned. During the inspection learning was very good where teachers used their specialist subject skills and knowledge to teach elements of citizenship, for example in art, drama, economics, English and history. Very good teaching used drama to enable pupils to reach above average standards learning about leadership in a tribe in Borneo. All groups of pupils achieved very well using good resources to distinguish between rumour and propaganda in relation to war in history. In art teachers' high expectations inspired pupils to develop their skills of enquiry and communication producing posters on social and environmental issues. Their standards of work were well above average. In Years 10 and 11 pupils reached above average standards in citizenship in English and economics lessons. In English excellent teaching used drama to allow pupils to extend their knowledge and understanding of human rights and responsibilities. They worked very effectively in groups to explore issues of prejudice and discrimination and there was a very strong spiritual content when they considered the perpetrators and victims of the Holocaust. In economics pupils used ICT well to compare the

market conditions in two contrasting countries. A decision-making exercise consolidated and extended their understanding of the unequal distribution of wealth and the concept of fair trade.

149. The school council is elected, involves over 60 pupils and is run very effectively by a Year 11 executive. It is an excellent feature of the school. Boys and girls are equally articulate and demonstrate above average skills in debate. The council is represented on the governor's student support sub-committee and the parents' association. The use of pupils as receptionists is another very good feature of the provision for citizenship. In a very practical way the pupils develop their skills of communication and civil responsibility.

150. Leadership and management of the subject are very good and have outstanding qualities. The vision and planning for the development of citizenship are excellent as is the commitment to equal opportunities and the improvement of standards. From this year all pupils will begin a short GCSE course in citizenship starting in Year 10. Teaching and learning are evaluated through lesson observation and tracking pupils' work. Assessment procedures are ambitious and involve pupils recording their own attainment and progress. However, they are not yet securely related to the National Curriculum levels and the collation of evidence from all subjects is at an early stage.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- Teaching is good.
- Good and improving examination results.
- Good projects covering all national curriculum areas.
- Good use is made of limited ICT provision.

Areas for improvement

- Teaching of drawing and graphics in Years 7 to 9
- Facilities for computer aided design and manufacture
- Progress of talented pupils
- Accommodation, storage and heating in certain rooms

151. At the end of Year 9 standards as reported in teacher assessments in 2002 were well above average. However, National Curriculum grades of almost 90 per cent of pupils reaching Level 5 or above are over-estimated. Standards of work seen during the inspection are above average and are rising in line with standards nationally. Pupils begin the school with skills in design and technology which are below average. Many understand the "design and make" procedures but standards of presentation, particularly handwriting and drawing skills, and reading ability are below average. Pupils achieve well over three years. They have a good grasp of design-make-evaluate and have good skills in all of the National Curriculum areas. Structures, electronics, control technology and mechanisms are thoroughly understood. Handwriting skills improve considerably but sketching and drawing skills do not keep pace because drawing and graphics skills are not taught systematically. Pupils need to communicate and develop their initial ideas better.

152. GCSE results are above average. Results in food studies, child development, textiles and graphics were particularly good. Girls do better than boys. The emphasis on coursework accounts for girls doing better than boys. Girls are more mature and enjoy the work entailed in producing a folder full of research, neat and careful drawings, graphs and questionnaires.

153. In Year 11 standards in lessons are above average with very good work in textiles, food studies, childcare, graphics and control technology. The increased use of ICT helps

many pupils produce work which they can be proud of, particularly very good work in graphics using drawing instruments. Where standards were lower it was in resistant materials. The standard of drawing is not high enough and folders are disorganised. The progress made in Year 7 to 9 is not continued at the same rate. Some of the projects seen in a Year 11 class had taken too long to complete and had not extended skills learnt earlier. A pupil had forgotten how he had drawn an ellipse to make a coffee table top because it happened so long ago and a teacher had done the welding for a pupil where the pupil could have brazed the project for himself.

154. Teaching is good and has improved considerably since the last inspection. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen and about three quarters of teaching was good or better. Over one third was very good. The strengths are in the planning and the teachers' knowledge and understanding. There are high expectations and pupils are managed well with good, firm discipline. Learning is good and pupils concentrate on the tasks and are keen to answer questions, though less good in answering in sentences and articulating reasons. Lesson time is used well and there is good pace and productivity in almost all lessons. Marking is especially good in the home economics department. The departments have now adopted a National Curriculum based marking scheme in Years 7 to 9 and this is helping to plan curriculum change as well as being a predictor of success. Most pupils in Years 10 and 11 know what levels they are working at and what they need to do to improve but some do not and could not relate the marks in tests to a GCSE grade. The teachers work very hard to compensate for the inadequacy of ICT provision, especially for control technology or computer aided design. There is a lack of tools to demonstrate or use for computer-aided manufacture.

155. Leadership and management are good. Members of the areas within the design and technology department work well together monitoring teaching and standards and have a clear set of priorities. The technicians are excellent and are appreciated by the departments. Money is spent wisely and responsibility delegated well. The funds provided to run the departments are low compared to the amounts usually allocated to departments of this size. Accommodation is of poor quality and quantity. There is a lack of storage space and some rooms have inadequate heating.

GEOGRAPHY

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

Strengths

- GCSE results are consistently above average.
- Good preparation for examinations and coursework promotes good attainment.
- Good quality relationships encourage pupils to work hard and make progress.
- The variety of tasks offered allows all pupils to experience success.

Areas for improvement

- ICT to support learning
- Challenge for high attainers in Years 7 to 9

156. In 2002, GCSE results were above average. They have improved slightly every year in the last three years. Girls' results were better than boys' and they gained more of the higher grades, although both groups attained above average grades compared with those of boys and girls nationally. Teacher-assessed National Curriculum levels at the end of Year 9 in 2002 were average in relation to national standards.

157. In Year 9, standards seen are average, which represents good progress in relation to pupils' below average standards on entry to Year 7. Pupils progress well because of good teaching which enables them to develop a geographical vocabulary. This was seen in a Year 9 lesson on Japanese industry, where pupils classified research findings into the causes and effects of environmental problems. However, limited curriculum time means that there is little

scope to consolidate work to promote even higher attainment. In Year 11 standards are above average in relation to national standards. Good teaching focuses on examination requirements so pupils have clear objectives, as seen in coursework, in which attainment is well above average for many pupils due to a close match to the specification. In coursework, girls attain higher marks than boys due to better data presentation and analysis in depth. This difference is not seen elsewhere.

158. The achievement of pupils during Years 7 to 9 is good. Boys and girls achieve equally well. Pupils with special educational needs have carefully structured activities and materials, so they make good progress, as seen in a Year 7 lesson on Ripley, where help with writing guided lower attainers. Higher attaining pupils, including gifted and talented pupils, are sometimes held back by a lack of challenging activities, so their progress is similar to that of other pupils. The achievement of all pupils in Years 10 and 11 is also good. Varied activities allow pupils to learn in different ways so that they learn to interpret information and explain well using technical language.

159. The quality of teaching in Years 7 to 9 is good. Good use of important geographical words, structured writing tasks and oral activities make the curriculum accessible to all pupils and allow them to develop ideas. Limited resources are used well to promote an awareness of other cultures in Ghana, Japan and Italy. Objectives are shared so pupils know what they are meant to be learning. However, limited access to ICT inhibits research, analysis and presentation in Years 7 to 9. Teaching is also good in Years 10 and 11. Teachers convey examination requirements well and ensure that pupils know a range of case studies to support their understanding and skills. However, although teachers have begun to use a variety of different materials in Years 7 to 11, they do not make full use of opportunities to encourage higher attainers to think more deeply about issues or to extend their writing fully.

160. Pupils enjoy geography. Positive attitudes and good behaviour are fostered and encouraged by cooperative group work and high teacher expectations. Relationships with teachers and each other are good, so pupils are prepared to work hard. They develop very good attitudes towards the subject by Year 11, and work independently to practice a range of mapping, graphing and analytical skills.

161. Leadership and management of the department are good. The curriculum is well-planned and good documentation supports the work of non-specialist teachers in Year 7. The department is carefully monitored and courses are regularly reviewed. Overall, there has been good improvement since the last inspection, particularly in Years 7 to 9, where the quality of teaching and learning opportunities are now good.

HISTORY

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

Strengths

- The teaching is very good.
- GCSE results are above average and steadily improving for both girls and boys.
- Leadership and management of the department are very good.

Areas for improvement

- The use of homework
- The presentation of the work of some pupils
- More challenge for gifted and talented pupils

162. Inspection evidence shows that when pupils join the school their standards of attainment are below average. They make good progress, so that by the end of Year 9 in teacher assessments their attainment matches the national average. Examination results for GCSE have been steadily rising during the last 3 years. In 2002 both boys and girls achieved results above the national average for A*-C and A*-G grades.

163. Standards of work seen in Year 9 are broadly average. Pupils develop a good range of skills. They become more confident in researching information and use the results well. In Year 11 the standard of work is above average. Pupils analyse events and compare and contrast the periods they have studied. Coursework is thoroughly researched, often illustrated with photographs and maps and well presented using ICT.

164. The achievement of pupils during Years 7 to 9 is good. Higher attaining pupils progress well. Lower attaining pupils progress in understanding and knowledge but tend to take issues at face value and do not look at them from more than one viewpoint. Some boys make much slower progress than girls because they seem less interested in their work. Pupils with special educational needs and the few for whom English is not their mother tongue make good progress because work is carefully matched to their requirements. However, there are many other pupils who do not take sufficient care with the presentation of their work and leave work incomplete and untidy. This lowers their standards and hampers their future success.

165. The achievement of pupils in Years 10 and 11 is good. A steady rise in attainment can be traced through Years 10 and 11. In their studies of 'Medicine through Time' and the development of the American West their independent enquiry skills improve and they start to look at issues from more than one point of view. Pupils are well-motivated and try hard. Good provision is made in lessons for pupils identified as gifted and talented but not enough extension work and homework is set to allow them to attain the highest grades in the examination.

166. Overall, the quality of teaching is good. Without exception lessons are well planned, paced and structured. Teachers are confident in their subject knowledge and make their lessons challenging and interesting. They use many different strategies to capture the imagination of students and to make them think. For example in a Year 9 lesson during the inspection the atmosphere of a Nazi classroom was briefly recreated to allow the students to experience for themselves prejudice and discrimination. Pupils are encouraged always to see the relevance of what they are studying and its impact on the modern world. The enthusiasm of the teachers is communicated to the pupils. They make the most of a limited range of resources to stimulate interest and promote learning. Lack of textbooks means that teachers have to rely on many work sheets which can easily be lost. Access to computers is limited so that there are few opportunities for pupils to underpin their work using ICT. The behaviour of pupils is managed well. Homework is set regularly but some tasks are trivial and take little time to complete. Marking is thorough; though when pupils leave gaps or their work is incomplete there is no follow-up.

167. The leadership of the department is excellent and management is very good. The experienced and committed staff share good practice monitoring their own performance and that of their pupils. They know their strengths and which areas need improvement. Assessment procedures are used well to check and promote pupils' progress. The curriculum is enhanced with an interesting range of visits to historical sites, though there are opportunities to develop this aspect of the department's work. Progress since the last inspection has been good.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- Pupils achieve well in Years 7 to 9 to reach above average standards by the end of Year 9.
- Standards of work for pupils taking an examination course in years 10 and 11 are above average.
- Pupils are well taught.
- Leadership and management of the department are excellent.
- Pupils' behaviour and attitudes are very good.

Areas for improvement

- Standards and achievement for non-examination pupils in years 10 and 11
- Statutory requirements for the teaching of ICT
- Resources

168. GCSE results in the two ICT based courses in 2002 were average overall. Pupils did slightly better in ICT than they did in their other subjects though results were not as good as in previous years. Standards are above average because pupils are well taught and the on-line GNVQ course is helping them develop good independent learning skills. Girls' results were significantly better than those of boys.

169. In Year 9 standards are above average in relation to national standards. Standards in handling and communicating information are particularly good and pupils use word processing, databases and spreadsheets to make polished presentations of text and numerical data. Standards are above average because pupils are taught well and bring very good attitudes to their work.

170. In Year 11, standards overall are average in relation to national standards. For pupils taking the GNVQ course standards are above average. They communicate, retrieve and analyse information efficiently and reliably and investigate patterns and relationships. They apply real-world applications of ICT to solve problems. Standards are above average because pupils are well taught and the on-line GNVQ course is helping them to become independent. However, for approximately half of Year 10 and 11 pupils who do not take the examination courses, standards are below average. This is because they have no ICT lessons and are not using computers enough in their other subjects because there are insufficient computers available.

171. The achievement of pupils during Years 7 to 9 is good. On entry to Year 7 standards are average so that the above average standards reached by the end of Year 9 represent good achievement. Achievement for examination groups in Years 10 and 11 is good for they are maintaining the high standards they had when they embarked on the course. However, achievement for non-examination pupils in Years 10 and 11 is unsatisfactory because their standards have worsened since Year 9. This is because they do not have sufficient opportunities to use computers in their other subjects and are not being taught the National Curriculum for ICT. Pupils with special educational needs in Years 7 to 9 make good

progress, improving their basic computer skills and their knowledge and understanding of software applications. Those who take an examination course in Years 10 and 11 make good progress because the course they follow is designed to provide opportunities for them to work at their own pace.

172. The quality of teaching and learning in Years 7 to 11 is good overall and a significant factor in helping pupils learn well. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen. In the very good lessons seen, pupils knew from the outset what they were aiming to learn, teachers used methods which helped them learn quickly and the tasks they were set challenged and extended them. Where teaching was only satisfactory, it was because pupils were not challenged enough and lessons were planned with insufficient thought as to what it was pupils were going to have learned by the end. In all lessons, relationships with pupils are encouraging and supportive and help motivate pupils to want to learn. Management of pupils is generally good and little time is wasted establishing control. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very good and help them learn more effectively.

173. The leadership and management of the department are excellent. There is a clear focus on raising standards and helping pupils achieve. The monitoring of teaching and learning in the department is thorough. Excellent documentation underpins both policy and practice. Subject development planning is very good and linked to whole school planning. A very good curriculum map has been drawn up showing where ICT can be used in other subjects. However, this has yet to be realised because of inadequate resources. The progress of pupils in Years 10 and 11 who do not take the examination course is not sufficiently monitored to ensure they are making progress and covering the requirements of the National Curriculum for ICT. Procedures for the assessment, evaluation and recording of pupils' attainment are very good. Accommodation is unsatisfactory. Rooms are too small for teachers to move freely around the clusters of computers. Resources are unsatisfactory.

174. Progress since the previous inspection has been very good. There are higher standards in Years 7 to 9 and GCSE results have improved. Only teachers with an ICT qualification now teach the subject. Teaching, leadership, staff training and subject planning have all improved. Still to be achieved is the monitoring of the progress and attainment of pupils in Years 10 and 11 who do not take an examination course in ICT.

ICT across the curriculum

175. Opportunities for pupils to use ICT to support their learning in other subjects are unsatisfactory and have worsened since the previous inspection. This is because the number of computers the school has is insufficient and significantly below the national average for a school of this size. Although teachers include the use of computers in their subject planning, and have received relevant training, the shortage of computers results in little being achieved. In the vast majority of subjects computers are underused. Mathematics, geography, history, modern foreign languages and art fail to meet statutory requirements. The lack of resources is particularly unfortunate in some subjects, such as geography, where the use of ICT is an integral part of the department's planning through the use of word processing, scatter graphs, hydrographs, data analysis, multimap and research using the Internet. Good use is made of technology in physical education. Pupils use digital cameras and video recording to evaluate their own and others' performance and produce graphs from computer programmes for pulse rates and strength tests for self-evaluation purposes.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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

Strengths

- Standards are high.
- The leadership and management of the department are good.
- Teachers have very good subject knowledge in both French and German.
- The quality of teaching and lesson planning is good.
- The cultural input and relevant use of real everyday items is outstanding.

Areas for improvement

- The use of the foreign language
- Contact with native speakers
- Formalising administrative systems, including enhancing the schemes of work
- Lesson endings and recapping learning

176. Standards of work attained by pupils by the end of Year 9 are average. They are above average in French by the end of Year 11 and well above average in German. Trends over recent years have been static in Year 9 and rising by the end of Year 11.

177. The standards of work observed during the week of the inspection were above average in all years. There is no difference in the achievement of those pupils who have English as an additional language, and pupils with special educational needs also make good progress.

178. Good learning is directly due to good teaching. All the lessons observed were at least satisfactory, with 90 per cent being good or better, and some excellent teaching seen. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and combine this with pace and challenge to provide stimulating learning. Pupils learn best in lessons where the teachers make extensive use of the foreign language and motivate and challenge their learners to do the same. Clearly planned stages of learning and very good lesson starters ensure progress. Relationships are very good throughout the department, teachers share targets with pupils who are actively involved in determining their own steps towards improvement. Where less satisfactory teaching takes place, some teachers use French and German inconsistently in the classroom, or use too much English, thus depriving the pupils of maximum learning opportunities. Lesson endings are not as sharp as other sections, which sometimes results in a lack of maximum consolidation of learning. There is a need to further develop opportunities for extended speaking practice. Pupils appreciate the efforts being made for them and respond well, demonstrating enjoyment of learning and a genuine hunger for knowledge and challenge which is well catered for by the teachers.

179. Resources are inadequate, but as with learning resources in general, it is the commitment, imagination and excellent use to which material is put which is such a credit to teachers and ensures maximum benefit to pupils. However, trips abroad have lapsed and learners have yet to make use of e-mail to establish links abroad. These factors mean that they have inadequate contact with native speakers of either language. There is a need to improve access to and development of information technology overall on a more consistent basis. Assessment procedures are very good. Marking is clear and consistent across the department and includes very good advice for improvement directly related to targets.

180. The leadership and management of the department are good. There is a strong sense of team spirit and vision and willingness to pool resources and share materials and good practice. The head of department knows her team well and manages a clear commitment to improvement. The staff are well supported in getting involved in new initiatives and new staff to the area feel very well supported by all. Improvement over recent years has been good. There is more variety and challenge in lessons and the multi-cultural element is now more evident. The department has also changed its examination to give

more emphasis to coursework as a direct response to pupils' needs. More development remains to be done on enhancing the schemes of work, formalising administrative procedures and extending pupils' speaking skills.

MUSIC

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

Strengths

- Results in the most recent GCSE examinations were well above average.
- In all year groups, pupils, including those with learning difficulties, are highly motivated and achieve well.
- The quality of teaching and learning are good.
- Pupils benefit from an extensive programme of extra-curricular activities.

Areas for improvement

- The consistency of teaching and learning styles
- The quality of accommodation and resources
- Provision for ICT

181. Results in GCSE examinations in 2002, when all pupils gained grades in the range A*-B, were well above average. Results have improved steadily over the past three years.

182. Teachers' assessments of pupils' attainment at the end of Year 9 indicate that standards are above average; work seen in Year 9 during the inspection reflected this assessment. Standards of attainment in Years 7 to 9 have improved since the previous inspection.

183. Standards in Year 9 are above average. Their creative effort is high; many are clearly developing their intuitive musical abilities, and understand that music integrates a number of musical skills. After their learning about the particular features of Impressionist music, many were able to create effective pieces. In one excellent lesson pupils competently used a whole tone scale and incorporated appropriate chords to create the characteristic harmonic effect. Their subsequent performances to the rest of the class were played with a subtle range of dynamics which effectively communicated the atmosphere typical of music of this genre. Their listening skills, both in ensemble work and as audience, are very good.

184. From their below average level of attainment at the beginning of Year 7 pupils' achievement in Year 7 to 9 is very good. They read uncomplicated staff notation, develop fluent keyboard fingering technique, sing well, and develop a useful musical vocabulary. Boys are enthusiastic and positive; willing to experiment and select ideas by a process of trial and error, and much of their work is highly imaginative. However, in a number of lessons in all year groups the lack of suitable spaces for group work restricts the range of activities possible, and although pupils are able to develop reading and performing skills, they are not able to experiment, select musical ideas and refine their work. Because not all have the same experience, not all pupils of otherwise similar ability make similar progress.

185. In Year 11, standards are very high, and pupils achieve well. Many perform to a very high standard, and are confident in a range of composing techniques. Their aural skills are above average, and their general musical knowledge is good. However, some have not acquired a wide enough knowledge of musical vocabulary, and they do not use a wide descriptive vocabulary in their responses to music they hear.

186. Throughout the school, pupils with special educational needs make very good progress. Although some have difficulty in concentrating they are given tasks which match their capabilities and sustain their attention, and most are clearly able to build on their previous knowledge and understanding. Pupils who are gifted and talented make very good

progress, both as a result of the challenge of classroom work and the range of activities taking place out of normal school hours. More than one pupil in ten learns to play an instrument, and over forty were successful in the recent Trinity College examinations. The cost of instrumental lessons is met in part by a subsidy from the school.

187. Pupils are positive and enthusiastic about music. They arrive to lessons prepared to concentrate, and work hard. They handle equipment responsibly, co-operate well with each other, and try to avoid being inconsiderate in the noise-congested circumstances of most lessons. Their relationships with each other and with teachers are courteous and based on mutual respect.

188. Pupils learn well and make good progress because they are well taught. The quality of teaching in most lessons is good, and during the inspection a number of examples of very good and excellent teaching were seen. Teachers have good levels of expertise, and objectives are generally very clear. A particularly successful feature is the structure of the lesson, which reflects the school's implementation of the national strategy for learning for younger pupils. The well-focused starter activities quickly develop pupils' aural and ensemble skills, and present a high musical challenge. As a result, pupils have an established response to pulse, they develop reliable musical memories, and they learn to maintain an independent line. Effective questioning encourages pupils to be discriminating, and to think as musicians. In less successful lessons, there is insufficient use of questioning to ensure pupils participate fully, and too much time is devoted to unnecessarily detailed explanations and in other lessons, the poor physical conditions prevent activities from being sufficiently varied.

189. The department is very well led, and well managed. Regular observations of teaching within the department identify examples of good practice and areas for improvement. The assessment system, clearly linked to National Curriculum levels of attainment, is systematic, informative and meticulously maintained, and pupils know how to improve their attainment. Accommodation for music is unsatisfactory. Rooms are separated in different parts of the buildings; one temporary classroom has no facilities for the subject, and equipment has to be carried back and forward on a daily basis. The acoustical properties of two rooms prevent pupils from hearing their work properly. In an effort to overcome these difficulties, pupils regularly work in corridors, in the foyer already used to store instruments, or even outside. Most of the spaces designated as practice rooms, used for instrumental teaching, are much too small to accommodate more than one person, but lessons in which there is more than one pupil occur frequently. Resources for music are unsatisfactory. Most classroom instruments are too small to produce a satisfactory tone quality or range of dynamics. The equipment for ICT is obsolete, and this limits the development of their musical skills. Financial constraints prevent the department from improving the quality of resources.

190. Both the department's permanent staff and its team of instrumental teachers give a generous amount of their own time, organising a wide range of extra-curricular activities which provide high quality experience for all who take part. Standards of performances are high, and concerts are well supported by parents and the local community. The annual carol service, which takes place in the local church, attracts an attendance of over five hundred people. Instrumental groups perform to pupils in local primary schools.

191. Since the previous inspection improvement has been good. Both standards and the quality of teaching have improved significantly, and extra-curricular activities continue to enrich pupils' experience. However, the accommodation does not meet the requirements of the subject, and together with the unsatisfactory resources, particularly those for ICT, adversely affects the progress of significant numbers of pupils.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- Teaching and learning are very good.
- Participation rates are very high with pupils eager to develop their skills.
- Teachers' subject knowledge and understanding are very good.
- Teachers establish very good relationships, set high standards and manage pupils well.

Areas for improvement

- Challenge for the most able pupils
- Use of assessment to diagnose areas of weakness
- Development of literacy

192. Teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2002 indicate that standards in physical education are well above average for both boys and girls. This represents very good achievement when compared to their starting point on entry to the school.

193. Results in GCSE physical education are average in terms of A*-C grades, however, all candidates successfully gained grades within the A*-G range, which represents good achievement. Pupils' results in physical education are generally half a grade higher than their results in other GCSE subjects.

194. There is no significant difference between the performance of boys and girls and those with special educational needs are making good progress. The progress of gifted and talented pupils is restricted because they are not set more challenging tasks within lesson time. Pupils take part in a variety of sports and activities. A thriving inter-house activity programme supports further development of pupils' competitive and social skills.

195. Behaviour and attitudes are very good with all pupils keen to improve their own ability. They are very enthusiastic and demonstrate positive levels of interest in the subject. Pupils work well with each other and are highly motivated. They are most respectful to the staff and are very supportive of each other. Commitment and effort are good, thus securing progress in all activities.

196. The quality of teaching and learning is very good throughout the school. The main strengths are the positive and caring management of pupils resulting in teachers establishing very good relationships with all of them. The very good pace of activities in lessons keeps pupils focused on the task set. Opportunities for intellectual, physical and creative work were evident in many lessons seen. In gymnastics pupils enjoy creating their own sequences involving flight, travel and balance and all pupils demonstrate competence in this activity. Teachers regularly seek out ways for pupils to improve their written and spoken English.

197. Pupils in all lessons respond well to the consistently high expectations of behaviour and performance and it is this constant reinforcement of expectation which secures good progress. Teachers have very good knowledge of each activity and establish clearly what pupils will learn, reinforced with good quality demonstrations to illustrate correct techniques. However, assessment is not used to diagnose areas of weakness and to set relevant individual targets to secure further improvement.

198. There are many opportunities for pupil's social and moral development. At all times teachers insist on the rules of fair play and when pupils are asked to work together they do so with good support for their fellow pupils.

199. Management and leadership of the department are very good with some excellent features and improvement since the last inspection is good. Schemes of work give a clear direction to the department and include policies on literacy, numeracy and ICT. The head of department monitors the quality of teaching and learning and makes all members of the department aware of professional development opportunities. Leadership by example and setting high expectations are real strengths.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- GCSE results are steadily improving.
- The subject makes an excellent contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Pupils' literacy skills develop well.
- The subject broadens the horizons of pupils and offers colour and variety.

Areas for improvement

- The achievement of boys
- Different work to suit the way pupils learn in lessons
- Pace of some lessons

200. Pupils begin Year 7 with below average standards. They make good progress through Years 7 and 8 so that by the end of Year 9 they have achieved average standards. Examination results have gradually improved during the last three years. In 2002 the results for grades A*-C were in line with the national average and above the national average for grades A*-G. Girls' results were well above the national average, but boys were well below.

201. Standards of work seen in Year 9 are average. Pupils follow the locally agreed syllabus for Derbyshire schools and make good progress in learning about religion and learning from religion. They understand and make simple comparisons of the world religions studied in a number of areas, for example, the attitude of different world faiths to the environment. They use specialist vocabulary accurately. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 who have opted for the full GCSE course make good progress, especially in their study of Judaism. Some are producing work at grades A and B relatively early in Year 10 and the standard of work overall is above average. Those who have not chosen to follow a GCSE course study a number of units in religious education within the personal and social education programme which is very successful.

202. The achievement of pupils in Years 7 to 9 is good. All pupils acquire some knowledge and understanding of the religions they have studied, higher achieving pupils also develop evaluation skills. Pupils learn from religion in a number of ways and write with feeling about places and people who are special to them. There is some especially good work done in Year 9 on multi-cultural Britain. Achievement is less good for some pupils, particularly boys, because their work is very brief, untidy and lacking in effort. The achievement of pupils in Years 10 and 11 is good. They develop thinking skills and recognise the important elements in more advanced concepts such as salvation and redemption. Their course work is well-prepared and written in detail. Lower achieving pupils and those with special educational needs also make good progress.

203. Teaching and learning are good overall. Most of the lessons seen during the inspection were at least satisfactory, often good or better. Where teaching is good, a variety of teaching approaches is used, the pace is challenging and pupils are actively engaged in their learning. This was the case in a fast-moving Year 9 lesson about baptism where pupils engaged in lateral thinking and quickly understood the key concepts. The department has a good range of religious artefacts and videos which help pupils to recognise and understand unfamiliar concepts. Work is planned carefully so that pupils know exactly what they must do to achieve the best grades. Class work and homework are marked carefully. The subject makes a very significant contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. They are taught to respect the views and beliefs of other people and to develop their own values. Where teaching is less effective, and on occasion unsatisfactory, objectives are unclear, and work is not well matched to pupils needs, for example, when more able pupils finish tasks early and no extension work is provided for them. Some

lessons progress too slowly. The basic skill of literacy is taught well. Pupils use a range of writing styles, including diaries, biographical accounts and analyses of Biblical narratives. At present there is only limited scope for the use of ICT because of problems of access to the computer rooms. Despite limitations there is evidence of some good Internet research, especially in Years 10 and 11. The occasional lapse in behaviour of pupils is well managed.

204. Leadership and management are good. There is a clear sense of educational direction. The staff continually aim to improve examination results and to inspire and enthuse their students. There has been good progress since the last inspection.

VOCATIONAL COURSES

205. Economics was also sampled in Years 10 and 11. Overall, the provision of economics is very good. Examination results are above average. Teaching and learning are very good. The subject is well organised and well managed. Teachers share good ideas and practice. Lessons are planned carefully. Individual help and guidance are given freely and efficiently. This is a significant factor in aiding student progress. Students are given clear instruction on how to improve on their current attainment. There is good use of ICT to support learning

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

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

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2002. There are no national comparisons available.

GCE AS Level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
MATHEMATICS	15	88	*	33	*	2.6	*
PHYSICS	19	79	*	32	*	2.3	*
BIOLOGY	22	73	*	9	*	1.6	*
CHEMISTRY	10	70	*	10	*	1.5	*
DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY	8	100	*	50	*	3.4	*
FOOD TECHNOLOGY	9	100	*	0	*	2.4	*
BUSINESS STUDIES AVCE	5	100	*	20	*	3	*
ECONOMICS	5	100	*	60	*	3.6	*
COMPUTING STUDIES	10	70	*	20	*	1.7	*
INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY AVCE	5	80	*	20	*	2	*
SPORT STUDIES	11	82	*	0	*	1.6	*
ART AND DESIGN	12	100	*	33	*	3.2	*
DRAMA AND THEATRE STUDIES	2	100	*	0	*	3	*
GEOGRAPHY	27	100	*	22	*	2.6	*
HISTORY	26	81	*	27	*	2.2	*
RELIGIOUS STUDIES	10	80	*	20	*	2.3	*
PSYCHOLOGY	47	79	*	15	*	1.8	*
ENGLISH LANGUAGE	11	100	*	27	*	2.9	*
ENGLISH LITERATURE	10	100	*	50	*	3.5	*
FRENCH	2	100	*	0	*	2	*
GERMAN	6	50	*	0	*	1.2	*

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	10	80	*	50	*	5.4	*
BIOLOGY	19	90	*	11	*	3.9	*
CHEMISTRY	6	83	*	33	*	4	*
PHYSICS	9	78	*	33	*	4.2	*

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY	6	83	*	0	*	3.3	*
BUSINESS STUDIES AVCE	6	100	*	67	*	7.3	*
ECONOMICS	6	100	*	33	*	6.7	*
COMPUTING	8	100	*	25	*	5	*
SPORT STUDIES	6	100	*	17	*	5.6	*
ART AND DESIGN	4	100	*	50	*	6	*
DRAMA AND THEATRE STUDIES	8	100	*	13	*	5.8	*
GEOGRAPHY	9	100	*	68	*	7.7	*
HISTORY	14	100	*	29	*	5.4	*
PSYCHOLOGY	24	92	*	42	*	5.6	*
ENGLISH LANGUAGE	11	73	*	18	*	4.5	*
ENGLISH LITERATURE	1	100	*	0	*	6	*
GERMAN	2	100	*	50	*	5	*
GENERAL STUDIES	51	77	*	24	*	4.4	*

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

206. The focus was on mathematics and biology, but chemistry and physics were also sampled. In chemistry, examination results in 2001 were below average and were similar in 2002. In physics, examination results were in line with national averages in 2001, but declined in 2002. One Year 12 lesson in each subject was observed. In a physics lesson designed to enhance practical skills in preparation for a forthcoming practical assessment, teaching and learning were found to be good. Students showed very good attitudes and attainment was above average. In a chemistry lesson on the extraction and recycling of metals students worked in pairs to prepare a presentation. Teaching and learning here were very good, attainment was above average and attitudes and behaviour were excellent.

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- A-level results are above average.
- Teaching is good and teachers know their subject well.
- Students' confidence and independence are good.
- Relationships are good.

Areas for improvement

- ICT provision to improve learning

207. The results of AS examinations at the end of Year 12 for 2001 were below average but improved in 2002. Those for A-level in Year 13 in 2001 were above the national average, but declined slightly in 2002. A-level results have been consistently above average in recent years. More male than female students take mathematics in the sixth form but, when females do take the subject, their attainment is in line with that of male students. Standards of work seen during the inspection are consistent with the examination results. They are above course expectations in Year 13. Achievement is good in Years 12 and 13, with students making good progress from average attainment on entry. Retention rates in Year 13 are very good.

208. The standards of work of current students are above average. In Year 13, students are achieving well in relation to predictions based on their GCSE results. In a lesson revising pure mathematics in preparation for the forthcoming examination, students used their understanding built up over the course to successfully analyse a variety of challenging questions.

209. Standards of work in Year 12 are average, despite the students having relatively modest prior achievements at GCSE. A group of students were making good progress analysing some complex force diagrams in a mechanics lesson, which is well beyond anything which they would have experienced in Year 11.

210. Teaching is good because it allows students to develop their understanding of complex topics at a good pace and with accuracy. Teachers' planning is good, but they do not use ICT enough to enhance and speed learning because there are insufficient ICT resources. A good pace is maintained in lessons and the curriculum is covered well. Marking is mostly good, with the best marking including useful comments to help students improve their performance in the future. Relationships with students are a strength of the department, because they result in the creation of a positive learning atmosphere in which students can progress. Occasional opportunities are missed to develop and link various aspects of the course, for example the algebraic solution of a forces diagram to its geometry and again developing the point that substitution is a method of simultaneous equation solution.

211. Learning is good and students show an intelligent interest in all aspects of their studies, with the result that they make good progress when tackling new topics. A group of Year 12 students made good progress with a new aspect of binomial and geometric distributions. Teachers use the friendly and relaxed atmosphere evident in mathematics lessons to develop students' individuality, confidence and independence. Students need no encouragement to discuss their work, either with their teachers or with each other. This was seen when a group of Year 13 students were observed honing their examination techniques through individual analysis, paired discussion and through individualised guidance from their teacher. Presentation of written work is good and attitudes to homework are also good.

212. Teaching of key skills is good, with clear communication using technically accurate language encouraged and high levels of application of number proficiencies seen. Standards have improved since the last inspection, although results in 2002 were similar to those seen at the previous inspection.

Biology

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

Strengths

- Teachers have very good subject knowledge.
- Assessment, monitoring and target setting are very good.
- There are good relationships between staff and students.

Areas for improvement

- Use of ICT in lessons
- Books and equipment for all aspects of the course
- Equipment for the health and fitness module

213. The GCE A-level results in 2001 were average overall and the number of students achieving a pass was slightly above average. In 2002 there was a decline in these results. The AS results for 2001 were average but there was also a decline in these results in 2002. Retention rates are good in biology.

214. Standards of work seen during the inspection are average and reflect the examination results. In relation to their standards at the start of the sixth form the achievement of students is satisfactory.

215. Students in Year 13 make good progress in lessons and rise to challenging questions. They answer questions relating to gene technology and appreciate some of the ethical issues surrounding it. They understand the control of insect pests through biological and chemical methods and debate the advantages and disadvantages of both methods. Students in Year 12 have a good knowledge of the digestive system and can explain the functions of various digestive organs. They understand the importance of biological molecules to living organisms and can draw their molecular structures. They are successfully building on work covered at GCSE level.

216. Teaching is good overall, and during the inspection week some very good teaching was seen, enabling students to learn well. Teachers have very good subject knowledge so that they give clear explanations of facts. Lessons are well planned, have a brisk pace and include a variety of teaching and learning styles which maintain students' interest. Reviews at the end of each lesson help to consolidate learning. Students are encouraged to share ideas and help each other, helped by the small group sizes, particularly in Year 13. Teachers' expectations are high and they question students frequently during lessons to establish and reinforce knowledge and understanding. There are pleasant working relationships between teachers and students during lessons so that students feel able to ask questions if they need to. There is little use of ICT in lessons, but this is due to problems with gaining access to computers and one that the department hopes to put right. Analysis of examination results has shown that students do not perform equally well across all parts of the examination, and the department is working hard at improving all skills. An annual residential field-course for all students helps to reinforce the theory of ecology. Every module of work contains an element which the students have to research for themselves and this helps to foster their independent learning skills. The school purchases biological and general scientific journals to encourage students to read around the subject. Marking is thorough and appropriately annotated, giving clear guidance to students on areas for improvement. Assessment is very good. Regular testing and individual progress cards inform them of their progress. Homework is set and marked on a regular basis and is used to reinforce work covered in lessons, often comprising past examination questions.

217. Students learn well and make good progress in lessons because of the good teaching and also because they are mature and highly motivated. 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 co-operatively together in both theory and practical lessons and help each other and share ideas in a mature and sensible way.

218. The department is well led and managed and teaching is regularly monitored. The head of department has a clear focus on direction and is committed to improving examination results. Accommodation is scattered and one of the teaching rooms is not equipped. There are no textbooks for two of the modules of work and there is no equipment for the Health and Fitness module, all of which are necessary to aid learning. Some of the larger pieces of apparatus, such as the microscopes, are in need of repair. Since the last inspection standards have been maintained and progress is good.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

219. In this curriculum area the school offers courses in design and technology and food technology. In design technology the results in 2001 were well above average but last year they declined significantly. In the lesson seen teaching was very good and enabled the students to learn most effectively about the design of a closed circuit camera. It was not possible to observe food technology but in 2002 all nine candidates passed the AS examination.

BUSINESS

220. The focus of the inspection was business studies. As a part of the provision in the sixth form, economics was sampled. Overall, the provision of economics is very good. Examination results are above average. Teaching and learning are very good. The subject is well organised and well managed. Teachers share good ideas and practice. Lessons are planned carefully. Individual help and guidance are given freely and efficiently. This is a significant factor in aiding student progress. Students are given clear instruction on how to improve on their current attainment. There is good use of ICT to support learning.

Business Studies

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

Strengths

- Students achieve well.
- Students are industrious and have positive attitudes to learning
- There is clarity of vision in the planning of lessons and schemes of work.
- Teaching, subject knowledge and marking are used well to extend students.
- ICT presentational skills are good.
- Individual consultation with tutors offers advice, assistance and guidance to students.

Areas for improvement

- Independent learning, particularly outside lessons
- Literacy
- Accommodation
- ICT resources to provide internet links in the classroom

221. Examination results in 2001 at the end of the AVC course are above average. They improved in 2002. Students make significant progress and surpass their previous attainments. There is no significant difference in most years in the performance of male/female students. Retention rates are good.

222. Standards in Year 13 are above average. These standards are achieved because the teaching is good. Students' achievements, in relation to standards on entry to the sixth form, are good. The clear assessment strategies and the positive attitudes of students also cause the quality of students' learning to be good. Students have good knowledge of business in relation to current theory and business practice and considerable awareness about modern economic growth. The majority of students make full use of the electronic media to gather relevant and up-to-date information on economic activity. The higher attaining students appreciate economic writing in the quality newspapers and frequently quote them as sources. They use the business reports of the BBC and appropriate journals to support their own research. Good writing, discussion and argument occur in class. However, even in the best writing there are problems with spelling and the accurate use of grammar. Students are given a clear perception of the importance sound finance has in business trading. Examples quoted covered the recent high profile business failures in America and Europe, providing students with an international perspective. Students undertake research individually and in groups. Coursework assignments encourage key skills development especially ICT skills.

223. Standards in Year 12 are above average and students are making good progress. They respond to the dynamic nature of the subject and separate and compare conflicting perspectives on the economic performance of the UK economy over a period of time. They maintain good notes and show good study skills in selecting and synthesising information, for example on marketing or production processes. Those of middle or lower attainment are less secure in their grasp of what their studies require in terms of research. They are, however, able to contribute well when dealing with oral reports. Teachers check files to ensure students are consolidating their learning.

224. The quality of teaching is good in ensuring that all students are challenged and supported effectively and that they are fully involved in the lessons, including both high attainers and those with special learning needs. Students are made to think analytically and show the product of their thoughts. All students receive oral and written feedback targeted at improving their writing. Students are expected to be engaged in their own learning and to contribute to arguments in class, although their independent research does not match their class work. Group work is well structured and it is generally productive. Pace and momentum are maintained through a variety of tasks. Teachers offer students a good level of support especially through the marking of students' work. As a result of this effective teaching and the positive attitudes of most students plus their hard work, learning is good. However, the quality of rooms used to provide business education is inadequate and represents an obstacle for teachers to overcome.

225. Leadership and management are good. The teacher in charge of business education monitors all the work associated with the subject. A variety of strategies are used to assess the quality of learning which include classroom observations. Planning is good and effective. High expectations are communicated to students. Routines are established which support the development of business and vocational education. There has been good improvement since the last inspection.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

226. In this group of subjects the school provides courses in computing, ICT and key skills. In 2001 the results in computing were well above average and similar results were obtained last year. In the Year 12 lesson sampled teaching was satisfactory. Standards are below average but given their attainment on entry to the sixth form, achievement is satisfactory. In ICT there have been no A-level results to date but those at AS level improved last year. In the lesson seen achievement was good in response to good teaching and the very good attitudes that students bring to their work. Standards are average. In key skills standards are average and teaching satisfactory. The poor results last year were due to an administrative error that led to incompatibility between examination software and that of the school.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

In this curriculum area the school offers advanced level sport studies and it was inspected in depth.

Sport Studies

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

Strengths

- Students achieve very well.
- Students are very well motivated and willing to learn.
- Teaching is very good.
- The subject is very well led.

Areas for improvement

- Support for the weaknesses in students' literacy
- Access and opportunity for practical experience
- Formal progress tests to monitor learning

227. A-level examination results in 2001 were average but showed an improvement on those achieved at the time of the last inspection. Results in 2002 showed further improvement and were the second best set of results achieved in the ten years since the course was introduced. In 2001 all students gained a pass with almost half of them achieving grades A to C. In the 2002 unconfirmed results 83 per cent of students achieved

grades A to C. The school allows students who have not taken a GCSE in the subject to follow the course. Retention rates are good with most students completing the course.

228. The standard of work seen in lessons and in scrutiny of students' files and coursework is well above average. In both Years 12 and 13 students compile accurate notes and extract relevant information from a range of resources including the use of electronic based resources. Coursework is a particularly strong feature, with students applying knowledge well with creditable attention to detail in both the depth and accuracy of analysing strengths and weaknesses of performances in a range of sports.

229. The achievement of students during the sixth form is very good. For many, the result in this subject is one of their best A-level results and most of the students perform beyond expectation. A significant number perform above predictions based on their GCSE grades. There is no significant difference between the performance of male and female students.

230. Teaching is very good with some of the highest quality. Characteristics of the teaching include a very good tutorial style and questioning that encourages all students to participate actively and at a brisk pace. The teacher has excellent subject knowledge and infectious enthusiasm. Tasks are matched closely to the needs of individual students. These qualities, together with students' overwhelmingly positive attitudes, mean that all students learn well and make very good progress. Some students find it difficult to complete the extended writing tasks to the highest levels due to limited literacy skills, and perseverance on the part of both the teacher and the students are required to overcome this. Students do not fully explore the context of their studies to develop their knowledge of different cultures and societies. The teacher's excellent guidance and the imaginative use of a range of classroom practical resources underpin the theoretical concepts covered, making up for the limited access to indoor facilities for practical activity. However, this is an aspect of the provision which needs improving.

231. The leadership and management of the course are very good. The progress since the last inspection is good. Thorough planning and preparation provide a very good learning experience where students achieve or exceed their potential in this subject.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

The school does not offer any course in this subject area.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

232. Art and design and music were the focus subjects in this group of subjects. It was not possible to sample a lesson in drama and theatre studies but in 2002 all candidates were successful at A-level and at AS level the results were above average in 2001 and similar last year.

Art and Design

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

Strengths

- Standards have risen since the last inspection.
- Teaching is good.
- The relationships between the teachers and students are very good.

Areas for improvement

- Independent research which students undertake on their own initiative
- The level and provision of resources for independent study
- Length of lessons which are too short
- Opportunities for students to be involved in activities, which would enrich the curriculum

233. The number of pupils entered for GCE A-level in 2001 and 2002 has been too small for a reliable statistical comparison to be made with national standards. Results have risen since the last inspection and for the past two years the students' point score in art and design has been higher than the school average. In relation to their GCSE results most students did as well as expected. In 2002 all four students passed and two gained the higher grades. A larger number of students took the AS level examination in 2002 and results were slightly above average and similar to 2001 but more students gained the higher grades. Achievement was satisfactory overall but male students did better than females. Retention to courses is good; most students successfully complete them.

234. The standard of work of current Year 13 students is average overall. The range of ability is wide with a number of students working at a high level. There have been sound gains in their independent decision making skills and in their knowledge of art and design since they sat their AS level examination. In the lessons seen students were achieving well as a result of the effective teaching which demands much of them. Much of the work is conceptually adventurous and often of a large scale. Students work with a high degree of individuality and many show in-depth analysis and exploration of ideas and styles, for instance in researching the work of Franz Marc and using the angular geometric style of dynamism to represent the concept of war. Contextual studies of areas such as the influence of cultures and traditions on artists, demonstrate a sound investigation of images and texts, as in the exploration of how Renaissance artists had portrayed traditional religious stories, compared with how modern day counterparts could be used to challenge preconceptions. Portfolios are well kept and show a good level of pride.

235. In Year 12, most students successfully move on from their GCSE work into new areas and soundly build on the challenge of individual study and interpretation. Work demonstrates a growing ability to interpret and convey ideas. For example, a student studying the work of Joseph Cornell used his philosophy of a container acting as a metaphor for the whole world and produced an interesting three dimensional house with the contents expressing her own personal response. Written ideas, analysis and evaluation are used creatively to complement practical research by higher attainers but this practice is less evident across all abilities.

236. Teaching is good and students learn well as a result. Teachers have a very good command of their subject and the specialisms they teach. A major strength of the sixth form is the emphasis given to independent thought and learning. The high quality of individual attention and knowledgeable advice plays an important role in raising standards. Students are treated as individual artists and well supported by staff when working on their own projects. In lessons the quality of dialogue on the analysis and evaluation of work is good and students are given clear reference on what routes can be used to improve standards of work. This would further support learning, particularly for middle and lower attaining, if pertinent parts were recorded. The teachers effectively develop the students' capacity for taking and making constructive criticism and analysis. Good assessment systems are in place with an

emphasis on self-evaluation. Teachers are always well prepared with examples to support critical analysis of artists and give direction on techniques however the departments' resources for the pupils' independent learning are poor.

237. Relationships between teachers and students are very good. Students have a positive attitude to their work, enjoy art and respond well to the supportive teaching and different learning styles that they experience. Most confidently pursue lines of development in long term project work but their skills of independent research undertaken on their own initiative are less evident. Only a few students had extended projects by visiting art galleries or places of interest in their own time. The teachers' enthusiasm for the subject encourages students to be receptive to new ideas and fresh viewpoints and most students display a willingness to consider views and beliefs other than their own. Students support and help each other effectively, they talk and listen to each others' ideas and confidently contribute to discussion. Although some students are using ICT well to develop and research projects, the lack of resources for it within the department restricts its use.

238. In the past students have worked with artists in residence but presently there is little enrichment of the AS and A-level course. Because lesson time is short and double lessons are not timetabled, activities of this kind are restricted. Valuable time is wasted on setting out and putting away work and equipment and students have no opportunity for long periods of concentration. The students have no room of their own and because of the demands on the art room it is very difficult to pursue work in private study time. These factors are impacting on continuity and the progression students make over the whole course. The good level of learning in lessons is not being effectively sustained and supported. The subject is becoming increasingly popular and the number of students studying it has risen significantly in the last two years.

Music

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

Strengths

- Teaching is good.
- Students achieve well.
- Procedures for assessing students' progress and for their educational support and guidance are very good.
- The range and quality of enrichment activities in music is good.

Areas for improvement

- Students' aural skills
- Students' pursuit of independent enquiry and research in greater depth
- Resources for ICT in music which adversely affect students' attainment

239. Only two students studied the course at A-level in 2001, and none in 2002. In previous years results have been close to average, but numbers entered are too low to be of statistical significance. Very few male students have taken the course in past years. There was no AS course in 2001, but results of those students entered in 2002 were in line with their overall abilities in music.

240. During the inspection standards seen were broadly average, reflecting students' individual musical abilities. Students' achievement is good. Standards of performing are high, often at a level well beyond the requirements of the examination. All students play more than one instrument. Their performances are authoritative and are interpreted with a good sense of style. Students compose attractive, extended pieces which indicate a satisfactory understanding of composing techniques. However, their work sometimes lacks coherence, and few explore sophisticated ideas. Because of the unsatisfactory provision of equipment

for music technology in the department, students are not able to consolidate harmonic understanding, or explore innovative ideas, their understanding of natural harmonic progressions is not well developed and their aural skills are weak. Written work is undertaken conscientiously but without evidence of sufficient in-depth research. Students do not use a sufficiently analytical approach in situations requiring aural perception, or use prior knowledge and understanding to identify structures common to music of apparently different genres. Although they had, for instance, explored the techniques underpinning the dramatic devices employed by eminent composers of film music, they did not readily recognise similarities in techniques used by the composer in an extract from Durufle's Requiem. Their development of independent learning and enquiry is hindered by a lack of suitable practice spaces, and spaces for private study.

241. Students learn well because of good teaching. The head of department has been involved in the school's initiative for developing teaching and learning styles, and much teaching in the sixth form is adapted to students' different learning styles. The system of assessment is meticulous. Because the progress of individual students in music throughout their school career has been monitored and recorded, the capabilities of each is well known, and each student is given a predicted grade based on the analysis of this accumulation of information. Their written work is well marked, with useful annotations. In one particularly effective lesson, after completing a practice question, students were provided with examination criteria against which they could assess and discuss their attempts in order to improve their technique and maximise their marks. The department's provision for gifted and talented students is very good. Because teachers have high levels of musical accomplishment, students are very well supported in their practical work; teachers give a great deal of their own time, both on school premises and at home, to rehearse and prepare students for practical examinations. All students are well prepared for their interviews and auditions for entrance to university or college of music, and are made fully aware of the wide range of opportunities available to them to broaden their experience and develop their technique.

242. The department is well led and well managed. The head of department has evolved a collegiate approach which involves not only full-time staff but also all in the team of ten instrumental teachers who visit the school. There is an extensive programme of rehearsals and concerts which significantly enrich students' experience. Apart from one recently refurbished room, the accommodation is unsatisfactory. Practice spaces are too small, and there are no alternative spaces available for individual practice or private study. Because of financial constraints, the provision for music technology is unsatisfactory.

243. Students are well motivated, and committed to high levels of music-making. They appreciate the support, encouragement and expertise readily offered by members of the music department. All play in the various instrumental groups which rehearse regularly, and are involved in a variety of ensembles run by the local authority, and in brass bands, choirs and youth jazz orchestras in the region. However, they have not taken the opportunity to widen their musical experience by attending professional concerts regularly.

244. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory. In the face of unsatisfactory accommodation and resources of poor quality, teachers and students work very hard to overcome the resultant difficulties, and have a shared determination to succeed.

HUMANITIES

245. The focus was on geography and psychology, but history and religious studies were sampled. In history, results in 2001 were average and they were similar in 2002. In 2002, all of the students passed both AS and A2 examinations, with some students gaining the highest grades. In the lesson sampled, very good teaching and cooperative student attitudes resulted in very good learning. Religious education attracts increasing numbers of students and the results in 2002 were the best for 3 years, although still just below the national average. In the lessons sampled, teaching and learning were good because there was a

balance between research and discussion which helped students to clarify their ideas and develop self-confidence.

Geography

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

Strengths

- Results are well above the national average.
- Fieldwork and case studies are used very well.
- Teaching is very good.
- Leadership and management of the department are very good.

Areas for improvement

- Students' involvement in discussions
- The use of ICT

246. In 2001 A-level results were well above the national average, and they improved further in 2002. Increasing numbers of students have attained the higher grades in the last three years and in 2002 two-thirds gained A or B grades. AS level results were above the national average in 2001 and declined slightly in 2002. Retention rates are good, and most students complete the courses that they start.

247. Standards of work seen are also well above average. In Year 13, good knowledge of case studies enables students to use selected examples to support points. In one lesson, students showed they understood the complex nature of multicultural societies very well. Coursework studies are very good, using diagrammatic presentation and data analysis well to allow points to be made very clearly. In Year 12, students show a very good understanding of issues and to link theories and case studies well. As a result of very good focused teaching, students achieve very well. They are aware of the importance of examination technique, and have already begun to structure practice questions and short essays well.

248. Overall, teaching is very good. Very good knowledge of specifications is used to inform students and make them partners in their learning, which encourages them to make very good progress. Teachers challenge stereotypes, as seen in a lesson in which accepted ideas of the relationships between Turkish immigrants and German society were overturned with very good use of a recent news article. Less confident students are well supported by paired activities, teacher prompts and sensitive intervention to correct misconceptions. An extensive fieldwork programme is used to enhance understanding of the links between processes and features and to prepare students for independent coursework. Where ICT is used, it is well planned, allowing complex data analysis which encourages students to identify and explain patterns. However, recent ICT use has been uneven due to limited access, so students have not had this benefit often enough.

249. Students learn very well. They discuss tasks and respond positively to each others' ideas. They use lesson time well to complete tasks with care. They make good use of available resources and extend work done in lessons with extensive homework and some background reading. Despite their confidence, some do not participate fully in open discussions and would benefit from being drawn in so they can develop their ideas.

250. Leadership and management of the subject are very good. Performance and methods are reviewed regularly and this information leads to curriculum change. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good. The department has built further on identified strengths so that both the quality of teaching and standards have improved.

Psychology

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

Strengths

- Standards are above average.
- Teaching is good.
- The internet is used well for research.
- Learning and study skills are good and students display a high level of independence.

Areas for improvement

- Access to a wider range of resources
- Completion of homework assignments using ICT
- Accommodation

251. Examination results, overall, in 2001, were above average in Year 12 and average in Year 13. Male and female students perform equally well over the whole grade range but female students earn the higher grades. Results reflect value added. High expectations are communicated to all students and as a result some students perform above the level predicted for them. Results at A-level in 2002 improved. Retention rates are good.

252. Standards in Year 13 are above average. Students have a good awareness of psychology theory and practice in their everyday life. They recognise that different people are involved in research transactions and are familiar with the key assumptions of social psychology as it develops their ability to seek and verify evidence. Most students use good research material to advance their learning. Students demonstrate good knowledge and an awareness of the ethical issues attached to experimental psychology. Students, in the main, build on and extend their previous knowledge and several pieces of work provided an opportunity to develop their understanding of both short and long term memory. Students successfully undertake research using the Internet. There are clear expectations for higher attaining students and extended tasks are provided. Students are gaining confidence in their use of specialist and scientific language. The teacher insists on clear and effective communication in the writing of reports. These exercises test students' grasp of the use of standard English.

253. Standards in Year 12 are above average. Students demonstrate knowledge and understanding of human behaviour in relation to current psychology theory and practice. The majority, but particularly female students, use relevant terminology, concepts and computing methods well to select up-to-date information, using the computer to analyse data using a database, presenting results in graph or chart form. The above average students know the advantages and disadvantages of the separation of positive and negative attitudes in psychology studies. Students are gaining an understanding of the moral, ethical, social and cultural issues that govern and influence research activities as for example the use of drugs in stress management. The average attainers are less confident about their writing and resort to more descriptive writing. The more able students produce the scientific style and well structured reports that are demanded for high marks. There is, in most work, an adequate expression of ideas but often an inadequate level of grammar is displayed. For the lower attainers the specialist vocabulary of psychology causes problems.

254. The quality of teaching and learning are good. Expectations of the level of work and students' commitment to psychology are high. There is good productive working atmosphere surrounding psychology. Relationships between the teacher and students are good. The teacher has a good knowledge of the science related to psychology, uses up-to-date research and the specialist terms to enhance learning. The teacher explains lesson objectives to students and sets targets for learning. Lessons are well structured. A Year 13 class examining Freudian ideas and their terminology was a model of clarity. A variety of class activities is used at a pace to hold interest and momentum is maintained. The teacher

communicates an interest in psychology and enthusiasm for research. The lower attainers receive the extra support they need.

255. Leadership and management are good. The teacher is aware of the targets set for students to achieve and takes account of them in his teaching. The subject is well administered and resources well used to advance knowledge. There has been progress over time in the development of the subject.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

256. The focus was on English language. English literature was also sampled. One Year 12 and one Year 13 lesson were observed. Standards in A2 examinations were average in 2000 and well below average in 2001. Last year's results and the standards of work seen during the inspection are similar to those in 2000. Teaching is good overall and students make good progress. In an otherwise good Year 13 lesson, students showed a good understanding of Blake's poetic techniques and received useful advice on how to link his writing to its historical context: however, when discussing his references to death in *Poems of Innocence and Experience*, they did not look beyond physical and literal death.

English Language

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

Strengths

- Standards of work seen are above average.
- Teaching and learning are good.
- Teachers' marking is very good.

Areas for development

- Students' independent learning

257. Standards attained at A-level in 2001 were above average. Results dipped in 2002 but were higher than in 2000 when they were well below average. Results in the AS examinations in 2002 were higher than in 2001 when they were average. Almost all students complete the courses and achieve a pass grade.

258. The standards of work seen during the inspection are above average. Most students in Year 13 show a good understanding of linguistic concepts and terminology and can refer confidently to the theories and work of practitioners such as Chomski and Piaget. Their individual investigations into a wide range of subjects, from how geography texts books are written and presented to the reporting of soccer matches in tabloid newspapers, are thorough and, at times, very perceptive. Students are well aware of the importance of reading texts carefully to determine their purpose and the writer's intended audience before beginning their analyses, and most have good research skills; although the less able do not always sufficiently evaluate information gained from the internet before using it. In both years, students make good use of linguistic frameworks to analyse a very wide range of texts. They express their interpretations fluently and use textual references and quotations well to support their interpretations. Both editorial and original writing are above average because students have a good vocabulary, are familiar with a wide range of writing and genuinely enjoy being creative. The quality of paired and group discussion in lessons is high because students are encouraged to explain and justify their arguments and to challenge each other: however, few are not yet confident enough to challenge their teachers. They are eager to learn, but do not ask enough questions: for example, two students in a Year 12 lesson realised that there were two valid interpretations of a notice they were analysing: however, they did not tell their teacher, and thus a valuable opportunity to consider the duality of texts was missed.

259. Teaching and learning are good overall with very good features. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and examination experience; therefore students receive good advice

on how to prepare for their written examinations and how to organise their pre-release materials. Because teachers plan each unit of work well, students acquire a methodical and disciplined approach to analysis. So, for example, in their commentaries on their own work, students carefully evaluate their writing, explain what they want to achieve and why they have chosen particular presentational and linguistic techniques. In a very good Year 12 lesson, the teacher ensured that the students were fully familiar with the assessment objectives, through careful questioning, before they examined their texts: hence responses were lively and full. Students were able to identify and illustrate how a writer's language determines our interpretation of tone and purpose because they knew what the examiner will be looking for in their answers. A great strength of teaching is the very high quality of all teachers' marking. Comments are positive and always suggest what students can do to improve their work further. Students' learning is also helped considerably by their very good relationships with each other and their teachers, as well as their enthusiasm for the subject, especially in Year 13 where they show much more confidence. However, in both years, there is sometimes too much reliance on the teacher to select, provide and suggest resources and tasks. Additionally, there is insufficient use of the internet to develop students' independent learning, but access to computers during school time is difficult.

260. The management of the department is very good. The four teachers work well together: they constantly review their teaching methods, plan, develop and share resources and set challenging targets for themselves and their students. Improvement since the previous inspection is good.