

INSPECTION REPORT

TAPTON SCHOOL

Sheffield

LEA area: Sheffield

Unique reference number: 107131

Headteacher: Mr D. Bowes

Reporting inspector: Mrs J. Tracey
20270

Dates of inspection: 11th -15th November, 2002

Inspection number: 249690

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11-18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Darwin Lane Sheffield
Postcode:	S10 5RG
Telephone number:	0114 267 1414
Fax number:	0114 294 1155
Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs C. Bagley
Date of previous inspection:	28 April - 2 May 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities (sixth form)	Aspect responsibilities (sixth form)
20270	June Tracey	Registered inspector		What sort of school is it? How well are the students taught? How well is the school led and managed?
13762	Norman Shelley	Lay inspector		Students' attitudes, values and personal development How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
23926	Douglas Howorth	Sixth form inspection co-ordinator		The school's results and achievements How well does the school care for its students? How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to students?
11966	John Clay	Team inspector	Design and technology Information and communication technology	
27803	Joseph Clark	Team inspector		
28178	John Connor	Team inspector	French	
2644	Mel MacLeod	Team inspector	Physics	
11975	Thelma McIntosh-Clark	Team inspector	Music Theatre studies	
18676	Roy Meakin	Team inspector	Mathematics	
19452	Antony Pearson	Team inspector	History	
15678	Jennifer Radford	Team inspector	English	
31680	Philip Redican	Team inspector	Art and design	
5851	Miles Robottom	Team inspector	Business studies	
8329	Gillian Salter-Smith	Team inspector	Sport and physical education	
22985	Jacqueline Sparkes	Team inspector	Biology	
13623	James Waddington	Team inspector	Psychology	

32147	Ann Wallis	Team inspector	Geography	
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The inspection contractor was:

North West Education Services

Cheshire House
164, Main Road
Goostrey
Cheshire
CW4 8JP

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Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Tapton School is a very large, mixed comprehensive school with 1566 pupils on roll, including 426 in the sixth form. The school is popular and regularly over-subscribed. It draws most of its pupils from the western suburbs of Sheffield although some come from other parts of the city. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals (8.5%) is below average. The majority of pupils are white British but a significant proportion come from Asian and African backgrounds. The proportion with English as an additional language is higher than in many schools; however, they are seldom at the early stage of learning English. There is a designated unit, separately funded by the local education authority, for pupils with visual impairment. These pupils come from all parts of Sheffield. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is below average. The school provides for children with a wide range of disabilities including physical and learning difficulties, emotional and behavioural difficulties, speech and visual impairment. The proportion of pupils with formal statements of need is average. Attainment on entry to Year 7 and the sixth form is above average. The school is a Beacon School. It shares and promotes good practice in literacy, the performing arts, post-16 education, teaching and the training of student teachers with other schools.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Tapton is a highly successful school with a number of excellent features. It is very well led and managed. Teaching is very good throughout the school, resulting in well above average standards in all year groups. Overall, pupils and sixth form students achieve very well. The school provides very good value for money.

What the school does well

- Results in National Curriculum tests, GCSE and Advanced level examinations are consistently well above national averages.
- The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Pupils and students respond well to teachers' high expectations.
- The school is very well led and managed.
- The school provides well for the personal development of pupils and sixth form students of all abilities. The statutory curriculum is enriched by a very wide range of additional activities.
- Provision in the sixth form is very good.

What could be improved

- The wide range of teaching and learning styles observed could be shared more within and across subject areas.
- Information from the school's assessment procedures could be used more consistently to inform pupils about their performance.
- The use of information and communication technology (ICT) could be more widely integrated into work in other subjects.
- Further opportunities could be provided for pupils to study vocational subjects at GCSE.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made good overall improvement since the previous inspection in 1997. There is more very good teaching. High standards have been maintained and the school has made good progress with most of the issues identified in the last report. The working environment has been improved through the provision of new buildings. Better resources have been provided for ICT and the staff's expertise in using them has improved. The deployment of support staff to assist pupils with special educational needs is much more effective. Procedures for assessing pupils' progress and reporting to parents have improved but could be further developed. The school still does not provide for religious education in the sixth form and a daily act of collective worship.

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
	2000	2001	2002	2002
GCSE examinations	A	A	A	A
A-levels/AS-levels	A	A	*	

Key	
Well above average	A
Above average	B
Average	C
Below average	D
Well below average	E

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

Years 7, 8 and 9

Pupils' results in national tests taken at the end of Year 9 were well above average in English, mathematics and science in 2002. Pupils' average points score was well above average compared to similar schools. Results were in the highest five per cent nationally in English and science when compared with similar schools. Since the previous inspection the school has sustained a high level of attainment and improved results year on year at a faster rate than the national trend. Pupils of all abilities achieve very well in relation to their prior attainment at the start of Year 7. Overall standards of work are well above average across the whole range of subjects. Standards are average in ICT because pupils in the current Year 9 have only benefited from specific teaching in the subject in one of the earlier years.

Years 10 and 11

The proportion of pupils gaining five or more passes at A*-C in GCSE examinations has been consistently well above average in recent years, as has pupils' average points score. Results are also well above average in comparison with those of similar schools. The school consistently meets the challenging targets set by governors. Results have kept pace with the rising national trend. In 2002, a quarter of the GCSE entries were awarded grades A*/A and 98 per cent of pupils gained five or more passes at A*-G. Girls slightly outperform boys, but to no greater extent than they do nationally. Evidence from the inspection shows that standards in the current Year 11 are well above average in English, mathematics and science and that pupils are maintaining their very good achievement. Throughout the school, pupils with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language make similar progress to other pupils. They achieve equally well because of the highly focused support that pays attention to their specific needs.

Sixth form

Advanced level results were consistently well above average in the period 1999-2001. In 2002, results were the best ever, the pass rate being 2 per cent above the national average. In many subjects, notably art, English, chemistry, German, history, mathematics, music, psychology, sociology and sport studies well over the half the candidates achieved A/B grades. The overall standard of work in Year 13 is well above average. Students achieve very well in relation to their prior attainment at GCSE.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Attitudes are very good. Pupils are keen and enthusiastic and take full advantage of the excellent range of experiences that are available.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. The school is an orderly community in which the vast majority of pupils show respect and concern for each other. There are relatively few exclusions.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Relationships are excellent and contribute to pupils' good progress in becoming mature and responsible.
Attendance	Very good.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Teaching and learning are consistently very good throughout the school. The high quality of teaching, combined with pupils' very good attitudes towards their studies, are contributory factors to pupils' and students' very good achievement and performance in national tests and examinations in Years 9, 11 and 13.

Teachers create a secure environment in which pupils are motivated to learn. They have high expectations that are transmitted to the pupils. The strengths in the teaching in Years 7 -11 lie in teachers' very good subject knowledge, meticulous planning and good understanding of how pupils learn. Teachers clearly explain what is expected at the beginning of lessons and offer the right amount of support at the appropriate time to ensure that pupils gain in self-confidence through independent study. Lessons are well planned, based on pupils' prior progress, and incorporate a range of challenging activities that place reasonable demands on pupils of all abilities, including those with special educational needs and the gifted and talented.

The teaching of English, mathematics and science is consistently very good in Years 7 -11. Literacy and numerical skills are taught well and these basic skills effectively support learning in other subjects. Written work is marked well but methods for informing pupils of their progress towards specific targets are inconsistent across the different subjects.

Teaching is very good in the sixth form. It builds on students' experiences in Years 7 - 11 and takes account of their prior knowledge and understanding. Many students experiment for themselves to find the learning styles that best suit their needs.

Throughout the school, there are examples of very good teaching strategies and practice but these are not shared within or across subject departments as much as they could be. There is scope for greater dissemination of the very best practices through more rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning methods.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good. The curriculum is well planned and relevant for most pupils. Not enough vocational courses are provided for older pupils and students. The curriculum is enriched by an excellent range of high quality extra-curricular activities, particularly in music, drama and sport. The personal, social and health education programme is outstanding.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. Teachers and classroom assistants provide very good support but there is a shortage of computers and specialist software.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Very good. Pupils achieve very well and make rapid progress in integrating with other pupils because of the highly focused support they receive from the outset.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good. The school pays excellent attention to developing pupils' and students' awareness of moral and social issues. Very good attention is given to their spiritual and cultural development.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very good. Behaviour and attendance are very well monitored and promoted. Extensive support and guidance enhance pupils' personal development. Procedures for assessing pupils' progress are good but the extent to which they are aware of their targets, and respond to them, varies too much from subject to subject.

Inspectors agree with the school's concern that adequate arrangements have not yet been made, in conjunction with the local education authority and the facilities management company, regarding a suitable fire assembly point for the whole school in the event of an emergency evacuation of the building. The leadership team has made provisional arrangements for the purpose of fire drill.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good. Leadership is purposeful and visionary. The headteacher is effectively supported by the senior management team and other key personnel. There is a good team spirit amongst the staff. Morale is high and underpins the caring ethos of the school.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governors are active and effective in carrying out their responsibilities. They have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. However, they are not meeting statutory requirements for provision of religious education in the sixth form and a daily act of collective worship.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school's analysis of its performance is thorough and self-evaluative. It contributes to action that leads directly to improvement in the work and results of individual pupils.
The strategic use of resources	The school understands and satisfactorily applies the principles of best value in consultative exercises and spending decisions. It makes very good use of its resources. The new buildings are an asset and have dramatically improved the quality of the learning environment.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The good standard of teaching that leads to good progress. • The school helps pupils to become mature and responsible. • The school is well led and managed. • There is a good range of extra-curricular activities. • The school is very approachable. 	<p>A small minority of parents expressed concern about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The variable amount of homework, particularly in Years 8 and 9. • Information about their children's progress. • The closeness with which the school works with parents.

Inspectors agree with parents' positive views. Homework is relevant and supplements very well the work in lessons but in some subjects it is not set regularly according to a specific timetable. As a result, parents and pupils do not know what to expect, or when. This can make it difficult for them to plan for private and extra-curricular activities. The school goes to considerable lengths to work closely with parents and inform them about their children's progress. It is currently considering how it can more effectively take account of parents' views.

ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form is oversubscribed and expanding. It is larger than most with 426 students on roll and has almost equal numbers of males and females. There are 45 students from a wide range of ethnic minority backgrounds who speak and write English well. A few students have specific learning difficulties. There is a very wide range of academic subjects at AS (Advanced Subsidiary) and A2 (Advanced) level. Over two thirds of pupils in Year 11 continue their education in the sixth form. The remainder joins from other schools. Students must have a minimum of five grade Cs at GCSE for entry. Places are offered to pupils from other schools in order of receipt of applications. Standards at the start of Year 12 are above average overall.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The sixth form provides a very good standard of education for all its students. It is very successful and cost-effective. Results have improved steadily and were consistently well above average in the three years up to 2001. In 2002 they were higher and the school's best ever. Current standards are well above average overall. Teaching and learning are very good and consequently students achieve very well. Leadership and management are excellent and ensure that the students receive advice, support and guidance of high quality. In the last eight years 43 students gained admission to Oxford and Cambridge colleges.

Strengths

- Results and standards are well above average in most subjects. In 2001, the results in government and politics, English literature and sport and physical education were in the top five per cent of the country.
- Teaching and learning are very good and students achieve very well.
- Students have very good attitudes and these contribute to their very good progress.
- Leadership and management of the sixth form are excellent.
- Advice, support and guidance are outstanding.
- The range of academic courses is very wide and there is an excellent programme of enrichment.

What could be improved

- The range of learning styles is narrow in some subjects.
- The use of ICT in lessons to support students' learning could be further developed.

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

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

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

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	Very good. Standards are well above average reflecting teachers' high expectations and the very positive attitudes of students. Results have improved.
Biology	Good. Standards are above average and results have improved because teaching is good and students are highly motivated. More use could be made of ICT.

Physics	Very good. Results have improved significantly and standards are well above average. Teaching is very good and enhanced by a wealth of enrichment activities.
Design and technology	Satisfactory. This subject is new to the sixth form curriculum. The first AS results were average and students achieved as expected. Teaching is satisfactory. It could focus more on developing independent approaches to design.
Business studies	Good. Enrichment and business links are excellent. Standards are above average and teaching is good. The range of learning styles could be extended.
Computing	Very good. Results and standards are well above average. Students achieve very well in response to teachers' expert knowledge and very good teaching.
Sport and physical education	Very good. 2001 results were very high. Teaching is very good. Students are highly motivated and they achieve very well.
Art and design	Very good. Results improved significantly in 2002. Achievement is very good because teaching and learning are very good. Students have very positive attitudes.
Music	Excellent. The quality and diversity of enrichment activities are outstanding. Teaching and learning are very good and the results are well above average.
Theatre studies	Very good. The results in 2002 improved very significantly. Students achieve very well in response to very good teaching. Enrichment activities are of very high quality.
Geography	Very good. Results were well above average in 2001. Teaching and learning are very good and the students make very good progress. More use could be made of ICT.
History	Good. Teachers use interesting and varied learning methods and teaching is good. Students have very mature attitudes. Results improved very significantly in 2002.
Psychology	Good. Teaching is good and students achieve well. Results at A-level have improved significantly. The range of learning styles could be increased. Not enough use is made of ICT.
English literature	Very good. 2001 results were very high. Students enjoy their work and achieve very well. Standards are well above average and teaching and learning are very good.
French	Good. Standards are above average. Students achieve well because teaching and learning are consistently good. The range of learning styles could be extended.

In 11 other subjects 18 lessons were seen. Teaching was very good in chemistry, government and politics, ICT key skills, English language and literature and further mathematics. It was good in economics, English language, ICT, German, general studies and sociology.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	The advice, support and guidance given to students prior to, during and after the completion of their courses is impartial, thorough and of excellent quality. Tutors check the progress of students regularly and rigorously so there is little underachievement.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Leadership and management are excellent. The major focus is on the provision of first class support and guidance. The sixth form leadership team is responsible for the provision of general studies and key skills and these are planned very effectively and taught well. There is a clear vision for further development that includes widening the range of learning styles.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The very good quality of teaching. • Being highly valued and treated as young adults. • The wide choice of subjects. • The range and quality of enrichment activities. • Advice, guidance and support at all stages and levels. • The sense of community and friendship. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The range and sophistication of ICT facilities. • The advice, in marking, of how to improve their work from a very small number of teachers.

Overall, students are very positive and supportive of the sixth form. Inspectors feel that students' views are justified. With regard to provision for the use of ICT, facilities are not as extensive as they need to be considering the number of students in the sixth form. Inspectors agree that a few teachers could offer students more advice about how to improve their written work.

COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

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

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Results in National Curriculum tests and public examinations taken in Years 9 and 11 are well above average.

1. Pupils' average points score in national tests taken in Year 9 has been consistently well above average since 1999 when compared with all schools and with those of similar background. Since the previous inspection in 1997, the school has sustained a high level of attainment and improved results year on year at a faster rate than the national trend. Pupils of all abilities achieve very well in relation to their prior attainment. The very good teaching, combined with pupils' self-motivation and very good attitudes to learning are the most significant factors in the high standards of attainment.

2. In 2002, pupils' results in the national tests at the age of 14 were well above average in English, mathematics and science. Scrutiny of pupils' work and observation of lessons confirm that overall standards of work are well above average in Year 9. The school is incorporating elements of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies in its teaching and there is clear evidence that these are contributing to the ever rising standards across all subjects of the curriculum.

3. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more passes at grades A*-C in GCSE examinations has been well above the national average every year since 1998, as has pupils' average points score. Results are also well above average overall when compared with similar schools. The school's results have kept pace with the rising national trend. In 2002, 25 per cent of the GCSE entries were awarded A*/A grades and 98 per cent of all Year 11 pupils gained five or more passes with grades A* - G. Almost all pupils are entered for English, mathematics and science, which makes the results in these subjects all the more creditable. Overall standards of work seen during the inspection reflect the well above average results in examinations.

4. Pupils with special educational needs make similar progress to other pupils and achieve equally well. The school's programme for identifying and meeting their needs succeeds in helping them to take external examinations at an appropriate level. They achieve a good degree of success, often exceeding the targets set in their individual education plans. In recent years all have achieved at least five passes at A*-G. Pupils with English as an additional language make very good progress. They receive very good support that accelerates their learning at an early stage. By the time they reach the age of 16 their attainment is equal to that of other pupils of similar ability.

5. Girls slightly outperform boys at the ages of 14 and 16 but to no greater extent than they do nationally. The school has taken action to further raise the attainment of boys but this has improved girls' performance too, maintaining the difference between the attainment of boys and girls.

6. The school believes that the high standard of attainment reflects the hard work and determination of the pupils and teachers, and the support and encouragement of their families. In keeping pace with improvement in national standards the school demonstrates that it is not complacent about the results it achieves. It sets demanding targets.

Teaching and learning are very good.

7. Teaching and learning are very good throughout the school. Pupils and students respond well to teachers' high expectations.

8. Teaching and learning are very good overall. A high proportion (41 per cent) of the lessons seen throughout the school was judged to be very good. Four lessons were excellent. The teaching meets the

needs of all pupils well. It enables them to make very good progress and maintain high standards. The inspection focused on English, mathematics and science in Years 7 - 11 but other lessons from a wide range of subjects were also sampled. A more extensive sample of lessons was observed in the sixth form. Reports on these are included in a separate section.

9. The high standards of teaching, combined with pupils' very good attitudes to learning, are contributory factors to the very good achievement and performance in national tests and examinations in Years 9 and 11. The strengths in the teaching lie in teachers' enthusiasm to share their very good subject knowledge, high expectations of work and effort, and their understanding of how pupils learn. For example, the introduction to lessons is sharp and clear so pupils know what is expected of them. Teachers provide good support during activities but are careful not to intervene before pupils have had a chance to work through situations for themselves, either individually or in groups. Pupils make rapid progress because teachers create a stimulating learning environment that raises pupils' confidence in their ability to succeed. Most lessons incorporate a range of challenging activities that place demands on pupils of all abilities. Planning for lessons is good. It leads to the use of a wide variety of strategies suited to pupils' specific needs. A good example was the step-by-step process for introducing lower attaining pupils in Year 8 to the use of ICT and spreadsheets in mathematics. By the end of the session they had entered information from a survey completed the previous day and investigated different methods of display. Another very good feature of teaching is the quality of discussion in lessons. This incorporates skilful questioning that leads to depth of thought and encourages pupils to offer their opinions without fear of getting the answer wrong. In two lessons, in history and PSHE, in Years 7 - 11 the teaching was excellent. It was dynamic and energetic. Sensitive planning progressively led pupils to deeper levels of thought that captured their interest and stimulated animated discussion. Learning throughout the school is productive, as is evident from the extent to which pupils remember what they have learned in previous lessons and apply it to new work.

10. Integral to Tapton's work as a Beacon School is a focus on Excellence in Teaching and the dissemination of good practice. Characteristic of this was the literacy project that involved the school, teachers from other schools and personnel from the local education authority in discussions and the production and trials of teaching materials. Evaluation of the net result indicates that all the schools involved considered the project to have made a very positive contribution to improving strategies for teaching literacy skills.

11. Teaching in English, mathematics and science is very good overall. Each subject has developed an individual approach to the teaching of the subject based on how pupils learn and apply basic skills. In English, the focus is on the comprehension of reading matter and the quality of writing. In mathematics, it is on the understanding and application of numerical and mathematical skills. For example, the school has analysed the specific use of mathematical skills in other subjects of the curriculum and has provided all teachers with standardised information about when and how particular aspects of mathematics are taught. This helps pupils because there is a degree of consistency across all subjects. Similarly, in English, the focus is on spelling and the use of grammar in writing. The programme of work in science is very well designed. It promotes learning through investigation and independent study. The use of ICT across other subjects of the curriculum has improved since the previous inspection, particularly in mathematics and modern foreign languages. There is scope for further improvement as the school gradually acquires more equipment.

12. The high quality of teaching reflects the commitment of staff. Parents recognise this and inspectors agree with their views. A small minority of parents expressed concern about the apparent lack of homework, particularly in Years 8 and 9. Inspectors found that the quality of homework was good and complemented work in lessons. However, the school does not provide a regular timetable for homework and consequently the amount given each night can vary. This makes it difficult for pupils to plan their evening's work, especially when they have regular commitments to extra-curricular activities.

The school is very well led and managed.

13. The quality of leadership and management is very good. It drives the school forward, constantly seeking new ways to match provision to local and national initiatives. The pupils' and students' interests and needs are of paramount importance in all of these. The school was successfully managed by two acting headteachers for 18 months until September 2002 when the current headteacher took up appointment. The school moved into new buildings during this period. There were considerable problems, some still unresolved. Nevertheless, standards of work and examination results continued to rise. This reflects the dedication of a committed staff who inspire pupils and students to give of their best. The management structure links all staff into the network of school activities. It enables staff to understand how their work contributes to that of the school as a whole and emphasises their accountability for areas of responsibility. As a result, morale is good and pupils and students are nurtured in a caring environment that provides well for its distinctive population.

14. The leadership team has established a very good ethos for learning, which reflects high expectations of effort and achievement. They monitor the school's work rigorously and there is a good system of performance management. This leads to professional development of staff, focusing on aspects of work linked to the school's overall development plan. The improvement in provision for ICT since the previous inspection, and rising standards, are a direct consequence of teachers' greater expertise and confidence in using ICT skills. Heads of subjects manage their departments effectively and have a good overview of performance. They initiate discussion on teaching methods and take effective action to detect and remedy underachievement. There are many good practices in use, but, from the pupils' stance, they are inconsistent. For example, the extent to which pupils are overtly aware of their level of performance and targets in relation to National Curriculum levels and GCSE grades varies from subject to subject. The science department is well advanced in its methods for sharing information with pupils. As a result, Individual action plans are set up specifically related to pupils' needs. These have led to improved performance.

15. The school is entrepreneurial in outlook. It is currently seeking to become a specialist science college. Pupils and parents are actively involved in raising funds to support the bid. The school has been a Beacon School for a number of years. As such, it spearheads initiatives to share good practice with other institutions. The philosophy underpinning the initiatives is one of response to expressions of need and 'learning together'. This was particularly evident in the project concerned with producing materials to integrate ICT into the teaching of modern foreign languages. Teachers from a number of schools worked as a team to share their expertise and now, as a result, a good package of teaching aids is available for general use. Another feature of the school's outreach in connection with its Beacon Status is its heavy involvement and commitment to initial teacher training. Students are well supported and benefit from gaining experience in a school where the best of practices are seen in action.

16. The governing body is active and effective in carrying out its responsibilities. However, it does not provide for the statutory requirements of a daily act of collective worship and religious education in the sixth form. Recently, much of the governors' time has been spent in managing the transition to new buildings. Now that this is largely complete, the governors are directing attention to areas for further development. These include the preparation of a long-term strategic framework to be executed through appropriately targeted school and department improvement plans. A visionary strategic plan is already in draft form.

17. The school is efficient; its finances are in good order. Funding of this 11-18 school is low in comparison with other schools in the local education authority. Monies are spent prudently to provide equally for pupils and students of all abilities and needs. Technical and educational support staff make a

strong contribution to the high quality of education provided. Administration runs smoothly, contributing to the school's efficiency and effectiveness. The governors and senior staff work hard to ensure that the school obtains best value through comparison of costs and consultation with other stakeholders. Governors are aware that the new dining room is too small. They are considering plans for its improvement. Pupils have to queue too long because there are not enough cash points or seating. As a result, senior managers' time and attention is diverted from other matters and they often do not get a lunch break themselves.

18. The school has made good improvement since the previous inspection. It has maintained high standards, successfully tackled most of the key issues and has been provided with new buildings. The school is vibrant and forward looking with exciting plans for the future. It provides very good value for money.

The statutory curriculum is enriched by a very wide range of additional activities that are enjoyed by large numbers of pupils and sixth form students.

19. The excellent programme of enrichment and out of lesson time activities helps promote high standards and makes a significant contribution to pupils' personal development. Opportunities provided in music, sport and drama are especially outstanding and almost all subjects make a contribution to the vast range of activities provided.

20. The music department organises a broad range of opportunities for pupils and sixth form students to perform. These include a Barber Shop group for boys and various formations of choirs and instrumental groups that range from a Quantam Jazz group to a large traditional orchestra. Pupils attending these activities have very positive attitudes, show commitment to high standards of performance and are ably led and directed by staff. Pupils respond very well to the demands of challenging pieces, as was seen in the senior girls' choir rehearsals in preparing Britten's Ceremony of Carols. The very demanding repertoire was exceedingly well tackled. Pupils had very accurate intonation and the interpretation of the work was subtle and sensitive. Highly accomplished singing was achieved as the result of excellent teaching and a high level of challenge and expectation.

21. The outstanding range of activities provided in physical education and sport results in pupils experiencing a considerable amount of success both in teams and as individuals. Badminton, basketball, hockey, trampoline, athletics and cross-country running teams succeed well in competitions at city and sometimes county and national level. The under-16 boys' basketball team was the runner up in the 2002 English School's Championships. Many individual pupils gain representative honours at county level in badminton, basketball, trampoline, athletics, cross-country running, netball and rugby union. In men's lacrosse and rounders, in addition to county honours, some pupils have representative honours for England.

22. This amount of success among pupils is built upon their wide participation in sporting activities for every age group and across a vast array of activities. Staff from across the school and external coaches support the physical education department in offering these opportunities, bringing a high level of expertise and experience of more unusual activities. For example, pupils compete at national level in the Frisbee Competition and a group takes part in clay pigeon shooting. Most importantly, pupils are encouraged to follow their interests in sport and physical activity and clubs are open to all pupils. The regular inter-form competitions in major sports provide very high numbers of pupils with the chance to compete. The enthusiasm and expertise of staff encourages pupils to sustain their interest, commit themselves to teams and to aspire to high standards of achievement. A reflection of pupils' interest and commitment is the regular high level of attendance of around fifty pupils, girls and boys, at hockey sessions held at 8am. The school has gained the Sportsmark award, a national award to recognise the breadth of the provision and the high level of participation.

23. More than 150 pupils regularly take part in the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme. There is a strong commitment to the scheme by both pupils and staff.

24. Pupils have many opportunities to perform in drama activities both in school and in local theatres. A recent arts project co-ordinated by the music, art and drama departments included performances given by lower school pupils. One in particular entitled 'Variety is the Spice', written and produced by pupils, gave the opportunity to explore social, moral and cultural issues surrounding differences, bullying and tolerance. High numbers of pupils take part in the regularly produced school productions. Pupils have the chance to act, sing, dance and carry out lighting, sound and stage management activities working productively alongside many school staff.

25. Pupils take part in a broad range of scientific activities. They meet people who use science in their day-to-day work and so their interest and enthusiasm are stimulated and their understanding deepened. External speakers have included a Greenwich astronomer, a telephone communications engineer talking about optical fibres, a neighbourhood engineer talking about industrial magnets and an engineer from an electricity company talking about electrical safety. During a science week, pupils and their families greatly enjoyed taking part in an 'Evening in Space' and all Year 8 girls carry out engineering related activities when the Women into Science and Engineering bus calls at the school. The Gifted and Talented programme enables some pupils to take part in challenging engineering projects.

26. Links with local businesses and enterprises ensure that pupils have an up-to-date understanding of local business activity. They develop a broader perspective through visits further afield. These included a visit to Skill City at Salford Quays by the World of Work groups in Year 10. Year 11 pupils take part in a national challenge, which involves understanding how to deal in stocks and shares. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 and sixth form students have gained many awards in Young Enterprise projects.

27. Exchange visits with French and German students, study visits to France in Year 11 and work experience in Germany all give pupils extensive opportunities for direct experience of modern foreign languages. A languages club for Year 7 pupils gives Year 13 students a good opportunity to help younger pupils enjoy languages. Field work in history and geography are strong features.

28. Most departments organise activities at lunchtime or after school which help bring learning to life for pupils. There is no doubt that very positive relationships are forged between pupils and between pupils and staff through these activities and that pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding are increased. Pupils benefit enormously from stimulating, challenging and enjoyable participation in the excellent programme of extra-curricular activities.

The school provides well for the personal development of pupils all abilities. It pays excellent attention to developing pupils' and sixth form students' moral and social development and very good attention to their spiritual and cultural development.

29. All pupils, whatever their ability, background, race or need are well catered for within the school's provision.

Personal, social and health education (PSHE)

30. The school's provision for personal, social and health education is excellent. The rigorous and relevant curriculum includes elements of citizenship, sex education, and drug abuse. Careers advice is very well co-ordinated and pupils are thoroughly prepared for making option choices at the end of Year 9 and for their two weeks' work experience in Year 10. The teaching of the subject by specialist staff is outstanding and this, combined with the excellent attitudes pupils bring to their work, ensures that the subject makes an exceptional contribution to pupils' personal development.

Pupils with special educational needs

31. Pupils with special educational needs make very good progress. They are very well taught and have very positive attitudes to their work. They achieve very well and gain much success in GCSE examinations. In 2001, for example, all pupils on the special needs register were entered for GCSE English with only a tiny minority of pupils not achieving a grade. Every pupil gained at least five grade A*-G passes. Classroom assistants provide effective support and ensure through regular meetings with the head of learning support that pupils' development is monitored on a daily basis. The leadership and management of the learning support department are very effective and ensure that the interests of pupils with special educational needs are positively promoted throughout the school. Visually impaired pupils are equally well provided for and make very good progress. The leadership and management of the specialist provision for visually impaired pupils are excellent. Pupils' progress is carefully tracked and monitored as they move through the school. Visually impaired pupils are fully integrated into the daily life of the school where they make a valuable and valued contribution.

The World of Work programme

32. The World of Work programme is offered to Year 10 and 11 pupils as an alternative to two GCSE subjects. Pupils taking this course can gain accreditation through the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) at Bronze and Silver levels in key skills, for example, in number application and in ICT. The course is supplemented by links with local firms and businesses which pupils visit in preparation for work experience and for planning future careers. This is a well-managed and popular course that makes a valuable contribution in preparing pupils for the transition from school to work or further education.

Provision for gifted and talented pupils

33. The school's provision for its gifted and talented pupils is very good. The enrichment programme is very well managed, and its wide scope enables students of all ages to explore new areas of learning and to discover their hidden talents. The programme is carefully designed to include activities for individuals, year groups, and mixed age groups. Response is very good. Individual projects in Year 8 have included making an animated cartoon and a millennium collage, and composing a piece of music. Over recent years, Year 9 pupils have learned how to conduct a legal case through taking part in the annual Magistrates Trial competition, and a group of older students were successful in GCSE Latin as a result of two years' extra-curricular teaching. The thriving chess club attracts many younger pupils in the lunch hour, and sixth form students enjoy the challenge of learning Japanese. Most subject departments have made good use of the available funding to extend and enrich the experience of their pupils. They have benefited from poetry workshops in English, competition prizes in art and design and technology, visits to concerts, and participation in science and mathematics courses. The funding has also helped musicians with the costs of an Italian tour and membership of the National Youth Orchestra.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

34. Pupils and students develop rapidly into thoughtful young people with a strong sense of community responsibility and a clear understanding of right and wrong. This is achieved because the school encourages pupils and students to uphold its mission of valuing all members of the community and providing opportunities for each to achieve excellence in many different ways.

35. The outstanding system of pastoral care, based on the development of excellent relationships, upholds high expectations of pupils' behaviour. Pupils are involved in the establishment of the school's code of conduct, rewards and sanctions through the student council. They are encouraged to take responsibility for their own actions and student counsellors are available to support individuals. A strong

moral dimension and sense of personal responsibility pervades the systems for maintaining good behaviour and discipline.

36. In lessons across the school teachers develop pupils' sense of right and wrong through thoughtful debate on pertinent issues in English, drama, history, geography, personal social and health education and religious education. For example, in a religious education lesson in Year 10, pupils gave much thought to their own views on the use of animals for experiments and research after consideration of the rights and responsibilities of man to animals.

37. The school offers outstanding opportunities for pupils' social development helping pupils to develop into confident and socially aware young people. The excellent extra-curricular programme involves pupils and staff in sharing many positive experiences through which excellent relationships are reinforced. Pupils have many opportunities to take responsibility across the school, not least through the school's student council which ensures that pupils' views are heard and valued. Older pupils and students often work alongside younger pupils, for example, on shared reading projects, in sporting activities, on summer schools organised for gifted and talented pupils, by mentoring pupils or supporting those who are new to the school. As pupils spend time in the school's supportive atmosphere, they grow in confidence and some take the initiative to organise fund raising events for their chosen charities. The high number of Christmas boxes collected for the Operation Christmas Child project is a reflection of their generosity and thoughtfulness.

38. The basis for pupils' spiritual development arises from well-established values and positive relationships. These are reflected in the care, concern and respect pupils and staff have for one another across the school. Specific events and activities across subjects contribute further to pupils' spiritual development. The two minutes silence held at 11am on Armistice Day was carried out well in many classrooms when poetry readings and clear explanations of the event helped pupils to understand its meaning and reflect on it. Well-planned year group assemblies give pupils a time for reflection on spiritual matters. During the week of the inspection, for example, the personal viewpoints of staff leading assemblies on the nature of war and the value of peace were shared with pupils and students who were provided with many social, moral and cultural issues on which to reflect. Due to the restriction of the accommodation, these assemblies are held just once a week and opportunities to develop the themes for assembly in form time on a regular basis are not taken. Religious education helps pupils to develop an awareness of their own spirit through many thought provoking activities, for example, by encouraging Year 7 pupils to consider what they value and write it down. The sensitive manner in which the content of subjects such as English and drama is handled by teachers helps pupils to reflect on the awesome nature of relationships and events. Other subjects encourage pupils to appreciate the outstanding achievement of fellow human beings for example, in art and design, science, history and English.

39. Pupils are being effectively prepared for life in a multi-cultural society. Art and design, music, drama, English, religious education and personal, social and health education all make a strong contribution. Pupils study art forms from a wide variety of cultures. Through religious education lessons, pupils visit places of worship of different faiths in the locality. Pupils of different faiths share their beliefs and practices with others, stimulating discussion on differences. Drama encourages depth of thought on differences between people, including cultures and backgrounds. The most recent lower school production reflects the depth of thought pupils have given to individual differences and people's reactions to them.

40. Many of the impressive range of opportunities contributing to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are not explicitly planned, but the natural outcomes of the high quality teaching.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

The wide range of teaching styles could be shared more within and across subjects

41. The high standard of achievement throughout the school is a result of highly focused teaching that motivates pupils to work hard and gain satisfaction from their studies. Teaching is rigorous and effective in all subjects but in some the range of methods used is narrow. The contrast between these and the very best lessons shows in the greater variety of activities and livelier quality of debate. The pace of the very good and better lessons observed was faster and they challenged pupils' thinking to the limit. The school could provide more opportunities for teachers to discuss their practices, particularly across the different subjects, by extending its programme for monitoring teaching and learning.

Information from the school's assessment procedures is not used consistently to inform pupils about their performance. Pupils could be more involved in setting their own targets for improvement towards predicted National Curriculum levels and GCSE grades. The recording of pupils' attainment on written reports could be more overtly linked to nationally recognised standards.

42. Procedures for assessing and recording pupils' attainment and progress in Years 7-11 are thorough. They provide subject teachers and staff with pastoral responsibilities with ongoing information that is well used in planning lessons and to keep regular checks on pupils who, for any reason, are not making sufficient progress. These pupils receive good guidance and support from teachers, learning mentors and external agencies. The assessment system has improved since the previous inspection in that there is now a standardised system for recording and reporting pupils' attainment and effort. The grades used are not as clearly linked to National Curriculum levels and GCSE grades as they could be. Consequently, pupils are not always aware of their predicted levels of attainment and what they should be doing to reach them. The school does not have a consistent policy for engaging pupils in discussion about their performance, targets and how to improve. Practices vary too much from subject to subject.

The use of information and communication technology could be more widely integrated into work in other subjects.

43. Standards in information and communication technology (ICT), though average overall, are not as high as in other subjects. Year 11 pupils in particular are underachieving. This is because this group of pupils had no ICT lessons in Years 8 and 9 and when using ICT in other subjects, the computers they used were old and outdated. In addition, some ICT lessons were taught by non-specialist teachers. The school now has an adequate number of computers and a core team of specialist teachers. However, the use of ICT to support learning in other subjects is hampered by major problems when trying to access the Internet. Although a broadband connection has been in place for over twelve months it is still not working properly and the alternative Internet connection systems are unreliable and frequently break down. Consequently pupils have too few opportunities to use the Internet in ICT lessons or to support their learning in other subjects. Sixth form students are not yet able to e-mail their work to teachers. Some subjects such as mathematics and modern foreign languages make good use of computers, for example, to share coursework materials. Most, however, are still at the early stage of development and are awaiting new computers, a reliable Internet connection and the completion of staff training before making the use of ICT a regular feature of their teaching and pupils' learning. Resources for pupils with special educational needs are unsatisfactory in that no computers are specifically dedicated for their use and there is very little specialist software.

More opportunities could be provided for pupils to study vocational subjects at GCSE.

44. The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 provides insufficient opportunities for pupils to study vocational subjects as part of their GCSE studies. The World of Work programme, offered as an alternative to one GCSE subject, makes a valuable contribution to preparing pupils for the transition from school to employment or further education. Other than this, there are no courses for pupils interested in

gaining GCSE or higher level qualifications through more practical courses linked to business and industry. The school is aware of this and has already identified it as an area for development.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

45. In order to consolidate and sustain its present standards, the governors, headteacher and staff should:

The main school (Years 7-11)

- (1) make more use of information gained through whole-school assessment procedures by;
 - more clearly linking attainment and effort grades to nationally recognised standards,
 - developing a consistent policy for engaging pupils in discussion about their performance, targets and how to improve,
 - providing opportunities for pupils to study vocational subjects at GCSE.

The whole school (Years 7-13)

- (2) widen the range of teaching and learning styles in use across the school by encouraging teachers to discuss and implement the most effective practices identified through the monitoring of teaching and learning,
- (3) provide resources to extend the use of ICT across all subjects of the curriculum as soon as is practicable.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	31
	Sixth form	83
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		60

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
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Years 7– 11

Number	2	13	9	7	0	0	0
Percentage	6	42	29	23	0	0	0

Sixth form

Number	2	30	46	5	0	0	0
Percentage	2	36	55	6	0	0	0

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

Information about the school’s pupils

Pupils on the school’s roll

	Y7– Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school’s roll	1140	426
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	103	5

Special educational needs

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	19	2
Number of pupils on the school’s special educational needs register	125	7

English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	60

Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	39

Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	24
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Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	5.8
National comparative data	8.1

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.6
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2002	126	102	228

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	113	109	108
	Girls	94	81	89
	Total	207	190	197
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	91(76)	84 (80)	87 (83)
	National	66 (64)	67 (66)	66 (66)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	68 (38)	69 (64)	68 (62)
	National	32 (31)	45 (43)	33 (34)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	92	56	53
	Girls	81	42	43
	Total	173	98	96
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	77(74)	88 (84)	78(84)
	National	67 (65)	70 (68)	67 (64)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	40 (43)	54 (58)	65(55)
	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	128	103	231

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	82	123	124
	Girls	80	103	103
	Total	162	226	227
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	70 (73)	98 (94)	98 (99)
	National	50 (48)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	48.2
	National	39.8

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

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

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

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Males	Females	All
School	Number of candidates (2002)	93	102	195
	Average point score per candidate	21.2 (21.5)	22.8 (20.6)	22.5 (21)
National	Average point score per candidate	* (16.9)	* (17.9)	* (17.4)

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS examinations			For candidates entered for Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Males	Females	All	Males	Females	All
School	Number of candidates	93	102	195	N/a	N/a	N/a
	Average point score per candidate	21.2 (21.5)	22.8 (20.6)	22.5 (21)	N/a	N/a	N/a
National	Average point score per candidate	* (16.9)	* (17.9)	* (17.4)	N/a	N/a	N/a

National comparison data for AS/A level results in 2002 are not yet available. Figures in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	934	32	1
White – Irish	3		
White – any other White background	20	1	
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	17	6	
Mixed – White and Black African	3	1	
Mixed – White and Asian	12		
Mixed – any other mixed background	10		
Asian or Asian British - Indian	9		
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	16	1	
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	2		
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	16	2	
Black or Black British – Caribbean	14	4	
Black or Black British – African	11	5	
Black or Black British – any other Black background	4		
Chinese	10		
Any other ethnic group	26	1	
No ethnic group recorded	38		

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

Teachers and classes**Qualified teachers and classes: Y7– Y13**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	93.1
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.5

Education support staff: Y7– Y13

Total number of education support staff	23
Total aggregate hours worked per week	676

Deployment of teachers: Y7– Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	76
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Average teaching group size: Y7– Y11

Key Stage 3	24
Key Stage 4	21

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	15.2
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	27.39
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	2.76
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	2001/02
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	£
Total income	4349088
Total expenditure	4321301
Expenditure per pupil	2802
Balance brought forward from previous year	-10498
Balance carried forward to next year	17289

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1560
Number of questionnaires returned	272

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	42.0	51.6	5.2	0.4	0.8
My child is making good progress in school.	49.3	46.8	2.7	0	1.2
Behaviour in the school is good.	29.8	54.0	7.5	0	8.7
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	21.8	61.1	14.3	2.4	0.4
The teaching is good.	28.2	62.4	1.9	0	7.5
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	25.0	50.8	17.4	2.4	4.4
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	54.8	38.1	5.5	0	1.6
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	63.9	35.3	0	0	0.8
The school works closely with parents.	26.2	56.0	12.7	1.2	3.9
The school is well led and managed.	38.5	46.8	2.4	0	12.3
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	40.5	52.0	1.9	0	5.6
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	48.8	40.1	5.2	0	5.9

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

46. The A-level results have improved since the previous inspection. They were consistently well above average in the three year period 1999-2001. Results in 2001 were in the top five per cent in the country in English literature, government and politics and sport and physical education. One student was in the top five candidates in the country in Chemistry. In previous years, students have achieved this honour in English literature, geography, physics and sociology. Overall, there is no significant difference between the results of males and females.

47. In 2002, the results in the new A2 examinations improved and were the school's best ever. There were significant improvements in art and design, further mathematics, history, physics, psychology and drama and theatre studies. However, the results in business studies declined significantly. The overall pass rate improved from 90 to 96 per cent and the proportion of passes at the higher grades A and B increased to 45 per cent. The proportion of A/ B grade passes could be raised further in business studies, biology, general studies and theatre studies.

48. The results in the new AS examination at the end of Year 12 were well above the national average points score in 2001. Similar results were gained in 2002.

49. Standards in Year 13 are well above average. Students have very positive attitudes to their learning and achieve very well in response to the very good teaching. Standards in music are very high. They are well above average in art, computing, English literature, geography, government and politics, mathematics, physics and sport and physical education and sociology. They are above average in other subjects except design and technology where they are average. This course was only introduced into the curriculum 2001; standards are rising.

50. Achievement is very good overall. Attainment at the start of the sixth form is above average, though ten per cent of students have below average standards. Given this starting point, standards improve and students achieve above what might be expected. Consequently they make very good progress as they move through the sixth form. Local education authority data indicates that students achieve advanced results well above those expected in relation to their GCSE performance.

51. Students with learning difficulties and those from ethnic minority backgrounds, including refugees, achieve very well. For example, students who are dyslexic have achieved high grades that enabled them to gain entry to Oxbridge. Students from a variety of other countries, who have made rapid progress learning English, obtain grades that ensure access onto the more prestigious courses at universities.

52. Course completion rates are high and 89 per cent of students move into higher education, with many gaining their first choices. In the last eight years 43 students gained admission to Oxford and Cambridge colleges. In the current year there are 24 applications.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

53. Students' attitudes, values, personal development and attendance are very good. Students are very positive about the sixth form and enjoy all of their experiences in school. They are very conscientious about their studies and are committed to their own success and to the school community. Most participate in the excellent enrichment activities and experiences that are available. Their participation in many aspects of the life of the school, such as the school council, organising events and helping younger pupils,

contributes very much to the quality of life in school as well as to their own personal development. They are impressive role models for their younger peers.

54. Students' behaviour is exemplary and they conduct themselves in a mature and responsible manner. Relationships between students and with their tutors are excellent and all work very supportively together. They develop very well the attitudes and skills necessary to maximise their learning both independently and with others. Students demonstrate appreciation and respect for the rights and values of others. Some take part in lower school assemblies by reading relevant literature and leading prayers. Students' attendance is very good. It is well above the average for secondary schools.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

55. Teaching is very good overall. The proportion of very good and better teaching seen during the inspection was higher than found in most sixth forms. Students respond very well to the high quality of the teaching. Consequently, they learn effectively and achieve very well. Teaching is very good in mathematics, physics, computing, sport studies, art and design, music, theatre studies, geography and English. It is good in all other subjects except design and technology where it is satisfactory. Design and technology was only introduced into the sixth form curriculum last year; good progress is being made in extending the range of teaching styles to meet the students' needs at advanced level.

56. The overall strengths of the teaching lie in the teachers' very good subject knowledge, high expectations of students' work and effort, good understanding of their capabilities and challenge to their intellect. Effective management of lessons and constructive use of day-to-day assessment of students' work ensure that progress is monitored on a regular basis. In response, students have confidence in their teachers; they develop a good understanding of their own learning. Most students make rapid gains in knowledge of their subjects. They are ambitious for themselves and rise to the challenges set for them. Teachers' enthusiasm for their subjects during lessons is one of the reasons given by students for choosing to study in the sixth form at Tapton. In individual subjects, many examples could be given of particular strengths in provision, for example, the high quality of opportunities to practise making music.

57. A wide range of teaching and learning techniques is used across the full range of subjects. Some of these are specific to individual subjects, such as in science and ICT. Others are applicable to more general use. The school could provide more opportunities for teachers to consider the different teaching styles in use. This would broaden students' experiences in some subjects where the teaching, although good, tends to be more traditional with lessons following similar routines and practices. It is in these situations that students' learning experiences could be extended, for example through note-taking during discussion and learning from work prepared by other students rather than the teacher. In design and technology, students would benefit from thinking freely about the development of designs rather than following known procedures.

58. The teachers' very good subject expertise, which builds up students' confidence as learners, was noted in very many lessons. As an example, in art, teachers talk to students on an individual basis as their practical work develops. As a result, they get immediate feedback on how to improve specific aspects of a picture, such as background and balance of colour. The quality of discussion encourages students to consider the importance of different visual elements to the composition of the piece of work. In French, students are accustomed to hearing the language spoken fluently and almost exclusively in lessons. Students' listening skills develop well and they become confident speakers.

59. Teachers know their students and capabilities well. Because of this, for example, in an outstanding drama lesson, the teacher was able to draw on a store of relevant, illustrative anecdotes that stimulated students' learning and inspired them to further exploration and articulation of ideas. In an

equally good music lesson, the teacher gave constructive criticism that helped students develop aesthetic and creative judgements.

60. Teachers' routine assessment of students' work gives them a clear picture of standards and, in the majority of instances, a good indication of how to improve their work further. Students describe teaching as very good and say that almost all of their teachers provide excellent feedback and constructive guidance. On occasion the advice given lacks detail and depth; students referred to this in their comments on the students' questionnaire. The school needs to ensure that the support students receive from all teachers through the marking of their work is equal to that of the best.

61. Teachers have high expectations of their students who respond well in lessons and in their assignments. In history, for example, individual students thoroughly researched the topic of Nazi economic policy, 1933-39, and chose their own method of presenting their findings. This was imaginative and interesting in that it took the form of a simulated dialogue between workers and party leaders. In other subjects, such as English, students lead discussions on sections of text, with their thinking challenged and enhanced through probing questions from other students and teachers. Challenge comes through other forms in science subjects, for example when, in physics, discussion about errors in work on forces and motion led to very clear alternative and complementary approaches to the work. The teacher had specific personal targets for the lesson to help specified students in identified aspects of their development.

62. Overall, teaching prepares students well for the next stage of their education. They are learning to disseminate information and consider its relevance and importance. In applying their knowledge, they are developing the skills to engage in good quality debate and are prepared to adjust their opinions in the light of reasoned argument. Written work is of a good quality and indicative of most students' progression as independent learners.

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

63. The curricular provision is very good. An extensive range of 25 academic AS and A2 subjects and an excellent enrichment programme provide a very good quality of education for all students. Consequently, results and standards are well above average. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural education of students is equally very good.

64. There is an outstanding range of enrichment and extra-curricular activities. These make a significant contribution to students' academic progress, promote very good relationships and make an excellent contribution to their personal development. All subjects invest time and energy to provide opportunities of high quality. Very good teaching and the high expectations of the school have a very positive influence on students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Enrichment and extra-curricular activities

65. Many students take an active part in the excellent range of extra-curricular activities and many organise activities themselves. For example, a group of students took the initiative to establish and run a successful Christian Union for the whole school. Students' participation in assemblies leads to reflection on spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues. Students were left with thought provoking questions to answer after a very good assembly based on Remembrance Day. However, there is no further opportunity for reflection and worship collectively other than in the fortnightly assembly.

66. Relationships between students and between staff and students are excellent and as a result students and staff hold each other in high regard. This creates a good basis from which teachers encourage a depth of discussion that enables exploration of spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues. For

example, spiritual awareness is encouraged in history through consideration of students' beliefs, values and attitudes towards minority groups. In French, students consider the implications of forms of religious persecution through study of the plight of Jews under Nazi occupation in France. In geography, students' work reflects a depth of understanding of social and cultural difficulties experienced by migrants. Music and drama offer an outstanding range of opportunities to perform that include different choirs, orchestras, and a number of different instrumental groups. Frequent performances of high quality take place both in the school and in the local community. Opportunities in sport continue in the sixth form. Teams in badminton have been successful in city-wide competition and the sixth form basketball team is receiving specialist coaching after its success in national competition. Students regularly work with primary age pupils through a national sports programme. Each year at least 40 students participate in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme, many successfully.

67. Opportunities in science are varied and broad. A few students obtain silver and bronze medals in the British Physics Olympiad. This is a tremendous achievement for them. Students are involved in the Engineering Education Scheme, the British Association of Youth Science fair, the Frontiers in Science project at Kings College Cambridge and there are many visits to the city's universities and hospitals. In business studies over thirty students regularly take part in Young Enterprise projects. This initiative is consistently very successful. For example, 'Bubble Enterprises' are at present working with business advisers from local banks. The history department organises visits, including, for example, Southwell Workhouse and the Apprentice House at Styal. Geography provides very good fieldwork opportunities locally and in the Lake District. In art, students visit a local sculpture park, galleries and exhibitions in Paris with a visit to Rome planned for next year. Students take part in 'Artists in Residence' work. In addition to visits to French and German plays and films, students take part in exchange visits and work experience in France and Germany organised by the languages department. Last year two groups of students made a contribution to a 'Mock European Parliament' organised by the local authority. They gave impressive power-point presentations on the issues of a single currency and globalisation that were followed by a vigorous debate.

68. Service to the school community includes help and support for pupils in Years 7-11 in the form of paired reading, classroom assistance, peer counselling and mentoring. They take on many additional responsibilities through the student council including supervision duties across the school. Students take part in and organise a range of charitable and fundraising events. Through these opportunities students are developing a strong sense of social and personal responsibility.

69. Overall, the excellent range and high quality of these activities enriches students' experiences and promotes high standards.

The curriculum

70. Options provide opportunities for students to select up to four subjects suitable to their needs and aspirations. In Year 12, most students take four subjects to AS level and a half take five, including general studies. In Year 13, most continue with their studies in three subjects to A2 level and a significant number take four. The breadth and relevance of students' education are, therefore, assured.

71. The sixth form does not offer vocational courses; it is seen and valued by students and parents as an academic sixth form. At present there are no vocational GCSE courses in Years 10 and 11. Pupils who require such courses receive advice on the range and quality of these available at other local schools and colleges. Thus, the sixth form complements other local provision. The school is currently considering this provision and the value and relevance that vocational courses might add to the education of some pupils and students. Overall, students are pleased with the range of courses available and the many additional opportunities provided through the school, the local community and abroad. They are pleased with social amenities and arrangements for private study but would like more versatile facilities for ICT

that would allow them to work at school or home with easy access to all relevant computer- based information and systems.

72. The quality of information and advice about subjects and combinations of subjects is excellent and is a key feature of the very effective induction process at the start of the sixth form. Students must have a minimum of five grade Cs for entry. Thereafter, there is equality of access and opportunity based on a first come first place basis.

73. The provision for students with specific learning difficulties is very good and these students achieve very well and successfully complete their courses. Gifted and talented students achieve equally very well, especially in music, and students have access to ‘master classes’ organised by the local authority.

74. A recent development of the sixth form curriculum is the tutor period. The well-planned and flexible course includes target-setting and reviewing of progress by tutors, study skills, key skills of communication, problem solving and working with others and health education. In lessons seen during the inspection students were beginning to work successfully together producing a video as an alternative prospectus for the sixth form. Others were talking with confidence and understanding about educational articles in newspapers. The course includes an excellent programme of careers advice and support and guidance for higher education.

75. ICT key skills lessons are timetabled in Year 12 and lead to a qualification at Level 2. This course lasts six months and covers research, power-point presentation and data logging and handling for students who have no previous qualification in ICT. At the present time there is no provision for the key skill of the application of number but most students are sufficiently proficient to cope with the requirements of their sixth form studies. GCSE retake classes operate when needed for English and mathematics. Overall, provision for key skills is satisfactory. Physical education is timetabled on Wednesday afternoons but is restricted to those students who have no lessons at that time.

76. General studies is taught by the leadership team of the sixth form. Large numbers take the examination. The results have fluctuated in recent years but they are usually above average. During the inspection students developed their understanding of ‘high’ and ‘popular’ culture and increased their knowledge of art galleries and museums in Sheffield. More opportunities could be taken to include aspects of religious education in this course.

77. Departments have planned work very well to meet the requirements of the new specifications and to match the work to students’ needs. Curriculum planning is at least good in all subjects and very good in many. This enables the students to progress very well building on their GCSE work. Time allocation in the timetable is adequate and class sizes are viable and sufficient for meaningful debate and the effective sharing of ideas.

78. The statutory requirement to provide religious education is not met and this aspect of the curriculum is unsatisfactory. There is no space to have a daily act of collective worship for all students. Nevertheless, assemblies do take place on a rotational basis.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS

Assessment

79. Assessment is regular, rigorous and supportive. The procedures for assessment and its use to guide curricular planning and evaluate students’ progress are very good. This aspect has improved since the previous inspection. With the exception of a very small number of teachers, in mathematics and

history for example, marking is frequent and informs students how to improve their work. Records of marks closely relate to examination standards and enable the progress of individual students to be carefully and accurately checked. Reports give a clear picture of students' performance.

80. The procedures for monitoring and supporting students' academic progress by tutors are outstanding. Students are involved in the assessment process from the start of their courses. They use valid data to negotiate realistic but challenging targets with their tutors. Tutors closely monitor their progress at five review times when targets can be updated. In addition, monitoring forms from subject teachers outline any problems encountered by students at any time. Underachievement is very quickly identified and most problems are effectively solved. When necessary parents are involved. Monitoring of students with specific learning difficulties, those with low GCSE scores and those from other countries is equally excellent. The new weekly tutor period provides more time for these very effective procedures.

Advice, support and guidance

81. The educational and personal support for students is exemplary. Parents and students are justly very pleased with it. It is a major part of the foundation on which the success of the sixth form depends.

82. Pastoral care is outstanding. In response to the quality of care, advice and guidance students talked of mutual respect, being treated as young adults, having high motivation and very good relationships within a welcoming and friendly community. They are confident to ask for help and advice and know that they will be heard with interest and concern and that response will be prompt.

83. The school provides students with excellent printed information, advice and guidance from Year 9 onwards about subject choices, courses in the sixth form and beyond and careers. The induction process into the sixth form is very thorough and advice and guidance from a very experienced team of tutors and learning mentor is constant throughout the sixth form.

84. Careers education and guidance and support for higher education including professional help for Oxbridge entrance are of a very high quality. Students receive help in applying to firms for sponsorship. For example, a student who is planning to take engineering is being helped to prepare a portfolio for presentation to a company with whom he has already had work experience. Mock interviews are available to all students.

85. A very comprehensive programme of enrichment contributes effectively to students' personal development. Students are expected to take responsibility for their own community and that of the whole school. They are encouraged to initiate and organise social and competitive events and they are superb role models for pupils particularly in the School Council.

86. Procedures for monitoring and improving attendance are very good and have improved since the previous inspection. The electronic system for recording attendance has been introduced very well and adapted to meet the needs of the sixth form. Records of individual attendance and reasons for absence are quickly available.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

Leadership and management

87. Leadership and management of this large and very successful sixth form are excellent. Its popularity has led to its growth since the previous inspection. It provides equal access to a very wide variety of AS and A2 level courses for all the students who meet its minimum entry requirements. The

sixth form implements the school's mission statement to 'value all members of its community, providing opportunities for each to achieve excellence'.

88. There is no complacency in the well above average results but a clear educational direction that is firmly rooted in further improving standards and results. There is a determination to raise the overall average total points score per student and the proportion of passes at the higher grades A and B. This is part of a strategic plan that is in the process of being extended. The school is about to make use of a commercial scheme to measure achievement more accurately and enable it to set class, subject and whole school targets with more confidence.

89. Pastoral care is very strong and the monitoring of students' progress is highly effective. Personal development is rigorously supported and encouraged especially in the excellent enrichment programme.

90. The leadership of the sixth form provides a clear sense of purpose and direction. A very experienced team supports the open and consultative style of management. Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined but are almost redundant in the mutually supportive structure and practice.

91. Leadership and management are very good in most of the focus subjects and teaching is monitored effectively. Currently, there is a commitment to monitor and evaluate the ways in which students learn most effectively through developing the responsibilities of the leadership team.

92. The examination results are analysed in detail and followed by subject reviews. The governors know the many strengths of the sixth form and are active in their role as critical friends. They have yet to fulfil the statutory duty to ensure the provision of religious education in the sixth form.

93. Improvement has been very good. Results have improved, the recently introduced tutor period is very effective and the school has been very successful in implementing the new curriculum and courses. Improvement in most of the focus subjects has been equally very good.

94. The sixth form is very cost-effective.

Resources

95. The staffing of the sixth form is very 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 building is new and the majority of the accommodation for teaching is very good.

96. Subjects have adequate numbers of books but the larger equipment in biology is becoming outdated and insufficient. Resources are barely adequate in art and design and this restricts the scale of some of the work. The facilities to use ICT to support students' learning in lessons are inadequate in eight of the focus subjects.

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

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

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2002.

GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	66	91		52		6.5	
Chemistry	42	81		55		6.4	
Biology	64	88		42		6.2	
Physics	37	95		41		6.4	
Resistant materials	9	100		56		6.0	
Business studies	12	100		33		6.2	
Economics	10	100		90		8.8	
Computing	16	94		44		6.3	
Sport and physical education	21	100		57		6.7	
Art	9	100		78		8.7	
Graphics	7	71		29		4.0	
Music	4	100		75		8.5	
Theatre studies	23	100		48		7.0	
Geography	26	96		35		5.9	
History	57	91		35		5.4	
Government and politics	16	94		25		5.6	
Sociology	62	88		24		4.9	
Psychology	65	92		37		5.7	
English language and literature	43	98		47		6.6	
English language	21	100		62		7.1	
English literature	24	100		75		8.3	
French	32	79		32		5.0	
German	10	100		70		8.0	
General studies	195	90		39		5.6	

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	45	96		53		6.9	
Further mathematics	6	100		100		9.3	
Chemistry	21	86		52		6.3	
Biology	38	89		32		5.2	
Physics	22	100		45		6.8	
Business studies	19	100		16		5.3	
Economics	14	93		43		6.4	
Computing	19	95		37		5.8	
Sport and physical education	22	100		55		7.0	
Art	11	100		64		8.0	
Music	6	100		67		7.7	
Theatre studies	26	100		46		6.9	
Geography	36	97		42		6.1	
History	39	100		62		7.2	
Religious studies	6	100		33		7.0	
Government and politics	19	100		47		6.5	
Sociology	45	100		62		7.4	
Psychology	45	100		51		6.8	
English language and literature	38	100		71		7.9	
English language	27	100		41		6.5	
English literature	37	100		49		6.9	
French	25	96		40		6.1	
German	7	100		57		6.9	
General studies	113	85		24		4.7	

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

97. The focus of the inspection was on mathematics, biology and physics, but chemistry and further mathematics were sampled. Two lessons were observed in chemistry. In one, standards were above average, in the other, they were well above average. A-level results in chemistry were similar to the national average in 2001. They rose in 2002. One further mathematics lesson was seen. The students' natural aptitude and enthusiasm for the subject were reflected in the very high level of understanding displayed when discussing their work. The quality of their involvement befitted their future studies as undergraduates. Further mathematics results improved significantly in 2002; four of the six students achieved a grade A and two a grade B.

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- Standards of work are well above average.
- Teachers have a thorough command of the subject and high expectations of their students.
- Students have mature, positive and enthusiastic attitudes to study.
- Relationships between students and teachers are very good.

Areas for improvement

- ICT could be used more extensively.
- The department could extend its monitoring systems further to promote the sharing of good practices.

98. The 2001 A-level results were above the national average. One-third of students obtained a grade A, compared with one-quarter nationally. The achievement of the majority of students was very good. Results in the A2 level examinations improved in 2002 with a significant increase in the proportion of students attaining the highest grades and a significant reduction in the number failing to achieve a pass grade. There is no consistent difference in performance between male and female students. AS results in 2001 were above the national average. As with A-level, these results improved in 2002; half of the students achieved grades A/B. Though most students have high GCSE grades on entry to the sixth form, there is a wide range of prior attainment. Nevertheless, retention rates are very good and a large majority completes the course. In addition to A-level and AS courses the department offers a GCSE re-sit course in the sixth form. Provision is adequate and in 2001 three-quarters of the students succeeded in raising their grades to within the A-C grade range.

99. Standards of work in the current Year 13 are well above average. Overall, students achieve very well. The quality of students' notes and exercises is generally very high and they are usually extremely well organised. Most students annotate their notes to suit their individual needs and their written solutions are well structured and systematic. The work of these students is rigorous and thorough and reflects their very good levels of understanding. This applies across all the modules of work; students' competence with pure mathematics enhances their understanding and progress in mechanics and statistics. A small minority of students, usually those who need to make the greatest extra effort, does not always complete an adequate amount of work to make the necessary progress. Students' work is regularly assessed. Although most marking is thorough, and usually includes extensive correction notes and pointers for improvement, the quality varies between teachers. Year 12 students have recently embarked on the AS course and though most are confidently coping very well with work at this level the progress of a small minority is impeded by a lack of proficiency with essential algebraic skills.

100. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Teachers have high expectations of their students and their detailed command of the subject ensures that they can jointly explore and develop concepts and ideas. In the best lessons the teachers' enthusiasm for mathematics is infectious. Very good relationships between teachers and students, particularly in Year 13, combined with the mature and positive attitude of the students, result in lessons being conducted at an appropriately challenging pace. In a lesson on projectiles, for example, there was a constant interaction between teacher and students as they systematically applied their pure mathematics knowledge to constructing and manipulating a range of appropriate equations. Learning was with understanding. ICT was effectively used in illuminating understanding in a lesson on changing gradients. A good start has been made in using the department's new ICT facilities and further development is already included in departmental plans.

101. Students' views of the subject and the progress they feel they are making are very positive. They are particularly appreciative of the accessibility of teachers when they require extra help and the emphasis in lessons on understanding rather than mere mechanical processes. When discussing mathematical ideas students display an enthusiasm for the subject and very good levels of articulation.

102. There is a very good match of teachers to the requirements of the various modules in the A-level mathematics courses and most members of the department are fully involved at AS and A-level. They share a commitment to do the best for the students and effectively work as a team and in pairs to develop and modify practice. The subject is very well managed and there is clear sense of direction. Monitoring of performance is good. There is scope for further development, particularly in identifying the most effective ways in which students learn.

Biology

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

Strengths

- Teaching is good. Teachers have high expectations and very good subject knowledge, which facilitate learning.
- Assessment, monitoring and target-setting are good.
- Students are well motivated, with positive attitudes.
- Accommodation is excellent and is conducive to learning.

Areas for improvement

- There is insufficient use of ICT in lessons due to a lack of equipment.
- The number of higher grade passes could be improved further.
- Larger equipment for A-level practical work is becoming outdated and insufficient.

103. The GCSE A-level results in 2001 were below average, particularly the number of students achieving the higher grades. Results were not as good as those in previous years. Girls outperformed the boys. The AS-level results in 2001 were average. They were similar to students' predicted grades, with most students achieving their targets. In 2002, the A2 level results were much improved, both in the overall pass rate and in the number of students achieving higher grades. The AS-level results also improved. Retention rates in biology are very good.

104. Standards of work seen during the inspection are above average. They are achieved because of good teaching and the positive attitudes of the students. Achievement is good in relation to students' attainment at the start of Year 12. Male and female students achieve similarly.

105. Students in Year 13 make good progress in lessons and are achieving well in relation to their GCSE results. Their written work shows that they can describe ecological sampling techniques and graphically display results. They demonstrate competence in practical work, performing serial dilutions with care and accuracy during a microbiology lesson. Students in Year 12 show clear understanding of the structure and function of cells. One group of Year 12 students demonstrated knowledge of the surface area to volume ratio concept in living organisms and its importance to them. These students are successfully building on work covered at GCSE level.

106. Teaching in biology is good overall, enabling students to learn well. Teachers are widely experienced and have very good subject knowledge that enables them to give clear explanations of facts to help learning. Lessons are well planned and have a brisk pace to maintain students' interest. Lesson aims are clearly stated at the beginning of every lesson so that students are fully aware of what they are to learn; reviews at the end of each lesson help to consolidate learning. Students are encouraged to share ideas and help each other. The development of independent learning skills is fostered through project work and individual studies. Students are encouraged to use the Internet. Teachers have high expectations 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. Marking of students' written work is thorough and appropriately annotated, giving clear guidance on areas for improvement, with good use of praise and encouragement. Assessment takes place through regular testing and targets are regularly reviewed so that students are always aware 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. An annual fieldcourse is organised and attended by all students, who also attend revision conferences at nearby universities. The department has good links with outside agencies such as Sheffield University and the local hospital, the latter allowing potential medical students to visit various departments and shadow members of staff, whilst the University provides visiting speakers. It is hoped to increase links of this type further because of the positive motivational effects on the students.

107. Students learn well and make good progress in lessons because of the good teaching, and also because they are mature and highly motivated. Many of them need to do well in biology because of their career aspirations, which further motivates them. They respond well in lessons and rise to challenges as shown during question and answer sessions. They work co-operatively together in both theory and practical lessons and help each other and share ideas in a mature and sensible way.

108. The department is well led and managed and there has been good improvement since the previous inspection. There is a good team ethos within the department and members of staff support each other and share information and expertise. All staff are biology specialists, enabling them to teach lessons with confidence. There is a clear focus on direction and a commitment to the continued improvement of examination results. Teaching is monitored regularly and good discussion encourages new practices to be shared. Regular meetings to review students' progress ensure that their effort is sustained. Assessment and record keeping are good. There needs to be an increase in the number of higher grade passes. The excellent accommodation provides a pleasant working environment. Resources are satisfactory but they are under strain because of an increase in student numbers and the high cost of providing textbooks for the new A2 level course. Larger equipment for sixth form work, such as microscopes and colorimeters are becoming outdated, as are the laptop computers which in turn leads to insufficient use of ICT in lessons. The department receives good technical support from six technicians.

Physics

Overall the quality of provision in physics is **very good**.

Strengths

- Results in public examinations have improved significantly.
- Standards of work are well above average.
- Students have a good grasp of physics concepts, have good practical skills and are achieving very well.
- Teaching is very good.
- The subject is very well led with good organisation and management.
- A wide range of additional learning opportunities is provided within and outside the school.

Areas for improvement

- There is insufficient use of ICT to enhance students' learning in physics.
- The system for setting and reviewing students' targets during the course could be improved.

109. The A-level results in 2001 were similar to the national average. They improved significantly in 2002. AS level results were well above national results in 2001 but showed a slight decline in 2002. Results represented very good achievement given the GCSE results of those involved. There was no significant difference in the performance of males and females. Results have shown significant improvement in the last few years. Almost all those starting the AS course and the second sixth form year leading to A2 level completed the courses.

110. Standards of work are well above average in Year 13. Students achieve very well. Written work is very good with the exception of a small group of the lowest attainers where there is incomplete and missing work. Students are very good at using mathematics to solve physics problems. Practical work is particularly good. Students grasp and learn concepts well and also show evidence of a thorough training in experimental methods. They competently carry out investigations, for example in Year 12 measuring Young's modulus for a variety of plastic bags. In Year 13, the careful recording, processing of results and evaluation of practical experiments were written up in a detailed and exemplary manner, most students showing excellent understanding of the principles involved and an awareness of how accurate and reliable the results might be.

111. Teaching is very good and this is the main reason for the good results. Lessons are very well planned with clear educational objectives and a careful structure. Theory lessons are broken up into a variety of activities to aid concentration and learning. A lesson on motion and force in Year 12 analysed the factors involved in road accidents to develop understanding of the physical principles involved. This made the science relevant and interesting. A particular feature of the teaching is the wide variety of additional learning opportunities provided, such as university lectures, hospital visits and participation in national initiatives. These show how physics is used in the real world and helps students to have a much deeper understanding of the subject. Teachers are skilful at questioning students and their clear exposition of complex topics is particularly good. They have a thorough, confident knowledge of their subject. Teachers support students in practical lessons well. Learning is very good as a result of the very good teaching. Learning was successfully aided by the use of ICT in one lesson in Year 13 to model the electric field and potential around charges, but, overall, there is insufficient use of ICT to sense the environment, process results and enhance learning.

112. Marking of students' work is thorough and regular. Targets are provided at the beginning of the course but the system is not extended throughout the whole course. The provision of short-term learning goals based on assessments, tracking of students' progress and discussions which already take place

between staff and students would help all students, but particularly the less capable, to make maximum progress.

113. The response of students to the teaching is very good and they learn very well. They work hard, are attentive and show interest. Most produce good quality written work. They work very well together in a friendly, co-operative atmosphere. Relationships between students and with staff are very good. Teachers are particularly good at providing a positive ethos in which good learning and academic results can be achieved. Students appreciate the quality of their physics education.

114. The subject is very well led and managed. Accommodation for physics, which was commented upon adversely in the previous report, is now excellent. Resources are well used and managed with adequate technical support, which is also an improvement on the previous inspection. Resources are generally sufficient but there is a shortage of ICT equipment and this is detrimental to students' learning.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

115. The focus was on Design and Technology. Two AS level Product Design courses were introduced in 2001. These were Resistant Materials and Graphics Products with Materials Technology. These have been considered together.

Product Design

Overall, the quality of provision for design and technology is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- Two AS/A level courses have been successfully established.
- In the first year of these courses, students are achieving in line with the standards they achieved at GCSE.
- There have been good improvements in the curriculum and teaching as a result of good management.

Areas for improvement

- Some teaching focuses too much on routines and too little on developing independent approaches to design.
- Students make too little use of computer aided design and manufacture.

116. The GCE AS level results in 2002 were similar to expectations based on students' GCSE examination results. Male and female students did equally well. Few students did not complete the course. These results in the first sixth form entry from the school in a design and technology subject are an indication of the recent good improvements in standards in the subject.

117. Overall, the standards of work of current students are average but the best work is of a high standard. Both Year 12 and Year 13 project folders are well presented and students make good use of computers for presenting text and graphics. They make very limited use of computer aided design and manufacture (CAD/CAM) because facilities for this work have only recently been installed. However, a Year 12 project to design and manufacture a mouse mat using CorelDraw and a vinyl cutter is providing a basic introduction to CAD/CAM. Students approach designing in Year 12 in a rather routine manner but by Year 13 they are beginning to show a more independent approach. Some AS level folders lack clear design objectives, which limits the rigour which students apply to evaluating their ideas. Drawing standards are mostly good, however many students spend too much time on presenting early ideas at the expense of generating and developing ideas through quick sketches and modelling. Final products are usually well made. Students have a sound understanding of the technologies which are relevant to their

courses, for example Year 13 students showed understanding of the use of smart materials during a well-prepared discussion of this topic. Overall, students are achieving satisfactorily in relation to their attainment in GCSE.

118. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. No lessons were unsatisfactory and several were good. Teachers have worked very hard to introduce two new AS level courses in one year but some lack of experience at this level has led to too much concentration on following procedures rather than on the 'organic' development of a design. For example teachers sometimes respond to questions about what to do next by reference to the mark scheme rather than requiring students to rigorously consider what they can do to improve their designs. This partly results from very limited opportunities for teachers to attend external briefings about new courses, which has led to them 'playing safe'. Teachers have sound subject knowledge and prepare thoroughly; consequently students acquire a sound understanding of technologies. They monitor students' progress well and then give students thorough individual help which ensures they make sound progress with their projects.

119. Most students chose these courses because they enjoyed design and technology in GCSE. Those students who were studying a different area from that which they studied in GCSE found no difficulty in changing and applying their previous experience. Some pupils remarked that they found designing for a client, which is possible at AS level and required at A level, more interesting than designing for themselves and in some respects easier to do well.

120. There have been many recent improvements in the provision for design and technology as a result of good management. There is now a clear direction for the future. Changes have been put in place in the main school that should feed through into higher standards in the sixth form. Teaching is monitored both directly and through the work of students. There is insufficient provision to enable students to use ICT regularly in some classes. Nevertheless, improvement since the previous inspection, particularly shown by the successful introduction of the subject in the sixth form, has been good.

BUSINESS

121. In this curriculum area the school offers courses in business studies and economics. The focus was on business studies, but economics was sampled. Two lessons were observed, indicating that students achieve high standards as a result of good teaching. In one class, students were challenged to explain aspects of national and international trade. They responded well with fluent use of the correct terminology.

Business studies

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

Strengths

- Teachers are very experienced.
- Extra-curricular activities and business links are excellent.
- Resources are very good.
- Students have positive attitudes to the subject.

Areas for improvement

- Examination results could be raised further, especially the proportion of higher grades.
- Teaching and learning could be monitored more rigorously to determine the most effective methods of learning.

- Students' independent study skills could be developed further.

122. Results at A-level in 2001 were well above the national average, with a large proportion obtaining the highest grades. Results in the A2 level examinations in 2002 showed a significant decline because the students were of lower ability and staff were not fully aware of the requirements of the new syllabus. Results in the AS examinations taken by Year 12 students in 2001 were similar to the national average. They improved in 2002. Completion rates for both courses were very good.

123. Standards of work in the current Year 13 are above average and the students are achieving well. They are able to interpret tables of figures in their business accounts and can understand the technical language involved. They show good understanding of marketing terms and make frequent use of computers. Students from ethnic backgrounds make good progress. In one lesson, students successfully worked out examples of fixed and variable costs. Progress was good as a result of very good teaching, in which the teacher used a computer projection to show detailed accounts on the board.

124. Standards of work in the AS group in Year 12 are above average. The class, containing students of both very high and very low ability, is achieving well as a result of good, forceful teaching, making very good use of external business links. The students show good business knowledge and an awareness of local and national issues, because they are introduced to good, up to date, materials from journals and magazines, as well as making frequent visits to local businesses. There is more scope, still, to involve the students in their own learning through more discussion and group work. This will also help to overcome the problem of their widely varying abilities.

125. The quality of teaching and learning is consistently good. Teachers are very well qualified and experienced and have interpreted the new specifications well. They use very good resources, including ICT, and employ up-to-date written resources. This ensures that the quality of written work is improved by the use of clear business vocabulary. Teachers effectively use their external links to enhance classroom teaching. In one class, the results of a local visit to a food outlet were used to illustrate marketing. Teachers mark work promptly and students say they always receive good feedback and are clear about their target grades. The amount of homework set is challenging.

126. The students' attitudes to the subject and to the school are very positive. Many specify the school's reputation for good teaching and good results as their reason for coming into the sixth form. Many of them have taken business studies as a subsidiary subject, as many courses in higher education include elements of business. The students enjoy the content of the subject, as well as the many externally sponsored competitions and activities, such as Young Enterprise, for which the school has an impressive array of trophies. The subject contributes to the students' awareness of many moral and social issues such as the effects of the global economy.

127. The subject is managed, along with economics, on an effective but informal basis. The curriculum is well organised, but more monitoring of teaching and learning would encourage consideration of how students learn effectively through alternative methods, such as independent study. Standards have risen steadily since the previous inspection, in line with the school average, but, to raise standards further, the students need to develop more independent skills in tackling project work. Accommodation and resources have greatly improved since the previous inspection and the department has the capacity for further improvement.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

128. The focus was on computing. Information and communication technology (ICT) which has been introduced at AS level this year was also sampled. One ICT lesson was observed. In the one lesson seen, teaching was good. Students gained a thorough understanding of data security because the teacher had a

good knowledge of the subject and was well prepared. The introduction of this course provides an important widening of the curriculum to accommodate those students who wish to take an AS/A level course to support their other subjects.

Computing

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

Strengths

- Examination results at AS and A-level are well above average.
- Students achieve better than would be expected from their GCSE results.
- Teaching is very good.
- The leadership and management of the subject are very good.

Areas for improvement

- Some lessons do not provide sufficient opportunities for students' active participation.

129. Results in the GCE A-level examination results in 2001 were well above the national average. In 2002, results declined slightly. The pattern of results at AS level in 2001 and 2002 was similar. In both years students' results were significantly higher than would have been expected from their GCSE grades. Male and female students achieve equally well but very few female students take this course. The large majority of students completed the course. There has been a significantly improving trend in examination results since the previous inspection.

130. The standards of work of current students in both Years 12 and 13 are well above average and they are achieving very well in relation to their GCSE results. Students attain equally high standards in all areas of the syllabus in both their AS and A level courses. They present their work with clarity, making for instance, very good use of flow diagrams to describe and design systems. Although most start the AS level course without experience of programming, they develop a very good technical understanding of computing and by Year 13 are very effective programmers. They systematically test and evaluate their programs. All students can work independently and some particularly interested and able students extend their work well beyond the demands of the syllabuses. For example, two A level students developed a Linux server and another group of students created graphics effects for a drama production.

131. Teaching and learning are very good overall. Together with the high motivation of most students the quality of teaching is a major factor leading to the high levels of attainment. This is achieved in spite of regular changes of staff as new teachers seek promotion after a few years. All the teachers have a very good knowledge of their subject and have high expectations of the students. In the best lessons complex concepts are conveyed with clarity. For example, in a lesson about relational database design an experienced teacher used his excellent teaching skills to ensure that teaching materials introduced by one of the new teachers clarified the concept of normalisation. Hence, students quickly learned how to carry out the three stages. This also provided an exemplar for the less experienced teachers. Through good monitoring, weaker aspects of some lessons, such as too much concentration on covering a lot of content and involving the students too little in their own learning, are being tackled. Marking is mostly very thorough and ensures that students' learning is fully monitored.

132. The students taking this course enjoy computing. They work hard, ask pertinent questions, quickly learn to work independently and hence produce well thought out individual projects that show logical development. Most are applying their understanding to their other subjects and to their choice of career even though this was not foremost in their mind when choosing to study the subject; a decision mostly based on their enjoyment of ICT at GCSE.

133. The high standards achieved in computing are as a result of very effective management of the subject. This ensures consistently high standards of learning, through thorough monitoring, even when students come from a wide ability range and there are changes in staffing. Thorough professional development enables teachers to keep abreast of a rapidly developing subject.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

134. Sport and physical education is the only course provided in this cluster of subjects. It was a focus subject of the inspection.

Sport and physical education

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

Strengths

- Results in 2001 were among the highest five per cent in the country.
- Results and standards of work are consistently well above average.
- Teaching is very effective; teachers have excellent knowledge of the subject and very high expectations of students.
- Students are very committed to the course, especially to their personal projects.
- Leadership and management of the subject are very effective.

Areas for improvement

- ICT is not used extensively enough to support teaching and learning.
- The range of activities in which students take an active part in their own learning is limited in some lessons.

135. The 2001 A-level examination results were among the top five per cent in the country. Although there has been a slight decline in 2002, results have been consistently high over the past three years and they have improved since the previous inspection. The 2001 AS examination results were well above average. There was a slight decline in 2002. Although more males than females take the course, they achieve equally well gaining much better results than expected based on their GCSE results. Most students complete the course.

136. The standard of work of current students is well above average. Students are achieving very well. In Year 13, students have a secure understanding of the theory of sport studies. In one lesson, students accurately described sources of energy and explained processes of energy release during exercise in response to the teacher's skilful and probing questions. A strong feature of students' work is their ability to apply the theory to practical work. In Year 12, students plan exercise programmes and relate theory to their planning. They analyse their chosen activity and apply the principles of training to their personal programmes. In Year 13, students do equally well in drawing on a full range of theory to explain and make adjustments to their programmes of improvement relating to specific skills. For example, they discuss theories of motivation, personality and learning. The depth of analysis varies between students but with additional guidance from teachers most reach well above average standards, including students with modest attainment at GCSE. The close attention students receive from teachers helps develop a high level of commitment which contributes to their success, especially in their personal projects.

137. Very good teaching helps students to learn at a rapid rate giving them confidence and developing very positive attitudes towards study. Teachers are very demanding of students' effort, rate of learning and commitment to the subject. They are highly committed to ensuring that students succeed. Teachers

expect students to carry out a great deal of reading and to carry out their own research using the Internet and a well-stocked department library. Students respond well to this encouragement and their efforts contribute to a high level of achievement especially in their personal projects. Teachers use their outstanding expertise in the subject and understanding of examination requirements to give students frequent expert guidance. This is particularly effective in helping students to develop the depth and complexity of their personal projects. Lessons are carefully planned and complex concepts broken down carefully into small manageable steps. Teachers question students frequently to check understanding and they are quick to pick up on any misconceptions. Lessons are demanding and move at a very good pace so that students concentrate hard and are always ready to contribute their ideas. In a very successful lesson on personality in sport, students shared their ideas well and developed confidence in their own ideas through well-structured pair and group discussions. In some lessons opportunities to encourage students to discuss their work with each other and to apply their knowledge and understanding in collaboration with others are missed. Teachers' planning of lessons, although identifying knowledge, skills and understanding to be learnt, does not often identify what lesson activities will take place to support learning. Teachers provide good quality written material to support students' learning but more use could be made of ICT to improve the quality of the presentation of learning materials.

138. The subject is very well led and managed. Enthusiastic leadership and high expectations of students and staff result in high standards. Very close analysis of students' performance in examinations has led to increased support for students to ensure that they reach their full potential. For example, an e-mail contact was established over the summer holidays, which enabled students to receive on-going support as they worked on their projects. Performance management systems are supporting improvements in the subject. Targets are firmly based on improving students' achievement and the action necessary to achieve this is identified and carried out. Since the previous inspection standards have risen and the quality of teaching has improved. Overall improvement is very good.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

Each of the three courses the school provides in this curriculum area was a focus subject.

Art and design

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

Strengths

- Results at A2 level showed a significant improvement in 2002.
- Teaching and learning are very good, and students' achievement is very good as a result.
- The subject makes a very good contribution to students' cultural development.

Areas for improvement

- Too much of the work is on too small a scale, reducing its impact.

139. In the A-level examination in 2001, results were average. They were also average in the AS examination in the same year. In 2002, results improved at AS level, and they improved significantly at A2 level. Numbers of male students taking the examination have been too small to reliably compare the attainment of male and female students. The great majority of students complete the course, and retention is very good.

140. Standards in the work of current Year 13 students are well above average. Their work from observation is confident, and they produce accurate drawings from plant forms, which very effectively

render detail and texture. Their mixed media work is strong, and tissue paper, glue and wire are used imaginatively to create vigorous and colourful studies. Sketchbooks are rich and lively, and research has a strong impact on the development of students' own work. Higher attaining students show a delicacy of touch and high standards in watercolour work. However, too much work in painting and sculpture is on too small a scale, and this restricts its impact. Overall, students make very good gains in their skills knowledge and understanding of the subject, and achievement is very good.

141. Standards of work seen in Year 12 are well above average. Students learn to use a variety of materials and processes, in both two and three dimensions. Their batik work is bright and bold, and compositions in this medium effectively express the fluidity of water. They also make very good gains in their skills in experimenting with colour, for example; when working with brightly coloured felt. Overall, their achievement is very good.

142. Teaching and learning are very good overall. A significant strength of the teaching is the sense of urgency that is communicated to students, creating a very brisk pace in lessons. Teachers also give very good individual advice, and provide a very wide variety of materials. For example, in a lesson where students were working individually, the introduction was very brisk, and the teacher's manner was purposeful. Students were constantly encouraged to work vigorously, and were challenged to engage with a wide variety of materials. They responded very well, and enthusiastically cut and rolled clay, and worked with plaster, wire and glue. This approach produced very good levels of interest, a busy atmosphere, and very good learning.

143. Students' attitudes are very good, and they respond very positively to the teaching. Relationships are very good, and students listen very intently to the very good advice that they receive. This produces a wide variety of outcomes, and very good learning.

144. The subject contributes positively to the development of students' key skills; for example, students use ICT very effectively to manipulate images and communicate moods and emotions, and they often give short talks about their work.

145. Leadership and management are very good. A very strong educational direction has been established, focused on raising standards. This has been very successful. The subject makes a very good contribution to students' cultural development. Students study a very wide range of artists' work. The programme of gallery visits includes one to Amsterdam. In addition, artists in residence are used to widen students' experience; for example, a recent sculpture workshop produced an impressive large-scale piece, which is displayed on the school building. The provision of resources, however, is barely adequate, and a lack of consumable materials restricts the scale of some of the work that is undertaken.

146. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good.

Music

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

Strengths

- Results in A-level music have been well above the national average in recent years.
- Teaching is very good; teachers have high levels of expertise and are intensely committed to their students.
- Students are highly motivated towards their learning and to a wide range of musical activities.
- The range and quality of enrichment activities in music is outstanding.

Areas for improvement

- The range of teaching and learning styles could be developed even further.

147. Examination results at A-level in 2001 were well above the national average. Results in the AS examination in 2001 were well above average: most students attained the higher grades of A or B. The pattern of success has been consistently high over recent years, with both the numbers taking the A-level course and those obtaining higher grades increasing. Similar high grades were obtained this year in both A2 level and AS examinations. There is no difference between the attainment of male and female students.

148. The attainment of students observed during the inspection reflected these high standards. Their achievement is very good. Students in Year 13 have particularly well developed abilities as composers. Their ideas are adventurous and innovative; they work equally confidently on pieces for small ensembles or large orchestral scores, using contrasting dynamics, changes of tempo and rhythmic variety to create exciting, energetic effects. Students confidently use information technology music programs as tools for creating their compositions and readily explore the additional potential of the range of sound sources these programs offer. All students are competent in a range of different styles of writing, including counterpoint and four-part chorale harmony, but occasionally their free composition does not employ a sufficiently wide harmonic variety, and although they understand the principles of structure and unity, some longer pieces lack structural coherence. Standards of performing are very high, frequently at a level well beyond the requirements of the examination. Solo and ensemble performances are stylishly interpreted and players have developed effective powers of communication with an audience. Students' knowledge and understanding of the development of different styles of music are very secure, drawn both from knowledge gained during lessons and from their own extensive involvement in a broad range of musical activities. Their research is thorough and their analytical skills are secure.

149. Teaching is very good. Students learn very well because of its high quality. Composition is particularly well taught. Teachers have high levels of expertise and complement each other's different skills to provide for students a wide range of experience on which to draw. In composition lessons, in addition to learning techniques of structure, orchestration and instrumentation students are encouraged to explore their ideas systematically and imaginatively and are taught to observe musical integrity as the prime objective. Lessons are very well planned, the most successful giving students opportunities to develop their musical abilities as widely as possible, and to enjoy the process to the full. In one very good lesson with a Year 12 group, when students presented the outcomes of their research on Impressionism, several spontaneously demonstrated their points with musical examples on different instruments. The entire group ended the lesson with a very creditable attempt at singing a sophisticated mixed-voice arrangement of a popular Christmas song, to a piano accompaniment stylishly improvised by one of the class.

150. Students are well motivated, highly enthusiastic about all their music-making, and deeply appreciative of the commitment shown them by all members of the music department. The subject's groups are expanding in size, and include both boys and girls in roughly equal numbers. All are actively involved in a number of the many vocal and instrumental activities, which range from small instrumental and vocal ensembles to choirs, concert band and orchestra. They develop a considerable measure of independence, directing some of these groups in public performances, and organising the programme for the annual charity concert. All take advantage of the many opportunities offered to attend professional concerts and musical shows.

151. The music department is managed very effectively. Students' work is carefully marked and regularly assessed, and students benefit from the quality of advice available on an individual basis. Individual profiles on students' on-going achievement ensure that each one is well informed about their progress. The department's provision for gifted and talented students is very good, and the aspirations of all are well catered for in preparation for their interviews and auditions for entrance to university or music

college. The accommodation, new since the previous inspection, is good, although there are still too few practice rooms. Resources, particularly for ICT, are very good. Opportunities for students' social and cultural development are outstanding. There is a regular programme of concerts and recitals in which the repertoire performed offers a high challenge. The quality of performances is consistently very high and at times outstanding.

152. Since the previous inspection the already high standards of attainment have risen further and improvement is very good.

Theatre studies

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

Strengths

- Teaching and students' learning are very good.
- Students achieve very well.
- Students benefit from an extensive programme of extra-curricular activities and theatre visits.

Areas for improvement

- The numbers of students obtaining higher grade passes in public examinations could be increased.

153. Standards of work in drama and theatre studies are above average. Although the examination results in A-level in 2001 were below average, the most recent results show a very significant improvement. All students who undertook the course at AS level went on to complete their studies at A-level. There is no significant difference in the achievement of male and female students.

154. Similar improvements in standards were observed in work seen during the inspection, principally as a result of the introduction of a different, more appropriate examination syllabus. Students have developed a good understanding of stagecraft and recognise the importance of voice, pace, gesture and facial expression in order to communicate effectively to an audience. Research undertaken by students in Year 13 for their devised drama unit was impressively thorough and well documented. The resulting pieces emerging from sensitive inquiry into the plight of the autistic child and from the study of political violence were compelling, full of compassion, and conveyed to the audience in a highly skilful manner. The overall strength of the pieces demonstrates the high level of commitment that students show towards each other and contributes significantly to the success of the presentations, overcoming occasional structural weaknesses. Students at all levels of ability achieve very well, acting with sensitivity and insight. Some less confident students of lower ability have difficulty in pacing and articulating scripted text, and so are not able to sustain a sense of character convincingly. Students of higher ability show depth of insight in the analyses of plays they have read, but the written responses of students of lower ability are not sufficiently analytical or detailed. Nevertheless, this represents very good achievement in relation to standards at the beginning of the course. Students in Year 12 have made very good progress for the stage of the course, both in sustaining character as seen in performances of extracts from Jim Hampton's 'The Road', and in levels of scholarship. Writing in response to this play, they showed perceptive understanding of the social difficulties caused by poverty and good insight into the social and historical circumstances prevailing in the 1980s; several were able to draw parallels with the problems of deprivation in contemporary society.

155. Students achieve very well because the quality of teaching and learning is very good. Teachers in the department have very good subject knowledge and high levels of expertise. Lessons are well planned, proceed at an energetic pace, challenge is high and very little time is wasted. In one excellent lesson on 'The Tempest' with a group of Year 12 students, activities quickly moved from stylistically appropriate 'fencing' warm-ups to a series of tableaux illustrating selected features of the sub-plot. Students went on to discuss the wide range of sub-plots involved and were constantly challenged through pertinent questioning by the teacher. The resulting discussion produced some highly perceptive comments succinctly expressed in sophisticated terms. For instance, the character of Caliban was viewed as the conflict between 'nature and nurture'. Students work is thoroughly assessed, and by conducting a formal series of reviews with individual students and by informal, on-going feed-back, students are well informed about their progress and know how they can improve.

156. The subject is well led and managed. Staff work together closely, constantly discussing and reviewing outcomes of their work in terms of students' achievements. As a result of careful review and analysis undertaken by the department a new examination syllabus was adopted. This provided a more appropriate course of study for students and led to the recent significant improvement in examination results. The new accommodation for drama is very good, as are resources. There are good information technology and sound systems, which permit students to realise their designs for lighting and sound plots. In addition to an extensive performance schedule, which involves all students, the department offers excellent opportunities for visits to professional productions, both in the immediate area and further afield. A trip to 'The Globe' in London provided students with a real insight into life in the theatre during Shakespeare's time.

157. Workshops with professional actors take place in school, and students become involved in all aspects of the annual dramatic production.

158. The department did not exist as a separate entity at the time of the previous inspection. It is now successfully established and well placed to improve even further.

HUMANITIES

159. The focus was on geography, history and psychology, but sociology and government and politics were also sampled. In sociology, examination results were well above average in 2001 and the results in 2002 were broadly similar. One lesson was observed. Learning was good reflecting good teaching of a range of relevant concepts dealing with marginality and sub-cultures in society. In government and politics, examination results in 2002 were slightly lower than those obtained in 2001, which were very high and in the top five per cent of the country. One lesson was observed. Students made very good progress in developing their understanding of the significance of mid-term elections in the United States of America. They were very well prepared for their discussions, and the teacher's own knowledge of the topic was used very effectively in skilful questioning which extended and consolidated the students' learning.

Geography

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

Strengths

- Examination results were well above average in 2001.
- Students have very good attitudes to learning.
- Teaching is very good. Teachers work well together.

Areas for improvement

- The use of ICT to support learning is too limited.
- The monitoring and review of new curriculum initiatives is incomplete.

160. In the 2001 A-level examination all of the students gained pass grades and over half gained A/B grades. These results were well above the national average. Students' results in geography were significantly above those of other subjects they took. Between 1999 and 2001 results in geography were consistently well above national figures. Females gained slightly better results than males. In 2002, there was a slight decline in results at A2 level. The 2002 AS level examination results in Year 12 represented an improvement compared with those of the previous year. Over a third of students gained an A or B grade. Course completion rates are very good.

161. Standards of work are well above average and students achieve very well. In a Year 12 lesson students had a very good understanding of the factors affecting rainfall and runoff in different river catchment areas. They were able to analyse data and reach very sound conclusions. Both male and female students respond well to challenging tasks and make very good progress. For example, in a Year 13 lesson students identified 'quality of life' indicators and gave these a weighting. They then ranked cities according to their quality of life, identified anomalies and assessed the implications of their findings for urban management. Students use specialist subject vocabulary with accuracy and show a very good understanding of more complex geographical concepts. Very good standards of literacy were seen in examples of extended writing on the subject of glaciation.

162. Overall, teaching and learning are very good. The standard of teaching seen during the inspection was never less than good. Teachers plan their lessons thoroughly with clear learning objectives. They have very good subject knowledge and set demanding and challenging tasks for higher, middle and lower attaining students that result in them making very good progress. Teachers make use of a variety of resources, use interesting analogies and recount personal experiences, all of which enliven lessons and motivate students. Teachers and students make too little use of ICT in lessons.

163. Students' attitudes towards geography are very good and these have a major impact on their learning. They come to lessons very well organised and prepared. For example in a Year 12 lesson each student had prepared information on a periglacial landform, which they presented to the rest of the group. Students demonstrated very good speaking and listening skills and worked co-operatively to share information. Students show trust and confidence in their teachers and are totally focused on their work. Students in Year 13 had clearly been motivated by a recent field visit to Keswick that had deepened their understanding of physical geography.

164. The leadership and management of the department are good and have contributed to the very good improvement that has been made since the previous inspection. Departmental documentation is thorough and priorities for development have been clearly identified. Teaching and learning are monitored effectively. The department has not, as yet, monitored and reviewed the new curriculum initiatives that have been implemented in the last three years. This should be done. Good use is made of prior attainment data to set targets for students and plan individual learning needs. Teachers in the department work collaboratively to produce resources and share good practice. They are committed to further improvement.

History

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

Strengths

- A2 level results improved very significantly in 2002 in comparison with 2001.
- Standards are above average and students achieve well.
- The overall quality of teaching is good, with paired and group learning strategies a particular strength.
- Students have positive attitudes to learning and co-operate very well with one another.

Areas for improvement

- More use could be made of information collected from assessment procedures.
- The advice given through the marking of some students' work could be improved.

165. The GCE A2 level examination results in 2002 showed a very significant improvement on those obtained in 2001, which were well below average. Students who took history did not do as well as in their other subjects, or in relation to their GCSE results. In 2002, over half the candidates obtained the higher A and B grades and, creditably, all who took the examination obtained at least a pass grade. They did well in relation to their GCSE and AS level results with many maintaining or improving upon the high standards reached earlier. Differences between male and female students were not significant. These same students' AS level results in 2001 were above average. AS results in 2002 declined slightly. Retention rates are very good.

166. The standards of work of current students are above average. In Year 13, students, females in particular, are achieving well in relation to predictions based on their GCSE and AS -level results. In lessons, students are making good progress because the lessons are well planned and challenging. Students have positive attitudes to learning. In one lesson they were able to gain a clear understanding of the effectiveness of Nazi electioneering methods because all contributed well to an analysis of campaign posters which were then shared with the rest of the class. In an initial lesson on a new topic, students gained an accurate understanding of the nature of Italian fascism although they made more effective use of their written analysis of documents than their discussions. Higher attaining students' written work is wide-ranging and detailed with judgements, for example on the motivation for and extent of Stalin's accumulation of power. The work was well supported by evidence and made good use of students' understanding of the views of different historians' interpretations of the period.

167. Students in Year 12 are making good progress. Their acquisition and consolidation of knowledge is made easier by the provision of good strategies for taking notes and planning written work and presentations. This is ensuring a secure base for future learning. Together with the support from the quality of teachers' marking this has resulted, for most students, in an improvement in the standard of essays since the beginning of the term. A few students have not improved their writing to the same degree because the marking, though accurately pinpointing weaknesses, does not give enough advice about how to improve. A strength in both Year 12 lessons observed was the quality of students' presentations resulting from well-focused and rapid research in class or more detailed analysis emerging from research completed as homework. Students made particularly good progress in learning about the impact of Nazi economic policies on different social and economic groups because of the high quality of their research and presentations. One group of students had the confidence to make their presentation in the form of role-play, which even managed an accurate portrayal of physical characteristics of the author of the reforms being evaluated

168. Teaching and learning are good overall. The range of learning activities and teaching styles used by teachers is well matched to students' capabilities and the requirements of the subject specifications. In a lesson on minorities in Germany in the 1930's, the teacher ensured that the most difficult group to research went to the highest attaining students. Teachers make comparisons with the present day, which not only helps students to understand the events and concepts being studied, but also contributes well to their personal development. Subject knowledge is used well in questioning and to lead students into deeper understanding through analysis of their discussions and presentations. Very good teaching had these qualities, together with a real pace, and was enhanced by the injection of humour, which raised interest and sustained motivation. Marking is regular and analyses students' written performance well.

Occasionally, there is not enough written advice on how the students, particularly those who are weaker, can improve.

169. Students are mature well-motivated and hard working. Most are adept at making notes and annotating printed handouts. Relationships with their teachers are very strong and they take notice of advice, which helps them to improve. Students work very effectively with each other in allocating and performing tasks. They enjoy the subject and appreciate the opportunities, which are provided to learn co-operatively while at the same time maturely recognising that some aspects of learning require either more individual or whole class methods.

170. The subject is well managed and led. The range of teaching styles has been broadened in order to improve the quality of learning, and the recent introduction of the new A2 level and AS courses has been supported by the provision of good quality texts and other learning materials. Strategies for supporting students' progress are good, for example by providing one to one tutorial sessions. Assessment procedures are good but the analysis of assessment information could be improved.

Psychology

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

Strengths

- Teaching is good and consequently students achieve well.
- Examination results improved significantly in 2002.
- Students' attitudes to learning are very good. This has a positive effect on the standards that they achieve.

Areas for improvement

- Opportunities for learning outside the classroom are limited. This reduces students' awareness of applied aspects of the subject.
- Teaching could be developed further through the extended use of the most effective learning styles.
- More use could be made of ICT to support students' learning.

171. Results at GCE A-level for 2001 were similar to the national average. Those for 2002 indicate a significant improvement in terms of the number of students achieving both A/B and A – E grades. This represents good achievement based on attainment on entry to Year 13.

172. The performance of candidates in the 2001 AS level was above the national average but declined in 2002. This represents satisfactory achievement based on attainment on entry to the sixth form. Girls generally outperform boys in both AS and A-level courses. There are at present no specific strategies in place for raising boys' attainment.

173. Retention rates are very good on both AS and A2 level courses and the proportion of students progressing onto the A2 programme is satisfactory. Students interviewed felt they were very well supported in their studies and welcomed the fact that staff gave freely of their time outside lessons. Psychology is a popular subject and many pursue the subject on leaving the school.

174. Standards of work are above average and students achieve well. Evaluation skills develop steadily within both A and AS options and this comprises a significant reason why learning is good. Students generally develop a good working knowledge of the principal case studies that inform the main debates within the discipline, for example Bandura and Ross and the imitation of aggression. Throughout both courses there is very good provision for personal development and students of all levels of ability

have a detailed knowledge of ethical issues, for example in relation to Milgram and studies concerning authority and obedience. Files are well kept and contain a good body of work.

175. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Lessons are well planned with clear objectives. For example, in a lesson mapping out the principal characteristics of the study of autism, students were given a sound framework for identifying the symptoms using professionally recognised criteria. There are useful course guides to help set expectations. These need to be developed further to reinforce effective teaching and learning strategies. The best lessons are animated and characterised by very good pace and variety of activity that allow opportunity for extensive peer group discussion and review. A very good feature is the developing use of peer group assessment. This could be further refined by the more considered use of group work in lessons. Marking is good but more consistent use could be made of short and medium term target-setting.

176. There are limited opportunities to deepen understanding through visits to national conferences and visiting lecturers. Guidance on both career paths in psychology and appropriate courses in higher education is good, but students are not given sufficient opportunity to experience applied aspects of the discipline, for example within education and clinical fields.

177. Leadership and management are good and there is a clear vision for the development of the subject. Schemes of work are well articulated and learning support materials produced by the department are of good quality. There is a good match of teachers' expertise to the demands of the curriculum and the increasing number of students who are now opting for the subject. Information about students' progress is being analysed with increasing precision. It is beginning to inform curriculum planning but this needs to be sustained in order that staff have a clearer understanding of effective and preferred learning styles.

178. Resources are well selected and of good quality and texts are up to date. Funding is however limited and, at current levels, cannot sustain the acquisition of sufficient reference materials that are a significant contributor to deepening and broadening student awareness of current debates within the discipline. This is exacerbated by the comparatively large number of students now studying psychology.

179. Psychology was not reported on as part of the sixth form programme at the time of the previous inspection. Improvement in results and management has been good. A weaker aspect of the subject has been the use of ICT, for example in research methodology and statistical analysis.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

180. The focus was on English literature, but English language and the combined course in English language and literature were also sampled. In English language, examination results at A-level in 2001 were well above average. The 2002 results showed a slight decline in the average points score. Results were above average at AS level in 2001 and they improved in 2002. In the three lessons observed, teaching and learning were good overall. In one lesson students made very good progress in learning how to analyse an early modern English text. This was the result of careful preparation in previous lessons, effective group presentations, and the teacher's challenging questioning.

181. Examination results in 2001 at A-level and AS level in the combined course were above average and they improved in 2002. Two lessons were observed and both were very good. Teachers' high expectations and purposeful lesson planning, together with students' keen interest and co-operative attitudes, made the lessons demanding, lively, and productive. Of particular note were the excellent end of lesson reviews and the detailed critique of students' written work.

182. In languages, one lesson of A-level German was sampled. Teaching and learning were good, because the teacher used German exclusively, there was a high level of challenge in the lesson and the

teacher involved students through skilful questioning. As a result, students could talk at length with confidence and fluency, using complex language.

English literature

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

Strengths

- Examination results in 2001 were in the top five per cent of the country
- Teaching is very good. teachers have a very good command of the their subject which they pass on very successfully to the students through high expectations and skilful questioning.
- Assessment and marking are very good. Students benefit from very clear and detailed guidance on how to improve their work.
- The very good relationships between teachers and students boost students' confidence and enable them to enjoy their work

Areas for improvement

- The subject does not have sufficient access to computers.
- The reticence and inaudibility in oral responses of a minority of students restrict their achievement in lessons.

183. The GCE A-level results in 2001 were very high. The proportion of students gaining grades of A/B was well above the national average, and there was 100 per cent success at grades A-E. Results in 2002 were not as high, but once again all students passed the examination, and they achieved very well in spite of some initial instability in the grouping arrangements. This is especially true of those students who joined the sixth form from other schools.

184. In the current Year 13, standards are well above average, and students are achieving very well overall. Half of the group achieved grades A-B in the 2001 AS examination and they continue to work at this level. Most students cope competently with unfamiliar language, as in 'The Canterbury Tales', and they respond successfully to the challenge of translating words and phrases into modern English. Higher attainers make lively and well-informed responses, and they explain accurately how Chaucer uses irony in his description of the worldly Prioress. Their written work provides good evidence of extensive research and they produce well-constructed essays in which texts are analysed perceptively. Middle attaining students express themselves clearly in writing, and make points effectively with apt use of quotations. The work of lower attainers is well presented, but has a tendency to be more descriptive than evaluative. Although class discussions are usually animated, there are, however, a few students who lack confidence in speaking. They are often very difficult to hear, and their reticence in contributing ideas restricts their achievement in lessons.

185. Students in Year 12 are achieving as expected. Newcomers to the sixth form from other schools generally make good progress as they accustom themselves to a different regime. In analysing speeches from 'Othello', students can explain how language is used to portray points of conflict. Most of them show a detailed knowledge of the main characters in 'Wuthering Heights' and make very thoughtful comparisons between the two texts, as for instance on the differences in the way that the desire for revenge affects the characters of Iago and Heathcliff. Students' essay writing is developing well because of the very high quality of collective and individual feedback from teachers. Sixth form students generally are very appreciative of the support they receive from this feedback which, while praising their strengths, pinpoints their weaknesses and indicates what they need to do to improve.

186. Teaching and learning are very good overall. High expectations are apparent in the amount of independent learning required of students, and most students have very responsible attitudes towards their work. They are conscientious and attentive, and work productively, both independently and in groups.

Students generally prepare their work thoroughly beforehand, and so they are able to make a valuable input to class discussions. However, a few students skip their homework, with the result that their contributions are too superficial, as was evident in some of the responses in the lesson on 'The Canterbury Tales'. The very good relationships in the classroom have a direct impact on achievement because students gain in self-confidence and enjoy their work. In the most effective lessons, teachers' rigorous planning ensures that lessons have clear aims, with activities that relate closely to these aims and are carefully tailored to the time available. The use of a wide range of learning methods, together with a purposeful lesson pace and skilful questioning, sustains students' interest and concentration. End of lesson reviews evaluate the quality of the learning. For example, most students made very good progress in appreciating the development of the main characters in 'Wuthering Heights' because they had been stimulated to think more deeply about the significance of key episodes through their teacher's probing questions. Students themselves are very positive about their progress. Course completion rates are very high.

187. The subject benefits from very good leadership and management. Most teachers in the department are involved in sixth form work and constitute a strong, well-organised team. They are prompt to take up opportunities for professional development, such as training on sixth form marking requirements and new examination specifications. The department has very good procedures for the assessment and monitoring of students' progress. However, some opportunities for measuring achievement are lost because the school does not analyse comparative data on the progress of internal students and that of the students who have entered the sixth form from other schools. Resources for learning are good overall. The department is well equipped and its own textual and guidance notes provide very good support for students. Library resources are satisfactory but the ICT facilities are unsatisfactory because they are not accessible to the students.

French

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

Strengths

- Teaching and learning are good.
- Work experience in France is effective in building up students' confidence and competence in the language.
- Systems for monitoring students' progress and identifying underachievement are well developed.

Areas for improvement

- Aims of lessons could be more sharply focused and shared more overtly with students.
- The range of teaching strategies could be broadened still further

188. Over the last four years relatively high numbers of students have been entered for A-level French. Results have been above, sometimes well above, the national average. In 2001, they were above average. Students' grades in 2002 were broadly similar. AS results in 2001 were similar to the national average. They declined in 2002.

189. Currently, standards of work are above average in Years 12 and 13 and students achieve well. Male and female students do equally well. In Year 13, students speak French confidently and convey views and opinions well, although with varying degrees of accuracy. Pronunciation and intonation are good, although it is evident that students are not native speakers of French. In a debate on the death penalty for example, students were able to adopt and defend a stance, and attempt to persuade others of their point of view.

190. In Year 12, the consistent approach of the teachers ensures that students are willing to participate in lessons even when they feel that they do not possess the level of language required by the task. Their comprehension skills are such that they can deal confidently with challenging texts. Teachers encourage students to develop independent research skills by directing them to relevant Internet websites. The standards of both year groups are firmly based on teachers' insistence on giving students a thorough grounding in grammar.

191. Teaching and learning in the sixth form are consistently good. Teachers use French almost exclusively in lessons, which means that students are given a good model of the language to imitate. High expectations encourage students to give of their best, and there is a constant emphasis on improvement through learning from past mistakes. Lessons are challenging and proceed at a good pace. The marking of students' work is regular and thorough, and helps students improve by setting targets for the next piece of written work. Learning objectives, however, are insufficiently sharply focused, and learning is not always fully consolidated at the end of lessons.

192. Students of French are mature and attentive and show interest in the subject. Most are keen to participate in discussions and can sustain and develop their views well, as in a Year 12 lesson on the arguments for and against the legalisation of cannabis. They have good research skills and their understanding of written and spoken French is well developed. They seek help when necessary and usually act on the advice given. This aids their progress significantly.

193. Leadership and management of French are good. Teachers of French follow clear procedures set out in the sixth form handbook. Documentation is well organised and supportive. The department meticulously gathers information from the assessments that teachers make, and the critical analysis of results helps teachers adjust their planning. This is bringing about changes to teaching and learning styles to the benefit of students. Another excellent feature of the sixth form course is the work experience placements for linguists in France. This raises significantly their confidence and competence in speaking the language and their knowledge of contemporary culture and society.

194. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good, in that there is now much better identification of and provision for gifted and talented students, for example through the Business Japanese course.