

INSPECTION REPORT

GEORGE SPENCER FOUNDATION SCHOOL AND TECHNOLOGY COLLEGE

Stapleford, Nottingham

LEA area: Nottinghamshire

Unique reference number: 122903

Headteacher: Tom Clark

Reporting inspector: Michael Lovett
3695

Dates of inspection: 6 – 11 November 2002

Inspection number: 249694

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: Foundation

Age range of pupils: 11 to 18

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Arthur Mee Road
Stapleford
Nottingham

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Telephone number: 0115 917 0100

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Appropriate authority: Governing body

Name of chair of governors: R Cowell

Date of previous inspection: 30 September – 4 October 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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3695	Michael Lovett	Registered inspector		How high are standards? What sort of school is it?
9865	Sue Howley	Lay inspector		Students' attitudes, values and personal development. How well does the school care for its students? How well does the school work in partnership with parents and students?
32086	Joy Bond	Team inspector	Mathematics	How good are curricular and other opportunities offered to students?
12968	Jon Parker	Team inspector	Design and Technology	How well are students taught?
2348	Marianne Ellender-Gelé	Team inspector	French	How well is the school led and managed?
32276	Morag Charlwood	Team inspector	English Media Studies	
10327	Philip Garnham	Team inspector	Biology Physics	
8119	David Milham	Team inspector	Information and Communication Technology	
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REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	7 - 11
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Pupils' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM	12 - 14
PART B: COMMENTARY	
WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL	15
WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED	19
WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	19
PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	20
PART D: THE SIXTH FORM	26
RESULTS AND STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS	26
STUDENTS' ATTITUDES, VALUES AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT	27
TEACHING AND LEARNING	27
CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS	29
THE SCHOOL'S CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS	30
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS AND STUDENTS?	31
THE EFFECTIVENESS OF LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT IN THE SIXTH FORM	31
PART E: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES	

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

This co-educational, comprehensive school has 1308 pupils aged 11-18 on roll, 1116 in the main school and 192 in the sixth form. It has been awarded specialist status as a Technology College, recognition as a Beacon School and as a Training School for training new teachers, and has the Investors in People award for staff development. The school is in the process of establishing its own stand-alone sixth form. Year 12 students are taught on-site. Much Year 13 work remains for this year located off- site in a consortium sixth form centre.

Almost all pupils are admitted from three designated primary schools. A very small number are admitted from elsewhere on the grounds of having a brother or sister at the school or having "probable capacity to benefit from the distinctive education of a Technology College". Almost all pupils are from a white European ethnic background; about 1 per cent of pupils are from each of Indian, Pakistani or Black ethnic groups. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is broadly average; most of these relate to dyslexia or emotional/behavioural difficulties. The proportion with statements of special educational needs is very low. Socio-economic factors are above average. On the whole, pupils' attainment on entry is well above average.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a highly effective school with several outstanding features. Pupils' attainment is well above average in the national tests and GCSE examinations. On the whole, teaching is excellent. Visionary and powerful leadership sets high expectations for staff and pupils and ensures these are met. The school gives very good value for money.

What the school does well

- Teaching is excellent and pupils' learning is very good.
- Strategic leadership, operational management and the professional development of staff.
- Pupils' attainment overall, and progress they make from age 14 to 16.
- Pupils' attitudes and behaviour.
- Use of information technology as a specialist technology college.

What could be improved

There are no significant areas for improvement in provision for the 11-16 age range. Less significant points are included in the full report. Areas for improvement in the sixth form are listed in the Sixth Form Annex.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in Autumn 1996. It has improved significantly since then in many respects. Teaching has improved from good to excellent. Test and GCSE results have continued to rise year on year, and the gap between boys' and girls' attainment is now smaller than the national average. The school has begun to address previous underachievement at A-level by setting up its own sixth form. Recent results have improved to be average. Substantial investment in computers and how ICT is used have led to the school becoming an outstanding example of a specialist Technology College. Internal monitoring, evaluation and spreading of best practice have improved and are now very good. Little progress has been made in providing daily collective worship.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1999	2000	2001	2001
GCSE examinations	A	A	A	B
A-levels/AS-levels	n/a	n/a	C	

Key

well above average A

above average B

average C

below average D

well below average E

Attainment in the National tests at age 14 is well above average and is better than predicted from the well-above average attainment on entry at age 11. This represents good progress and achievement from age 11 to 14. Results are rising faster than the national trend. Pupils' high level of understanding of what and how they learn indicates even better future outcomes.

At GCSE, results are also well above average and are well above what is predicted from the high attainment at age 14. Progress and achievement from age 14 to 16 is therefore very good. Almost every pupil gains five or more GCSE passes, placing the school in the top 5 per cent nationally for this indicator. Taking account of a further rise in 2002, the GCSE results are now improving faster than the national trend. Although boys do not do quite as well as girls, both groups' results are well above average and the gap is slightly narrower than that found nationally. The school has met or exceeded its targets for 2002 and has set appropriate, challenging targets for 2003. The quality of current pupils' work suggests these high standards will continue.

Results in the sixth form have been broadly average for several years. The proportion of entries gaining grades A or B has been below average. The mainly sound achievement of past students is in contrast with the good quality of work of current students.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Pupils want to learn and do well. They are readily engaged by the high standards of teaching in lessons. They are positive and enthusiastic about school and keen to get involved in the range of opportunities and activities provided.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	The excellent behaviour in lessons allows teaching and learning to proceed without interruption. This has a very positive impact on standards achieved. Around the school, pupils are very self-disciplined. This exemplary behaviour results in an orderly community where exclusions are low.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Pupils are confident and feel secure. Relationships are a strength. Pupils work very co-operatively and show respect for one another and for property. Pupils have a very good rapport with adults working in the school. Staff provide excellent role models.
Attendance	Excellent. The vast majority of pupils in all year groups attend regularly. Punctuality to school and to lessons is excellent.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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 is excellent overall. The proportions of lessons that are good, very good and excellent are well above what is usually seen. The teaching of English is very good, and the teaching of mathematics and science is good. The strategic decision taken by the school to focus on teaching and learning is having a significant effect upon practice, particularly in Years 7 and 8, through the 'learning to learn' initiative.

Most pupils start the school with good levels of basic literacy and numeracy skills, and teaching builds on this effectively. Learning proceeds at a very good pace and pupils apply themselves very well. The main strengths in teaching are the high standards of knowledge teachers have of their subjects, careful planning for what students are to learn, the wide range of effective teaching methods and the high levels of challenge built into lessons. Teachers are aware of pupils' differing stages of learning and adapt lessons appropriately.

The quality of teachers' input to the time they have with tutor groups is satisfactory, but not as high as the quality of their subject teaching. Opportunities for encouraging pupils' personal development, for example by discussing the social, moral or spiritual aspects of current events, are sometimes missed.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The school provides a wide range of subjects, which is enhanced by extra-curricular provision. Well planned cross-curricular activity weeks and suspended timetable days develop pupils' skills.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. Procedures to identify needs are effective. Support for learning is managed very well. Subject teachers provide very good support. More could be done to evaluate students' achievements over time.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Moral and social development are strong, in contrast with relative weakness in spiritual development. Although opportunities exist for pupils' personal reflection during assemblies and through organised visits, for example to Beth Shalom, they are not always recognised and shared with pupils in lessons. Pupils develop their cultural awareness well, both in the curriculum and through organised exchange trips and visits. Enrichment through awareness of multi-cultural issues was less evident.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very well. The school has thorough procedures and guidance to ensure the welfare, care, health and safety of pupils. Arrangements for child protection are very good. Academic monitoring and support is excellent. Good behaviour and attendance are promoted well.

In Years 7 and 8, the school has an innovative curriculum with a fresh emphasis on learning. Pupils have an excellent awareness of their preferred learning style and the principles of learning, which are developed in their 'learning to learn' lessons. In Years 10 and 11, appropriate option choices include vocational courses offered at school and at local colleges. Although there are occasional conferences on a religious theme, there is insufficient evidence that the school meets its statutory requirement to

deliver the Agreed Syllabus for religious education in Year 11 and the sixth form, and for daily collective worship throughout the school.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Strategic leadership is excellent. Visionary and powerful leadership from the head teacher leads to high standards being set for all aspects of the school's work. Other managers share the vision and are highly effective in turning it into reality.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Very well. Governors are well informed and committed to the school's continuing success. They support the school effectively in strategic decision-making and by holding the school to account.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Thorough self-evaluation and practices are used to monitor performance, identify areas for improvement and take appropriate action. This is underpinned by excellent management of staff performance and very good professional development of staff.
The strategic use of resources	Very good. The school is very clear about its priorities; it raises and allocates funds efficiently to meet them. Investment in ICT across the school and in new buildings for the sixth form is a particular strength.

Main strengths in leadership and management are the clarity of purpose and vigorous pursuit of key objectives exhibited by the head teacher and senior staff. Their example sets high standards for all other staff and pupils. The management team has the intellectual capacity, energy and courage to innovate, taking evidence from research and carefully evaluating the outcomes of its initiatives. A significant, positive outcome has been to set up the sixth form, but the costs are as yet uncertain. It applies most of the principles of 'Best Value' to a reasonable extent. It compares its own performance with that of other schools and challenges itself to provide high quality. It could apply the principle of consultation better for the 11 to 16 age range by seeking pupils' and parents' views about what they want from the school.

Accommodation has been adapted well for its purpose and is clean, bright and well-maintained, but the quality of indoor accommodation for physical education is well below what is now typical in secondary schools. Staff and pupils cope well with the potential distractions caused in classrooms through which other rooms are accessed.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nearly all parents say that the school expects their child to work hard, teaching is good and their children are making good progress. Behaviour is good. Their children like school and are helped to become mature. The school is well led and managed. Parents feel comfortable approaching the school and are well informed about how their child is getting on. Most parents are satisfied with the amount of work their child is expected to do. Most parents feel that the school works closely with them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A minority of parents, mainly with children in Years 10 and 11, would like to see improvement to the range of activities provided. A small proportion of parents, mainly with children in Year 7, would welcome better information about how their child is getting on. A minority of parents, mainly with children in Years 9, 10 and 11, would like the school to work more closely with them.

A large majority of parents has very complimentary views of the school. The inspection team agrees with these positive views. Views of parents of Year 7 pupils may be explained by the short time their children have been at the school. The school provides very regular information to parents through five progress 'scans' (reports) and an annual report, which is more than is normally found. The scans provide clear information about effort, behaviour and homework and, from Year 9 onwards, also give the National Curriculum levels being worked at. A good range of information sessions is provided and staff work hard to involve parents over academic or behavioural concerns.

ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM

GEORGE SPENCER FOUNDATION SCHOOL AND TECHNOLOGY COLLEGE

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form is undergoing major transformation by being set up as a stand-alone provision at the George Spencer site. The governing body has decided to withdraw from a consortium arrangement with two other schools, where virtually all post-16 provision was made at the Lakeview Centre, a separate building on the site of Chilwell Comprehensive School some four miles away. All three schools contribute to the teaching at Lakeview, and jointly fund a head of centre and support staff. At the time of this inspection, all George Spencer School's Year 12 teaching was provided on its own site by George Spencer staff. Year 13 teaching was split between Lakeview and George Spencer. By agreement with OFSTED, the inspection focused mainly on the work at George Spencer, with a small number of lessons observed at Lakeview. The examination results in this report are for George Spencer students only, whether or not they were taught entirely at George Spencer School or in the Lakeview consortium. From September 2003, the plan is for all George Spencer sixth formers to be taught at George Spencer School.

There are 111 students in Year 12 and 81 in Year 13. Numbers have increased from 151 in 1999 to 192 at present. There are equal numbers of boys and girls in Year 12; in Year 13 there are 58 per cent boys, 42 per cent girls. The normal entry requirement is at least five GCSE passes at grades A* to C. The school also expects at least a grade B at GCSE if a subject is to be continued in the sixth form. About half of Year 11 pupils stay on to the sixth form; a further quarter progress to Further Education Colleges. Almost all students are of white European ethnic background. Two have special educational needs, including one with a statement. Socio-economic circumstances are above average.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

In recent years, provision in the sixth form has been satisfactory but examination results have not matched the high standards reached at age 16. This contrasts with current provision which is good, and in many subjects very good. Teaching is excellent. There is a wide range of advanced academic and advanced vocational courses. Staff have a high level of commitment to making a success of the new stand-alone arrangements. Owing to unusual complexities in funding arrangements, with partial withdrawal from the consortium and new funding responsibilities passing to the Learning and Skills Council, the school has not provided data on the current cost of sixth form provision. A secure judgement on cost effectiveness is not therefore possible at this time.

Strengths

- Teaching is excellent and students' learning is very good.
- Strategic leadership in the creation of the stand-alone sixth form.
- Students' attitudes and behaviour in lessons.
- Improved examination results in 2002 over 2001.

What could be improved

- Studies additional to main courses, to meet students' needs better.
- The proportion of post-16 examination results at grades A and B.
- Collation and evaluation of performance data.
- Identification, monitoring and evaluation of the funding and costs of sixth form provision.

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. Teaching is very good and this leads to very good learning. The standard of work seen in the school is well above average. Students appreciate the help that teachers give them.
Biology	Good. Results are average. Teaching is good and, on occasion, very inventive. Students learn well in a variety of ways. Students in Year 12 need to consolidate their understanding more fully at the end of lessons.
Physics	Good. Results are above average. Teaching is good and students make good progress, with increasing use of ICT to consolidate understanding. A few need to broaden their understanding of the subject and develop confidence in expressing their ideas about it.
Design & Technology	Very good. Recent A-level results are well above the national average. Standards in Year 13 lessons are above average in textiles and in line with the national average in graphics. Teaching is very good.
Information and Communication Technology and Computing	Very good. Teaching is well planned and of consistent, high quality. Students are very well motivated and keen to learn. They are given very good individual advice in lessons which are enhanced by high quality learning materials.
Media Studies	Very good. Teaching is very effective, with teachers having a good understanding of the learning needs of their students. Students make good progress throughout the course, due in part to teachers' effective use of assessment to improve learning.
Geography	Very good. Students work hard in lessons and in their individual studies, and the standard of work seen was good. Teaching is very good, based on very effective planning of the curriculum. Students achieve their potential.
English	Very good. Teaching is very effective, with teachers having a good understanding of their students' learning needs. Students make good progress throughout the subject, due in part to their teachers' expertise and knowledge of the subject.
Modern Languages (French)	Good. Standards are above average in Year 13 where students make good progress and use the language very effectively. More emphasis on speaking the language is needed in Year 12. Teaching is good, and students' attitudes are excellent.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Assessment and tracking procedures are very good. Students receive good advice in lessons on how to improve. Guidance is generally good and readily available. The school needs to review the provision of information about sixth form subjects to Year 11 pupils.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Very good. Plans to transfer sixth form provision fully to the George Spencer site are managed very effectively. Priorities for development are rigorous and appropriate. Day-to-day management is very good. The sixth form team has established a very good climate for learning. The school has identified the need to improve further the use of assessment data to monitor students' achievement.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

The school did not use the questionnaire. Its own survey analysis revealed the following:

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their courses suit their talents. • The school helped them settle well into the sixth form. • They are well taught. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advice into the sixth form and what they do after leaving school. • Being treated as responsible young adults. • Listening and responding to their views.

The inspection team held discussions with many sixth form students, attended the sixth form council meeting and the meeting of the School Team where the new sixth form was reviewed.

Inspectors found that most students were studying suitable courses, although a small number was struggling, for example in mathematics and biology. Students are very well supported in lessons. Helpful information is provided to Year 10 students through taster sessions. Students feel they had insufficient advice and discussion from subject teachers during Year 11. A good programme of advice, careers guidance and visits is scheduled for Year 12 students but has not yet begun. Year 13 students are very pleased with the support they receive in completing their UCAS applications. There are issues relating to the relevance and delivery of the Key Skills and General Studies programme and the arrangements for tutor time and supported private study. The sixth form council discussed all the concerns and plans are in place to review these arrangements. Staff are very committed to the success of the new sixth form arrangements and are very positive about consulting with students and listening to their views.

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

Teaching is excellent and pupils' learning is very good.

- 1 The strategic decision taken by the school to focus on teaching and learning has had a significant impact. Consequently, teaching and learning are major strengths. Teaching in English is very good, and teaching in mathematics and science is good. Overall, teaching is good or better in 88 per cent of lessons and very good or excellent in 54 per cent. This is a significant improvement since the last inspection. These proportions of high quality lessons are well above what is usually found, and together represent an excellent overall quality of teaching. In Years 10 and 11, teaching is very good overall. In these years, there were a few shortcomings in a small number of lessons in French, mathematics and science. These relative weaknesses were due to insufficient planning of activities, lack of pace within lessons and some lack of involvement by pupils in the tasks set. From the sample seen, form tutors were not always making the best use of the form time available with their groups. Opportunities to discuss current issues were being missed.
- 2 Within Years 7 and 8, the 'learning to learn' initiative is having a significant effect upon how pupils learn and the progress they are making. Year 8 pupils speak enthusiastically about the impact of this work upon their own learning. They demonstrate a clear understanding of how different people learn most effectively and describe the types of learning which suit their needs best. They appreciate how teachers are applying this initiative to learning in subjects. For example, for a recent humanities project on the Jews, pupils chose how they would best prefer to present their work to express their views, as a piece of written text, by preparing an interview or by producing a drawing. Year 7 pupils, in a weekly 'learning to learn' lesson, determined what, for them, constituted a good learning environment and reflected on the way in which they study most effectively at home. Teachers are applying the 'learning to learn' principles in lessons with Years 9 to 11. However, the timing of the introduction of the initiative means these pupils are not so highly aware of how best they learn. Nevertheless, the lessons where they learn independently, with the support of teachers, are effective in developing good study habits.
- 3 The main strengths in teaching are the high standards of knowledge teachers have of their subjects, careful planning for what pupils are to learn, the wide range of teaching methods used and the high level of challenge within lessons. The consistency of the quality of the teaching is a major strength because pupils know what is expected of them. They arrive to lessons ready to learn and know that effort and concentration will be insisted upon. For example, in a Year 9 mathematics lesson, the teacher challenged pupils to develop alternative ways of solving problems and pupils rose to the task. In a Year 7 humanities topic on the Norman Conquest, pupils made excellent progress as a result of thorough planning which engaged the group in a wide range of both challenging and reflective activities. These included careful questioning, worksheet resources and use of a video, showing that the teacher recognised the variety of learning styles preferred by individuals within the group.
- 4 The teaching of literacy and numeracy is very good. Basic skills are reinforced appropriately in all years. Teachers stress the importance of accurate spelling, use of subject-specific vocabulary and correct structures in writing and speaking. Teachers make very effective use of computers to enhance learning in all subjects. The school

Intranet provides both an extremely valuable resource to support pupils' learning and a strong link between work undertaken at school and at home.

- 5 Pupils with special educational needs learn well, particularly when learning support assistants are available in lessons. Teachers have a detailed understanding of their pupils' needs, evident in the quality of the individual education plans that support learning for these pupils.

Strategic leadership, operational management and the professional development of staff.

- 6 The school's high qualities and continued improvements in standards are the result of excellent strategic leadership, efficient and effective management and a strong sense of purpose throughout the staff teams. The headteacher has established an insightful vision for how the school should educate and prepare pupils to participate fully and be successful in 21st century life. He has communicated this clearly and powerfully. This is complemented by setting high expectations for all aspects of school activity and by being rigorous in seeing that these are met. Great care has been taken to build teams of management, teaching, technical, administrative and other staff who understand and contribute fully to the overall direction.
- 7 The management team has the intellectual capacity, energy and courage to innovate, and significant opportunities have been taken. As part of its vision to improve pupils' chances in the 21st Century, the school chose to invest in information and communication technology and became one of the first specialist Technology Colleges. This accelerated the installation and use of computer and other technology, funded from government sources and supported by impressive local business partnerships. With determination to continue to improve on pupils' already high achievement, the school investigated how it might make a further, significant difference. Staff researched the possibilities, prepared extensively for and implemented a far-reaching plan to transform teaching and learning for 11 to 14 year olds. This work has already had an impact in classrooms across the whole school, and the effects on test and examination results at ages 14 and 16 are anticipated eagerly. These examples are representative of an extensive range of high quality developments which make George Spencer an excellent example of both a Beacon School and a school where teachers are trained.
- 8 Key to the school's current success is the priority it gives to training and developing staff from all areas of activity. Staff have personal development targets agreed in their annual performance management interview. These are linked to the systematically-written and clearly-focused School Improvement Plan. A high proportion of the statutory in-service training time is devoted specifically to improving teaching and learning. The school's high standards in this area have been recognised by renewal of its Investors in People award.
- 9 Governors are highly committed to the school's continued success. They monitor achievement and make strategic decisions on the basis of improving quality and standards, the main recent example being to withdraw from the local consortium and establish the sixth form provision entirely on site. A secure judgement on the cost effectiveness of the sixth form is not therefore possible at this time. The same uncertainties have led governors to take a cautious approach to planning the school budget, reserving a significant sum to cover contingencies in each of the next three years. The remainder of the school's large budget carry-forward was committed to payment for the new modern languages building and adaptations elsewhere for the

sixth form. Across the whole school, the overall income and expenditure per pupil are slightly above average, but the high quality of provision and outcomes represent very good value for money.

Pupils' attainment overall, and progress they make from age 14 to 16.

- 10 On the whole, the attainment of pupils on entry to the school is well above average. Predictions from their test results at primary school and from standardised tests are that the school will get very good results at age 14 and at GCSE. Owing to the good progress pupils make through to age 14, their results in the nationally-tested subjects of English, mathematics and science are better than even the high predictions. At this age, boys and girls do equally well in mathematics and science, girls do better than boys in English, in line with the national pattern. Results are improving faster than the national trend. The school's ambitious 'learning to learn' project and work to transform teaching are having a noticeable impact on current pupils who therefore have a firm foundation for high achievement in the future.
- 11 At GCSE, results are also well above average, and are well above what is predicted from the high attainment at age 14. In 2002, 75 per cent of pupils gained 5 or more grades A* to C. Progress and achievement from age 14 to 16 is therefore very good. Almost every pupil gains five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to G, placing the school in the top 5 per cent nationally for this indicator. The total GCSE points per pupil is almost 50, which is well above average, being equivalent to over eight B grades or nearly ten C grades per pupil. Taking account of the further improvement in 2002, the GCSE results are now improving faster than the national trend. Although boys do not do quite as well as girls, both groups' results are well above average. The gap between boys' and girls' results in 2002 is slightly narrower than the national gap, having been wider in 2000 and 2001. When compared with schools with a similar proportion of pupils entitled to free meals, GCSE results are above average.
- 12 The school has met or exceeded its GCSE targets for 2002 and has set appropriate, challenging targets for 2003. Nearly all subjects met their targets for 2002, with above or well-above average results. For those that did not there are no significant concerns. Science missed its target but achieved well-above average results nonetheless; results in geography were average but below target. Results in physical education and history were particularly good. Pupils did well in design and technology compared with their other subjects. The outcomes of vocational courses at age 16 were very good in business and good in information technology.

Results in the sixth form have been broadly average for several years. A fuller commentary appears in Part D of this report.

Pupils' attitudes and behaviour.

- 13 Pupils' very positive attitudes to school and learning have been maintained since the last inspection. They work really hard, with interest and enthusiasm. They are well organised, motivated, very willing to join in with discussions and very responsive to the challenging, high quality teaching. Many pupils get involved in the wide range of activities provided and make very good use of the opportunities at break time and after school.
- 14 Parents are very satisfied with pupils' behaviour, the quality of which has been sustained and improved since the last inspection. Both in and out of lessons behaviour is excellent. This contributes substantially to the high standards achieved.

Pupils show maturity and self discipline. The school is a very orderly community where pupils feel safe and free from harassment. Good behaviour is very well promoted. Staff are clear and consistent about what is expected and what will not be tolerated. Exclusions are low and used appropriately, mainly for non-co-operation, verbal abuse and the very rare incidents of violent behaviour. A small number of parents expressed concern that the sanctions are quite tough. Most appreciate the resulting high standards of behaviour and self-discipline.

- 15 Relationships are very good. Staff provide excellent role models, and the rapport and high levels of mutual respect between pupils and staff contribute to the very positive learning environment. Pupils develop maturity and take responsibility for their work and their actions. They are mutually supportive and work well together in groups. They are confident and cope very well with the pressures of school life.
- 16 Attendance is excellent and has improved since the last inspection. Pupils in all year groups attend very well. Punctuality is excellent and pupils arrive on time to school and lessons. The consistently high levels of attendance reflect pupils' and parents' commitment and contribute significantly to learning and achievement.

Use of information technology as a specialist technology college.

- 17 The school has established itself as a highly effective specialist Technology College through an inspired combination of developments, vigorously pursued. These include examination courses, access to computers, intensive staff training, provision of training to commercial organisations, building an extensive internal Internet service (the Intranet), and support for other schools, such that information and communication technology (ICT) permeates the school's daily life. The outcome is that ICT is a readily accessible tool for learning, exploring, locating information, managing, administering and communicating for staff and pupils alike.
- 18 A key feature is the requirement that all teachers either have an ICT qualification before appointment or undertake training to gain an appropriate qualification within one year. This ensures they all have the skills to contribute to the school's ICT objectives. An excellent range of ICT courses is provided for staff, for staff of other schools, and for commercial organisations. High level technical support is provided by the school's systems manager and his team who also support other schools and businesses.
- 19 A target for 2003 is for two fifths of homework to be completed and submitted on-line. This is becoming achievable because, from recent surveys, almost all Year 7 and Year 8 pupils have Internet access at home. The school seeks ways of providing access for those who don't. The computer suites in each faculty area and in the library/learning centres provide ready access in school, and pupils can use the equipment freely outside lesson times. The school's Intranet is already highly developed and is maintained by information managers. Each subject has its own area which contains a rich source of information and learning activities, complete with simple links to related sites on the World Wide Web.
- 20 The school teaches ICT skills to pupils aged 11 to 16 in lessons in other subjects, rather than having separate ICT lessons on the timetable. This is sufficiently effective to cover the National Curriculum because it is written into schemes of work, and all teachers have the necessary skills. There are examples of GCSE coursework where some quite able pupils used basic ICT methods or none at all, indicating that they lacked confidence or ability to use spreadsheets or databases at more than a superficial level. An area for improvement would be to check that pupils use the

higher level skills that they are taught. As part of the Technology College aims, the school has set up very good sixth form courses in advanced level computing, advanced vocational ICT and three separate sciences.

- 21 ICT is used extensively for communication amongst staff, and increasingly amongst pupils. Students are highly aware of how ICT can improve communications. The sixth form council has suggested that the routine, weekly information briefing from their form tutors should be replaced by e-mail distribution. Many sixth formers routinely communicate with their subject teachers by e-mail, which greatly assists some whose teachers work in other schools through the consortium arrangement. Frequent, very effective use is made of data projection of slide-show presentations to enhance lessons and assemblies visually, and the use of interactive white boards in lessons often aids teachers' explanations and pupils' understanding.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

Main school

- 22 There are no significant areas for improvement in provision for pupils aged eleven to sixteen.

Sixth form

To improve further the quality of education and pupils' achievements, governors, senior management and staff should:-

1. Provide more fully for the needs of individual students by

re-examining the programme of activities that support the AS level courses, including provision for: re-sit GCSEs in English and mathematics; general studies; religious education; citizenship; form tutor time; and by matching key skills courses more closely to students' individual circumstances.
2. Increase the proportion of examination results graded A and B by

identifying students capable of the higher grades, teaching them to the appropriate standards, giving them confidence in their abilities and monitoring their progress.
3. Improve evaluation of sixth formers' attainment by

collecting performance data in a consistent manner across subjects and evaluating students' AS and A-level grades against the progress made by students with similar GCSE performance nationally.
4. Monitor and evaluate the cost-effectiveness of the sixth form by

establishing accurately the income and expenditure of main school and sixth form education, comparing this to national and local benchmarks and evaluating the educational outcomes against the costs. Take any appropriate action arising from the evaluation.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	52
	Sixth form	46
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		51

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

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

Number	8	17	18	8	1	0	0
Percentage	15%	33%	35%	15%	2%	0%	0%

Sixth form

Number	12	16	15	2	1	0	0
Percentage	26%	35%	33%	4%	2%	0%	0%

The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching. Care should be taken when interpreting the percentages as each lesson in Years 7 to 11 and in the sixth form represents approximately two 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	1116	192
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	46	2

Special educational needs

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	5	1
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	189	2

English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	0

Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	21
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	19

Attendance

Authorised absence

%

Unauthorised absence

%

School data	4.9
National comparative data	8.1

School data	0.8
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2001	113	108	221

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	80	96	99
	Girls	91	88	86
	Total	171	184	185
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	78 (83)	83 (85)	84 (80)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	43 (39)	56 (51)	52 (43)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	75	88	94
	Girls	83	85	84
	Total	158	173	178
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	79 (78)	78 (89)	81 (66)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	27 (25)	53 (59)	42 (19)
	National	31 (31)	42 (39)	33 (29)

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	2001	123	93	216

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	78	122	122
	Girls	73	92	92
	Total	151	214	214
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	70 (67)	99 (97)	99 (99)
	National	48 (47)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	48.5 (46.7)
	National	39.0 (38.4)

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	n/a
	National		n/a

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

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	32	43	75
	Average point score per candidate	13.3	16.4	15.1
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	18.0	17.5

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS examinations			For candidates entered for Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All	Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	26	38	64	6	6	12
	Average point score per candidate	14.7	16.8	16.0	7	11	9
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.9	17.4	9.8	11.4	10.6

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

International Baccalaureate		Number	% success rate
Number entered for the International Baccalaureate Diploma and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all they studied	School	0	n/a
	National		81

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	1244	49	0
White – Irish			
White – any other White background	17		
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean			
Mixed – White and Black African			
Mixed – White and Asian			
Mixed – any other mixed background			
Asian or Asian British - Indian	13		
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	12		
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi			
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background			
Black or Black British – Caribbean	9		
Black or Black British – African	3		
Black or Black British – any other Black background	2		
Chinese	4	2	
Any other ethnic group			
No ethnic group recorded	4		

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

Teachers and classes

Based on current numbers

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	83.18
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	15.3

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	20
Total aggregate hours worked per week	634

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Financial information

Financial year	2001/02
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	£
Total income	3,857,405
Total expenditure	3,606,297
Expenditure per pupil	2,832

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	74.7
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y13

Key Stage 3	24.6
Key Stage 4	19.2

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Balance brought forward from previous year	797,908
Balance carried forward to next year	1,049,016

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	26.14
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	30.28

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	2.8
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1,308
Number of questionnaires returned	435

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	31	57	9	2	1
My child is making good progress in school.	43	51	3	0	3
Behaviour in the school is good.	33	58	4	1	4
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	21	63	11	3	2
The teaching is good.	34	60	2	0	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	35	46	11	3	5
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	42	46	6	3	3
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	70	29	0	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	26	55	12	3	4
The school is well led and managed.	39	50	4	0	7
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	36	54	5	1	5
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	26	46	13	4	11

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

- 23 Results of the George Spencer School students at Advanced Supplementary (AS) and Advanced Level GCE have been broadly average in recent years. They have not reflected the increasingly high standards reached at GCSE. The school is seeking to raise standards further by taking full responsibility for its own sixth form. Until the current school year 2002-2003, most of the teaching was provided by staff from this and two other schools through the consortium arrangement at the Lakeview Centre about four miles away. The current Year 13 will be the last group to go through the consortium, although some Year 13 subjects are already taught entirely at George Spencer School.
- 24 The total A-level point score of 16 per student in 2001 was average for school sixth forms, but was above average for all post-16 providers. Girls achieved on average one grade higher than boys in one of their subjects. Results in 2002 show improvement over 2001 by about two grades per student to just over 20 points. A significant part of the increase is caused by students taking additional AS levels in Year 12 or Year 13, compared with previous year groups. This increases their point score if the AS subject is not continued through to a full A-level. National figures for 2002 are not available for comparison at the time of writing.
- 25 The overall pass rate is high, but the proportion of A-level passes at grades A and B is below average. Some 32 per cent of George Spencer entries reached grades A or B, compared with 42 per cent nationally, based on August 2002 results data. Equivalent figures for 2001 are not available for George Spencer students; the consortium as a whole achieved 27 per cent grades A or B in 2001, below the national average of 36 per cent.
- 26 Results in A-level design and technology in 2002 were very good, and those in physics, media studies and geography were good. In the other subjects inspected, results were generally in line with students' predicted grades. Neither the school nor the consortium has provided analyses of subject results by gender. The school has evaluated results against the minimum grades projected by the ALIS statistical method operated by Durham University, though not by the progress charts available from the Department for Education and Skills. This limits the evaluation of the results.
- 27 The results of Year 12 students at AS level in 2002 were satisfactory. Twenty-six per cent of the 266 entries gained grades A or B, which is below the national average of 36 per cent. Eighty-five per cent gained a pass grade, which is average. Grades are good in chemistry, English language, geography, media and textiles; sound in most other subjects, and below the school's average in English literature, physical education, graphics, psychology and sociology; (the two latter subjects were not taught by George Spencer staff).
- 28 The standard of students' current work is at least as good as previous results indicate, and in mathematics and information technology it is better. This is a consequence of teachers making considerable efforts to establish stand-alone sixth form courses within their own school, and at the same time applying the excellent teaching methods they have developed for the main school to the sixth form lessons. The well-established commitment to work, homework and general high standards

expected in the main school have been successfully transferred into the current teaching for Years 12 and 13.

- 29 The school has not supplied data concerning the proportion of students that completes the courses upon which they embark. In recent years, over half of students progressed onto university courses, a sixth to further education and a sixth direct to employment.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

- 30 Students have very positive, mature attitudes to their learning. They have opted to stay at the school because they value the high quality teaching and are committed to doing well. Students are confident, independent and skilled learners.
- 31 In most lessons there is a high level of quiet industry and a very positive work ethic. For example, attitudes were excellent in half of lessons observed. Only in the very large groups for English and mathematics are students sometimes slow to settle. In Key Skills lessons, a few students are reluctant to learn because they feel the content is irrelevant. In the weekly administrative session, many students arrived late and displayed a lack of interest, which was in sharp contrast to lessons.
- 32 Students' opportunities to interact in the general life of the school are limited because they have their own teaching and social accommodation. However, some students are beginning to support younger pupils. Year 12 students are keen to participate in the enrichment programme which is evolving. A significant number of Year 12 students feel that they are not treated as adults and the school does not listen and respond to their views. There are clear signs that this is being addressed. Their sixth form council members actively represent the views of the student body, and they do so in an articulate, reflective and persuasive manner, making a very positive contribution to proposed improvements. Year 13 students demonstrate very mature attitudes and are well-rounded individuals, clearly very able to cope with the pressures of study and prepared for the world of work or further study.
- 33 Relationships are excellent. The very good rapport between staff and students in teaching groups contributes to the high standards in lessons. Attendance is very good. The vast majority of students attend well and lessons start on time.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

- 34 Overall, teaching in the sixth form is excellent. This is because the proportion of lessons that were good, very good or excellent was exceptional. Of the forty-six lessons seen, teaching was very good in sixteen and excellent in twelve. It was good in the large majority of the remaining lessons. The high quality teaching has not had time to impact on the examination results of previous students who were taught within the consortium arrangements. The very good and excellent teaching is characterised by several important factors that enable students to deepen their intellectual, creative and practical capabilities very effectively. Students' learning is generally of a high standard, and sometimes excellent. In English, media, mathematics and key skills, a few students in Year 12 are slow to settle and do not make best use of their time. However, the overall quality of learning is very good.
- 35 Teachers demonstrate an excellent knowledge and understanding of their subjects. For example, in a Year 13 statistics lesson on normal distribution, students

demonstrated a clear understanding of the topic as a result of the teacher's thorough and accurate exposition. In a Year 13 media studies lesson on 'British cinema since 1900', the teaching showed both an in-depth knowledge of the topic combined with an accurate understanding of the requirements of the examination course. In textiles in Year 13, the teacher demonstrated an excellent understanding of a broad range of new textile materials, illustrating the lesson with a wide collection of specialist clothing, such as ski wear and a fireman's uniform. The analysis of the materials proved to be an interesting and challenging task.

- 36 Lessons are very carefully planned. They cater for students' individual needs and build effectively on the knowledge students have already gained. These lessons have clear objectives for reinforcing students' understanding and extending their learning further. For example, in a Year 12 geography lesson on the quality of life in urban areas, the teacher explained clearly the main objective of the lesson to the group. A sequence of activities planned for the session started with a short video clip of Sheffield to focus the group on the topic. Students were then fully engaged throughout the lesson and, by the end, had a heightened understanding of their own attitudes towards city life. In Year 13 in English, as part of a series of lessons on Chaucer's 'Pardoner's Tale', students arrived at the lesson having completed an independent research task on the Internet. This preparation enabled the group to make excellent progress within the lesson and to extend their knowledge and understanding of Chaucer's language.
- 37 Teachers use a very wide and effective range of teaching methods. The strategic decision taken by the school to focus on teaching and learning has had a significant effect upon practice in the sixth form, and the range of activities seen in lessons is much wider than normally seen at this level. For example, in a Year 13 biology lesson on additives, students engaged in a broad range of activities within the session. This started with a brief discussion of the topic, followed by completion of a crossword on additives. Within the lesson, the group engaged in group work, a 'sorting' activity and an enzyme activity game. The lesson concluded with a summary activity to discuss the learning that had taken place. In a Year 12 food technology lesson, students worked independently to prepare a selection of individual dishes to match a product specification. At the end of the lesson, the teacher engaged the group in a detailed discussion and evaluation of the work they had completed. This wide range of activities ensures that students maintain a high level of interest and motivation and enables them to develop a wide range of learning skills.
- 38 Teachers build a high level of challenge into lesson activities. For example, in a Year 12 information technology lesson on data storage, the teacher asked challenging questions that would extend their knowledge and understanding of how to add, delete or amend records in different kinds of data files. In Year 13 in French, students engaged in an excellent level of debate, spoken in French, about the spread of Aids in Africa. The learning was good because the teacher provided time for the students to be reflective and this enabled the conversation to flow spontaneously.
- 39 The assessment and marking of students' work are accurate and detailed, and help them understand their own learning and how to improve further. For example, in design and technology, the department has implemented excellent procedures which provide both staff and students with a clear understanding of achievement and progress, by using the school Intranet. Day-to-day feedback to individual students about their work is very good. The scrutiny of students' work illustrates this well, with written work marked carefully using the examination criteria.

- 40 The teaching of key skills, communication, the application of number and the use of information technology, is reinforced well through subjects. For example, in Year 12 geography, students developed their communication and computer skills, using computer display technology and the interactive whiteboard, to make individual presentations to the group. In textiles, students used writing frames to prepare notes on different types of manufacturing systems and then presented their findings to the group.
- 41 Students learn very well. They work productively, listen well and persevere when faced with demanding problems. They enjoy collaborative and investigative work. However, sixth form tutors, known in the school as learning managers, do not always make the best use of form time with their groups when there are clear opportunities for the discussion of current issues. As a result, the students do not value this time. Homework is used well to extend learning and develop research and organisational skills. Teachers make very effective use of computers to enhance learning in all subjects. The school Intranet, for example, provides a comprehensive and developing resource, providing students with a wealth of information and a strong link between study at school and at home. The introduction of supervised supported study, using material on the school's Intranet, is an innovative and effective strategy to develop students' independent study skills.

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

- 42 The sixth form curriculum is good. The provision for Year 13 students continues to be shared with two other schools at the Lakeview Centre 4 miles distant, although some courses for Year 13 students are taught entirely on the George Spencer site. In September the school formed its own sixth form and is now providing a full curriculum for Year 12 students for the first time. All students entering Year 12 are expected to have gained at least 5 GCSEs at grades A* to C. The school helps Year 11 students who have not met these academic requirements to find suitable courses at other schools or colleges.
- 43 A wide range of courses is available for both Year 12 and Year 13 students, including advanced vocational courses, to meet the aspirations of all students. New courses were introduced recently for Year 12 students, including AS courses in law, accounting and business, and AS courses in use of mathematics, music (which is taught at another school) and technology – food science. There are plans to offer an even wider range of courses to Year 12 and Year 13 students from September 2003.
- 44 The programme of activities and courses for Year 12 students to support their AS level studies does not fully meet the needs of all students and needs further consideration and development. This includes the provision for: resit GCSEs in English and mathematics; key skills; general studies; religious education; citizenship and form time. The requirements for religious education are not fully met. Key skills is unpopular with some students. Although the enrichment option is in its early stages of development, there is a wide range of activities from which students can select. These include aerobics, film society, dance group, newsletter, website development, football and going to the gym. Students can also make their own suggestions for what they will do during this time.
- 45 The school provides a good induction programme for students at the start of their sixth form course to prepare them for the rigours of academic study. This includes

sessions on study skills and a meeting with their learning manager (tutor), as well as activities focusing on problem solving and thinking skills. At the end of the last school year, students in Year 11 also had the opportunity to experience a three-week cultural visit to China as part of their induction to the sixth form.

- 46 Many opportunities exist in the sixth form for developing students' moral, social and cultural experiences. These include geography field work in Barcelona, the study of euthanasia in general studies, the use of industrial links in design and technology and the ICT sixth form conference related to real world systems analysis problems. Modern foreign languages make a very positive contribution to moral and cultural development for the students taking those subjects. Students demonstrate understanding of current issues, such as poverty and homelessness. They can identify and write about differences between English, French and German traditions and cultures. There is limited evidence of any planned provision for students' spiritual development or collective worship in the sixth form. Students show respect for themselves and for others but the opportunity for personal reflection in lessons is limited. Teachers set very high standards of respect and provide very good role models for students, which promotes social and moral development effectively.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

Assessment

- 47 The school has very good assessment and tracking procedures, although data management is not consistently good. Interim reports (scans) produced each half term provide students with clear information which forms the basis of a full discussion about progress. Assessments at the end of each module, regular feedback in lessons and very good sharing of information by staff across the Intranet ensure that students are kept fully informed and supported for improvement. In information and communication technology, staff and students make very good use of information sheets showing the course assessment criteria. The school plans to improve the use of statistical predictions of final exam grades with the current Year 12 students as a further way of supporting improvement.
- 48 Staff know the students well and are very aware of their potential. There is very good diagnosis of individual learning needs, particularly in English. Teachers provide very good individual support in lessons through discussion, careful marking and helpful comments.
- 49 Staff use assessment information well for Year 12 lessons to guide curricular planning and amend lesson content accordingly, especially in information and communication technology, design and technology, mathematics and modern foreign languages. However, this does not feature well in some Year 13 lessons which are taught off site.

Advice, support and guidance

- 50 Induction into Year 12 is well planned and appropriate, but some students would welcome better guidance from subject teachers during Year 11 about sixth form courses. Good support and guidance is generally provided, especially following receipt of GCSE results. This could be further improved to ensure that all students are following courses most suited to their academic needs; for example, in mathematics a few AS students are struggling.
- 51 Staff at the George Spencer site are accessible to students and there is an effective programme planned to provide regular interviews with learning managers (tutors). Good advice is provided at this early stage in the year to support those few students facing difficulties. Very good support is provided to Year 13 students, especially with the completion of UCAS forms; however, there is insufficient provision within the consortium arrangements to support their personal development.
- 52 A programme to support personal development is planned for the new Year 12, with speakers, careers advice and visits to universities with which the school has established strong links. The school also has many business and industry links which are helpful in widening students' experience. A good range of trips and foreign travel greatly enriches the sixth form experience. There is limited social accommodation, but the school is exploring how to provide more.

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

- 53 Parents are mostly positive and pleased with the new arrangements for the sixth form, although only a few parents of post-16 students completed the questionnaire. Concerns relate to the amount of work required for AS levels and organisational issues in establishing the new sixth form.
- 54 Students are very positive about being in the sixth form and would advise others to join. Students in Year 12 are pleased to be part of the new sixth form. Although most are satisfied with the suitability of their courses, many Year 12 students would have liked more information before choosing subjects. The majority of students are very satisfied that they are taught well. Year 13 students are very satisfied with the guidance they receive about university entrance. The recently established student council is now providing an opportunity for students to express views and concerns in the ongoing review and development of the sixth form.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

Leadership and management

- 55 The strategic management of the sixth form is very good. Over recent years, the governing body became increasingly aware of the strengths and weaknesses of consortium arrangements and were concerned about standards achieved. Consequently, governors and the leadership team planned to create a sixth form at the George Spencer School, starting with Year 12 students from September 2002 and Year 13 students from September 2003. This major change has been managed very well, with high potential benefit for students. The priorities in the improvement plan for the sixth form are appropriate, and developments are monitored rigorously. For

example, there are effective systems in place to monitor teaching and learning. Learning managers provide effective guidance on academic achievements and set targets for students to help them progress.

- 56 Day-to-day management is very good. The head of sixth form and her assistant provide clear educational direction to staff and students. The sixth form team has established an excellent climate for learning, with good quality personal support and guidance. The ethos of high achievement, within a supportive framework of good relationships and mutual support, leads to very good development of learning skills and excellent levels of commitment. Subject teachers give additional time to assist individual students. Supervised private study sessions offer further opportunities for academic guidance. The monitoring system is effective; it enables regular and accurate identification of strengths and difficulties encountered by individual students across their subjects.
- 57 Not all heads of department use data sufficiently to inform teaching and learning, or compare students' results and achievements across subjects and against national data. Lines of accountability within the Lakeview consortium arrangements are not clear, and this inhibits recommendations for action. The head of sixth form at George Spencer has started to gather relevant information and is aware of the need to monitor achievement fully during and at the end of courses. The school should build upon its effective procedures at GCSE to evaluate more precisely the quality of education and outcomes in the sixth form.

Resources

- 58 The overall quality and provision of resources in the sixth form are good. There is high quality accommodation for students, with a good range of teaching rooms and facilities for study, including computer suites, a small common room area and a well-equipped private study room. Lessons in open-plan science rooms are, on occasion, affected by distractions from adjacent classes. General equipment and materials, including those on the school's Intranet, are good. Students commented very positively on the high level of subject expertise demonstrated by their teachers. Inspectors confirm the excellent deployment of qualified specialist teachers. The experience and subject knowledge of teachers are impressive, leading to a wide range of effective teaching methods used in lessons.
- 59 Owing to unusual complexities in funding arrangements, with partial withdrawal from the consortium and new funding responsibilities passing to the Learning and Skills Council, the school has not provided data on the current income and costs for the sixth form. A secure judgement on the cost effectiveness of the sixth form is not therefore possible at this time.

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

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

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2002. The 'England' figures are for 2001, the latest year for which comparisons are available.

GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School 2002	England 2001	School 2002	England 2001	School 2002	England 2001
Mathematics	22	68	71	14	30	1.6	2.2
Chemistry	14	93	87	71	40	3.6	2.8
Biology	19	74	84	26	34	2.3	2.6
Physics	8	63	86	38	39	2.4	2.8
Design and Technology	20	95	86	25	32	2.6	2.5
Business Studies	1	0	89	0	31	0.0	2.6
Computing	23	70	81	30	22	2.2	2.2
Physical Education	8	100	88	13	25	1.9	2.4
Art	8	100	86	13	43	2.5	2.9
Drama	3	100	95	0	40	2.3	3.0
Media Studies	32	100	n/a	31	n/a	3.1	n/a
Geography	16	94	91	38	38	3.0	2.9
History	12	92	94	33	41	2.7	3.0
Sociology *	6	67	86	17	34	1.8	2.7
Psychology	26	69	85	15	32	1.8	2.5
English Language	12	83	93	33	35	2.8	2.8
English Literature	20	90	95	5	39	1.9	3.0
French	9	100	89	22	40	2.8	2.9
German	7	100	90	0	39	2.7	2.9
School Total	266	84.6	87	25.2	35	2.4	2.7

* The 'England' data is for 'other Social Studies', which includes Psychology.

A2 level results

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School 2002	England 2001	School 2002	England 2001	School 2002	England 2001
Mathematics	13	92	87	31	42	5.7	5.7
Further Maths	1	100	n/a	100	n/a	10.0	n/a
Chemistry	9	89	90	33	43	5.3	5.9
Biology	7	86	88	29	34	4.9	5.3
Physics	7	86	88	71	41	7.7	5.7
Design and Technology	6	100	91	100	33	8.7	5.5
Business Studies	5	100	n/a	0	n/a	5.2	n/a
Economics	3	100	89	0	38	4.7	5.6
Computing	13	100	86	15	23	4.8	4.6
Physical Education	2	100	93	0	25	3.0	5.1
Art	4	100	97	50	46	7.5	6.5
Drama	3	100	99	0	38	6.0	6.6
Media Studies	12	100	n/a	42	n/a	6.8	n/a
Geography	7	100	93	57	38	6.9	5.8
History	12	92	89	8	36	4.3	5.5
Sociology	5	100	87	20	36	5.6	5.4
Psychology *	10	100	88	20	35	5.4	5.4
General Studies	20	100	86	45	30	5.8	4.9
English Language	12	100	92	8	30	5.2	5.3
English Literature	18	100	96	28	37	5.2	5.9
French	1	100	89	0	39	4.0	5.6
German	4	100	92	50	41	7.0	5.9
School Total	174	97.1	89.9	31.6	35.63	5.7	5.5

* Other Social Studies

n/a Data not available

Note: England data is for 2001: 2002 results not published
School data is for 2002

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

The inspection focused on mathematics, biology and physics. Chemistry was sampled. 2002 AS results in chemistry were good, and A-level results were satisfactory. Teaching in the lesson seen was very good. It was conducted at a brisk pace and provided work at an appropriately high level of challenge for the class.

Mathematics

Overall, provision in mathematics is **very good**.

Strengths

- The standard of work seen is well above average.
- Teaching is very good overall and often excellent. This leads to very good learning.
- Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and they use it to challenge students' thinking.
- Teachers use a wide range of very effective teaching strategies.
- The introduction of the AS use of mathematics course meets the needs of a wide range of students.
- Students enjoy the subject and have very good attitudes towards their work.
- Students appreciate the help teachers give them.

Areas for improvement

- The analysis of the performance of students year on year against national results, including the use of national data on progress from GCSE to A-level.
- The guidance given to students to ensure that they are on appropriate courses.

- 60 The school offers AS courses in mathematics, further mathematics and use of mathematics. A-level courses are offered in mathematics and further mathematics. The mathematics department also provides teaching of application of number leading to a key skills qualification. A GCSE re-sit course is provided through a link with a local college. Lessons in methods were seen for Year 12 and in statistics and pure mathematics for Year 13. No key skills or use of mathematics lessons were observed, but a student studying use of mathematics was interviewed.
- 61 Over the four years 1998 to 2001, A-level mathematics results for George Spencer students have remained below the national average. However, the results in 2002 showed a significant improvement. AS results have fluctuated over the last two years. In 2001, the percentage of students gaining grades A to C was above the national average, but the percentage gaining grades A to E was below the national average. In 2002, the number of pupils entered for AS mathematics fell by over a third; the percentage of students gaining grades A to E improved, but there was a decline in the percentage gaining high grades. The number of students entered for a further mathematics qualification each year is minimal, but these students generally perform very well.

- 62 The standard of work seen in lessons and students' files is well above average, with boys and girls performing equally well. Most students in Year 12 have a good recall of basic algebraic knowledge and use this to solve multi-step problems. They know and can apply the factor theorem to factorising and solving a cubic equation. Students in Year 13 deduce the equation of a circle with a given radius and centre at the origin and then extend this to a circle with its centre elsewhere. They have a very good recall and understanding of the algebraic skills developed in Year 12, including completing the square. Work in their folders showed that they were able to solve inequalities by sketching curves with discontinuities and horizontal and vertical asymptotes.
- 63 Teaching is very good and students' learning is very good as a result. Teachers have an excellent command of the subject and they use this well in explanations and questioning to extend and challenge students' thinking. In a Year 12 group, students were challenged to determine the gradient of a horizontal and a vertical line and then later in the lesson to match sketches of curves with sketches showing the rate of change of the gradient of the curves. Teachers plan effectively for progression, always recapping and building on prior learning. Teaching was excellent in half of the lessons seen. In these lessons the teachers had very high expectations and challenged students to think about the mathematics and not just accept what they were told. This secured the learning and enabled students to progress quickly and to apply their knowledge and understanding to further challenges. These teachers employed a very wide range of teaching methods including investigation using ICT. Large posters of key learning points and challenges were displayed in the classroom for use later in the lesson and in future lessons. These strategies provide an excellent visual impact on learning. Learning was slower when students were given too long on one consolidation activity.
- 64 The department is managed very well. The teachers work very hard and work well as a team, developing and testing new resources and ideas together. The head of department provides clear educational direction with specific actions for the further improvement of teaching and learning clearly identified in the mathematics team development plan. The effective introduction of the new AS course, use of mathematics, meets the needs of those students who wish to continue their study of mathematics to either support their other courses or to give them a mathematics qualification beyond GCSE. Students need clear guidance to ensure that they are studying the most appropriate AS course for their individual circumstances. The department produces an analysis of examination results each year and identifies clearly actions to bring about improvement. They now need to extend this to include a year-on-year analysis against national results and consider how best to use the national data on the progress students make from GCSE to advanced level.

Science

Physics

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

Strengths

- A-level results in 2002 were encouraging with a majority of students achieving higher grades.
- The subject is led and managed well with the capacity to develop and improve provision further.
- Good relationships between staff and students.
- The increasing use of data for monitoring progress which is shared with students.
- Teachers' knowledge of the subject.
- Encouraging use of the school Intranet by students to support learning.

Areas for improvement

- To develop further the scheme of work to reflect the social, ethical and historical relevance of the subject.
- To provide more opportunities for students to practise and develop confidence in their skills to present and share their own ideas and understanding of the subject.
- Further develop the use of assessment data to provide diagnostic feedback to students.

- 65 A-level results are much improved since 2000. In 2002, results were above average, with a high percentage of pupils gaining higher grades. AS results in physics show students achieving the grades predicted based on GCSE performance and, in some cases, better. Students feel well supported by their teachers and are given good advice during the course. Students enjoy the subject.
- 66 The quality of students' AS and A2 work, as seen in lessons and by analysis of students' folders, matches the pattern of recent examination results. Most students show a satisfactory understanding of basic facts and concepts, with some demonstrating well above average knowledge and understanding of key concepts such as sound physics related to specific musical instruments.
- 67 The teaching is good. Students' knowledge and understanding are developed and consolidated by appropriate activities and skilful questioning by the teachers. This results in secure understanding of the subject, for example, in one lesson about radioactive decay, students were quickly able to calculate decay series questions and understand the relevance of carbon dating.
- 68 Students' learning is mostly good. They take a keen interest in the lessons, complete work set and ask challenging questions. They are attentive, work productively and respond well to the supportive teaching they experience, producing written work which makes good use of summary tasks, data, well-drawn diagrams and bulleted lists. However, a few students lack confidence in sharing and presenting their ideas to others.

- 69 The best marking is based on assessment schemes, and the work is carefully annotated with corrections and indications of omissions. Students are well aware of how to improve work they have completed, but are not always given strategies for improvement.
- 70 The increasing use of the school's Intranet is a very positive development welcomed by students who can now access a range of good homework and additional tasks to extend their knowledge of the subject. The subject is currently being further developed to extend students' breadth of subject knowledge and its applications, as well as raising awareness of the social impact of the subject. A very positive development was the recent visit to CERN (the European Laboratory for Particle Physics), which was very well received by the students.
- 71 On occasion, A-level lessons take place in the open-plan accommodation, which can be distracting when other classes are using the adjacent area.

Biology

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

Strengths

- Rate of improvement in students' knowledge and understanding is good.
- AS results are in line with national averages.
- The subject is led well with the capacity to further develop and improve provision.
- Very good relationships between staff and students and between students.
- Inventive and challenging teaching in Year 13.
- The increasing use of attainment data for setting targets which are shared with students, including self-assessment tasks.
- Teachers' subject knowledge, and depth and rigour of questioning.

Areas to develop

- To improve the confidence of students to learn independently and share their understanding more widely.
- To consolidate learning more effectively at the end of Year 12 lessons to ensure all students have a clear grasp of key concepts.

- 72 A-level biology results in 2002 were average, and similar to previous years. AS level results in biology indicate students achieved the grades predicted overall, with two students gaining higher grades than expected. Arrangements for entry to sixth form courses have resulted in a number of students taking the course whose GCSE results suggest that they may have difficulty in coping with the demands of higher-level study.
- 73 The quality of students' work as seen in lessons and by analysis of students' folders reflects the pattern of recent AS and A2 level results. Most students show understanding of basic facts and concepts, such as the effect of acidity levels on enzyme activity and classification of sugars. Practical work is carried out satisfactorily, but a few students lack confidence and a level of precision when carrying out detailed practical work, especially in Year 12.

- 74 Teaching is good overall. Students' knowledge, understanding and practical skills are developed and consolidated by a range of carefully-planned activities and skilful questioning by the teacher with high expectations of students' responses. In very good lessons, inventive and innovative methods are used to challenge students to learn at a very brisk pace. In a Year 13 lesson, students tackled with enthusiasm a range of well-designed tasks to deepen and consolidate their understanding of artificial sweeteners. These included visual clues, research tasks and very relevant board games. In Year 12, learning was, on occasion, insufficiently consolidated at the end of lessons to ensure all students had a clear understanding of some key biological concepts.
- 75 Students' learning is usually good; they take a keen interest in practical lessons and are developing skills. They are generally attentive, work productively and respond well to the supportive teaching they experience. The school Intranet is used well to provide homework tasks and additional activities to extend and diversify students' knowledge of the subject; for example, hormone control of an internal environment in the body. The use of self-study materials and assessment tasks is developing students' skills as independent learners. Data can be used further to diagnose students' strengths, weaknesses and development strategies. Students feel well supported by their teachers and enjoy the subject.
- 76 Marking is usually good with the work carefully annotated with corrections and indications of omissions. Students are usually aware of their areas for improvement but not always of strategies for making better progress.
- 77 The recently-improved accommodation provides a very good learning environment, with evidence of students' work and positive images of the subject on display. There remain some limitations in specialist equipment and insufficient use of data logging equipment by individuals or small groups.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

The inspection focused on the AS and A-level design and technology courses offered by the school. These include design and technology (product design) in graphics and textiles, and design and technology (food technology). The product design course in resistant materials, taught at the Lakeview Centre, was not inspected.

Design and Technology

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

Strengths

- The teaching is of a very high quality.
- The range of AS and A-level courses available to students.
- The courses are very well organised to meet examination requirements.
- The relationships between staff and their students are very good.
- Students have a clear knowledge and understanding of their attainment and progress.
- The leadership and management of the subject are very good.

Areas for improvement

- Extend opportunities for students to use computer aided designing and manufacturing techniques.
- Develop a programme of staff training to ensure that all teachers are fully equipped to deliver their courses to A-level standards.

- 78 The number of students following the AS and A-level courses in design and technology has increased significantly over the last two years, particularly in graphics. The department has achieved a 100 per cent pass rate over this period. The most recent results at A-level are well above the national average, the six students all gaining A and B grades. Twenty students recently completed the AS course. Of these, one quarter gained A and B grades; results just below the national average. Results were higher in resistant materials and textiles than in graphics.
- 79 Current students in Year 12 are making very good progress and are achieving much as expected at this early stage of their course. They have embarked upon a wide range of individual projects to cover the coursework component of the examination. For example, in graphics, students learn how to develop a specification by carefully analysing everyday products such as electrical plugs. In textiles, they develop their understanding of a range of different manufacturing systems by analysing videos of industrial practices. In food, students demonstrate competent making skills, producing products to meet a variety of specialist needs such as healthy meals for a primary school and high-energy food bars for dancers.
- 80 In Year 13, students are making very good progress, preparing for both the coursework project and the examination components of the A-level course. In graphics, the standards of current students are average. Currently, they are developing a wide range of promotional materials in consultation with local clients; for example, to improve the display of information in a doctor's surgery and to promote a martial arts club. In textiles, students are achieving standards that are above average at this stage of the course. They demonstrate a very good understanding of a wide range of new textile materials and their properties. The more talented students have produced portfolios of excellent quality, demonstrating a depth of understanding of their chosen products and a high standard of presentation. Students have made appropriate use of computers to enhance their work; for example, using the Internet for research and spreadsheets to record the results of questionnaires. However, there is limited use of computers to aid the designing and making of products at the present time.
- 81 Teaching in the sixth form is very good. Teachers demonstrate a secure knowledge and understanding of their specialisms. They provide students with a wide range of activities and have high expectations of what they will learn in each lesson. For example, in Year 13 textiles, the teacher started the lesson by revising effectively what students had learnt in the previous session about modern materials. The group then analysed a range of specialist clothing to enable them to evaluate how these materials are used in products at first-hand. In Year 13 graphics, students were able to learn how to design pages for a website, with the valuable help of a speaker from local industry. In Year 12 food technology, students produced a variety of trial products within the lesson. The teacher ensured that each dish was thoroughly evaluated so that the lessons learnt would be shared effectively across the group. The department has established comprehensive record-keeping procedures which

provide both staff and students with a clear and up to date picture of attainment and progress in each subject.

- 82 The leadership and management of the subject are very good. Teachers have prepared appropriate plans for each unit of the course to ensure full coverage of the AS and A-level specifications. The team action plan and the analysis of examination results undertaken have enabled teachers to identify clear priorities to be addressed to further develop the subject within the school. A strength of the management of the AS and A-level courses is that each course is jointly taught by two members of staff. The majority of teachers have very limited experience of teaching at this level, yet are already providing very good teaching. The department recognises that the continued professional development of these staff is a priority for the future.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

AS and A2 computing, A(S)VCE, Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) and AVCE(double award) ICT, and ICT Key Skills were inspected.

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

Strengths

- High quality learning support material is produced for students.
- All teaching is well planned.
- Record keeping is detailed and assists with planning.
- Teaching is consistently of high quality.
- Students are very well motivated and are keen to learn.
- Results in A2 and AVCE are very good and reflect good achievement.

Areas for improvement

- Further develop more rigorous and consistent assessment practice.
- Continue to address the issue of gender imbalance in teaching groups.

- 83 In 2001, AS students achieved a 100 per cent pass rate, exceeding projections from prior attainment. The A-level pass rate was 75 per cent. Results for 2002 show 80 per cent of AS students achieved passes at A-E level, with the majority achieving A-C grades. Students achieved a 100 per cent pass rate in full A-levels, with a full range of grades and good added value. AVCE results were good, ranging from 86 per cent passes in the three unit award, 89 per cent in the six-unit award to 100 per cent in the twelve-unit award.

- 84 Overall standards, from lessons observed and a wide range of folios scrutinised, are very good, with some excellent work seen. AS students apply themselves well to considerable theory work. They learn key definitions and understand the essential features of different storage methods. They are very attentive and answer challenging questions. Although tests are marked and feedback for improvement given, some marking is inconsistent. AVCE students learn through practical instruction from an information manager how to install and configure a system. They use this knowledge to produce a guide to explain how home users with no technical background can connect computers to the Internet. They write confidently for the end user. They

research, analyse and write concise descriptions of what is required to make a good interface between a computer program and its user.

- 85 Students in Year 13 learn how to use data-control software to link and manipulate information within other software packages. They listen very carefully and attentively to detailed instructions, confidently apply software links and all make very good progress with new work. Students also learn about system architecture and consolidate their understanding of machine instructions, addressing modes and registers. They are set challenging tasks to translate examples of assembly language into machine code and simulate loading into memory. Very able students work confidently on extension tasks. Adults not known to students are used to simulate a real client systems analysis problem. Through teamwork, students produce feasibility reports and systems specifications, which solve the problem, and present their work to an audience. In key skills, students are able to write formulae for interrogating spreadsheets and use functions for incorporating data.
- 86 Students are attentive and remain on task throughout lessons, which they enjoy, and make very good progress. Relationships, attitudes and behaviour are very good. Students interact well with staff and are confident. They can analyse situations well, apply knowledge independently and put considerable effort into coursework portfolios, which involve the use of real end users.
- 87 Teaching is very good, with some lessons excellent. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and confidently impart this to students. All lessons are well planned and prepared, with good quality back-up material being provided where necessary. Good quality electronically projected presentations are also used and very good use is made of data projectors and interactive whiteboards. Students are given course specifications to assist them with planning. AVCE coursework units and major A-level projects are marked rigorously, with good comments for improvement given. Teachers monitor students' progress well, give much individual help and keep good records of progress.
- 88 The faculty, which is very well led by an assistant headteacher, contributes significantly to the school improvement plan which is enhancing teaching and learning through using the latest technologies. The team action plan is moving the faculty forward and preparing all students for a rapidly-developing world. The faculty is also involved in many educational and business initiatives in the community, fully in keeping with its role as a technology college. These benefit students. A systems manager and team maintain the network efficiently, and information managers play a vital role in assisting staff and students. The faculty has made good progress since the last inspection.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The school offers courses in art, which were not inspected. Art has a high pass rate. Media studies is a very popular course, both at the Lakeview consortium and at this school.

MEDIA STUDIES

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

Strengths

- The expertise, enthusiasm and commitment of the teaching team.
- Teaching is very good with teachers having a good understanding of the learning needs of their students.
- Students learn well and make very good progress in the subject.
- Planning and use of assessment to inform teaching.
- Teachers' professional development in the subject is very up to date.

Areas for improvement

- Increase the proportion of A-grades to develop on the already successful results.

- 89 A-level results in Media Studies in 2002 were good, with 85 per cent of students gaining an A-C grade. This showed an improvement on results in 2001. AS results for 2002 were very good, with 94 per cent of students gaining A-C grades.
- 90 Standards of work seen during the inspection were good and show evidence of a range of achievement from potential grades A-E. Predicted grades for A-level 2003 range from A-D, a range supported by the inspection evidence. Very good achievement in an essay on *film noir* from a Year 13 student was corroborated by the same student's intelligent and analytical oral responses in a lesson on recent British films. In general, essay and practical tasks enable appropriate achievement because they are based on assessment objectives from the syllabus, with which students are very familiar. Students increasingly use appropriate critical and analytical language in written, oral and practical tasks over the course of time.
- 91 Students' response to lessons is generally very good. They express enjoyment of the subject and say that they enjoy the contemporary nature of the texts used, such as current tabloid newspapers. A few boys in Year 12 are taking a little time to settle to the ethos of sixth form work, but are acquiring good study habits and skills of independent learning within a structured learning environment.
- 92 The teaching of media studies is very good. Teachers have good understanding of their subject and how best to teach it. They themselves are good models as users of critical media language. Planning is excellent: the new schemes of work are clear, helpful and show how the needs of students of differing ability will be met. The course addresses well the examination requirements, and the requisite assessment objectives are at the heart of the delivery of lessons.
- 93 Challenge, pace and the use of interactive teaching styles are all significant features of the very successful teaching methods used by the team. Teachers are aware of the different learning needs within the group and respond to individuals with skill. Teachers are particularly good at paying attention to the learning styles best suited to

boys, such as short bursts of incremental learning, with elements of competition built in, and skilled use of oral work. Equally, as in a discussion on 'The Full Monty', they are very competent at making use of the very able skills of gifted and talented students to help out weaker students, whilst enhancing the feedback skills of the able student at the same time.

- 94 Students make good progress as a result of the very good teaching. They become more independent users of critical terminology as time passes, and use media language confidently. Students show insight, as when one student, in a discussion on the film 'Brassed Off', suggested that the opening of the film is guilty of a very stereotyped representation of the English working class. Students support each other in pair and group work, and their practical work and homework demonstrate their increasing independence as learners.
- 95 Leadership and management of the subject are very good. The team works through a collegiate and collaborative approach. Resources are very good and very well used to enhance the success of the students. Provision meets the terms of the school improvement plan and the media studies action plan. Together with English, the subject offers a suite of contemporary approaches to texts which appeals to students. The growth in uptake of media studies attests to the strength and popularity of the subject.

HUMANITIES

Courses are offered in geography, history, sociology and psychology. Law has been introduced this term. Geography was inspected in detail. Recent results in the other subjects showed a good pass rate, but too few students gained passes at grades A and B. History lessons were sampled and found to be of high quality.

Geography

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

Strengths

- Students benefit from a very good standard of teaching.
- Very effective planning provides an interesting, relevant and challenging course of study.
- Teachers give a high level of support to help individual pupils with their work.
- Students work hard, both on their individual studies and on group activities.
- The subject leader co-ordinates the work in the subject very effectively.

Areas for improvement

- Develop further ways of helping students to set learning targets for themselves.

- 96 There are courses leading to examination at AS and A-level. The number of students studying geography at the school is increasing. Recent examination results show that students who choose geography build successfully on their GCSE results. In this inspection a small number of lessons was observed, and a sample of the students' work looked at. These show that the students work hard and gain a secure understanding of the subject.

- 97 Standards at A-level are getting better, with more students gaining higher grades in the examinations. This summer, all seven students who took the examinations gained a pass grade. Students achieve well, doing a little better than in their other subjects, and a little better than expected in relation to their GCSE results. There is no significant difference between the achievements of boys and girls.
- 98 The standard of work seen in lessons and in students' folders was also a little above average. For example, in a lesson in Year 12, students used computers confidently to present results of their research into aspects of change in rural settlements in the UK. They all showed a good understanding of changing patterns, and their effects on village communities. Similarly, in a Year 13 lesson, students showed their determination to achieve well. They worked hard at improving their essay writing skills. They showed a good understanding of the relationship between the level of development of a country and the vulnerability of the population to earthquakes.
- 99 The standard of teaching is very good. Two subject specialists work together well and plan lessons which are engaging and challenging. Lessons are well organised, with clear learning targets, purposeful activities and constructive homework. Students benefit from the knowledge and skill of their teachers. For example, in a Year 12 lesson, the teacher provided a sequence of interesting resources and activities to encourage students' thinking about different perceptions of the quality of life in cities. He used a pertinent video clip to capture their interest. Students then worked together well to evaluate photographs and surveys. The teacher led a very good class discussion, asking probing questions to make students think more carefully about their ideas. He summed up very well so that everyone had a good understanding of interactions between social and economic factors in cities. The students gained a lot from this lesson. They showed good skills in interpreting a range of resources and in sharing their ideas with the rest of the class. Work in students' folders is marked regularly, with helpful comments. Students understand where there are shortcomings in their work.
- 100 The attitude of students to their lessons is excellent. They work with concentration and determination. They are attentive to their teachers and respectful of others in the class. They work together well on group activities. Analysis of a sample of coursework folders showed pupils also have a very positive attitude to their individual studies. Work is well organised, planned and presented. For example, in work on the impact of tourism in the Peak District, pupils demonstrate good skills. Data on environmental impact of people were collected carefully and analysed well, using a range of statistical and graphical techniques. Work included clear evaluation of methods used and well-written explanations of management issues.
- 101 The course is led and managed very well by the subject leader. He gives a clear lead on curricular planning and co-ordinates teaching and learning effectively. There is commitment to providing helpful support to students and to raising standards further.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English and French were inspected in detail; German was sampled. Recent results for the few students who study German have been very good.

English

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

Strengths

- The expertise of the English team and their knowledge of their subject.
- Teaching is very good with teachers having a clear understanding of their students' learning needs.
- Students learn very well and make good progress in the subject.
- There is growth in provision of English and English Literature and in the uptake of the subject.

Areas for improvement

- Analysis of data to inform curricular management.
- To enhance the induction programme for English at AS level.

- 102 GCE AS and A-level English language and English literature courses are offered. A-level results in English language and literature in 2002 were broadly average when compared with national data. For AS in 2002, English language results were good, with half the students attaining grades A-C. In English literature there was a wider range of grades, with few A and B grades being awarded.
- 103 The standards of current written work are good and in line with students' capabilities as indicated in statistical and teachers' predictions. They also correspond with students' oral responses during the inspection. Attainment of top grades in English literature is recognised as a target by the team. Students improve their standards in part because of the thorough, individualised and careful marking of their written work by teachers. Students are aware of examination syllabus requirements and know the relationship of their progress to the assessment objectives.
- 104 Progress is seen in the students' quality of analytical and critical thinking over the course of time in both language and literature lessons. Students are actively encouraged in class to evaluate what they have learnt and consider how they can best express this in written and spoken forms. In a lesson on 'The Importance of Being Earnest', students were able to comment on their own consolidation of learning when reflecting on the lesson. Students are encouraged to find an independent and personal analytical voice, as when Year 12 language students discussed the differences between spoken and written texts, or Year 12 literature students debated the roles of the dual narrators in 'Wuthering Heights'.
- 105 Overall, students' response in lessons is very good. They enjoy the lessons, generally concentrate and co-operate well together as learners and express appreciation of the effort put in by their teachers. A few boys in Year 12 are taking a little time to settle in to sixth form study, but are acquiring the habits of independent learning in a structured teaching environment.

- 106 The teaching of English is very good, and some excellent teaching was seen. Teachers know their subject very well and are expert in using methods that suit both the material and the learners. Both the planning and pace of lessons are excellent. The new schemes of work for English are very clear and support good teaching. Lessons are taught starting from the examination assessment objectives, which is a strength. Use of ICT within the subject is evident, but needs further development.
- 107 Lessons are engaging and active, with much paired and small-group work to structure and deepen students' learning experience. The impact of the school's 'learning to learn' programme is very much in evidence. Teachers often organise classes specifically to encourage boys and girls to work together. There is a high degree of understanding of how to engage boys' interest, such as using chunks of learning in short bursts with immediate feedback and introducing a level of competitiveness. Different pairings and groups are used either to encourage pairs of similar ability, or to help a weaker student through the support of a more able one. Teaching is challenging and expectations are high. Teachers encourage students to evaluate their learning and to develop their analytical skills in both language and literature. Teachers themselves use appropriate critical terminology and provide good models of reflective thinking about topics. In a lesson on 'Wuthering Heights', for instance, the teacher used a series of hypothetical questions to probe students' deeper understanding of the implications of Heathcliff's behaviour.
- 108 Teaching is conducted in a context of humour, good relationships and high expectations of oneself and the group. These are extended to the completion of work, including homework, participation in the lesson and capacity to work with and for each other.
- 109 Teachers are well qualified and have up to date knowledge of their subject. Post-16 English is taught in comfortable, well-equipped rooms. The school Intranet carries course-related materials, and new texts are being built up to support the course. There is potential for continued development in this area.
- 110 The quality of learning is very good because the teaching is so good. Students make progress and become increasingly independent learners as time passes. They are encouraged to evaluate and take responsibility for their own development as learners and to support their classmates' learning, too, within the ethos of a learning community.
- 111 The leadership and management of English is good. The team works on a collegiate model with clear guidance from the department manager. Resources and administration are organised well; display is a strong feature in the English area. Courses are very clearly planned. Provision in the sixth form meets the school improvement plan and English action plan. The good range of courses, together with media studies, means that there is a broad appeal to potential students of both genders, offering traditional literature, language studies and contemporary modes of communication through the media. The growth in student numbers in English attests to the strength of the subject.

Modern Foreign Languages

The school offers sixth form courses in French and German. French was inspected in detail. There are no students of German in Year 13. Comments on Year 12 are included below.

French

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

Strengths

- Attitudes to learning are excellent; students demonstrate high levels of intellectual efforts and concentration.
- The rate of progress is good over time, leading to good outcomes at A-levels in all skills.
- Teaching is good.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is used well to develop research skills.

Areas for improvement

- Year 12 students' confidence in speaking; they need greater support, with better strategies to promote their spontaneous use of French.

112 Low numbers of students opt to study French at A-level. Results have fluctuated over the years but the relatively small numbers make it difficult to establish clear patterns. In the last two years, only one student obtained a high grade (B). In 2001, A-level results were below average. In 2002, the only student entered obtained a grade D. AS results are above the national figures with seven students achieving a pass in 2001, three at the higher grades (A and B). Nine achieved a pass in 2002, including three B grades, though these results are provisional, being subject to re-marking.

113 Students now in Year 13 are achieving above average standards. They speak French confidently and convey their opinions very effectively. Pronunciation and intonation are good. They have high levels of general knowledge and use a wide range of sophisticated grammatical structures and vocabulary. This was demonstrated well when they engaged in a lively discussion about Africa and issues related to poverty and health. The quality of the written work is also good. Essays are structured appropriately and ideas are argued well. In contrast, students' speaking skills in Year 12 are underdeveloped. Students are only two months into the course and are finding the AS course expectations quite demanding compared with the GCSE course. At this early stage of the course they need more confidence and to increase their general knowledge of social and moral issues in order to sustain a conversation and challenge teachers or their peers to debate key contemporary matters. The quality of written work is satisfactory overall, although basic grammatical mistakes remain. Comprehension skills, however, are good. Students understand French spoken at normal speed and can extract information from a wide range of sources, including difficult audio-taped materials such as the recording used of French people expressing ideas and opinions.

114 Teaching is good overall. The strengths are the high levels of command teachers have of the subject, their precise knowledge of course requirements and their use of a wide range of resources. They sequence activities effectively to help students make progress and give positive feedback to help students improve. Teachers provide clear assessment criteria and advice on coursework. Grammatical points and

essays are corrected sensitively, with many topics covered by Year 13. In a Year 13 lesson, the teacher provided ample opportunities for students to speak and use the language in an active and authentic manner. Students sustained an animated debate in French for over 15 minutes. The use of ICT is another strength, with teachers setting homework and research tasks based on the use of the Internet or using the e-mail facilities well, thus targeting and speeding up the correction process very effectively. Teachers' expectations are high. However, Year 12 students have not yet developed their speaking skills sufficiently. Those who lack confidence need greater support, with more strategies to promote their active use of French focusing on personal development, self-confidence and presentation skills, for example through collaborative activities. The impact of the good teaching is shown as students make good progress in all four skills from Year 12 to Year 13.

- 115 Students work very hard, are attentive and show high levels of interest in the subject. All want to do well and use research skills effectively, for example when researching information from the Internet, using grammar reference materials or dictionaries. Year 13 students have developed high levels of independence and confidence. Whilst they are very keen and hard working, Year 12 students have not yet acquired sufficient strategies to challenge and argue a point at this early stage of the AS course. However, they organise their work effectively, work hard during private study time and arrive well prepared for lessons.
- 116 The leadership and management of post-16 provision are satisfactory. The sharing of classes is managed well and teachers liaise regularly to maintain progression on the course. Procedures and policies are applied consistently. For example, assessment criteria are shared with students. The analysis of data and results to inform teaching and learning requires further improvement to include thorough analysis of assessment and results, rigorous monitoring of teaching, and agreed actions taken to meet the department's targets and priorities. Other positive features of the sixth form are the opportunities for students to work with the foreign language assistant and the organised viewing of foreign films at a local centre. The department is investigating the possibilities of work experience in France. The subject makes a positive contribution to students' moral, social and cultural development.

German

- 117 German was also sampled. There are no students in the current Year 13. Ten Year 12 students are on the AS course. They obtained high grades at GCSE (grades A*-B). These students were observed reviewing language structures and content covered in their GCSE on the topic of holidays, but at a higher level with focus on expressing their own views.
- 118 Students express opinions and show confidence in speaking. They use an appropriate range of grammatical structures. Pronunciation and intonation are accurate. Work in folders is rightly focused on skills practice, particularly the application of grammar. The few extended essays seen demonstrated good use of vocabulary and idioms. The small amount of teaching seen was effective, being both challenging and supportive. German was used very well to conduct all activities in the lesson and was seen by students as the normal way of communicating with the teacher. A wide range of authentic resources was used. Students demonstrated high levels of perseverance and determination.