

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **MALMESBURY SCHOOL**

Malmesbury

LEA area: Wiltshire

Unique reference number: 126452

Headteacher: Mr M Trobe

Reporting inspector: Mr J Bald  
17932

Dates of inspection: 14 to 17 January 2003

Inspection number: 249699

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Community

Age range of pupils: 11 to 18

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Corn Gastons  
Malmesbury

Postcode: SN16 0DF

Telephone number: 01666 829700

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Appropriate authority: The governing body

Name of chair of governors: Mr K Sharp

Date of previous inspection: April 1997

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## **PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT**

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Malmesbury School is a large comprehensive school serving a rural town and surrounding villages. It has 1126 students, including 174 in the sixth form, and an even balance of boys and girls. Most students are white. A small number have minority ethnic backgrounds, including a very few with English as an additional language; these students speak good English. Students joining the school have reached broadly average standards for their age. The proportion of students with special educational needs is below average, but some have significant learning difficulties and physical disabilities. Overall, the social and economic background to the school's work is favourable.

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

Malmesbury School is a thriving learning community that provides good education. GCSE results are well above average, and represent very good progress from the standards reached by students joining the school. The school takes very good care of its students, helps them to develop positive attitudes to work and to society, and provides a wide range of learning opportunities outside lessons. Teaching and learning are good overall, and often very good for older students. Strong and sensitive leadership has built very good teamwork among the staff. Management is good, although some aspects of it could be made more systematic. The school provides good value for money.

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

- The headteacher, senior staff and governors provide clear direction for the school.
- Teaching is good overall, and often very good in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form.
- Students enjoy school, behave well and work hard. They make very good long-term progress.
- Standards in national tests and examinations are high throughout the school.
- All students are involved and included in lessons and other aspects of the school's life.
- The new building has boosted all aspects of the school's work.

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

- The school could assess and track progress more closely, particularly in Years 7 to 9.
- Overall, girls do significantly better than boys at GCSE.
- The management of faculties and departments is not consistent enough.
- Homework is not used effectively in some subjects.
- Some aspects of provision for modern languages and religious education need improvement.

*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 May 1997. The overall quality of its work was good, and GCSE results were high. However, sixth form standards were average, and poor accommodation was holding back progress. The school has made good improvements on this situation. The high standards at GCSE have been maintained, while standards in the sixth form are now above average and rising. The senior management team has been slimmed down and made much more efficient. Improvements in other issues arising from the last report have been good overall, but more work is needed to improve consistency in the issues listed above. The school's move to a new building, in the summer prior to the inspection, has made an excellent improvement to accommodation and has had a positive

effect on all aspects of the school's work. The school is in an excellent position to make further progress.

## STANDARDS

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

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

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

Results at GCSE are consistently well above average, and have kept pace with the national trend of improvement. Results are significantly above average in a broad range of subjects, including English, mathematics and science. However, while boys do better than in most schools nationally, they have reached significantly lower standards than girls at the school in GCSE in each of the last five years. While targets for improving results are satisfactory, they do not take account of this issue.

Results in national tests in Year 9 have improved at an above-average rate since the last inspection. They are well above average in English, mathematics and science, and showed very good improvement in 2002 after a fall in English and mathematics in 2001. Boys did particularly well in English in the 2002 tests, in which the school's results were among the best five per cent nationally.

National data are not available for 2002 AS and A-level results, but the school's records show substantial improvement from 2001, with significant proportions of A and B grades in all subjects.

The standard of work seen during the inspection was well above average in science and above average in other subjects in Year 11. It was above average overall in Year 9, but with some weaknesses in modern languages. The difference between work seen during the inspection and test and examination results is within the normal variation of results from year to year. The overall achievements of students with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language are very good. Overall, the standard of work and examination results represent very good long-term achievement.

## PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Students help create a happy and purposeful atmosphere.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good. Mostly very good in lessons and around the school, and often excellent. There is some unsatisfactory behaviour in the small minority of lessons in which teaching does not meet students' learning needs.
Personal development and relationships	Good, with some very good features. Students learn to accept responsibility, and to support each other in their work.
Attendance	Above average, with good punctuality.

Students make very good use of the school's facilities, and many are involved in sports and other learning outside school. They give very good support to those with special educational needs. Lower-attaining students respond very well when teaching is closely matched to their learning needs.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Teaching in English and mathematics, including literacy and number work, is good throughout the main school, with very good features in Years 10 and 11. In science, teaching is good in Years 7 to 9, and very good in Years 10 and 11.

Teaching seen during the inspection was very good in physical education, with excellent teaching in dance, history and the new vocational course for lower-attaining students in Years 10 and 11, where relationships and learning are excellent. Specialist teaching for students with special educational needs is very good, and they have good overall provision in lessons. The overall quality of teaching in other subjects was satisfactory to good. However, teaching methods in some classes in French and German are not meeting the needs of all of the students. In a very small minority of lessons, communication with students is not effective. Teachers make good use of homework in English, mathematics and science, but there are some gaps in setting homework in other subjects.

Overall, teaching in the main school and in the sixth form meets the needs of students well, and has many very good features. Teaching and learning benefit from students' very good attitudes. They take part in good lessons with enjoyment, and develop a strong sense of purpose as they approach examinations. Teaching in the sixth form is good, with very good features. During the inspection, teaching and learning were very good overall in science, English, history, drama and theatre studies. Very good features in other subjects included very good assessment and use of discussion.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL



Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good. The curriculum provides good learning opportunities for all students, and a very good range of activities outside lessons.
Provision for students with special educational needs	Good. Very good identification of learning needs and specialist teaching. Support in lessons is mostly good, but there are some gaps.
Provision for students with English as an additional language	Very good. Almost all of these students have good skills in English. Their learning is very good, and they are often among the highest achieving students in their classes.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good. There is a good programme of responsibility for students, and they develop positive attitudes. They are prepared well for life in modern society. They have very good opportunities to take part in performances and residential visits in this country and abroad.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very good. The school takes very effective care of students' safety and well-being, and provides good guidance to them in their work.

Students learn to use computers confidently and computer clubs are well attended, but there is no certificated course for information and communication technology (ICT). Religious education is not taught to all students in Years 10 and 11, and there is no daily act of collective worship. Some assemblies and tutorial periods could involve students more. The new vocational course in Years 10 and 11 is outstanding and has very good community support. The school offers extensive opportunities for sport, and has the Sportsmark award.

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

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Good, with very good features. Leadership has built strong teamwork, and standards are rising. Most management systems are very good, but some aspects of the management of subjects could be improved.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Well. Governors are well organised, keep in close touch with the school, and have very good priorities for improving it.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good. The school makes good use of modern technology to identify strengths and aspects for improvement. This is followed by action.
The strategic use of resources	Very good. The school deploys its resources very effectively to promote the interests of all of its students.

The senior management team is very well organised. It strikes a good balance between aiming for excellence and making good provision for all students in the school. It has effective procedures for managing the performance of teachers, and is quick to recognise and promote talented teachers. Management of the care of students and of arrangements for special educational needs is very good. However, some aspects of the management of subjects and faculties are not yet leading to speedy and effective action once weaknesses are identified. The school keeps close control over its finances, and assesses closely the cost and benefit of each course in the main school and in the sixth form. This ensures that it provides best value in its work as well as obtaining best value in purchases.

## PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Children are expected to work hard and do their best.</li><li>• They enjoy school and make good progress.</li><li>• The school is benefiting from its new building.</li><li>• Children become mature and responsible.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Homework.</li><li>• Information for parents.</li><li>• Co-operation with parents.</li><li>• Behaviour.</li></ul>

Inspectors agree with the positive views in this table, which were expressed by a very large majority of parents. They found that homework was effectively set in English, mathematics and science, but not always in other subjects. They consider that information for parents and students is straightforward and clearly set out, but that reports could give a clearer account of standards in some subjects. Inspectors found that the school co-operated effectively with parents, but that there was some friction with individual parents. The number of parents expressing concern about behaviour was small. Inspectors found that behaviour overall was good, and that the small amount of unsatisfactory behaviour almost always took place in lessons where teaching was not fully effective.

**INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM**

The sixth form offers the only post-16 provision in Malmesbury, and arranges its courses to complement those offered in two further education colleges some miles away. It has 174 students, with slightly more female than male students. Most students follow A-level and Advanced subsidiary (AS) courses, and there is also an advanced vocational course (AVCE) in business studies. Information and communication technology (ICT) is not offered at A-level, but all students take a key skills course in ICT in Year 12. The proportions of students with minority ethnic backgrounds and English as an additional language are similar to those in the main school, and these students are proficient in English. Sixth form students' backgrounds are very favourable. At the time of the inspection, a very small number were entitled to free school meals, and an equally small proportion had special educational needs. Just over half of students in the main school stay on to the sixth form, and numbers are rising slowly. A small number join the sixth form from other schools. The school has extended the range of courses it offers since the last inspection. Students join the sixth form with above-average standards at GCSE. They are expected to have five or more GCSE passes at A\* to C, and grade B in their chosen subjects, though the last requirement is applied flexibly. A high proportion of sixth form students complete their courses, and just under two thirds proceed to higher education.

**HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS**

The sixth form provides good education and meets the needs of its students well. Examination results and the standard of students' work are above average and rising. There has been a substantial improvement from the broadly average standards reached at the time of the last inspection, and overall achievement is now very good. Teaching and learning are good, with very good features, and the sixth form is efficiently and sympathetically managed. Value for money is good.

**Strengths**

- Standards and examination results are consistently above average and sometimes very high.
- Teaching and learning are consistently good, and very good in some subjects.
- The school tracks students' progress very well, and sets them demanding and realistic targets.
  - Students and teachers form a very effective working partnership.
  - Most students are mature, hardworking and independent.
  - The sixth form is led and managed efficiently and sympathetically.

**What could be improved**

- A small minority of students do not take enough care over their work.
- A small number of students do not attend as regularly as they should.
- There are not enough opportunities for students to reach high standards in ICT.

*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	<b>Good.</b> Standards are above average. Teaching, learning and achievement are good, and there is a good working atmosphere.
Chemistry	<b>Very good.</b> Standards are consistently well above average. Teaching is highly skilled and imaginative. Very good achievement.
Design and technology	<b>Good.</b> Standards are above average and teaching and learning are good, with very good relationships. Good achievement.
Business studies	<b>Good.</b> Standards are above average, and there is a good range of courses. Teaching, learning and achievement are good.
Information and communication technology (ICT)	<b>Satisfactory.</b> Teaching and learning are satisfactory, and students reach broadly average standards for their courses. Achievement could be improved if more advanced courses were provided.
Music	<b>Good.</b> Teaching and learning are good, with very good features. Standards are above average and achievement is good.
Drama and theatre studies	<b>Very good.</b> Examination results are very high. Teaching, learning and achievement are very good, with many opportunities for performance.
History	<b>Very good.</b> Standards are well above average, and achievement is very good among all groups of students. Very good teaching and learning.
English	<b>Very good.</b> Students work hard and reach well above average standards. Teaching is very good, and the best is excellent.

The standard of other work seen was above average. Teaching and learning were good overall, with outstanding features in individual lessons. Students work well outside lessons, particularly with coursework, and develop good skills in discussion and debate.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Very good. The head of the sixth form and all teachers know students well, and match guidance and support effectively to individual needs.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Good. Sixth form courses are carefully planned to meet students' needs, and new courses are effectively developed. The quality of teaching is closely monitored, and standards are rising. There is effective commitment to equal opportunities for all students. Management systems are well organised and effective.

## STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers know their subjects well, and are always willing to support and help students.</li> <li>• Students are challenged to do their best.</li> <li>• They are treated as responsible young adults.</li> <li>• There is a good working atmosphere, and students enjoy being in the sixth form.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Activities outside lessons.</li> <li>• Careers advice.</li> <li>• Information on their progress.</li> </ul>

A very substantial majority of students expressed positive views, and inspectors agree with them. Inspectors found that the school provides a good range of activities outside lessons, but that some students' time for them is limited by their need to take on part-time work. Discussion with students indicated that the school provides good individual guidance on careers and higher education, but that arrangements for this are not always clear to students joining the sixth form. Inspectors found that information on progress is good, and that teachers are always willing to provide more.

## 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**

#### **The headteacher, senior staff and governors provide clear direction for the school.**

1. The headteacher, all senior managers and governors work closely together for the benefit of the school and its students. Their clear sense of the school's mission is reflected in a well-balanced statement of its aims, and in development planning that combines good long-term aims and values with suitable priorities and medium-term goals. In discussions with inspectors, the headteacher, his senior colleagues and governors showed clear understanding of the school's strengths and of areas that needed to be developed. In particular, governors' understanding of the obstacles to progress posed by the building at the time of the last inspection rightly led them to give priority to the school's move.
2. Since the last inspection, the school's senior management team has been slimmed down and re-organised, so that it now provides efficient and cost-effective management for a large school. The school's finances are tightly controlled, and used in a balanced way to promote high standards and to ensure that all students' needs are met. The new vocational course for lower-attaining older students, for example, is supported by funding from both the school's resources and the local community, and excellent accommodation has been provided in the new building for work with students with special educational needs. The headteacher makes very good use of the talents of the staff, recognising and promoting success among heads of department. Performance management arrangements identify strengths and weaknesses in teaching clearly, and are followed up by suitable programmes of action. Provision for the school's substantial number of newly-qualified teachers is excellent, combining a central training programme with very effective support from middle managers. One example of this during the inspection was an outstanding consultative meeting between a newly-qualified teacher of physical education with the head of department and her deputy, leading to very effective preparation for a lesson in gymnastics. The strong sense of direction provided by outstanding leadership, and in particular the priority given to the school's move to its new building, has put the school in a position to realise its long-term aim of excellence in all areas of its work.

#### **Teaching is good overall, and often very good in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form.**

3. At the time of the last inspection, teaching was good with very good features, and these qualities have been maintained. Teachers in the main school know their subjects well and almost all plan interesting lessons with a good range of activities to engage students. This enables them to form good working partnerships with students, and to promote very good long-term progress. Teachers in all subjects make very good use of question and answer sessions, and of class discussion. This is a particular strength, as it helps students to develop confidence and a sense of pride in their work, whatever their abilities and learning needs.
4. Teaching is better in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9 because it is more tightly focussed on what students need to learn. Teaching in lessons in Years 10 and 11 is also supported by better assessment than for younger students, and by well-organised coursework. Teaching prepares students very well for the requirements of GCSE, and is very well matched to the needs of higher-attaining students. The quality of teaching in the new vocational course for lower-attaining students is very good overall, with outstanding features, including excellent relationships and opportunities for students to

learn a very broad range of skills. Teaching in the sixth form shares many of the strengths seen in Years 10 and 11, and is well adapted to the needs of the students. Sixth form teaching is discussed in detail in paragraphs 34 to 37 below.

5. Teaching seen in the main school in English and mathematics, including literacy and number work, was good, and at times very good. Very good features included the use of computers in English and demanding homework for higher-attaining students in Year 9 in mathematics. Teaching in science was particularly consistent and very clearly planned, both in lessons and over longer periods. Teaching was very good in physical education, with excellent teaching in dance, and in most history lessons, where the school's emphasis on the use of a broad range of teaching techniques is leading to high standards at GCSE and a substantial increase in students studying history in the sixth form. Teaching was very good in specialised lessons for students with special educational needs. It is good overall across the school for these students, but in a minority of lessons their needs are not considered closely enough in planning. Teaching assistants have good teaching skills and form very good relationships with the students they support.
6. The video and television sets in each classroom have opened new opportunities for teachers. They are used very well in some lessons, although in others teachers have yet to build up sufficient collections of video materials to make full use of them. While there is little unsatisfactory teaching, teachers in a small minority of lessons were not communicating effectively with students. This has been identified in the school's monitoring procedures. The teaching of ICT skills through subjects is satisfactory overall, and enables most students to use computers confidently by Year 11. It does not, however, enable students to develop advanced skills in the subject as there are no certificated courses. Teaching and learning in modern languages have some shortcomings, and are discussed in paragraphs 24 to 26 below.

**Students enjoy school, behave well and work hard. They make very good long-term progress.**

7. Students enjoy coming to school. They are keen to learn and to take advantage of the wide range of learning opportunities offered outside the classroom. Over two fifths are regularly involved in competitive and other sports, and many take part in clubs, dramatic and musical performances and visits. Students told inspectors how much they appreciated the new building, which they use thoroughly, while treating it with respect. Students are happy to accept responsibility in formal contexts such as the school council, and also informally through helping younger students and those with special educational needs.
8. In lessons, all students respond very well to teaching that enables them to learn effectively. They listen carefully to teachers, and co-operate very well when working in groups. They present their written work well, particularly in GCSE coursework. Some of the most positive attitudes during the inspection were shown by students taking the new vocational course and by students with special educational needs working with specialist teachers. These students were proud of their work, and wanted to share it with inspectors.
9. While many parents told inspectors that they were pleased with the values and attitudes promoted by the school, several were concerned about behaviour. During the inspection, however, lapses from good behaviour were few, and almost all took place in lessons where teaching was not enabling students to learn effectively. In one of these lessons, there was a marked improvement in the behaviour and attitudes of students

towards the end, when they were given a task that was better planned and made more rigorous demands on their thinking. An incident of name-calling between two students from minority ethnic backgrounds was dealt with thoroughly and effectively using the school's race equality procedures. Overall, racial harmony, relationships between boys and girls, and mutual respect in the school are very good.

10. In each of the past five years, students have joined the school with test results in the average band. A significant number of students in some year groups, mostly boys, have joined with test scores well below the level normally associated with success at GCSE. In the light of this, the achievements of all students at GCSE represent very good long-term achievement. Higher-attaining students achieve A\* grades in many subjects, and standards in several subjects, notably mathematics and history, are leading to some very large groups in the sixth form. Students with special educational needs make very good long-term progress in response to specialist teaching that is closely related to their individual requirements, and the small number of students with English as an additional language do very well, both in the main school and the sixth form. Students taking the new vocational course in Years 10 and 11 achieve high standards in the range of skills they study.

### **Standards in national tests and examinations are high throughout the school**

11. In the light of the standards reached by students joining the school, standards in national tests and examinations represent very good overall achievement. While boys overall achieve less than girls by GCSE, available evidence shows that this is due at least in part to boys' lower standards when they join the school. Higher-attaining boys do well by the time they reach GCSE and sometimes also in earlier years. For example, over twice as many boys as girls reached outstanding standards in the Year 9 mathematics tests in 2002.
12. The 2002 Year 9 test results in English and mathematics were particularly good at Level 6, one grade higher than the expected standard. In science, they were significantly better at Level 6 and at Level 7. Only in mathematics, however, did any students achieve Level 8, either in tests or in teachers' assessments. The gap between standards reached by boys and girls narrowed significantly in 2001 and 2002, so that the difference is now very close to the national average.
13. At GCSE, the 2002 results were significantly above average in science, English, mathematics, design and technology, French, home economics and geography. In some subjects where students reached average standards, this was due to significant numbers of lower-attaining students choosing to study them. Nevertheless, the quality of these students' best work is outstanding. For example, a student with a serious behavioural and learning difficulty had produced fluent, well-written history essays showing understanding of the subject that was well up to the standard of GCSE grade C. The 2002 GCSE results also showed well above average proportions of students achieving A\* and A grades in English language, English literature, French, geography, home economics and science, and high proportions of A\* grades in mathematics and history. These very high results were, however, most often achieved by girls.
14. A-level results were broadly average overall at the time of the last inspection, with above-average results in some subjects. National comparative data were not available at the time of the current inspection, and the pattern of entry also changed between 2001 and 2002, as a greater number of students took four subjects at Advanced Subsidiary (AS) level. Nevertheless, A-level results in 2002 showed significant improvement in many subjects at all levels of pass. In drama and theatre studies, over



nine tenths of students achieved A or B grades, while in history there was significant improvement in the standards reached by lower-attaining sixth form students, who all achieved at least grade D. This represents good achievement, with very good potential for further improvement.

**All students are involved and included in lessons and other aspects of the school's work.**

15. The school creates a broad range of opportunities for all students to become involved in its work. These begin with an early residential visit for all students in Year 7, and continue with clubs and other learning activities that provide opportunities for students with a very wide range of interests and learning needs. Students told inspectors that they appreciated the breadth of provision offered, and teachers' willingness to help them outside lessons.
16. Students with special educational needs often have significant learning difficulties. Additional teaching for these students is well planned to help them achieve the learning goals set for their classes. For example, students in Year 9 benefited from close personal support from their teacher and teaching assistant in preparing to write a non-fiction item for national tests. Specialist accommodation for students with special educational needs is attractive, spacious and well-lit, with good ICT facilities. This encourages good learning and behaviour, and conveys the message that these students' work is as important as every other student's.
17. The school has recognised the need to extend the curriculum to meet the needs and interests of a small number of older students, mostly boys, who have not been learning effectively. Its new vocational course allows these students to work to a high standard in learning a wide range of practical crafts. The course has been carefully developed by the headteacher and a former head of year to make maximum use of available teaching skills, and has received a good level of sponsorship in the local community. Teaching and learning on this course are very good, with some excellent features. Students are rightly proud of their achievements.

**The new building has boosted all aspects of the school's work.**

18. At the time of the last inspection, inadequate accommodation was holding back much of the school's work. The effects included dangers to health and safety in workshops, overcrowded classrooms and much time wasted for teachers and students in travelling between sites. The school moved to its new building, funded under the Private Finance Initiative (PFI), at the start of the summer term in 2002. By the time of the inspection, it was fully settled in, and the benefits of the move were clear.
19. The building is clearly laid out, with teaching rooms for subjects grouped together and wide corridors that allow students in this large school to move about without bumping into each other. During the inspection, the broad central corridor was used for informal lunchtime concerts. Classrooms are of adequate size, chairs and furniture are practical and comfortable, and each classroom has a television and video. Workshops, laboratories, sports facilities and teaching rooms for small groups provide excellent accommodation. Offices, meeting rooms and storage are well designed, and furnished attractively but economically. All of these features help teachers and students to concentrate on their work in a secure and comfortable environment. Students treat the accommodation with respect, and the inspection team received many positive comments on its impact on the school's work from parents, students and teachers. There was a small number of negative points, including the need for more insulation

between some classrooms and occasional noise from hail on the roof, but these were not evident during the inspection. The building conveys to all a message that their work is important, and that confidence and success are to be expected.

## **WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED**

### **The school could assess and track progress more closely, particularly in Years 7 to 9.**

20. The school has a good system to track the progress of students in Years 7 to 9 in science, and satisfactory systems in mathematics and English. Assessment of standards and progress in other subjects is inconsistent, and no arrangements are in place to assess and track progress in ICT in the school as a whole. Other assessment arrangements in Years 10 and 11 are good, and are used to set targets that make a very good contribution to the high standards reached at GCSE.
21. Information from assessment in Years 7 to 9 is not used effectively to set targets for students in most subjects, and gifted and talented students are not identified systematically. These factors lead to some inconsistency in learning. For example, while 11 students reached very high levels in national tests for mathematics in 2002, very few reached the same level in any other subjects, either in tests or teachers' assessments. The lack of reference to National Curriculum levels in assessment, or to other measures that provide information in the same detail, also limits the quality of information on standards provided to parents in annual reports. As at the time of the last inspection, there is no consistent system of rewards for good work across the school – in some teaching groups, some students are eligible for merit awards while others are not, and there is no clear reason for this. Assessment arrangements for students with special educational needs are wide-ranging and very well informed. They involve close co-operation with students, their parents, and agencies outside the school. In some classes, these targets are used well in planning lessons, but in others students are given the same work as the rest of the class, whether or not it fully meets their needs.

### **Overall, girls do significantly better than boys at GCSE.**

22. GCSE results have been well above average in each of the past five years, and boys' results are higher than in other schools nationally. However, girls' results have been higher still, and the gap between boys' and girls' results each year has been wider than in most schools. The gap was above average in eight of the subjects in which the school had comparative data in 2002. These included subjects, such as science, in which the quality of teaching and learning during the inspection was consistently good or better. In several subjects, often those most strongly dependent on literacy and language skills, there was a particularly large gap between boys and girls in A\* and A grades. Only in design and technology, where boys did slightly better than girls overall, was the gap between boys' and girls' results significantly below average. The school's data, for a small number of students, showed boys doing better than girls in GCSE music.
23. The school's analysis shows that reasons for this position are complex and require further investigation. In 2002, a significant proportion of boys had had very low test scores when they joined Year 7, and had also done significantly less well than girls in national tests in Year 9. There are, on the other hand, examples of very good achievement by boys in some subjects, both at GCSE and in Year 9 national tests. In 2002, for example, significantly more boys than girls achieved an outstanding standard for their age. Analysis of boys' coursework has shown some weaknesses, but

suggests that examination performance is the main source of the lower results. The strong overall pattern of results puts the school in a good position to make further progress in raising the standards reached by boys.

**The management of faculties and departments needs to be made more consistent.**

24. Professional development is based on initiatives designed to improve teaching across the school as a whole, and is supported by the grouping of subjects into faculties.
25. This system provides good value for money, and has led to a good 'toolkit' of teaching methods that is leading to greater variety in teaching. On the other hand, the approach does not do enough to ensure that developments are thought through in terms of their impact on the particular needs of each subject. This limits its effectiveness in improving teaching in the few areas where there are weaknesses. The distinction between matters which can be dealt with at faculty level and those which need to be considered in the specific context of individual subjects is not made clearly enough. This is a particular problem in faculties which contain a very broad range of subjects, notably performing arts. Senior managers ensure that ideas are shared between faculties, and they identify weaknesses in development planning. They do not, however, act quickly and systematically to ensure that these are put right. One reason for this has been the heavy recent demands on management time caused by preparation for the move to the new building. The school is now in a position to give this issue the attention it needs.

**Homework is not used effectively in some subjects.**

26. Parents told the inspection team that homework was not set consistently. Analysis of homework records and discussion with students shows that most homework is properly set, and that it promotes consistent learning and good personal organisation in English, mathematics and science. However, homework in some other subjects is not always set regularly enough, and some homework does not do enough to meet the learning needs of all of the students in a group. In particular, some homework does not provide enough challenge for the highest-attaining students. In some cases, completed homework is not followed up effectively in class. Most of the gaps in homework are in Years 7 to 9, but there are also some inconsistencies in Year 10. The school's well-established system of personal planners for students provides a good basis for improving checks on the use and quality of homework.

**Some aspects of provision for modern languages and religious education need improvement.**

27. Teachers have good knowledge and understanding of the languages they teach, and plan a range of activities within each lesson. Good features in teaching during the inspection included enthusiastic presentation and, in some classes, good relationships and effective provision for Year 7 students with significant special educational needs. GCSE results were above average in French in 2002, but below average in German, an issue that the school has addressed by introducing German in Year 8 rather than in Year 9. The school has a particularly good system of exchanges, which enables students to stay with French and German families at a reasonable cost.
28. Some parents were concerned at the quality of teaching and learning in modern languages prior to the inspection, and their views were partly confirmed by inspection evidence. Lesson observations, analysis of students' work and discussion with them showed that many did not understand their work clearly enough. Much written work is based on copying, and students do not have enough opportunity to compose simple sentences of their own. By Year 9, too few students have moved beyond the initial stages of the National Curriculum, and by Year 11 some lower-attaining students do not understand that including, or not including, words in their writing has an important effect on meaning. While all lessons seen included an element of speaking and listening as well as reading and writing, the range of resources used was often limited. Very little use was made of new video equipment, and some homework, such as a cut-and-paste task for higher-attaining students in Year 8, followed by copying, did not challenge these students to apply what they had learned.
29. Teachers use computers for word processing, but many older, lower-attaining students do not benefit from this as their language skills are too limited. During the inspection, some copied from sheets, while others misbehaved and had to be asked to work on paper instead. Discussion with students, and analysis of the pattern of behaviour in the faculty, showed that the misbehaviour followed teaching that was not meeting the needs of students. Students with the most significant special educational needs in Year 7, for example, worked happily and well in a lesson in which teaching had been carefully matched to what they most needed to learn and to what could reasonably be expected of them. Planning in other lessons was often based on the same task for all students, restricting scope for the highest-attaining students, and providing too little support for those who were struggling. In some lessons, teachers were reluctant to explain issues clearly and in enough detail to give students control over their work. Students with particular gifts and talents are not identified. Few students choose to take two languages to GCSE, and sixth form numbers are very low. The linguistic and teaching skills within the faculty, however, put the school in a good position to address these weaknesses through its procedures for planning and review.
30. Teaching in religious education during the inspection was satisfactory and covered a good range of faiths and related issues. However, the subject is not provided for all students in the main school and in the sixth form, as required by law.

## WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

31. In building on their successful work to improve the school since the last inspection, the headteacher and governors should pay particular attention to these points. The school has begun to investigate point 2, which is included in its improvement plan.

(1) Improve arrangements to assess and track progress, by:

- making more consistent use of National Curriculum levels, or their equivalent, in assessing students' work, planning lessons and reporting to parents;
  - gathering and using information from assessment more consistently when planning work for pupils joining the school;
  - establishing effective assessment procedures for ICT.
- (Paragraphs 20, 21)

(2) Improve boys' performance at GCSE, by:

- analysing strengths and weaknesses in boys' coursework and examination performance;
  - identifying subjects where boys do particularly well, and the reasons for this;
  - devising a specific plan of action and monitoring its effectiveness.
- (Paragraphs 22-23)

(3) Improve the management of departments and faculties, by:

- ensuring a good balance between topics considered at faculty level and those that need to be tackled in departments;
  - taking action to improve development plans when weaknesses are identified;
  - ensuring that professional development arrangements take full account of the needs of each subject.
- (Paragraphs 24-25)

(4) Improve the quality and consistency of homework, by:

- identifying a clear long-term programme of homework for each subject;
  - ensuring that homework builds up gradually to the standard expected for GCSE coursework;
  - monitoring homework, and taking action when it is not set.
- (Paragraph 26)

(5) Improve provision for modern foreign languages and religious education, by:

- providing an effective balance of work on words, sentences and whole texts;
  - improving the use of computers and the provision of study support outside lessons;
  - meeting statutory requirements for religious education.
- (Paragraphs 27-30)

## **Sixth form**

- (1) Ensure that all students take sufficient care over their work, by:
  - making clear from the outset what written work is required, and why;
  - matching marking and additional support closely to students' learning needs;
  - identifying and tackling weaknesses in written work as early as possible.(Paragraphs 35, 52, 76)
  
- (2) Improve attendance, by:
  - identifying gaps in punctuality and attendance as early as possible in Year 12;
  - identifying the patterns and causes of unauthorised absence;
  - providing support and guidance at the earliest possible stage where it is needed.(Paragraphs 35, 44)
  
- (3) Improve standards and achievement in information and communication technology (ICT), by:
  - providing more opportunities for advanced study;
  - increasing the number of students who complete courses at each level;
  - encouraging all students to develop their skills to the highest level possible.(Paragraphs 73, 75-79, 84)

### **Additional points for inclusion in the school action plan.**

- (1) Ensure that students re-taking GCSE mathematics receive sufficient teaching over the course of the school year to give them a reasonable chance of success.  
(Paragraph 56)
  
- (2) Ensure that students joining Year 12 are fully aware of arrangements for careers guidance.  
(Paragraph 46)

*The following points apply to the sixth form and also to the main school.*

- (1) Meet legal requirements for religious education and collective worship.  
(Paragraph 42)
  
- (2) Develop the library to provide good support for the curriculum and wider reading.  
(Paragraph 50)

## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

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

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	63
	Sixth form	43
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		37

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
<b>Years 7 – 11</b>							
Number	2	20	22	15	2	2	0
Percentage	3	32	35	24	3	3	0
<b>Sixth form</b>							
Number	2	17	19	5	0	0	0
Percentage	5	37	44	10	0	0	0

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

### Information about the school's pupils

<b>Pupils on the school's roll</b>	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	954	174
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	54	1

<b>Special educational needs</b>	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	15	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	161	1

<b>English as an additional language</b>	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	13

<b>Pupil mobility in the last school year</b>	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	25
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	35

## Attendance

### Authorised absence

	%
School data	7.2
National comparative data	7.8

### Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.5
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2002	94	112	206

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	83	83	78
	Girls	101	91	93
	Total	184	174	171
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	89 (64)	84 (77)	83 (80)
	National	66 (64)	67 (66)	66 (66)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	70 (37)	62 (58)	52 (54)
	National	32 (31)	45 (43)	33 (34)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	74	84	85
	Girls	98	94	96
	Total	172	178	181
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	83.5 (78)	86 (79)	88 (74)
	National	67 (65)	70 (68)	67 (64)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	44.6 (44)	63 (57)	51 (42)
	National	32 (31)	44 (42)	34 (33)

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



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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
		2002	97	84

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	56	87	87
	Girls	66	83	84
	Total	122	170	171
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	67 (66)	94 (98)	94 (98)
	National	50 (48)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	49 (48.2)
	National	39.8 (39)

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	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	25	38	63
	Average point score per candidate	19.4 (18.3)	20.3 (19.0)	20 (18.7)
National	Average point score per candidate	*(16.9)	*(18.0)	*(17.5)

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

### ***Ethnic background of students***

<b>Categories used in the Annual School Census</b>
White – British
White – Irish
White – any other White background
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean
Mixed – White and Black African
Mixed – White and Asian
Mixed – any other mixed background
Asian or Asian British - Indian
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background
Black or Black British – Caribbean
Black or Black British – African
Black or Black British – any other Black background
Chinese
Any other ethnic group
No ethnic group recorded

### ***Exclusions in the last school year***

<b>No of students on roll</b>	<b>Number of fixed period exclusions</b>	<b>Number of permanent exclusions</b>
1097	108	6
3	1	0
12	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
6	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
6	0	0
3	0	0
0	0	0
1	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0

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

### ***Teachers and classes***

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

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	69.7
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.2

#### **Education support staff: Y7 – Y11**

Total number of education support staff	18
Total aggregate hours worked per week	459

#### **Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13**

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	74.1
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#### **Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y13**

Key Stage 3	23.5
Key Stage 4	22.7
Sixth form	11.7

### ***Financial information***

Financial year	2001-2
	£
Total income	3,364,871
Total expenditure	3,444,817
Expenditure per pupil	3,054
Balance brought forward from previous year	102,018
Balance carried forward to next year	22,072

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

### **Recruitment of teachers**

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	23.2
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	26.3

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	0
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	1126
Number of questionnaires returned	655

### **Percentage of responses in each category**

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	43	49	6	2	1
My child is making good progress in school.	45	49	4	1	2
Behaviour in the school is good.	28	58	7	2	6
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	19	57	19	3	2
The teaching is good.	28	64	3	1	4
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	26	53	17	3	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	50	43	5	2	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	55	42	1	0	2
The school works closely with parents.	25	53	14	2	6
The school is well led and managed.	37	51	4	1	7
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	37	53	5	1	5
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	27	47	11	3	12

## **PART D: THE SIXTH FORM**

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

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

32. When the school was last inspected, standards in most sixth form subjects were broadly average. Female students were reaching higher standards than male students. Overall, standards in the sixth form did not match those achieved at GCSE. The present pattern of results is much better. A-level results in 2001 were above average, with little overall difference between male and female students, and the school's records show significant further improvement in 2002.
33. The pattern of results and standards in students' work are consistently above average or better in all of the school's AS and A-level courses. Target grades are carefully set, and overall students meet them. Slightly more students exceed their target grades than fall below them, and a high proportion of students complete their courses. There are no significant variations in the achievements of groups of students. Entry requirements for the sixth form result in above-average standards among students joining it in Year 12, although the school allows some students who do not quite meet its requirements to join on a trial basis for half a term. All of the students joining on this basis in 2002 were making good progress after the first half term.
34. In history, lower-attaining students benefit from exceptionally clear guidance on written work, and the pattern of achievement among lower-attaining students is improving. Across the sixth form, higher-attaining students achieve the standards they should. There is a high proportion of A and B grades in many subjects, with particular strengths in mathematics, sciences and drama and theatre studies. Only in ICT, where no advanced courses are offered, are overall standards lower than in most other sixth forms. The lack of national comparative data on sixth form performance makes it impossible to compare the school's results precisely with national averages and similar schools. Nevertheless, 2002 results and students' work provide convincing evidence that achievement in the sixth form is now good, with very good features.

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

35. The vast majority of sixth form students are mature, co-operative and responsible. They are committed to their work and to the school community. Students work hard and creatively in lessons, contributing freely to discussion. Almost all take very good care with their coursework, although a small minority do not take enough care with other aspects of their work. Most students have very good records of attendance, and use home study leave responsibly. A small number of students, however, have significant gaps in their attendance from an early stage in Year 12, and these are reflected in lower standards of work.
36. Students use their time in school outside lessons well for study and exercise, and take a lead in creating a climate of learning and achievement. For example, sixth form drama students carried out a dress rehearsal of their A-level performance for students in Year 11, and sixth form music students give informal performances at lunchtime. Sixth form students contribute to school management and leadership through the school council and membership of a committee of governors.

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

37. Teaching is good overall, and has very good features. It is very good overall in English, science, drama and theatre studies, and history. Teachers know their subjects and examination requirements in depth, and have very good understanding of students' interests and patterns of learning. These strengths enable them to design well-balanced courses of study that are relevant to students and encourage them to develop their interests at an advanced level. Teachers form very effective working partnerships with students, and help them to take responsibility for their own work. They provide a good balance of guidance and challenge to all, and this is leading to improving standards among lower-attaining students as well as the most able. In 2002, for example, the lowest grade achieved in history A-level was D. All teachers pay close attention to developing students' key skills in literacy and communication. Students in all subjects learn to examine issues and evidence critically, and to present their work well using new technology. The quality of class discussions is a particular strength, in mathematics and sciences as well as in arts subjects.
38. Within individual lessons, the quality of teaching ranges from excellent to satisfactory, and is almost always good or better. Lessons are very well planned and a very good pace of work is established, so that students learn a lot in each lesson, but without rushing. Teachers provide clear and detailed explanations and organise a very good balance of activities within each lesson, including well-designed practical work. Course work is carefully built into each course, and its high quality is a key factor in raising standards and promoting consistent learning outside the classroom. In most subjects, coursework is very carefully marked and assessed, and supported by regular individual reviews. There are, however, some weaknesses in marking in mathematics and in aspects of work in other subjects, most often in marking students' notes. Where this occurs, some students do not take enough care over these aspects of their work.
39. There has been a significant increase in the amount of very good and excellent teaching since the last inspection. Where the teaching is excellent, it adds to the consistent qualities of sixth form teaching an exceptional degree of insight, imagination and organisation. In biology, this enabled all students to conduct a very effective practical investigation of DNA, and in English to consider a very broad range of interpretations of a Shakespearian character in a very short time. Teaching in this lesson also made excellent use of computers. Teachers across the sixth form make effective use of ICT and other new technology where it is available, so that students learn to use computers confidently and well. Teaching on specialist ICT courses is satisfactory, and offers good guidance to individual students.
40. Across the sixth form, students make a major contribution to their own learning and take pleasure and satisfaction in it. They often pursue their interests in research out of school, for example, by visiting a museum to see examples of objects they are designing. Some students, however, do not read enough outside the materials required for their courses, and the limited range of books in the library does little to encourage this. Students take a lead in promoting learning in the school, and are happy to present their work to younger students. There are often informal music concerts at lunchtime, and students in Year 11 were delighted by the professionalism and humour of a sixth form rehearsal for a practical drama examination.

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

41. Sixth form students take four AS courses in Year 12, with additional courses in ICT and either general studies or critical thinking. These account for 30 out of 35 periods each week, providing a good balance between taught time and time for private study and preparation. The range of AS courses provides good opportunities for students to pursue a personal interest or take a vocational course, such as business studies, in addition to the courses they take to A-level. Courses are effectively matched to the needs of the students, and complement a broader range of vocational courses in further education colleges. The school is aware of its need, as the only sixth form provider in the town, to offer as broad a range of courses as its finances permit. It develops new courses well. A-level music, for example, started with three students, and now has nine in Year 12, with growing interest from prospective students. It finalises its timetable for the sixth form once numbers are firm, and does its best to meet students' needs. On the other hand, this leads to very large classes in popular subjects, such as history and mathematics. In history, the quality of teaching and learning is maintained at a very good standard despite this, but problems with timetabling the large Year 12 group in mathematics have had some effect on learning in statistics. The school has also made too little provision to give students re-taking mathematics GCSE in the sixth form a reasonable chance of success.
42. The sixth form offers a good range of activities outside lessons. While there is no timetabled physical education, many make use of their access to a well-equipped gymnasium during school hours. There are netball, basketball and hockey teams for female students, and a basketball team for male students. Students are encouraged to take the Duke of Edinburgh Award at the local youth club, and several help younger students by mentoring and assisting those with special educational needs. They are encouraged to give blood and to undertake training in first aid. A sixth form council and membership of the school council and a committee of the governors provide opportunities for leadership. Many students take part in musical and dramatic performances for the community, parents and other students. Some students' time for these activities is, however, limited by their need to take part-time jobs. The school does not meet its legal requirement to teach religious education to all students in the sixth form. Nevertheless, the school's overall provision for sixth form students' personal development is good and being actively developed.

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

### **Assessment**

43. The overall quality of assessment for sixth form students is very good, with several outstanding features. The system of assessment on entry to the sixth form ensures that students are qualified for the courses they take, and is used flexibly. Students wishing to take a subject in which they have grade C at GCSE are closely assessed during their first half-term to ensure that they have a realistic chance of success. All 12 students receiving this additional support in the present Year 12 were fully accepted onto their AS courses. Target grades, set towards the end of September of the autumn term in Year 12, take account of students' first pieces of sixth form work as well as their GCSE results and the overall quality of their work in the main school. This gives them a broader basis in evidence than those in many schools, and students find them accurate. Beginning at the end of the first term, students receive regular 'current achievement' grades that keep them in touch with their progress. Assessment gives

students a very clear idea of their progress and of suitable opportunities for higher education. It is an important strength, and contributes to rising standards.

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

44. This aspect of sixth form provision is very well organised. The head of the sixth form, sixth form tutors and teachers know the students very well, often from teaching them in the main school, and all advice, support and guidance is closely matched to individual needs. This leads to a well-directed approach that makes the best use of the available time, and meets the individual requirements of both students and courses. Students with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language benefit equally from the school's well-established systems. At the time of the inspection, the school was introducing a new computerised system for monitoring attendance, and this was not yet working properly. The school's present systems for promoting good attendance and detecting weaknesses in attendance and work are effective for the vast majority of students. However, they do not always identify and deal with the gaps in attendance and work of a small minority of students as early as they might.
45. Guidance within subjects has many outstanding features. In many subjects, including history and design and technology, students receive very detailed and effective guidance on how to structure their coursework and take examinations effectively. Much of students' work is marked in very good detail, and supported by high levels of personal guidance, and the quality of guidance in some subjects, notably English and drama, was described by students as 'inspirational'.
46. Students receive good guidance on joining the sixth form, including well-written course descriptions in the prospectus. All students in the sixth form have a compact personal development plan, drawn up in consultation with their tutor or the head of the sixth form. This is prepared from a well-designed prompt sheet that ensures that all relevant areas are considered, and that the resulting plan is relevant to the individual student. A significant minority of students completing the questionnaire told inspectors that they would value more careers advice. Discussions with them, however, indicated that almost all students received good advice on the areas in which they needed it. Students following business studies, for example, had very good vocational advice, while those who had decided that they wanted to go to university received very good, up-to-date advice on suitable courses. There are, on the other hand, a small number of gaps in provision for specialist advice related to subjects, and students in Year 12 could usefully be given clearer explanations of the school's approach to careers guidance.

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

47. Students and teachers share the same goals and interests in their subjects, and work together in harmony. Sharing and debating ideas is a prominent feature of sixth form lessons, and continues in informal tutorials and discussions with teachers, and in the common room among students. Students understand their own leading role in the learning community, and share responsibility for their learning by completing coursework conscientiously. They respect their teachers, enjoy their company, and benefit from their guidance. The school's partnership with its sixth form students is a major strength.

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

#### **Leadership and management**



48. The strategic development of the sixth form is well thought out to meet the needs of the students and to ensure a good balance of provision in the local area. The school tracks the cost of all aspects of its sixth form provision exceptionally closely, develops new courses well, and maintains a good balance of courses across subjects. Teaching, standards and performance are closely monitored. The head of the sixth form works closely with tutors and sixth form teachers to ensure effective day-to-day management. There are systematic arrangements to provide personal guidance to students and to ensure equal opportunities for all. Leadership and management of the sixth form, by the head of the sixth form and by the headteacher and his senior colleagues, have led to rising standards and expansion since the last inspection, and have placed the sixth form in an excellent position to improve further.

## **Resources**

49. All sixth form teachers have appropriate qualifications and experience for their work. Many are very highly qualified, and have extensive professional experience in other fields, including music, drama and business studies. Some strain has been placed on staffing when groups in Year 12 have become very large, particularly in mathematics. Teachers' additional efforts have prevented this from interfering with learning in advanced groups, but the group for students retaking GCSE mathematics has not received consistent teaching across the year. Some parents told inspectors that the school did not do enough to cover sixth form classes when teachers were absent. Inspectors found that there had been some interruptions to staffing in the term before the inspection for reasons beyond the school's control. Sixth form students during the inspection were given suitable work and support when a teacher was absent.
50. Overall, resources are adequate for sixth form courses, and are often supplemented very well by teachers' own resources, such as guidance notes. Resources are well used in teaching, with increasingly effective use of ICT. The library does not have enough books to enable students to read widely beyond their set programmes of study. The excellent new accommodation contributes much to the purposeful learning atmosphere of the sixth form. There is a very good range of specialist teaching rooms and laboratories, very good ICT facilities for private study, and an attractive common room. Teachers and students make very effective use of all aspects of the accommodation.

## 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 2001.

### ***GCE AS level courses***

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
French	1	100	78	0	13	2.0	1.7
Religious studies	2	50	85	50	26	2,5	2.4

### ***GCE A level and AVCE courses***

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	12	92	96	42	46	6.2	6.6
Biology	12	83	88	42	34	5.0	5.3
Chemistry	6	100	90	83	43	9.0	5.9
Drama	5	100	99	40	38	7.2	6.6
Economics	4	100	89	25	36	5.0	5.5
English language	2	100	91	100	30	9.0	5.3
English literature	28	100	95	32	37	5.9	5.9
French	3	100	89	33	38	4.7	5.6
Design and technology (full)	4	100	91	0	30	4.5	5.4
Geography	10	100	92	40	38	6,4	5.7
German	1	100	91	100	40	10.0	5.8
History	12	92	88	42	35	5.8	5.5
Home economics	5	100	83	40	28	6.8	4.7
Mathematics	11	91	87	45	43	6.0	5.8
Music	2	100	93	50	35	5.0	5.7
Other social studies	11	100	87	36	34	5.8	5.3
Physics	3	100	88	67	40	8.0	5.7
Religious studies	5	100	92	80	38	8.4	5.8
Sociology	11	100	86	45	35	5.0	5.3
Sports/PE studies	8	75	92	25	25	4.3	5.1

## SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

### MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

51. The A-level mathematics course, which includes pure mathematics, statistics and mechanics modules, was inspected. The sixth form GCSE retake course was evaluated, but no teaching took place during the inspection. In sciences, chemistry was fully inspected, and biology and physics were sampled. Examination results in mathematics and sciences are high, and a high proportion of students in some year groups achieve A and B grades.

#### Mathematics

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

#### Strengths

- A-level results are above average and represent good achievement.
- Teaching develops students' skills and understanding effectively.
- Lessons promote a high level of mathematical discussion and argument.
- Teachers' enthusiasm for mathematics inspires students to study A-level.
- Teachers provide very effective additional support for students outside lessons.

#### Areas for improvement

- Students' work is marked too infrequently and with too little annotation to help improve standards.
- Some teaching groups in Year 12 are very large.
- There is too little provision for students wishing to retake GCSE.

52. A-level results are good. In 2002, all 12 candidates passed, and three quarters achieved A or B grades. The standard of work during the inspection was also above average, particularly in lessons, where students express mathematical reasoning well and competently contribute to discussions about methods for finding solutions. Students' folders contain mainly correct answers but do not contain the same detail in explanation and reasoned mathematical argument that students show in lessons.

53. Teaching and learning are good and have very good features, such as careful development of understanding, based on students' existing skills. Year 12 students, for example, used GCSE statistical techniques as an introduction to more complex probability problems. In a Year 13 pure mathematics lesson, students competently differentiated implicit functions drawing on a range of calculus techniques, knowledge of trigonometric functions and algebraic skills. Teachers plan thoroughly, giving computerised presentations and encouraging students to use laptop computers whenever appropriate. At the same time, they are flexible during lessons, successfully matching learning experiences directly to priorities as they arise. In one class, this approach enabled all students to make good progress, though some were working on mechanics and others on statistics.

54. Emphasis is placed on understanding as well as developing good techniques to satisfy examination requirements. For example, after investigating the gradient of tangents to a series of curves, Year 12 students could appreciate concepts of calculus from first principles. Teachers explain issues very well. However, with the exception of end-of-topic tests, they do not mark students' work in enough detail to ensure consistently high standards of rigour and presentation.

55. Students are enthusiastic about mathematics. The large number of students in Year 12, with a balance of male and female students, reflects the success of their GCSE course in inspiring interest, and in enabling many to achieve very high grades. The very good relations between teachers and students facilitate confident learning through discussion, with the development of different approaches and, at times, the appreciation of elegant solutions. Because of the unanticipated extra demand for mathematics, Year 12 students have a weekly private study lesson, with a teacher available for consultation, instead of one taught lesson. They are also taught in a class of over thirty students for a statistics lesson each week, in which competent female students were observed to dominate oral work. These arrangements put additional pressure on teachers and are detrimental to the pace of learning for some students.
56. The school provides inadequate support for the sixth form students still wishing to achieve GCSE mathematics grade C. Only one quarter of recent retake entries have resulted in success. The current provision of one lesson per week, for part of the year only, does not enable students to develop the depth of understanding necessary.
57. The team of four teachers of sixth form mathematics is very competent and enthusiastic. They are led well in their common purpose to promote enjoyment as well as to help secure examination success. At the last inspection, standards were broadly average; they are now significantly higher, and students approach their work with much greater confidence. Teachers are readily available to help individual students beyond timetabled lessons. Those who use this to advantage appreciate the opportunity to extend their understanding and a few take further mathematics A-level as an extra subject with the help of this facility.

## Chemistry

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

### Strengths

- Standards and examination results are consistently well above average.
- Teaching is broadly based, well-planned, highly skilled and imaginative.
- Relationships between teachers and students are excellent.
- Students have a mature approach to learning.
- There are regular assessments of students' work, related to AS and A-level grades.
- Numbers are increasing, and a high proportion of students complete their courses.

### Areas for improvement

- There is too little monitoring of teaching and data within the department.
- Students would benefit from more guidance on improving the content and presentation of work in their folders.

58. AS and A-level results are consistently high, and often better than students' target grades. There is a very good balance in the number of male and female students, and no significant difference in their achievements. In work seen during the inspection, standards were well above average in Year 13 – all students are aiming for A or B grades. There is a wider range of attainment in Year 12, but standards are still above average. Since the last inspection, there has been good improvement in chemistry. Grades in AS and A2 examinations are now well above average, and students' experimental skills are very high. The new accommodation is excellent, and access to computers is now very good. Teachers and students continue to show a very high level

of commitment to their work, and uptake for the subject is once again improving. There is very good capacity for even further improvement.

59. In Year 13, students have very good understanding of atomic structures. They can relate the atomic structure of nitrogen to its unreactive nature, and understand how this compares with the structure and much greater reactivity of phosphorus. During the inspection, they enjoyed learning about the chemical changes involved in dyeing cloth, and observed with interest the impact of a single dye on a variety of materials. In Year 12, students recognise the large increase in knowledge and understanding required in the AS course. They respond very well to this challenge and a high proportion of students complete both years of the course.
60. Teaching has many outstanding features. Teachers have deep knowledge and understanding of chemistry, and convey their fascination with the subject to their students. Planning is very thorough, and there are clear learning objectives for each lesson. Planning includes very good liaison with the technicians. Furthermore, there are excellent relationships between teachers and students, so that there is a very good working atmosphere in all classes. For example, in a Year 12 practical lesson, students enjoyed converting oil of wintergreen to salicylic acid, the basis of aspirin. This gave them a very good understanding of how natural products form the basis of our modern drugs industry. Students contributed well to the lesson summary, indicating an effective understanding of the chemical changes occurring.
61. Students' literacy skills are enhanced through regular opportunities to express their understanding of the work in their own words. This is particularly evident in their detailed coursework. Numeracy skills are also improved especially when using formulae, and in the analysis of data. Computers are regularly used for research, in spreadsheets and in coursework.
62. At present, the subject is effectively managed by the headteacher, and all teachers make a positive contribution. There is regular assessment of students' work; this provides indications about whether students are likely to reach their examination targets. Homework is thoroughly marked, but routine notes in folders less so, and this leads to careless habits from a minority of students. There is also room to improve the monitoring of teaching and of examination results in order to build on the present high standards. There have as yet been insufficient opportunities for the younger teachers to receive training for the A-level course.

## Biology

63. Provision is **very good**. Examination results in 2001 were average; in 2002, there was an increase in the number of entries and in the overall quality of the results. Two lessons were observed. In a very good lesson in Year 13, students studied the responses of wood lice and larvae to a variety of stimuli. In an excellent lesson in Year 12, students worked in pairs to produce a DNA fingerprint. Students in both lessons had a very secure grasp of their work.

## Physics

64. Provision is **good**, and students achieve good results at GCSE. Two lessons were observed. In a satisfactory lesson in Year 12, students conducted a series of experiments with waves, in order to calculate the wavelength of sound, light and microwaves. Their practical skills were good, but they required more guidance with the theory of the experiments in order to gain maximum benefit from the tests. A very good

lesson in Year 13 considered the concept of binding energy, and the stability of elements. Students showed a high level of skill in constructing a spreadsheet, and clearly understood how binding energy relates to the use of fission and fusion.

## **ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING**

65. AS and A2 level courses in product design and home economics, nutrition and food science were inspected.

### **Design and technology**

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

#### **Strengths**

- Teachers ensure that students work carefully, and think hard.
- Students develop excellent attitudes and relationships with teachers.
- Leadership and management are helping the subject to grow and develop.

#### **Areas for improvement**

- Some teaching groups have very few students.

66. Examination results are above average overall, though they are higher in home economics than in design and technology. A high proportion of students successfully complete their courses, though female students have tended to achieve higher grades than male students. Some teaching groups, however, have had small numbers in recent years, particularly in Year 13. Overall improvement since the last inspection has been good. The school has maintained standards and has extended the range of its provision. There has been a vast improvement in resources and accommodation, which the school is beginning to exploit.

67. Work seen during the inspection was above average in all aspects of the subject. Students pursue their ideas independently and show a good and varied range of skills in modelling their designs, including the use of computers at an advanced level. Work is well finished and presented, and makes a good contribution to students' literacy skills. Project folders show clearly the stages of development and the course of students' thinking. An attractively-produced Year 12 project on the design of a coffee table, for example, included detailed consideration of materials and analysis of a broad range of existing designs, some in a local museum. In home economics, the syllabus makes rigorous demands on scholarship, and develops good understanding of investigative and analytic techniques in a practical context. Examples during the inspection included a range of investigations of vegetables as a food source, including the development of a range of recipes to be produced by younger students, and a study of organic vegetables.

68. This serious and purposeful learning is the result of well-informed and enthusiastic teaching, and of students' own excellent attitudes to their work. Teachers' wide variety of professional skills and experience, including significant experience of work in industry, allows them to provide effective guidance on an unusually wide range of projects. Much of this guidance is given individually, and is closely tailored to individual students' needs and helps them to adjust their thinking to deal with issues that arise during the making of a project and not just at the design stage. Students' work is assessed thoroughly, with an insistence on mature analysis rather than the expression of subjective opinion. This aspect of the teaching generates an appropriately academic approach to creative

thinking, and is the key to the good standards students achieve when working independently. It also leads to very effective speaking and listening skills. Teachers choose topics that are interesting and relevant to students – for example, a group largely made up of female students was strongly engaged by a lesson on the causes of osteoporosis, which they had not previously understood to affect women particularly.

69. Leadership and management are sensitive, effective and forward thinking. All staff are encouraged to contribute fully to the development of the department, and there is very effective support for the newly-qualified teacher. Courses are kept under review, and sixth form courses are designed to build on students' achievements in the main school. The school is currently developing its work on textiles, which is under-represented at present. The breadth and quality of the subject make an important contribution to students' personal and intellectual growth.

## **BUSINESS**

70. Economics and business studies at AS and A-level, and the Vocational A-level (AVCE) in business studies were inspected.

### **Business studies**

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

#### **Strengths**

- Standards are good and students achieve well.
- Both vocational and academic courses are taught.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and teaching is good.
- Management of the department is good, and it is very well led.
- Teachers have vocational experience and there are very good links with local business.

#### **Areas for improvement**

- Computers are used well but facilities do not match those in a modern business context.
- Groups tend to be small, particularly in Year 13.
- Timetable anomalies mean that students are taught during the lunch hour.

71. Examination results in all courses are above average. They represent good achievement, and significant numbers of higher-attaining students achieve high grades. Male and female students reach similar standards. On the other hand, some students choose the subject with the intention of taking it at AS level only, and this leaves small groups in Year 13. Standards during the inspection in Year 13 were above average in the A-level group; there were no AVCE students in Year 13. Standards in the present Year 12 are broadly average, but represent good achievement for the students in the group. The subject was not separately assessed in the last inspection report.

72. The school does not offer business studies at GCSE, and so students have to adapt quickly to a new subject. At AVCE, the consistent vocational approach to the subject challenges average students and supports those who encounter problems. Students make good use of their part-time employment and a range of business-related visits to inform their studies. Many do better than their target grades, because of the good quality of teaching and of their response to it. An AVCE mini enterprise in partnership with a children's charity has been very successful. Students on the AVCE course are achieving well.

73. Teaching is good. Teachers are skilled at questioning, both to assess understanding and to encourage students to think for themselves. They use their experience in business and industrial situations very well. Students' written work shows a good grasp of both theory and business practice. AVCE students in Year 12 show a secure understanding of human resource management. In Year 13, the work of higher-attaining students shows a good knowledge of motivational theory. All students have secure knowledge of business theory and practice, and they use appropriate vocabulary with confidence. Learning is well managed. Students appreciate the range of teaching and learning styles employed and the pace and challenge in lessons. Independent learning is fostered, and students' key learning and study skills are very well developed. Assessment is accurate and students are made very well aware of examination board criteria. Marking is rigorous, and data are managed well. During the inspection students were benefiting from access to good ICT facilities. However, teachers were not able to model the high quality of presentations that are the norm in the business world because the hardware is not readily available in the classroom.
74. The department is managed well and leadership is very good. Teachers make very good use of local contacts and AVCE students clearly benefit from well-planned visits, for example to a highly technical company that has a niche market in providing scientific equipment. New courses have been effectively introduced although timetabling issues mean that some students are taught during the lunch hour. Planning is very good and documentation is well managed.

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

75. All students in the sixth form begin the Computer Literacy and Information Technology (CLAIT) course. The school offers courses in key skills in ICT at Level 2 and Level 3. It does not offer advanced courses.

Overall, the quality of provision for ICT is **satisfactory**.

#### **Strengths**

- Teachers have very good relationships with students, who develop very good attitudes to their learning.
- Very good new accommodation and good equipment provide a stimulating and secure environment for students.
- Sixth form students make good use of computers in most of their subjects.

#### **Areas of improvement**

- Standards are below average overall, partly because students have taken no GCSE course, and partly because there are no advanced courses.
- There are few opportunities to link school ICT work with students' experience in part-time jobs and work placements.

76. Most students join the sixth form as confident users of ICT, but they have below-average specialist skills in the subject, partly because there are no timetabled ICT lessons in Years 10 and 11, and no GCSE course. All Year 12 students begin the CLAIT course. In 2002, three quarters of these students gained the full qualification in the course, and most other students completed parts of it successfully. Just over two-thirds of the 33 students entered for the Level 2 key skills examination passed, and 12 students of 24 entered gained Level 3 in key skills. These students had attended extra lessons and worked particularly hard. The school is reviewing courses offered in order to stretch higher-attaining students better. Students' achievement over time on the



CLAIT course is satisfactory overall. The course has been introduced since the last inspection, but there are still no more advanced courses. There has, on the other hand, been substantial improvement since the last inspection in students' use of computers in a broad range of subjects, and the best of this work, for example, in English in Year 13, enables students to consider a broad range of ideas quickly and in depth.

77. Lessons during the inspection and analysis of all students' work showed satisfactory overall progress. Most students, female and male, work very well on their own, and have a very good, mature attitude to their studies. Teaching is satisfactory, with several good features. Each of the three units of the course is well organised. The teacher has a very good relationship with individual students, and guides them well to work independently and take responsibility for their own progress. The teacher ensures that students understand how each unit was assessed, and marks work promptly and constructively according to examining board requirements. Students are given good feedback on how to improve their work. There are, however, too few demands on students to be creative, to explore software packages or layouts, and to extend their range of more advanced skills in spreadsheets, databases, and publishing and communications software.
78. Formulae used during the inspection were fairly simple, apart from where a small number of students chose to practise for a key skills test at Level 3 in their own time, very well supported by the teacher and technician. Some male students do not respond well to the lack of challenge in the course. They work too slowly, do not correct errors when word processing and achieve less than they should. At the moment students have few formal opportunities to extend their social development through linking school ICT work with business, industry or part-time work. However, several students are very helpful monitors in the lunchtime clubs for younger students. They help administer the school's strict policy for internet use.
79. The ICT network manager, who has good experience in industry and further education, leads sixth form work well and organises courses effectively in association with other staff. The fast, up-to-date computers, linked by broadband to the Internet, and the very good and spacious accommodation have brought a significant improvement in opportunities since the last inspection. These have yet to be matched, however, by teaching and courses that challenge and fully extend all students. The school is now in a good position to address this issue.

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

80. Music, and drama and theatre studies were inspected at AS and A-level. These are increasingly popular subjects in the school, and contribute much to students' personal development, through exhibitions, performances and informal lunchtime concerts. Standards and the overall quality of provision across the area are above average, with some outstanding features.

### **Music**

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

#### **Strengths**

- Teaching and learning are good, with very good features.
- Students and teachers are committed and work very well together.
- Accommodation provides very good scope for teaching and performance.

- The subject is very well led and managed, and numbers are growing.

#### **Areas for Development**

- Instrumental teaching needs to be monitored more closely.
- Students need more access to computers to aid composition.

81. A-level examination results for 2001 were broadly average, but 2002 results and work seen during the inspection indicate an improvement to above-average standards. Students work with maturity and commitment and are enabled to make the most of their talents and interests. Although male and female students respond and achieve equally well overall, a significantly greater number of male students choose the subject. Music has been introduced as a sixth form subject since the last inspection and is now well established. The subject is in a very good position to grow and develop further.
82. Students show a good level of understanding and stylistic awareness in work on the history of music. Although there is a leaning towards popular styles, students show interest in a wide variety of music, recognising its value and significance, and take part enthusiastically in discussions on the music being studied. Composition work is varied in character and standard, though the best is very good. A Year 13 piece under construction during the inspection contained influences from Rock and ethnic music and made good use of the new resources in music technology. Students in Year 13 showed very good understanding and recognition of complex chord patterns when preparing for a listening examination.
83. Teaching is characterised by enthusiasm, good subject knowledge and a good sense of pace and organisation. Teachers have a wide range of musical experience in educational and professional contexts, and use this to generate interest and excitement among students. They encourage an atmosphere of co-operative improvisation, for example, in blending the contributions of students playing a wide range of instruments in informal ensembles. They give very effective technical advice on issues such as chord structure and guitar fingering, and match this well to what students most need to learn. This helps students consistently to refine their composition, thinking and elements of performance. They make effective use of the school's modern resources for the subject, and also of more traditional resources such as a skeleton score for a Baroque concerto.
84. The department is very well managed, and has positive and committed leadership. The complementary skills of staff and the time they devote to the students are important strengths. The new accommodation and resources are having a positive impact on motivation and learning, though additional, less sophisticated ICT equipment is required to give more support to work in composition. The department offers a range of instrumental tuition and performing opportunities to enrich students' musical experience. Standards are generally good in these but could be higher if rehearsal patterns were changed. Time in instrumental lessons is not always used efficiently and this provision requires more consistent monitoring.

#### **Drama and Theatre Studies**

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

#### **Strengths**

- Examination results are well above average.
- Students produce confident, polished practical performances.

- Students' coursework records are coherently written and well presented.
- Extra-curricular productions provide good opportunities for students to develop their performance to larger audiences.
- Accommodation and resources are very good.

#### **Area for improvement**

- Some students need to read more of the work of theatre practitioners, and plays other than set texts.

85. Standards are well above average, and nearly all students achieved A or B grades at A-level in 2002. AS students also did well, maintaining the good standards established in the previous year. The practical and written work seen during the inspection confirmed this high achievement. Students in Year 13 write fluent accounts of their preparation for improvisations, explaining the dramatic process leading to the theatre product. Their perceptive insights are reflected in the high standard of their dramatic performance. They work co-operatively in groups, sharing the responsibilities for their student-directed performance. They have a keen awareness of the impact of specific aspects of the drama on their audience, such as the suspected witchcraft in the play 'Vinegar Tom'. Students record rehearsals using the acting techniques and design forms of playwrights, directors and designers they have studied during the course, most notably Bertolt Brecht. This relates well to the Year 12 presentation of 'Grusha's Story', which is linked to the school production of 'The Caucasian Chalk Circle'.

86. Teachers' skilful presentation, explanation and reinforcement of drama experiences involve students completely, and lead to high standards of learning. Students study the social attitudes, moral attributes and physical characteristics of roles they are playing so that the playwright's purpose is realised through their performances, and they inhabit the character. Marking of coursework is exemplary, indicating students' strengths and areas needing improvement. As a result of this very good teaching, students are very well prepared and achieve highly in practical performance and written examinations. Nevertheless, some students rely too heavily on their teachers' expertise and do not read and research as thoroughly as they should.

87. The experienced and highly skilled head of department shares his expertise with more recently qualified teachers who bring fresh and innovative approaches to the teaching of drama, integrating music and dance to provide a range of learning experiences and using the excellent facilities to the best advantage. Drama studies contribute well to students' spiritual, moral and social development as they study conflict, prejudice and social inequality in the plays of Shakespeare, Brecht and contemporary playwrights such as Caryl Churchill.

## **HUMANITIES**

88. History at AS and A-level was inspected.

### **History**

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

#### **Strengths**

- Standards are high and achievement is very good.
- Teachers have excellent knowledge and understanding of the subject.
- Revision guides and other support materials are very effective.

- Students have very positive attitudes to the subject.
- Numbers are growing rapidly as a result of high achievement in the main school.

#### **Areas for development**

- More use could be made of information on students' long-term progress.
- The teaching group in Year 12 is very large.

89. Standards in history are well above average and are rising. In 2001, examination results were above average, and a good proportion of students achieved grades A and B, with no student failing. In 2002, the percentage of students who attained grades A and B was similar, but lower-attaining students did much better, and the lowest grade was D. Over the past four years there has been a considerable and steady increase in the percentage of grades A and B and, more recently, a reduction in the proportion of lower grades. At AS in 2002, over four fifths of students reached grades A and B, an improvement on the high percentage of top grades in 2001. The standard of work seen during the inspection reflects the trend of examination results. Overall, achievement in history is very good, and has shown good improvement from the above-average standards recorded in the last inspection report.
90. Most students join the sixth form with above-average standards, though a few students have reached only average standards at GCSE. Students currently in Years 12 and 13 are making very good progress. A particular strength is the way in which students record and organise a wide range of complex information in order to produce substantial pieces of written work. These are coherent and well substantiated, making good use of the work of well-known historians to add authority to their ideas. They are confident and articulate and make very good use of discussion to modify and extend their ideas.
91. The quality of teaching is very good. Particular strengths are the variety of learning activities that teachers use, backed by a wide range of useful and imaginative resources. Teachers make very good use of discussion and challenging questioning and students respond very positively to this. Teachers use their excellent subject knowledge to add depth to their teaching and increase students' confidence. They provide very effective guidance and preparation in essay writing, and this is reflected in the high quality of coursework. Good additional monitoring and support are given to students who need them, and this represents particularly good improvement since the previous inspection. Students have a very positive response to their study of history as an A-level subject, work hard and appreciate the high quality of teaching and support they receive. A high proportion have decided to study history at university.
92. Leadership and management are very good. There is a clear commitment to raising standards for all students, with good arrangements for the identification and support of students who are in danger of underachieving or whose performance at GCSE indicated that they might be in need of additional support. This is an important factor in raising standards among lower-attaining students. On the other hand, more use could be made of information from assessment of students' long-term progress. Very thorough new schemes of work are in place for each unit of work, accompanied by a helpful revision handbook for students. The increasing popularity of history has led to a very large teaching group in Year 12. This places a substantial additional burden on teachers and tends to restrict the teaching strategies that can be used. Teachers overcome this difficulty by hard work, and senior managers attempt to limit the occasions on which they have to cover for other teachers.

## **ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION**

93. English was inspected fully, and a limited amount of sampling was undertaken in modern foreign languages. This sampling revealed good teaching and learning, though the size of teaching groups in modern foreign languages is often very small, and the numbers of students taking examinations is too small to permit standards to be compared reliably with those in other schools.

## English

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

### Strengths

- Examination results are above average, and well above average in English literature.
- Learning is very well supported by teachers' critical guidance.
- Students develop their personal style of writing, using a range of resources to present their work.
- Teachers use innovative methods to share their very good subject knowledge.
- An inspirational teacher leads a team committed to high achievement for all students.

### Area for improvement

- More books of literary criticism and contemporary literature are needed in the library to encourage wider reading.

94. Results in A-level English literature for 2002 were very good, and showed significant improvement on those for 2001. AS results sustained the good standards of the previous year with a strong showing of A and B grades. English was a strength of the sixth form at the time of the last inspection, and the school has maintained high standards while extending the range of its work.
95. Work during the inspection was also significantly above average. Students express their personal response to texts through well-structured arguments. Students in Year 12 explained that the repeated scientific references in an Ian McEwan novel reflect the deeper meaning of the text. Students use linguistic terminology confidently explaining how language is influenced by shifting values in society, for example in the spread of 'Estuary English'. They produce well-structured coursework, which strikes a good balance between examination requirements and the need for students to have space to develop their thinking. Students' eloquence in class discussions shows that they are developing the skills of intellectual enquiry that are needed in higher education.
96. The quality of learning is very good in response to the high expectations and stimulating challenges offered to students. Students are encouraged to research independently and share their findings with the whole group. In an excellent lesson, Year 13 students researched the conflicting views of leading critics on the character of Iago and its significance in Shakespeare's 'Othello'. Students' proficient use of laptop computers enabled them to examine and understand a wide range of ideas in a much shorter time than this would otherwise have taken.
97. Teachers use their very good subject knowledge sensitively, tailoring their lessons to meet students' needs and the demands of the syllabus. As a result, students feel secure in their learning and work confidently. They appreciate the many opportunities for writing timed essays, for example analysing Margaret Atwood's powerful use of language in 'The Handmaid's Tale'. Teachers mark work thoroughly, indicating ways to improve and areas of strength and weakness. Students appreciate the twice-yearly

reviews of their progress and the ready availability of teachers to discuss difficulties as they arise. As one student commented, 'They are never too busy to listen'.

98. These very good relationships between teachers and students are the key to the highly successful department. The needs of students are the paramount consideration of teachers, and management systems are very effectively set up to meet them. The department has adequate resources, but the library has too few books to promote wider reading. Inspectors agreed with the view, expressed by many staff as well as students, that the leadership of the head of faculty was a source of inspiration.