

INSPECTION REPORT

ST LAURENCE SCHOOL

Bradford on Avon

LEA area: Wiltshire

Unique reference number: 126472

Headteacher: Mr N Sorensen

Reporting inspector: Mr J Bald
17932

Dates of inspection: 4 to 11 November 2002

Inspection number: 249704

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive
School category: Voluntary Controlled
Age range of students: 11 to 18
Gender of students: Mixed

School address: Ashley Road
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Wiltshire

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Appropriate authority: The governing body

Name of chairman of governors: Miss V Davies

Date of previous inspection: March 1997

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			English as an additional language	
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10392	Donaleen Ratcliff	Team inspector	Geography	
13122	Stephanie Matthews	Team inspector	Law	
			History (sixth form)	
16042	Paula Haes	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	
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23080	Robert Isaac	Team inspector	Information and communication technology	
			Drama (sixth form)	
23499	Howard Seymour	Team inspector	Music	
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St Laurence School is a voluntary controlled Church of England comprehensive school, for students aged 11 to 18. It is a large mixed school, with 1129 students, including 208 in the sixth form. The school is a performing arts college and a beacon school. Almost all students are white. A very few have English as an additional language, but none are in the early stages of learning English. The proportion of students with special educational needs is below average, but several have behavioural difficulties. There is a small unit for students with dyslexia. Most students come from favourable backgrounds, but a small number have unsettled lives outside school. The standards reached by students joining the school vary from year to year, but are above average overall, particularly in mathematics.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

St Laurence School provides satisfactory education and has good features. The overall quality of teaching is good, and this, with the good standards of students joining the school, leads to high standards in Year 9 and at GCSE. Very nearly all students complete their courses successfully. Standards in the sixth form are high. Provision for personal development and creative work is good. On the other hand, management is not identifying and dealing with weaknesses quickly enough, and there are some gaps in provision in the main school. Overall, value for money is satisfactory.

What the school does well

- Test and examination results are well above average in Years 9 and 11.
- Teaching, learning and standards in the sixth form are very good.
- Teaching is good. It is excellent in art and design, and very good in religious education, dance and history.
- Opportunities for learning outside lessons are good, with some outstanding features.
- Students have many opportunities to develop their creative talents and skills.
- Students have good attitudes to their work, and the overall quality of behaviour is good.

What could be improved

- The organisation and efficiency of management teams needs to be improved.
- The sixth form receives more than its share of teaching time.
- Some work, particularly in Years 7 to 9, is not meeting students' learning needs.
- Students with behavioural difficulties do not receive enough support in lessons.
- There are gaps in resources in the main school, and some accommodation is unsatisfactory.
- Too little information and communication technology (ICT) is provided in Years 10 and 11.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

When the school was last inspected, in March 1997, all aspects of its work were good. Since that time, GCSE results have improved at an above average rate, and standards in national tests in Year 9 have kept pace with the national trend. The school has greatly extended provision for performing arts, and has extended the range and quality of provision in the sixth form. On the other hand, management has not developed effective systems to ensure that all students are fully challenged in Years 7 to 9. The headteacher and governors have not kept an even balance of funding between the main school and the sixth form. The school is taking steps to improve provision for ICT. As a result, standards are above

average in Year 9, although provision is not yet satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. Overall improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory, and the school is in a good position to improve further.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by students 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
	1999	2000	2001	2001
GCSE examinations	A	A	A	A
A-levels/AS-levels	A	A	A	

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

The school has maintained high standards at GCSE and in the sixth form since the last inspection, and GCSE results have risen at an above average rate. The results of national tests in Year 9 have also been well above average over recent years, and showed good improvement in 2002. The rate of improvement in these tests has been in line with the national trend. The school is meeting its targets for improvement, though targets for some subjects could usefully be more detailed, particularly in Year 9. Boys' results are lower than those of girls overall, but the pattern is not consistent. The school has taken effective action to reduce the gap between boys' and girls' results in English by Year 9, and is to extend this action.

The standard of work seen during the inspection was above average overall in Years 9 and 11, though standards in some subjects in Year 9 did not rise above average levels. Excellent work was seen in art and design, and by Year 11 students were also reaching well above average standards in science, history, dance and religious education. Standards in English and mathematics in Year 11 were above average, but a little lower than the most recent examination results; students were well placed to reach high standards by the end of the year. Standards in vocational courses are below average, but represent satisfactory achievement for the students taking them. Standards in ICT are above average in Year 9, but below average in Year 11.

Students with special educational needs make satisfactory overall progress. Gifted and talented students make satisfactory progress by Year 11, but should be achieving more consistently in Year 9. The small number of students from minority ethnic backgrounds, including those with English as an additional language, make good progress. Overall, students' achievement is satisfactory in Year 9, and good by Year 11.

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Good. Students enjoy school, want to learn and accept responsibility.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good. Most students behave very well, but there are some lapses, and not always from students with behavioural difficulties.
Personal development and relationships	Good. Students make friends easily and form good relationships with teachers. They make good progress in citizenship.
Attendance	Broadly average. A small minority of students, often girls, have a poor attendance record, and there is some unpunctuality to lessons.

There is very good racial harmony, and the school council is well-organised and effective. Students are actively involved in learning outside lessons. Behaviour at breaks and lunchtimes is good, despite cramped conditions.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

The teaching of English, mathematics and science is of good overall quality in Years 7 to 11, and there are examples of very good teaching in each subject. The teaching of literacy and numeracy skills across the school is satisfactory, but there are wide variations in its quality between subjects. ICT skills are taught effectively, but too little teaching is provided for a significant number of students in Years 10 and 11. Teaching in the sixth form is very well matched to students' needs, and promotes key study and learning skills as well as high standards in lessons.

Excellent teaching in art and design makes an outstanding contribution to students' creative development, as well as promoting high standards in the subject. Very good teaching in history, dance and religious education promotes high standards and very good personal development, with an excellent contribution to literacy skills in history. There are very good features in much of the remaining teaching, including very good guidance and marking in business studies, and very good teaching in music in Years 10 and 11.

In a significant minority of lessons, mostly in Years 7 to 9, teaching provides satisfactory learning for most students, but is not matched closely enough to individual needs. This limits the achievement of the most able students in Years 7 to 9, although they receive suitable teaching in Years 10 and 11. In a very few lessons, weak planning and a lack of challenge lead to unsatisfactory learning. Teaching assistants provide very good support for learning, and often take responsibility beyond the classroom. Teaching for students with special educational needs is satisfactory, with some good specialised teaching. Overall, teaching meets the needs of all students in the school well.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Satisfactory. Good provision for creative work across the school, but there are too few opportunities for older students to use ICT.
Provision for students with special educational needs	Satisfactory. Specialist teaching and support in lessons are effective, but there is too little support for students with behavioural problems.
Provision for students with English as an additional language	Good. The very small number of students with English as an additional language receive suitable support and learn well.
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good. Students develop a clear sense of personal responsibility, and clear understanding of right and wrong. They have good understanding of the range of cultures in modern society. Performing arts offer a broad range of cultural opportunities in and out of the classroom.
How well the school cares for its students	Satisfactory. Arrangements for personal welfare are effective, but fully stretched. Guidance on improving work needs to be more consistent.

The school has a satisfactory working partnership with parents. Most parents support the school well, but a significant minority do not give their children enough support, for example by checking homework diaries. Learning activities outside the classroom are good and have outstanding features in community drama, art and the Challenge programme. Provision for ICT in Years 10 and 11 does not meet legal requirements. Acts of worship are of good quality, but do not take place each day. The school targets careers guidance and personal support well to students who most need it.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Satisfactory. Leadership and management provide clear direction, and vision. Standards are rising. However, the organisation of middle and senior management teams requires substantial improvement.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Satisfactory. Governors are closely and actively involved in the school and understand its strengths and weaknesses.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Satisfactory. The school uses data well to track standards and identify strengths, but not always to challenge areas of weakness.
The strategic use of resources	Unsatisfactory. There are some gaps in resources and in provision for special educational needs in the main school.

The school has sufficient, well-qualified teachers, but there are too few teaching assistants to meet the needs of students with behavioural difficulties. There are significant weaknesses in resources for learning in several subjects in the main school. Accommodation is just adequate to teach the National Curriculum, but there is too little shelter in wet weather, and some toilets are not hygienic.

Leadership places good emphasis on creativity, and values good teaching in all departments. The organisation of senior and middle management teams does not allow them to monitor work across the school effectively, so that weaknesses are not tackled systematically. Management has recently taken action to improve ICT provision, but more is needed. The school makes sound use of the principles of obtaining and giving best value in the main school, but not in the sixth form.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children are expected to do their best. • They enjoy school. • Children make good progress. • The school is approachable. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school's co-operation with parents. • The quality of information. • Homework. • Leadership and management.

Many more parents expressed positive than negative views about the school. On the whole, inspectors agree with the positive opinions, though they believe that more could be expected of some students in Years 7 to 9. Inspectors share parents' concerns about homework, and they and the school agree that improvements are needed in management. Co-operation with parents, and information for them, are satisfactory, but reports could provide more guidance on improving work.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

There are 208 students in the sixth form. As in the main school, almost all are white, with a small number from minority ethnic backgrounds, and there are similar numbers of male and female students. Just over half of Year 11 students transfer to the sixth form, and numbers are stable. All students follow A-level, Advanced Subsidiary (AS) and vocational A-level (AVCE) courses; a broader range of vocational courses is available in local further education colleges. The sixth form has no fixed entrance requirements, but standards among students joining Year 12 are above average.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

St Laurence School sixth form provides good education and has some outstanding features. Students work hard to reach A-level results that are often well above average. They are very well taught, and learn to use their time outside lessons well for study and research. They develop a strong sense of citizenship and responsibility, and are very well prepared for higher education. The sixth form is well managed, and provides good support and guidance to all students. The range of courses has been extended significantly since the last inspection, and meets students' needs well. Although some teaching groups are small, the sixth form provides satisfactory value for money.

Strengths

- Standards and examination results are well above average.
- Teaching is very good, and helps students develop key learning and study skills.
- Students receive good care and guidance.
- There is good provision for students' personal development.
- The sixth form is led and managed well.

What could be improved

- Teaching techniques and learning opportunities in some subjects could be improved.
- Teaching and learning could be more closely monitored.

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 and science.	Very good. High standards and very effective teaching throughout.
Business	Very good. High standards, very good teaching and learning.
Information and communication technology	Good. Standards above average and teaching and learning now very good. Some equipment is outdated.
Physical education	Very good. Examination results above average, and very good achievement for students taking the course.
Visual and performing arts and media	Very good overall. Standards high, very good teaching and learning, with excellent work in art and design.
Humanities	Very good overall. Teaching, learning and standards very good in history and psychology, satisfactory in geography.
English, languages and communication.	Very good overall. Very good in English and media studies, satisfactory in modern foreign languages.

The overall quality of other work in the sixth form, including learning outside lessons, is very good. The general studies programme in Year 12 is very effective in developing study skills and citizenship.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Very well. Provision for guidance is well-structured, and backed up by high levels of personal support and guidance where this is needed.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Good. Day-to-day management is very good, and the range of courses is well thought out. Teaching and learning need to be monitored more closely, and some teaching groups are very small.

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"> • Courses meet students' needs well, and prepare them well for higher education. • Teaching is very good. • There is good personal guidance and support, particularly at the start of Year 12. • Students enjoy being in the sixth form. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guidance on courses and careers. • Feedback on their performance. • The degree of independence outside lessons.

Inspectors agree with students' positive comments, and found many outstanding features in these aspects of the school's work. Inspection evidence shows that, over their time in the sixth form, students receive good guidance on courses and careers, and that the school helps them use their time well outside lessons. Students receive very good feedback on performance in most subjects. However, they could usefully have more feedback in some subjects, and the first major feedback to students in Year 12 takes place a little late in the term.

COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

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

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

1. The high standards reached by the most capable students prepare them well for sixth form work, and the school enables a high proportion of lower-attaining students, including those with behavioural difficulties, to complete their courses and leave with a qualification.
2. Some parents told inspectors that they felt their children could be achieving more at various stages of their school career, and inspection evidence confirmed this. In 2002, for example, no students reached exceptionally high standards for their age in English, mathematics or science, although six were accurately assessed as having done so in history. In mathematics, where standards among students joining Year 7 are higher than in other subjects, parents are right to believe that still more could be achieved by Year 9.
3. Across the school, students achieve their full potential in subjects where outstanding teaching is combined with effective management. This is the reason for the very high standards reached in art and design, and for the pattern of very good and rising standards in history, religious education and dance. Elsewhere, students' good attitudes to work and the generally good quality of teaching ensure that standards are above average in most subjects. Standards in modern foreign languages, however, are broadly average in Years 9 and 11, chiefly because of a lack of time for students studying two languages, and standards in design and technology, music and geography do not rise above average levels in Year 9, mainly because too little is demanded of students. Overall, gifted and talented students reach satisfactory standards by Year 11, but should be achieving more in Year 9. Standards in physical education are broadly average, but there is a high level of involvement and participation from students, and achievement is good.
4. Standards in literacy and numeracy are above average throughout the school, but could be higher with a more consistent approach across departments. The very high standards of writing in history, for example, could be repeated by a similar approach in other subjects, notably geography, and students need more opportunities to analyse data.
5. The long-term achievements of students with special educational needs are satisfactory, and higher-attaining students with specific learning difficulties (dyslexia) achieve good examination results. The small minority of students who have behavioural difficulties do well in response to carefully constructed vocational programmes in Years 10 and 11, which involve high levels of personal support from teaching assistants. In some classes, however, these students do not receive enough support to enable them to behave and learn as they should. This affects the standards these students can achieve in the longer term. The achievements of students with minority ethnic backgrounds, including the very small number who need extra help with English, are good.
6. GCSE results have been improving at an above average rate since the last inspection. Results in Year 9 have matched the national trend, and showed a good overall improvement in 2002. At the time of the last inspection, results and standards were well above average in Years 9 and 11, and the current pattern shows satisfactory improvement.

Sixth form

7. Standards are well above average across the sixth form, with many strengths and only a few areas where they could be significantly improved. In subjects fully inspected, standards were well above average in history, business studies, physical education, art and design and chemistry, and similarly high standards were seen in other sciences. Standards in other subjects were above average, except for modern foreign languages, where standards were broadly average. Standards in key skills and citizenship are high. The high quality of sixth form work is reflected in coursework and in examination results.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

8. The vast majority of students have good attitudes to school, and enjoy their work. They behave well, and respond particularly well to the school's best teaching, especially when this is supported by extensive opportunities for learning outside lessons. Many art and design students, for example, regularly work through lunchtimes on their GCSE portfolios, and results as well as relationships are exceptionally good. Overall, relationships between students and teachers and among students are good. Racial harmony is excellent, and there are many friendships among students of different ethnic backgrounds. Relationships in some classes, however, suffer from the poor attitudes and behaviour of a minority of students. Some of these students have behavioural difficulties for which they do not receive enough support, but others do not, and some students still do not treat all teachers with proper respect. The older students identify mutual respect and trust between students and teachers as the key principles. They like being treated in a more grown up way and challenged to go beyond the set work. Relationships are mostly good among students in class, and they happily share resources. Years 7 and 8 students value the sixth form mentors attached to their classes, but regret that there are not enough male students volunteering for this work. Many students participate in after-school sporting, music and drama activities, and enjoy residential visits.
9. Behaviour outside lessons is good overall. Students use the school's cramped social areas responsibly, and show good resilience in unpleasant weather, even though they have too little shelter. There is a small but persistent amount of litter. Students in one year group told inspectors that there was still some bullying. Some, they said, had been effectively dealt with, but some they preferred not to report. There have also been particular problems over the past year with poor behaviour. These have been largely linked to a small minority of students with disturbed lives outside school, and to drugs issues within the community. Fixed-term exclusion was very high in the year immediately before the inspection. By the time of the inspection, the school had made considerable progress in dealing with this behaviour, and the rate of fixed-term exclusion has fallen. Some poorly behaved students during the inspection showed increasing understanding of their own difficulties, and were trying to improve. A few students who have been excluded from other schools have made an effective fresh start at St Laurence.
10. In assembly, students behave in an exemplary manner: For example, they listened attentively as Year 11 students made a powerful presentation on the theme of Armistice, and joined in silent reflection. Student members of the rejuvenated school council are excited about their responsibilities to participate in shaping the direction and focus of the school community. The council is kept in good touch with all other students, and the quality of participation in meetings is very good.

11. Attendance has fallen since the last inspection, and is now broadly average. The above-average rate of unauthorised absence reflects the personal difficulties of a few students, who also take a flippant attitude to lateness.

Sixth form

12. Students have very good attitudes in lessons, especially when they enjoy the subject and taste success. They respond very well to additional learning opportunities designed to develop their key skills, and work hard in private study and coursework. Students in Year 12 feel that their relationship with teachers is much more grown up. Sixth form students have an intense loyalty to their school, and would like to be involved in making it even better.
13. Several sixth form students volunteer to act as mentors and are trained within school in listening skills, though more female than male students do this. Those who do, find it a valuable experience, particularly when they accompany younger students on residential trips, such as the Year 8 visit to the Lake District. Those who wish to start a club or activity are encouraged to follow their interest through, provided they have made a convincing case. A male sixth former has started a lunchtime self defence club for up to a dozen students, and a group of girls leads a successful cheer-leading club. Sixth form students offer a well-attended workshop to primary students.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

14. Good teaching is the main reason for the pattern of rising standards in national tests and examinations. Most teaching across the school is interesting, well planned and carried out at a good pace. Within subjects, almost all teaching ranges in quality from excellent to satisfactory, with a very small amount of unsatisfactory teaching. Teaching is excellent in art and design, and is very good in history, dance and religious education. It is good overall in most other subjects. Teaching in Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory rather than good in music and design and technology, and unsatisfactory in geography. Teaching in the vocational courses in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory, and has some good features. There has been a substantial improvement in teaching since the last inspection.
15. The very good and excellent teaching makes an outstanding contribution to the broader aims of the school. Students in these subjects learn to work creatively, to think clearly and to consider key issues in modern life. Teachers are highly skilled, and transmit their own personal and professional interest in the work to students, so that they develop high levels of commitment, as well as reaching high standards. Teachers assess work closely, give students good guidance, and use homework consistently, so that students understand the importance of working outside lessons. The quality of learning in art and design fully realises the school's mission as a centre of creative excellence.
16. Teaching and learning in English, mathematics and science are good overall across the school. Teachers have good knowledge and understanding of these subjects, plan lessons effectively, and have clear goals for each lesson. The work has some outstanding features, including the teaching of poetry in English, imaginative teaching techniques in mathematics, and the challenge to higher-attaining students in practical work in science. However, assessment is not used consistently enough to ensure that students are working at the right level, and this is one important reason why no students in Year 9 were assessed as reaching exceptional standards in 2002 in any subject. There are also weaknesses in marking and homework in mathematics and science. These areas are, by contrast, strengths of the good teaching in business

studies, where very detailed marking and guidance help students of all abilities to produce good coursework.

17. In lessons where the teaching is satisfactory, teachers plan a suitable range of learning activities, have sound knowledge of the subject and give clear explanations. They do not, however, match work well enough to the needs of all students, and the range of teaching techniques is sometimes limited. In some music lessons, where teaching was only just satisfactory, students did not have enough practical guidance when working independently. In the small number of lessons where teaching was unsatisfactory, most often in geography, work was pitched at too low a level, so that students could not make progress even when the class was managed well. The high quality of homework in subjects where teaching is outstanding is not matched across the school. Many students have significant gaps in their homework, and a significant minority of parents does not check and sign homework planners.
18. Gifted and talented students make satisfactory progress in the course of their school career, and do very well in subjects where the overall quality of teaching is high. In other subjects, they are generally successful by GCSE, but could achieve more if they were fully challenged at an earlier stage. The learning of students with special educational needs is satisfactory overall. Specialist teaching is effective, and teachers in most subjects ensure that work is modified to meet their needs. They do well on the vocational course in Years 10 and 11. However, students with special educational needs sometimes struggle, for example in geography in Years 10 and 11. The very small number of students with English as an additional language are effectively taught and make good progress.
19. Excellent provision for literacy in history is a key factor in raising standards, but this is not sustained well enough in other subjects – for example, some work in science is left unfinished, and some geography work is careless, particularly among boys. Number skills are developed satisfactorily across subjects, although students have too few opportunities to work with data. Good provision for ICT, taught through a range of subjects, leads to above-average standards in Year 9, but teaching and learning in ICT are inadequate in Years 10 and 11, chiefly because too little is provided. The school is taking steps to improve this situation, but has much more to do. The contribution of teaching to all of these key skills is held back by weak co-ordination and management.

Sixth form

20. Sixth form teaching has a clear focus on developing students' key study and learning skills, and on promoting effective learning outside lessons as well as in class. This generates a strong sense of purpose, and enables students to reach high standards. There is greater consistency in teaching in the sixth form than in the main school, with outstanding work in a broad range of subjects. In most subjects, learning benefits from very good continuity with the main school, so that, for example, students taking history and business studies are able to build on learning skills that have been carefully built up. In geography, a significant minority of teaching is not matched closely enough to the learning needs in the class, and the range of teaching techniques and resources in modern foreign languages needs to be extended. The excellent quality of art and design is maintained into the sixth form, and teaching is very good in new subjects such as psychology and media studies.

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

Learning opportunities

21. The curriculum has significant strengths, but also some weaknesses that are preventing it from meeting the needs of all students as well as it should. At the time of the last inspection, learning opportunities were satisfactory, but had significant gaps in Years 10 and 11. Since that time, the school has extended opportunities for students to work creatively, for example by developing the teaching of dance, and has made some improvements in Years 10 and 11, for example by developing a work-related option for lower-attaining students, and providing additional support and careers guidance to students at risk of exclusion. The system of teaching ICT skills across a range of subjects in Years 7 to 9 works well, and leads to above-average standards. The programme of personal, social and health education meets students' needs well. It includes well planned provision for education against the misuse of drugs and for sex education. The curriculum is enriched by special events, including an annual creativity week that takes in a broad range of subjects, including ICT.
22. On the other hand, there is too little teaching time for modern foreign languages in Years 7 and 8, and too little provision for ICT in Years 10 and 11, where there is no certificated course. Provision for literacy and numeracy is satisfactory, but chiefly because of the work of individual teachers; co-ordination is not ensuring that the best work, such as the excellent provision for writing in history, is taken up and used elsewhere. Learning opportunities are also restricted by the uneven quality of management between subjects. In art and design, religious education and history, work in lessons is supplemented by a wide range of additional learning opportunities throughout the school day. In other subjects, notably modern foreign languages, the range of day-to-day learning support outside lessons is much more limited. A relatively low proportion of students takes a language to GCSE, and few students take two languages.
23. Opportunities for learning outside lessons have been developed well. There are extensive opportunities to take part in musical, dramatic and dance productions, and the wide range of trips and residential visits, including the Challenge programme of outdoor activities, is much appreciated by parents and students. Because of the balance of staffing, there are slightly fewer opportunities for girls than boys to take part in extra-curricular sport, but the school has plans to tackle this shortly. Overall, the quality of learning opportunities outside lessons is good, with some outstanding features.
24. The curriculum provides satisfactory opportunities for students with special educational needs, with good specialist teaching for students with specific learning difficulties (dyslexia). Students with behavioural difficulties are left with too little support in some lessons, however, and this limits their ability to learn. Over the course of their school career, gifted and talented students have satisfactory learning opportunities, and do well at GCSE. They are not identified early enough, however, and there is no co-ordination to ensure that they are fully challenged in all lessons. Students with minority ethnic backgrounds, including the very small number with English as an additional language, make good overall progress. Overall, the curriculum provides equal opportunities for boys and girls.
25. The school has a good working relationship with primary schools, though it does not use its links to ensure that the curriculum in Year 7 builds on students' existing skills.

The community makes a good overall contribution to learning, and is very actively involved in work experience programmes. Careers guidance and advice are good, and well focused on students who most need them.

Sixth form

26. The sixth form provides a good range of courses, and its very good provision for developing key study and learning skills helps students use their time outside lessons well. Curriculum planning takes good account of other local provision, and students receive good personal and careers guidance during their two years in the sixth form. The legal requirement for religious education in the sixth form is not met, but general studies lessons make a very good contribution to personal development and citizenship.

Personal development

27. Provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students is at the heart of the school's vision as a performing arts college. The festival of creativity in July 2002, for example, offered students a rich variety of activities, and there have been enriched learning opportunities over the last two years, particularly through the community theatre initiative. Music, drama, art and dance enrich students' spiritual development and enable them to express their thoughts and feelings using imagination and initiative. There are missed opportunities in some subjects, but overall provision for each aspect of personal development is good.
28. Stimulating and purposeful lessons on meditation in religious education make an important contribution to spiritual development. In art, students delight in intricate patterns and the power of earthquakes and volcanoes studied in science elicit awe and wonder. In an outstanding assembly observed during inspection week, Year 11 students gave their personal reflections through poetry and expressive writing on their visit to the First World War battle sites, explaining such terms as: 'Known unto God'.
29. The behaviour policy has a good emphasis on personal responsibility, and teachers give a strong lead in relationships and in showing students the difference between right and wrong. Most departments encourage students to reflect on moral issues, such as attitudes to war and conflict, environmental issues and accepting rules. In religious education, students are challenged to consider the moral rules of the major world religions and, in art, students respond visually to issues surrounding homelessness and poverty in the Third World. The school offers extensive opportunities for social development and collaborative work. Opportunities to take responsibility include reception duty, mentoring and membership of the school council. Sixth formers give a good lead to younger students, and take part in model United Nations events, including a conference in Belfast. Students raise much money for charities. The school's work in personal development provides a good foundation for citizenship.
30. Students develop good understanding of the richness and diversity of other cultures such as Chinese, Japanese and Aboriginal art. The senior choir has established a link with a choir in Japan. One World band, an international group of musicians, has worked with GCSE students exploring common cultural ground through the composition of songs. Cultural development is good in a broad range of subjects, and excellent in art and religious education. Multi-cultural elements are contained in dance schemes of work, and the three-day creative festival included African dances and native American culture. Multi-cultural teaching is strong through the study of the historical context of slavery. Students are very aware of the wide range of cultures in modern British society.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

31. Provision for the care and welfare of students is satisfactory overall, and has good features. These include a good introduction to the school for students joining Year 7, well-focused careers guidance for lower-attaining students and those at risk of exclusion, and good relationships in most tutor groups. However, the quality of tutorial work is not consistent across the school. Several tutors do not plan interesting activities for each session, and do not give students sufficient guidance on using their planners effectively. Heads of Year use their briefing sessions well to give information, so that assemblies are kept as a formal act of collective worship.
32. Matters of health and safety are dealt with thoroughly, and prioritised well in planning. Risk assessments are properly carried out, and there are satisfactory arrangements to protect students from harmful material on the Internet. Overall, arrangements for students' welfare, health and safety and for child protection are satisfactory. The school received a grant during the inspection to tackle safety issues in the design and technology workshops, but toilet facilities are inadequate, and a significant proportion are not kept clean during the day. The lack of shelter in wet weather causes discomfort to students.
33. Procedures for promoting good behaviour and preventing oppressive behaviour are satisfactory. Younger students are well motivated by the reward scheme for good work and behaviour, and an award ceremony for Year 10 students was well conducted. Students told inspectors that instances of bullying are mostly, but not always, dealt with effectively. Support for students with behavioural difficulties is of good quality, particularly in the vocational programme in Years 10 and 11, but there is not enough of it in some lessons. Procedures for monitoring attendance are satisfactory and have recently been improved; they are not the reason for the fall in attendance since the last inspection.
34. Procedures for assessing students' work and setting targets have some good features, such as the use of additional tests in Year 7, but are not meeting the school's needs. The school receives good information on National Curriculum standards from most primary schools, but does not use this effectively to set consistently challenging work to all students in Years 7 to 9. Parents said some students were becoming bored as a result, and their views were borne out in part by inspection evidence, particularly in geography. Assessment in subjects is not linked closely enough to National Curriculum level descriptions. This leads to serious inaccuracies in some subjects, notably design and technology, and does not give the school clear enough information on which to base teaching and target-setting. This leads to uneven standards in Year 9 – for example, while six students were accurately assessed as having reached outstanding standards in history in 2002, there were none in English, mathematics or science. Because of weak assessment in ICT in Years 10 and 11, the school is unable to be sure which students have met the standard expected nationally, and which have not. Assessment of the needs of students with special educational needs, and of those with English as an additional language, is satisfactory.

Sixth form

Assessment

35. The quality of guidance and feedback on students' work is good overall. It is very good in some subjects, such as history and business studies, and excellent in art and design.

In some subjects, notably geography and modern foreign languages, students need more detailed feedback and guidance, and Year 12 students in some subjects had not received their first assessments by the time of the inspection. Students' view that they needed more feedback was borne out by this evidence.

Advice, support and guidance

36. Students receive very good guidance on their choice of courses, and on the use of their time outside lessons. Information technology is used well: the website publishes sixth form prospectus, and university applications may be submitted electronically or on paper. The sixth form common room is well cared for and sensibly used, though toilet facilities for female students are unsatisfactory. Year 13 students can be trusted to work off site, and sixth form attendance is monitored well.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

37. About a fifth of parents responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire; a smaller, but substantial, number attended the pre-inspection meeting. There was a very wide division of views at this meeting, and a substantial number of parents wrote to the team. Over 90 per cent of parents who expressed a view told inspectors that the school expects children to work hard and do their best. Almost as many think their child likes school, and that it is helping them to become mature and responsible. A number are concerned that the behaviour of a few students in some lessons inhibits their child's learning, and inspectors agree. Another group are concerned about the school's performing arts status having a negative impact on other curriculum areas. Inspection evidence did not support this view.
38. Most parents work closely with their children at home, and support them with homework. Many think that there are weaknesses in homework, and inspectors found substantial gaps in homework in some classes. They also found that a substantial minority of parents do not check their children's homework planners, which makes it very difficult for tutors to ensure consistency. The overall quality of information for parents is satisfactory, and there are good features. These include termly consultation meetings, linked to academic reviews, at which the student is set targets for improvement. Review targets are not followed up in annual reports to parents. These give an outline of what has been studied and progress in relation to national standards in every subject, but most comments relate to attitudes towards work or offer praise without guidance on improvement. By Year 11, however, reports are giving students good support in evaluating their progress and setting targets.
39. Newsletters are not comprehensive in their coverage, and a number of parents would like to see recorded successes in all areas of school activity. There are particular frustrations when they want to speak to someone about a concern because it is not clear to them who they should contact, and how. The school's new telephone system is designed to deal with this problem, but was not yet fully operational at the time of the inspection.
40. The school provided a good programme of activities for students joining Year 7. Many parents attend an early 'fun activity evening', which acts as an introduction to the parent support groups. These are also well attended. The headteacher's focus is that students should be 'ready to learn' about uniform, expectations and behaviour, and most support him in this, although a few have concerns over the cost of uniform. The school is keeping this issue under review.

Sixth Form

41. Sixth form students are very satisfied by their courses, and enjoy being in the sixth form. They think the school helps them to settle well to sixth form work, and to make good use of their time. They appreciate the support offered by the head of the sixth form. They feel they are taught well and challenged to do their best in all their subjects. Inspectors shared these positive views, and saw some examples of very effective personal support to individual students. Students in Year 13 said that the school provided very good support with careers advice and university entrance. Many keep in touch with the school. One former student, now studying medicine at Oxford, said that she was better prepared than many others on her course for academic investigation and writing.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

42. When the school was last inspected, leadership and management were good overall, but there were weaknesses in middle management. Since that time, management has extended opportunities for creativity and for the involvement of students with behavioural difficulties. However, the re-organisation of management teams has not been successful. While some subject leaders and senior curriculum team leaders are very effective, many do not ensure that teaching and learning are consistent in their subjects. This results in uneven teaching, learning and achievement, including the gap between the achievements of gifted and talented students in history and in English, mathematics and science. The organisation of the senior management team does not allow it to manage middle management effectively.
43. The headteacher and his senior colleagues have taken good care with new middle management appointments, and most of these teachers are making an effective contribution to management. In art and design, history and religious education, dynamic leadership and management lead to very high standards and make a significant contribution to creativity. In others, including mathematics, music, design and technology, drama, science, modern foreign languages and geography, management is not doing enough to build on strengths in teaching and to ensure that all lessons are taught to a good standard. There are similar weaknesses in the management of tutorial work. Where there are interruptions to middle management, the school does not make adequate alternative arrangements. For example, the subject leader for English had been seconded to a national body, and the school had not made adequate arrangements to co-ordinate literacy across the school in her absence. The headteacher and governors have recognised these weaknesses and had begun to address them by the time of the inspection; however, not all of their plans were clearly focused on the main points of weakness in management.
44. The sixth form receives an unduly large share of teaching time, and over a third of its classes contain eight students or fewer. Some sixth form facilities, notably the common room, are also much better than those enjoyed by students in the main school. These arrangements place unfair additional pressure on the budget for the main school, where resources are inadequate in English, mathematics, science, design and technology and geography.
45. While the governors are applying the principles of best value in their management review, they do not do so in the sixth form. This significant weakness has contributed to a budgetary deficit, which the school has made satisfactory arrangements to clear. On the other hand, the school often receives financial information too late to use it in long-term planning. Day-to-day financial management is exemplary, and specific

grants are properly allocated. Despite recent improvements, provision for ICT in Years 10 and 11 is not meeting legal requirements, and the lack of a certificated course is a significant weakness in the only secondary school in the town. While there is too little collective worship to meet legal requirements, all students attend two very good assemblies each week. The school has established good facilities for data handling and monitoring attendance, but these are not used effectively by some middle managers. The school has good policies and arrangements to promote race equality. There are good policies for equal opportunities, and some very good arrangements, including the targeting of careers advice and work experience to students at risk of exclusion.

46. Teachers are well-qualified for their work, and some have very high levels of professional skill and understanding. Both new and experienced teachers are well supported by the school's provision for training and professional development. Staffing difficulties and illness in the year prior to the inspection have affected standards in business studies, geography and history. The school now has sufficient teachers, but not enough teaching assistants to support all students who have behavioural difficulties. Teachers in some departments have taken great care to build up good collections of resources, sometimes supplementing them from their own collections, particularly in art and design. Shortages of resources in the main school are preventing some students from achieving as much as they should – for example, mathematics homework is hampered by a lack of textbooks.
47. The school has recently begun to take extensive action to bring resources for ICT up to satisfactory levels, but there is still too little access to computers in some departments. The library is well organised and well used, but there are very few books in some subjects and the library is therefore unable to provide effective support for learning across the school. For example, the history stock is good, but there are almost no books on art. The buildings offer adequate accommodation for all subjects apart from design and technology, and funds arrived during the inspection to rectify this. Most subjects have their own base, and teachers use this to create a good learning atmosphere, supported by displays. These are outstanding in art and design, and displays illustrating geometrical principles support learning in mathematics.

Sixth form

Leadership and management

48. Leadership and management of the sixth form are good, with very good features. The programme for all students is organised to develop key skills and citizenship as well as to promote very good learning in subjects. Courses are well-designed to meet the needs of students and to complement other local provision. The head of the sixth form keeps in close touch with the needs and progress of all students. There is, however, not enough monitoring of teaching and learning, and this limits the ability of management to identify and tackle weaknesses at an early stage.

Resources

49. Resources for learning in the sixth form are good overall, but there are too few books for several subjects in the library. Outdated computers are being replaced.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

50. The school is undertaking a review of management systems, and has given recent priority to improving provision for behavioural management. A grant to remove health

and safety risks in design and technology arrived during the inspection. As the headteacher and governors continue their work to improve the school, they should pay particular attention to the following points:-

- (1) Improve the organisation and efficiency of management teams, by:
 - simplifying the structure of middle and senior management teams and lines of responsibility;
 - setting out clearly what managers are expected to do, with guidance on how to do it;
 - establishing effective monitoring systems for all areas of management.(Paragraphs 21, 42-3, 61, 65, 71, 78, 82, 88)
- (2) Ensure that activities in the main school are properly funded, by:
 - spending funds provided for the main school to support work in Years 7 to 11;
 - applying the principles of providing and obtaining best value to all aspects of the school's work;
 - monitoring the balance of spending.(Paragraphs 44, 46, 46, 85, 101)
- (3) Ensure that all teaching, particularly in Years 7 to 9, meets students' learning needs, by:
 - improving the use of information from assessment in planning lessons, particularly at the start of Year 7;
 - ensuring that all students are fully challenged and extended in their work;
 - making more consistent and effective use of homework.(Paragraphs 23-5, 16-19, 23-4, 32, 38, 57, 59, 68, 81, 85-7, 111, 122, 130)
- (4) Improve support for students with behavioural difficulties, by:
 - monitoring patterns of behaviour and achievement more closely in Years 7 to 9;
 - using the school's behaviour policy more consistently, particularly for minor infringements;
 - ensuring that students whose behaviour is likely to interfere with learning are properly supported.(Paragraphs 5, 8, 23, 37, 54, 57, 81, 114)
- (5) Improve resources and accommodation, by:
 - ensuring that all students have access to adequate and hygienic toilets;
 - identifying areas of weakness and allocating funds to them systematically;
 - improving arrangements for students to shelter in wet weather.(Paragraphs 31, 46, 47, 77, 81, 85, 101, 117)
- (6) Improve the organisation of the curriculum, by:
 - meeting legal requirements for ICT in Years 10 and 11;
 - improving arrangements to manage the national strategy for Years 7 to 9;
 - improving provision for students wishing to study two foreign languages.(Paragraphs 21-2, 43, 45, 95-8, 110)

Sixth form

- (1) Improve the range of teaching techniques in some subjects, and particularly in geography and modern languages, by:
 - matching work to the learning needs of students more consistently;
 - extending the range of teaching techniques and resources;
 - improving the quality of students' work outside lessons.(Paragraphs 20, 35, 201)

- (2) Improve the monitoring of teaching and learning, by:
 - providing adequate time for this work;
 - setting up a systematic programme;
 - using information from assessment to target monitoring;(Paragraphs 48, 189, 192)

Other issues to be included in the improvement plan

- (1) Improve the range of books and learning resources in the library.
(Paragraphs 47, 77, 174, 179)

- (2) Improve punctuality to lessons and tutorial periods.
(Paragraph 11)

- (3) Improve accommodation for the Unit for specific learning difficulties (dyslexia).
(Paragraph 53)

- (4) Meet legal requirements for collective worship, and for religious education in the sixth form.
(Paragraphs 25, 194)

Unit for specific learning difficulties (dyslexia).

51. This small unit has five students with statements of special educational needs, and provides some specialised teaching for a further ten. Students receive a small amount of specialist teaching in the Unit, with further support from teaching assistants in normal lessons.

52. At the end of Year 9, students are making satisfactory progress. Their standardised reading and writing scores have improved, and this is reflected in their written work. Students in Year 11 are making good progress. Their reading and writing skills give them good access to GCSE, and they present their work well. Teaching is good. Teachers work systematically through reading and spelling programmes. When teaching note-taking, they encourage students to use quick sketches as well as words where this helps their learning. Students benefit from other courses available in six-week blocks throughout the year. These include mind-mapping skills, study skills before examinations, and a good touch-typing course.

53. Assessment procedures are detailed and thorough, and students receive good support for examinations. Parents regularly attend reviews, and there is a monthly 'drop in surgery' after school until 5.30 pm. When further help and advice is required, it is

sought from the local education authority support services. The unit's work is made very difficult by a lack of suitable accommodation, and it sometimes has to vacate its shared base at very short notice.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 - 11	139
	Sixth form	67
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students		47

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 7 - 11							
Number	10	33	57	33	6	0	0
Percentage	7	24	41	24	4	0	0
Sixth form							
Number	7	25	24	10	1	0	0
Percentage	10	37	36	15	1	0	0

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

Information about the school's students

Students on the school's roll	Y7- Y11	Sixth form
Number of students on the school's roll	921	208
Number of full-time students known to be eligible for free school meals	54	2

Special educational needs	Y7- Y11	Sixth form
Number of students with statements of special educational needs	15	0
Number of students on the school's special educational needs register	79	0

English as an additional language	No of students
Number of students with English as an additional language	4

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of students
Students who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	20
Students who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	30

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	7.1
National comparative data	8.1

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.6
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	98	87	185

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	67	75	81
	Girls	71	64	74
	Total	138	139	155
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	75 (85)	75 (76)	84 (83)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	35 (40)	57 (53)	57 (54)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	71	76	73
	Girls	72	69	72
	Total	143	145	145
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	77 (80)	78 (71)	78 (73)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	48 (53)	37 (52)	47 (44)
	National	31 (31)	42 (39)	33 (29)

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

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

Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	99	89	188

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of students achieving the standard specified	Boys	65	99	99
	Girls	67	87	88
	Total	132	186	188
Percentage of students achieving the standard specified	School	70 (73)	99 (91)	100 (98)
	National	48 (47)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	46.8
	National	39.0

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

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

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS examinations		
		Male	Female	All
School	Number of candidates	36	59	95
	Average point score per candidate	19.6	19.9	19.8
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.7	17.4

Ethnic background of students

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

Exclusions in the last school year

No of students on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
1104	108	6
0	0	0
1	0	0
1	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
2	0	0
2	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
1	0	0
2	0	0
2	0	0
1	0	0
7	0	0
8	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)	66.3
Number of students per qualified teacher	17.0

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	26
Total aggregate hours worked per week	504

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	76.7
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y13

Key Stage 2	26.3
Key Stage 3	23.6
Sixth form	11.3

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2001-2
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	£
Total income	3,339,791
Total expenditure	3,491,432
Expenditure per pupil	3,142
Balance brought forward from previous year	230,377
Balance carried forward to next year	78,736

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	18.7
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	22.6
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	2
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1129
Number of questionnaires returned	223

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	38	52	8	2	0
My child is making good progress in school.	37	50	7	1	5
Behaviour in the school is good.	15	57	15	4	9
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	17	50	23	5	5
The teaching is good.	20	66	6	0	8
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	20	44	25	5	6
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	35	47	12	4	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	39	51	5	1	3
The school works closely with parents.	17	46	27	6	4
The school is well led and managed.	24	45	15	7	9
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	31	55	9	0	5
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	25	47	16	3	9

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

ENGLISH

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

Strengths:

- Results in Year 9 national tests and at GCSE are above average.
- Good teaching is reflected in improved standards, particularly at GCSE.
- Good extension classes help students with learning difficulties to catch up.
- The school is reducing the gap in achievement between boys and girls in Year 9.
- Good relationships between teachers and students make learning a good experience.
- Good creative writing, particularly of poetry, is developing in Year 9.

Areas for improvement:

- Standards and progress in Years 7 to 9 need to be more effectively tracked.
- There are too few alternative tasks for the mixed-ability groups in Years 7 and 8.
- Homework does not meet the learning needs of all students.
- More opportunities are needed for students to present their ideas and interests formally.

54. Students join the school with above-average standards overall, though some have weaknesses in their writing. Standards are more clearly above average in Years 9 and 11, and represent good overall achievement. Girls do much better than boys in Year 11, but the gap in Year 9 is now very small as a result of successful strategies to improve the performance of boys; these are to be extended to include older students. Students with English as an additional language make good progress. Students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress overall but poor behaviour limits the achievements of a significant few and disrupts the learning of others in a significant minority classes, even where teaching is good. Some of these students do not receive enough support in lessons. Gifted and talented students make good long-term progress, and benefit particularly from the imaginative and creative aspects of the most effective teaching. The department has made steady and satisfactory progress since the last inspection.

55. By Year 9, most students answer well in class and take a lively part in group discussion but there was little evidence of more formal speaking presentations. Higher-attaining students read fluently, bringing the text to life for the listener. Lower-attaining students read accurately although not as expressively but all are keen to try. Standards of writing are good because students work productively and know how to change their style to suit their readers. The best creative writing is outstanding. Poems on a variety of topics such as horror, ghosts, supermarkets, flowers and other themes sensitively express students' emotions and feelings and have a good rhythmic beat when spoken aloud.

56. Students in Year 11 develop the skills to give a talk about their work experience as an oral presentation for GCSE. Year 10 students develop reading and writing skills by analysing the techniques of fiction writing, understanding that words can be used economically as broad brush strokes providing clues for the reader to respond imaginatively. By Year 11, students' writing is often adventurous with exciting choice of vocabulary and good use of punctuation to shape meaning.

57. Most teachers plan their lessons to excite students and arouse their curiosity. For example students in Year 7 were enthralled by the teacher reading a horror story and a frisson of fear gripped the class as they explained some of the techniques used by writers to excite the reader's imagination and create tension. Students suggested appropriate adjectives, verbs, and adverbs to enliven their writing. However, a significant proportion of students in Year 7 have not yet mastered the skills of sentence construction and formats for sustained writing. Work is matched to this range of learning needs in most classes, but not in all.
58. Learning improves in Year 9, when students are grouped according to their learning needs. For example, in a Year 9 class which contained students with many behavioural difficulties, students learned well because a relevant novel was chosen and they took turns reading aloud competently, and writing tasks were broken into manageable chunks which related to their study of the central character, Stanley. Students in Years 10 and 11 learn well in response to skilled teaching, closely matched to GCSE examination requirements. For example, students are given a detailed commentary on the set text of 'Hobson's Choice' with questions designed to reinforce their learning, and to encourage them to find suitable quotations to support their answers. There was little evidence of wider reading outside examination texts. Students on Certificate of Achievement courses organise their writing well, and develop confidence. Students with English as an additional language learn well because of the sensitive help given by teachers and teaching assistants.
59. Teaching is good overall, and sometimes very good. Less experienced teachers are well supported by their senior colleagues, who plan with them to provide a framework for successful teaching by devising schemes of work and effective strategies to ensure that students learn well. Teachers manage their lively classes competently and establish good relationships which create a good atmosphere for learning, other than in a few classes where the tasks set are not varied enough to meet the students' needs. Marking is satisfactory, and teachers indicate ways to improve writing. Teachers' mark-books, however, do not provide an effective system of assessing and tracking progress. Teachers and teaching assistants provide committed and effective support for all students.
60. Across the school, reading and writing skills benefit from outstanding work in history, but there are weaknesses in other departments, notably science and in day-to-day writing in geography. Most students apply their writing skills well in GCSE coursework. ICT is used profitably, especially for students' personal writing, where the excellent presentation is a celebration of students' creativity. The range of topics in English makes a good contribution to students' personal development. The library has a good stock of English books, particularly fiction, although some are very old.
61. Management is satisfactory, with good support and teamwork among teachers. However, there is too little time for management, and there have been gaps in the appraisal and monitoring of teaching and learning.

MATHEMATICS

Overall the quality of provision for mathematics is **satisfactory**.

Strengths:

- Students reach high standards in tests and examinations.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning in lessons is good.
- Very good relationships in almost all classes promote good learning.
- Skilled teaching assistants promote learning well among all students.

Areas for improvement:

- Good practices should be shared by teachers to improve learning for all students.
- There are significant weaknesses in marking and homework.
- Assessment is weak, and does not make enough use of National Curriculum levels.
- There are too few textbooks for students to use at home, and there is too little access to computers.

62. Students join the school with well above average standards in mathematics. They make satisfactory long-term progress. Results in the Year 9 national tests and GCSE examinations are well above average, and almost all students, including those with special educational needs, achieve a GCSE mathematics qualification above the lowest grade. The proportion of those achieving A* and A grades is twice that recorded nationally, and boys and girls reach similar standards over time. However, inconsistencies in teaching and learning prevent students from doing as well as they should in all lessons, so that, for example, none reached exceptional standards in the Year 9 national tests or teachers' assessments in 2002. The high standards recorded at the last inspection have been maintained, and overall achievement and improvement since the last inspection are satisfactory.
63. By Year 9, students express their reasoning fluently in speaking, but their written work does not show the same level of care. Students have a good range of numeracy skills, which they can apply in other subjects. In science, graphs are used well to compare variables such as temperature and time. Students use calculators efficiently. Algebraic skills are well developed; higher-attaining students solve linear equations and describe symbolically the terms of a sequence. Students apply statistical techniques well in some geography lessons. They carry out investigative tasks systematically and can make appropriate deductions. Examples seen during the inspection included the effect of changing the dimensions, of a simple shape, on its area and perimeter.
64. By Year 11, higher-attaining students apply their knowledge of vectors and angle properties of circles to solve problems. Most students competently use Pythagoras' theorem and trigonometry; they understand cumulative frequency but lack experience in handling data which they have collected themselves. Lower-attaining students have an appropriate range of skills, which they apply to problems. Numerical skills, including the use of costs and dates, together with the analysis of the results of questionnaires, are used well by those on the vocational programme.
65. The quality of teaching in most lessons ranges from very good to satisfactory, with a small amount of unsatisfactory teaching. Overall, teaching is good. Students learn very well in the lessons for which the planning and range of activities have been skillfully tailored to their needs. Lower-attaining Year 9 students enthusiastically consolidated understanding of negative numbers through puzzles, discussion and application to temperature changes. A class of Year 8 students was inspired by an

enthusiastic dialogue with their teacher, which underpinned their understanding of area. The very good relations, typically evident among students and their teachers, are conducive to learning. This was apparent when Year 11 students enjoyed a game in competition with the teacher; the resulting diagram was used for an in-depth study of vectors. Learning is at its best when varied resources, such as sets of activity cards, OHP transparencies and work sheets, are used to support teaching. In a small proportion of lessons, including one in which there was unsatisfactory learning, students' interest is not stimulated. The pace of lessons is sometimes too slow, with a lack of challenging activities for all students. Homework is not used consistently enough to consolidate understanding and to provide a challenge, and the quality of homework suffers from a lack of textbooks, particularly for older students. Learning support assistants use skillful questioning techniques and give clear, simple explanations that help both students with special educational needs and others in their classes. The similarity of two configurations of matchsticks used in an investigation became apparent to students, when the assistant described them as snakes.

66. Management is satisfactory overall, but has weaknesses that lessen the impact of good teaching. Teaching, learning and homework are not monitored closely enough, and the quality of marking has fallen since the last inspection; it is no longer thorough, nor does it contain significant formative comments; errors go unnoticed. Teachers do not assess students' work closely enough, and national statistics are not used effectively to evaluate results. Computers in the department are outdated and under-used. Enthusiastic teaching is complemented by imaginatively presented students' work and posters which provide a stimulating environment. Generous after-school support contributes to success in GCSE examinations, and the department has recently revised the scheme of work for Year 7 to build more effectively on the work of primary schools.

SCIENCE

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

Strengths:

- Standards are well above average.
- Gifted and talented students achieve a high proportion of A and A* grades at GCSE.
- Teaching is good, leading to consistently good achievement.
- Relationships between teachers and students are good.
- Students co-operate well in practical work.

Areas for improvement:

- Assessments of students' work are not linked closely enough to national standards.
- Science could do more to develop students' literacy skills.
- There is insufficient monitoring of the work of the department.
- Resources and the use of ICT need improvement.

67. Standards are above average among students joining the school, and rise to well above average by the Year 9 national tests. Standards are also well above average at GCSE, though boys have had lower results in each of the past two years, despite having better results in Year 9 tests. Students with special educational needs are well integrated, and well known to their teachers; they make good progress throughout the school. Gifted and talented students are provided with suitably challenging work, and the proportion of A* and A grades is very high. Overall, results indicate good achievement by boys and girls, though no students reached exceptional standards in the Year 9 national tests and teachers' assessments in 2002. Since the last inspection, there has been a satisfactory improvement in standards.

68. Students in Years 10 and 11 are committed to their work. Higher-attaining students make particularly good progress; practical skills are improving, and students respond well when required to use their initiative when undertaking investigations. For instance, in a Year 10 lesson, they investigated the action of trypsin on milk. Their planning was very thorough and a very good working atmosphere developed. Lower-attaining students were given more support by their teacher when investigating factors affecting the rate of breathing. Students co-operate well in groups, and they understand the concept of a fair test. There is good coverage of the National Curriculum. Students have increasing access to computer rooms for research. They quickly access web sites, but their ability to read information, to distil the key points, and then write in their own words shows wide variations, and boys' written work is not as good as that of girls.
69. Standards in Years 7 to 9 vary according to the level of challenge in the lessons. Students persevere well and reach high standards when they are given challenging work, such as close examination of cells using microscopes. When less is demanded of them, as in a lesson on shadows which were only measured approximately, they achieve only average standards. By Year 9, higher-attaining students can differentiate between different forms of energy, including gravitational and chemical energy. All students learn to use chemical symbols and equations to describe reactions, and higher-attaining students are particularly adept at balancing equations.
70. Teaching is good overall; it is never less than satisfactory and is occasionally excellent. Students are well prepared for national examinations. Teachers have very good understanding of their subject, and provide interesting background information. They plan the content of lessons thoroughly, but less thought is given to strategies for improving learning. Effective liaison with technicians ensures that lessons are well-prepared and begin promptly. The management of students is very effective, and leads to mutual respect between students and teachers. Most routine marking of work is satisfactory, but grading does not take enough account of national standards; this is reflected in longer-term assessment, which is not linked closely enough to National Curriculum grades. Homework is rarely challenging enough for higher-attaining students.
71. Students' number skills improve through regular practice, for instance in taking measurements, and in the use of formulae. They draw graphs to compare and analyse results, and most clearly know the meaning of the line of best fit. Word frames are prepared to support the writing of lower-attaining students, but there is insufficient use of key words in lessons to consolidate important facts, and students' skills in scientific writing are under-developed. While the computer rooms are used well for research, there is less progress in the use of computers and sensors in practical lessons. Other technology is also under-used.
72. Textbooks and the quality of some accommodation have been improved since the last inspection, but the management of the department is limiting the benefits to students of the good teaching they receive. The department improvement plan does not provide an effective programme for raising standards and developing resources. Subject leaders do not monitor teaching, learning and achievement closely enough, and they have received too little training in management skills.

ART AND DESIGN

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

Strengths:

- Standards are above average in Year 9 and well above average in Year 11.
- The quality of teaching is excellent.
- All students have excellent opportunities for learning, in and out of lessons.
- By Year 11, students develop excellent attitudes to their work.
- Regular assessments provide students with very good knowledge of their progress.
- Leadership, management and teamwork among teachers are excellent.

Areas for improvement:

- Teachers have to spend too much time preparing materials.
- There is no additional learning support for students with special educational needs.
- There are hardly any books on art and design in the library.

73. Many students join Year 7 with low standards in both practical work and their knowledge and understanding of art and design. The standards reached in Years 9 and 11 therefore represent excellent long-term achievement. Boys are as committed to the subject as girls. There has been very good improvement since the last inspection. More attention is now given to developing students' knowledge of artists and designers from many cultures. Procedures for gathering assessment data are sharper, better used by teachers and contribute effectively to students' progress.
74. By the end of Year 9, students use a wide range of media effectively, including graded pencils, paint, fabrics, printmaking and sculpture. They develop very good levels of specialist subject vocabulary, and use it appropriately when evaluating their own work and discussing that of other artists. Most have very good knowledge of a wide range of artists from different times and cultures, including contemporary artists such as Andy Goldsworthy, Georgia O' Keeffe, Bridget Riley and Roy Lichtenstein. All make very useful comparisons between their own work and that of other artists, using the colour range, quality of line and style of these artists, as a starting point. Students' sketchbooks show clear lines of development and maturity of thought from initial sketches to final presentation. Weekly homework exercises are taken seriously, and contribute well to students finished works. Students use computers well to scan and modify imagery for use in their own work and for researching the lives and times of artists, designers and crafts makers. Students develop increasing confidence, skills and imagination because teachers teach the skills of drawing, painting and 3-dimensional representation on a step-by-step basis.
75. In Year 10, students adapt quickly and rigorously to meet GCSE requirements. They sustain concentration, through extended themes, and develop ideas creatively, using skill and imagination. Students make very good use of homework projects to practise skills, making detailed preparatory sketches from mainly first hand and some very good quality secondary sources, such as books, periodicals, the Internet or visits to galleries. They talk knowledgeably about their work and ideas, show good reasons for their decisions and know how they want their work to develop. Students develop and use ICT skills in depth for personal research.
76. The quality of teaching is excellent. Teachers create a welcoming ethos in the department for all students, regardless of gender, ability or background. The quality of relationships is excellent. Teachers support, care for and take justified pride in their

students and in their achievements. They have high levels of practical specialist expertise and subject knowledge, which students recognise and admire. Teachers have very high expectations, and plan dynamic, stimulating and challenging learning experiences. They strike a very good balance between whole-class and individual help. Teachers regularly track students' progress, and give constant, clear verbal feedback to explain grades, so that students know what they need to do to improve. Teachers are sensitive to individual needs and provide appropriately matching work. They insist on good behaviour from the outset. Teachers give generously of their time outside of lessons. Students appreciate open access to studios at lunchtimes and after school. This enables them to meet coursework deadlines, try new techniques and develop ideas fully. The teaching of ceramics is very successful.

77. Leadership and management make excellent provision for future development and sustain an exceptional level of teamwork. The newly developed assessment procedures are more effective in practice and show good improvement since the last inspection. Displays of students' work are inspirational and of outstanding quality.
78. As there is very little technical support, teachers have to spend too much time outside lessons on tasks such as preparing clay. There is insufficient storage space in the department for large 3-dimensional works to be kept safely between lessons. This restricts students' experiences of sculpture, especially in Years 7, 8 and 9, where large groups of around 30 students or more are taught together. Students with special needs do not receive additional support with the written requirements of the subject. Teachers generously supplement learning resources by providing their own books, because there are almost none in the library. The department makes an outstanding contribution to the aims of the school, and carries out large-scale performance art projects for special events.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths:

- Teachers have good professional knowledge of the subject.
- Teaching of basic designing and making skills in Years 10 and 11 is good.
- Girls do well, particularly in Years 10 and 11.
- Students in Years 10 and 11 work well independently.

Areas for improvement:

- Work in Years 7 to 9 is not assessed accurately.
- Students with special educational needs do not receive enough support in lessons.
- There are too few opportunities for personal development and ICT.
- Health and safety in the workshops need improvement.

79. Standards are broadly average among students joining the school and in Year 9. A below-average proportion of students take GCSE in the subject, but they achieve well above average results, including a high pass rate for lower-attaining students. Examination results are best in child development but below the national average in resistant materials and food and nutrition. Girls do significantly better than boys at GCSE, and there is too little support for students with special educational needs, so that their progress is unsatisfactory in some lessons. There is too little challenge to gifted and talented students in Years 7 to 9. Overall achievement is satisfactory by Year 11, but interruptions to management have prevented significant development since the last inspection.

80. Students learn to design and make a good range of products using wood, plastic, metal, textiles and food materials in Years 7 to 9. They learn to use simple mechanisms and electronics satisfactorily, for example, when making a decorative plastic and metal bell push, with its electrical circuit. Students work from a design brief to make and evaluate a product. For example, in Year 7, students researched and made a coleslaw recipe and evaluated it very well. Students in Year 8 use the Internet, for example, to investigate alternative energy sources, but ICT is otherwise under-used in design, making and presentation. Students learn key words and routinely use dimensions and quantities in their work well, but the spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects of the subject receive little attention.
81. Standards in extended GCSE coursework are above-average and sometimes higher. For example, students in Year 10 had designed interesting clocks after researching clocks and producing several design ideas. Some students used computers to improve the presentation of their work well. Successful lessons in Year 11, included good work on nutrition, food preservation and child development.
82. The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall in Years 7 to 9, and good in Years 10 and 11. All teachers have secure knowledge of the subject and plan lessons well. The best introduce activities and engage students in learning by asking questions in lessons. There is good and appropriate use of handouts and textbooks to support learning. Teachers are confident and relaxed. As a result, relationships are good, and students work independently in Years 10 and 11. When lessons are less successful, teachers fail to keep students involved in their work, and there are some weaknesses in managing classes. Students' work is marked and recorded well, but standards in Years 7 to 9 are graded too highly. Teachers do not give students with special educational needs sufficient help in lessons to enable them to progress satisfactorily, and there were no teaching assistants in lessons seen during the inspection to support students with behavioural difficulties. There are procedures to teach health and safety issues, but these are not fully effective, and the accommodation does not provide a safe working environment. The school received a grant to improve these facilities during the inspection.
83. The subject leader was appointed very recently and has not yet made an impact on the department's work. Senior management has not monitored progress in the subject closely enough. Students use the workshops to complete work at lunchtime, but there are otherwise few opportunities for learning outside lessons.

GEOGRAPHY

Overall, the quality of provision in geography is satisfactory.

Strengths

- Teachers have good knowledge and understanding of the subject.
- Students have good attitudes and behave well.
- There are interesting and enjoyable tasks in many lessons and in fieldwork.
- There are good arrangements to assess students' work in Years 7 to 9.

Areas for improvement.

- Higher-attaining students should be achieving more by Year 9.
- Older students with special educational needs do not have enough support.
- There is too little use of ICT.

84. Standards are average in Year 9, and above-average in GCSE courses. Girls do better than boys at the end of Year 11, but boys' standards are improving, and the gap is narrowing. Most students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress over time, but they do not have enough support in some lessons. Gifted and talented students reach suitable standards at GCSE, but are under-extended in Years 7 to 9. Standards are similar to those reached during the last inspection, though improvement has been held up by the absence of key staff. Overall achievement is satisfactory, but it could be higher in Year 9.
85. Students make rapid progress in Years 10 and 11. Most can make links between physical processes and human activities, compile case studies using secondary sources and apply their geographical skills in practical situations. Most provide good oral explanations, but many do not write enough in lessons and do not use their good literacy skills to summarise information in their own words. GCSE coursework shows higher standards, with good planning and application of fieldwork techniques. A significant minority of students, mostly boys, do not carry their thinking through to reach well-argued conclusions, and lower-attaining students struggle with work that does not cater for their specific needs. These students try hard and have a measure of success at GCSE.
86. Students extend their geographical skills steadily in Years 7 to 9. In some lessons, where the teaching is good, they learn to consider issues in detail, for example, by working effectively to scale. By Year 9, they begin to consider links between changes in the physical environment, such as erosion, and patterns of settlement. Students with special educational needs make satisfactory gains in understanding, but the work in a significant minority of lessons does not require higher-attaining students to consider issues in sufficient detail. Learning in these lessons is sometimes held back by outdated textbooks.
87. Teaching is satisfactory overall. It has good features in Years 10 and 11, but is unsatisfactory in a significant minority of lessons in Years 7 to 9. All teachers have good subject knowledge, know students well and create a positive learning environment. In roughly half of the lessons, these qualities are matched by demanding and interesting activities that engage students and help them to learn. These lessons are planned well, make good use of questioning, offer scope for independent learning, and have a good final session to consolidate and assess learning. In almost a third of lessons in Years 7 to 9, however, planning is not matched closely enough to National Curriculum requirements, so that higher-attaining students, and some average students, work at too low a level. Homework is regular but marking tends to encourage students without giving them enough information on how to improve their work. Teaching meets the needs of students with special educational needs effectively in Years 7 to 9, but more adjustment is needed to meet their needs in GCSE courses.
88. Students make satisfactory progress in number work, in the careful construction of graphs, and mapwork. Provision for literacy is reflected in the good GCSE coursework, but some older students' work in class is careless, and they do not correct errors or make up for lost work. Overall, this provision for literacy is just satisfactory, but reflects the lack of demand in some of the teaching. There is a little use of ICT for some assessments and coursework, but overall ICT resources are under-used, and some new computers were not working properly during the inspection. The school library is a good resource.
89. Management is recovering from problems caused by the absence of the head of department, and is satisfactory. There have also been some interruptions to the quality of teaching over the past year through the need to rely on temporary supply teachers,

who have not marked work consistently. Assessment arrangements are good, though information from them is not used consistently enough in planning lessons. Accommodation is adequate, but displays are under-used to promote learning.

HISTORY

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

Strengths:

- Standards are well above average in Years 9 and 11.
- The quality of teaching in history is very good.
- GCSE students receive full and helpful guidance on their work.
- The school establishes and maintains high standards of written work.

No significant weaknesses were identified.

90. The results of GCSE examinations are consistently well above average and have continued to rise in 2002. Students achieve higher grades than in most other subjects. This is partly due to the strengths in writing established from Year 7. Boys and girls reach similar standards. Students with special educational needs and those who are gifted and talented make the same very good progress as all other students. Achievement in history is very good. Teaching, examination results and provision for literacy have shown very good improvement since the last inspection, although opportunities for learning outside the classroom have been limited because of changes in staffing.
91. Students in Year 9 are able to link ideas and knowledge and suggest reasons for food rationing, for example, in World War II. They work out the context and significance of pictorial sources, such as propaganda posters. Students use the library and websites frequently and effectively for research. Higher-attaining students produce some very good research, and explain and develop ideas at length in structured essays. Lower-attaining students organise their thoughts but do not add detail.
92. At the end of Year 11, students have very good knowledge and understanding in all areas of the subject. High-attaining students can explain various strands in an argument and pursue them to a conclusion. Research skills are well used by all students. In essays and coursework, there are some outstanding examples of work by both high and low-attaining students, reflecting the outstanding provision for literacy across the department. Students develop very good skills in analysing documents and other evidence, such as cartoons. Coursework entitled 'Women before World War I' is very well researched and presented.
93. The quality of teaching is very good. Teachers know their subject well and have very good materials for lessons. They use a variety in most lessons, so students of all abilities learn effectively. Lessons often include a video sequence, paragraphs read aloud, and scrutiny of visual as well as written sources. The teachers' questions then create a framework for all this information. These methods were used most effectively in a Year 9 lesson on slavery, at the end of which all students had reinforced their knowledge of the triangular trade and the horrors of the middle passage. Students with special educational needs progressed particularly well in this lesson. All students are challenged to think, and gifted and talented students respond very well, often with ideas from their own research. Homework is regularly set and carefully marked, with suggestions for improvement.

94. Teachers have carefully planned the development of students' literacy. Year 7 students write about the romanisation of life in Britain by writing about aspects of life linked to their own experiences – 'selling' a Roman villa, for example, after they have drawn up detailed plans and illustrations. Those who find writing more difficult are encouraged to illustrate accurately, label correctly, and describe in short explanatory sentences. Extension tasks often have a touch of humour that makes students want to try and do them. Keywords are taught and the understanding of vocabulary and concepts checked. The system of recording grades on cumulative sheets allows students to track their own progress very clearly.
95. The department is very well led. Despite changes in staffing, the head of department has improved standards. He has done this by supporting new teachers, including newly-qualified teachers, fully, and establishing team work. His analysis of examination data has led to the emphasis on structured essay writing and the early completion of coursework. The national and school initiatives on literacy, numeracy and ICT have been very successfully introduced into all the schemes of work. Current revision is ensuring that citizenship themes are being made explicit throughout. External visits and field work have been interrupted by staffing changes and need to be re-introduced. The annual Year 10 visit to the World War I battlefields has continued and resulted in a moving library display and assembly for Armistice Week.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

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

Strengths:

- Teaching, learning and the curriculum are good in Years 7 to 9.
- Most students are keen and well motivated.
- Leadership and management are good.

Areas for improvement:

- There is too little provision in Years 10 and 11 to meet legal requirements.
- There is too little technical support for non-specialist teachers.
- The school does not have enough up-to-date computers.

96. Standards are above average in Year 9, but below average overall in Year 11 because too little is provided. There is no certificated course in Years 10 and 11. A third of students follow a vocational programme which has large elements of ICT, but other students and teachers confirmed that they do not use computers enough. Students joining the school have average standards in ICT, and overall progress in Years 7 to 9 is good. Girls do almost as well as boys. Students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress in response to close support from teachers and classroom assistants. Many students make good progress in literacy through their work in ICT. The school has made good recent progress in developing provision for the subject, including improving resources, but has not yet ensured that all students' needs are met in Years 10 and 11. For this reason, overall provision and progress since the last inspection are unsatisfactory.
97. Students in Year 7 use a variety of word-processors and LOGO programs successfully. Students in Year 8 have designed small databases and composed artwork using sophisticated applications. In Year 9, students develop good skills in numeracy through using spreadsheets. They can, for example, format spreadsheets with formulae to calculate box office profits, and design web pages. Year 9 students have also prepared and used multimedia presentations to enhance their work in several

subjects. The school's annual creativity week has involved groups of students in designing and producing an outstanding record of this event on CD-ROM, including digital photographs, text, sound and video-recordings.

98. Good matching of work to the capabilities of students means that most, including those with special educational needs, make good progress in the vocational programme in Years 10 and 11. The school does not have reliable information on the standards reached by the of the two-thirds of students, who are not on the vocational programme, and opportunities for higher-attaining students are held back by the lack of a suitable certificated course. By Year 11, most students can change the presentation of text by using a range of word-processing functions. They grab images from Internet websites to paste and use in multimedia applications or publishing software. A few very advanced students have designed and launched their own websites, which are of high quality. Most, though, are less certain about standard ICT applications, such as data-logging programs in science, because they have too few opportunities to learn.
99. The quality of teaching is good. The department is staffed by an experienced and well-informed team, and all teaching observed was satisfactory or better. Where teaching is most effective, both in separate ICT classes and as part of lessons in other subjects, teachers know their material well and communicate their aims clearly. They prepare work and resources carefully, explain concepts clearly, manage groups effectively, and maintain a quick pace. Teachers ask probing questions, and students develop a healthy, analytical approach as a result. Where teaching is less effective, usually in the few lessons taught by non-specialists, students are not given sufficient opportunities to lead learning and questions are asked of too few students. Sometimes, too little time is left at the end of the lesson to check on how much students have learned.
100. Teachers open computer rooms up to students regularly at lunchtimes, and these sessions are well attended. They also ensure that Year 6 students in primary schools can attend for taster lessons in ICT, and the school has offered courses in computer literacy for adults. Teachers track the performance of students in Years 7 to 9 carefully and set targets for improvement, but some students are unaware of the National Curriculum levels they achieve.
101. Leadership and management are now good, though there had been no subject leader for two years prior to the appointment of the present co-ordinator. Teaching and learning are monitored, and the co-ordinator provides effective support and training for teachers in other subjects. The school network has been improved and is managed by a skilled technician, although there is insufficient technical support in some lessons. The subject leader and the network manager have provided significant help in improving and running the school's administration support systems.
102. Accommodation is adequate, but is scattered throughout the school. This sometimes leaves non-specialist teachers without working computers or technical support at critical points in their teaching. The number of computers is sufficient for the teaching of ICT in the computer rooms, but insufficient for the needs of other departments. A fifth of the equipment is past its useful working life. Broadband access to the Internet ensures that students have quick access to websites for research; this is a strong feature of work throughout the school

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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

Strengths:

- Standards in French and German are well above average at GCSE.
- Very good and outstanding teaching leads to rapid learning in some lessons.
- Teachers prepare students well for examinations and develop students' skills in information and communication technology.
- Lower-attaining students make good progress.
- There are very valuable exchange visits to France and Germany.

Areas for improvement:

- There is too little time for students studying two languages.
- Not all teachers enable students to take an active part in their learning.
- Students do not always know how well they are doing.
- Some students, especially boys, are careless in writing and do not complete their work.
- The management of the department could be stronger.

French and German

103. Standards at GCSE are well above average in French and German and have improved since the last inspection. In 2002, the proportion of A and A* grades rose significantly in both languages. On the other hand, a substantial minority of students in Year 11, are not entered for the examination. The girls' results are higher than the boys, and in German the gap is wider than nationally. Standards during the inspection were broadly average in Year 11, and lower than recent examination results. This reflected the lack of time for students taking two languages from Year 8.
104. Standards in Year 9 across the two languages are as expected and students achieve as well as they should. Those studying two languages have less time to improve their active skills of speaking and writing the foreign language, although at times the writing of the higher-attaining students demonstrates an average-command of the different tenses of verbs. These students can sometimes, however, be very careless in their approach to grammatical accuracy and to spelling.
105. Students studying only one language benefit greatly from the additional time available. They tackle complex sentence structures in their writing, have a satisfactory range of vocabulary and pleasing pronunciation. Students identified as having special educational needs make good progress over the longer term. Teachers are very aware of students' difficulties and offer targeted support and appropriate teaching methods. When additional adults are present in the classroom, they support learning well.
106. By the end of Year 11, standards are in line with those expected nationally and students are achieving as well as they should. Students draft and redraft their oral and written work for the examinations, and higher-attaining students reach well above average standards. They use different tenses very well and express their opinions in a rich variety of ways, although at times they do not pay enough attention to detail. Lower-attaining students build on their good foundations from earlier years and increase their range of vocabulary and grammar structures, irregular verbs, for example. Again, their pronunciation of French or German is largely accurate and authentic. The capacity to read and understand the foreign language is well developed across the ability range, as the result of extensive practice.

107. The teaching of French and German is good overall in Years 7 to 11. Over half the lessons seen were good or very good, and one was excellent. As a result, students learn well. All teachers have a good knowledge of the languages they teach. They prepare students well for the public examinations and tests. Some strong teaching means that some lessons are conducted at a very brisk pace, with high expectations of accuracy in pronunciation and grammar. In a Year 7 French lesson, the teacher gave rapid practice in both the questions and answers required to elicit personal information. She conducted class and individual repetition in an exemplary fashion to introduce and reinforce the acquisition of new and extensive vocabulary on animals, including the two French words for guinea pig! Students followed the lesson with rapt attention, and at one point all students had their hands up, eager to reply to questions.
108. Some of the teaching methods adopted show imagination and innovation, and are very well adapted to the needs of the students. In a Year 8 German lesson on asking for and giving directions around the town, lower-attaining students acted out a role play, recorded by the teacher, between a tourist and the townspeople. Students were thoroughly involved, threw themselves into the exercise with enthusiasm, and acquired new vocabulary and skills at a very rapid pace. In a Year 10 German lesson, students played entertaining games, effective in reinforcing the vocabulary of household tasks.
109. Some teaching is not as well planned. The objectives of the lesson are not clear and there is less variety of methods and resources. Too often, the teacher dominates the lesson, and provides vast amounts of material to students, without allowing them the opportunity to master actively the knowledge and skills. As a result, students do not develop their powers of speaking, for example, and remain too passive and dependent as learners. Some marking of work is excellent in Years 10 and 11, with very detailed suggestions for improving standards. Other marking is superficial: errors go unchecked, work is not completed, and students are not aware of how well they are doing or how they might improve their standards. There is no consistent mark scheme within the faculty and the levels of the National Curriculum are rarely used in assessment.
110. Teachers develop students' skills in information and communication technology well. For example, in a Year 9 German lesson, students skilfully devised a presentation on pastimes with the aid of computer software, using moving pictures, sound and text. The library, however, is not well stocked with modern languages material.
111. The curriculum is enriched by the flourishing exchange visits to France and Germany. The arrangements for the teaching of two languages to the majority of students in Years 8 and 9 mean that there is insufficient time to establish the firm foundations necessary for language learning in Years 10 and 11. In these years, the focus has to be squarely on the requirements of the GCSE examinations and hence the curriculum is rather narrow. In the groups studying a second foreign language at GCSE, prior experience can be very variable, which poses problems for the teachers. There has been insufficient attention paid to monitoring the quality of teaching and learning in the faculty and ensuring a consistently high standard, offering additional professional development where necessary. The solution to these issues lies in stronger management of the faculty and clearer educational direction.

MUSIC

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

Strengths:

- Standards at GCSE are high and the subject is popular.
- There are many opportunities for musical enrichment.
- Students have good opportunities to use music technology.

Areas for improvement:

- Teaching and in Years 7 to 9 needs to be more effectively planned.
- The curriculum and assessment for Years 7 to 9 could be improved.
- The range of instruments used in classes is too narrow.

112. Standards are broadly average in Year 9 but above average for those continuing into Years 10 and 11. Teachers' assessments show above average standards in Year 9 but the quality of work seen during inspection was below this. All groups have access to the music curriculum, and boys and girls respond and achieve equally well overall. There has been a satisfactory improvement since the last inspection through the enhancement of provision for information and communication technology and an increased range of performing opportunities.
113. The music curriculum for Years 7 to 9 is taught through a varied range of units which have a strong practical emphasis. In the best lessons, students could read and play melodic lines on the keyboard, select appropriate supporting harmonies and combine them with a good sense of ensemble. The more able students created accompanying parts which had distinctiveness and style. This standard of work is not sufficiently widespread, however, and a significant minority of students are not making enough progress in knowledge and skills.
114. Composition work at GCSE benefits from the new facilities for music technology. Students handle the software confidently and skilfully. They experiment with effects and structures to produce a wide range of effective pieces. One was a stylish dance for wind ensemble in a conventional style, and another was a layered piece using synthesised sound effects in response to a dramatic scenario.
115. Teaching is satisfactory overall, with some good and very good teaching in examination classes. Relationships are good and most students respond positively, though there were some instances of poor behaviour which affected learning in Years 8 and 9. In some keyboard lessons, the noise level was too great for students to hear what they were doing clearly, and work was not always sufficiently well matched to students' needs.
116. The new resources for information and communication technology are extending the opportunities and experience of all students, particularly those in Years 10 and 11. Literacy is beginning to be addressed but needs further development. There is satisfactory provision for number work.
117. The department is well managed and given positive and committed leadership. The teamwork of staff and their considerable expenditure of time provide students with the opportunity for a wide range of musical experience outside the classroom. The students respond loyally, and strive towards the standards of performance appropriate to a specialist school. However, boys of all ages should be more involved in singing.

Resources and accommodation are generally good, though practice room accommodation for curriculum group work and individual instrumental work is inadequate.

118. The narrow range of instruments available restricts opportunities for performing and composing music in classes in Years 7 to 9, and the scheme of work for these year groups is not tied in closely enough to the National Curriculum. More attention needs to be given to British music and music from the western classical tradition. Over 230 students receive instrumental lessons on an increased range of instruments and a large number achieve success in graded instrumental examinations at all levels. In addition to the school concerts and productions, the outgoing nature of the music department is exemplified in a number of other initiatives: workshops with composers and professional musicians, community performances, concert visits and a link recently established with a choir in Japan.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Strengths:

- Teaching and learning are consistently good.
- Students are very positive in their approach to physical education.
- Relationships between teachers and students are very good.
- The overall quality of activities outside lessons is good.

Areas for improvement:

- Links with primary schools need to be developed further.
- ICT is under-used, particularly in Years 10 and 11.
- Girls have fewer learning opportunities outside lessons than boys.

119. Standards are broadly average in Years 9 and 11. Teaching and learning, however, are consistently good across the school, and boys and girls show good levels of involvement and commitment to the subject. Students take part with enthusiasm, even when working outdoors in poor weather. In the course of their school career, gifted and talented students have satisfactory opportunities to reach high standards, and students with special educational needs are consistently well involved in lessons. There has been good improvement since the last inspection. Assessment is now firmly based on National Curriculum levels, and schemes of work have been improved. Community links have been strengthened and a student sports council has been established.

120. Although ability levels vary significantly among students new to the school, all quickly begin to make good progress. One Year 7 class worked enthusiastically in a hockey lesson, improving students' ability to tackle correctly. In one gymnastics lesson in Year 9, a minority of students performed some basic movements with control, but overall attainment was below average. In the extra-curricular activities observed, students achieved well in football, netball, dance and cross-country. Students with special educational needs progress as well as others. Several students on the register of special needs are following the GCSE course. There is no specific mechanism for formally identifying gifted and talented students. Staff know the students well, however, and they are encouraged to develop their skills further through good links with local clubs.

121. The quality of teaching and learning is consistently good. In some lessons, particularly, though not solely, in dance, teaching and learning are very good. Teachers know the

subject well, plan effectively, and set a good pace of work. Students respond very positively. They are always correctly dressed for physical activity and levels of participation are high throughout the school. Their attitudes have a positive impact on learning, though the small number who do not take part are not always fully engaged in the lesson. Students show respect for each other and for the rules. They handle equipment with care. Relationships between teachers and students are good and also encourage learning. In their practical activities, most examination students show a ready willingness to work hard in order to improve. In some of the most successful lessons, students evaluate their own and others' work well, but this does not always happen.

122. There is a good range of additional activities for students of all ages, particularly for team games. There are fewer opportunities for girls to take part in some of these, but the school has plans to improve this position. The library has a limited stock of books for the subject, and students need more opportunities to use computers, particularly in the GCSE course.
123. Provision for physical education is well managed, and ICT is used effectively for administrative purposes. The department has some links with primary schools, but does not use these to gather full information on students' skills from the start of Year 7. Accommodation and resources are good. The school received the Sports Mark award in June 2002.

Dance

124. Students make very good progress in dance in Years 7 to 9, and reach well above average standards in the GCSE course. Very good and sometimes excellent teaching results in learning of a very high quality. Lessons are carried out in a spirit of shared commitment and enjoyment, whether the subject be modern dance techniques or recreations of the Charleston. All students are committed, enthusiastic, hard working and dedicated. Dance makes an outstanding contribution to the creative aims of the school.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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

Strengths:

- Teaching is good and, at best, excellent.
- Very good relationships between teachers and students lead to effective learning.
- Leadership and management are very good
- Religious education contributes significantly to spirituality, personal development and citizenship.

Areas for improvement:

- There is still no full GCSE course.
- Assessment in Years 7 to 9 needs further improvement.

125. Standards in Years 9 and 11 are well above average, and students achieve well in all years because of teachers' high expectations. Most students take the GCSE short course, and results are well above average, though boys do less well than girls at the highest levels. Gifted and talented students make satisfactory progress but are hampered by lack of a full GCSE course. Students with special educational needs

make good progress because of the support given to them by teachers and learning support staff where present. Improvement since the last inspection is very good.

126. In Years 7 to 9, students show good knowledge of the Christian and other major religions through progressive study of origins, teaching and practice. There is a depth to students' knowledge and understanding of Christianity and other religions. They evaluate some of the moral dilemmas faced by believers in living according to the rules of their tradition. They can express thoughtful, personal responses, through poetry and other forms of imagery, to questions and issues about beliefs and values. Students understand the reasons for, and responses to, religious persecution and prejudice.
127. Year 11 students reach well above average standards in the short GCSE course, which focuses on Christianity and Islam. Work in Years 10 and 11 is challenging and student motivation is high. Students illustrate facts with impressive supportive references, from both the Bible and the Qu'ran. Presentation of written work is usually excellent with students showing pride in their written and class work.
128. Overall, teaching and learning are very good. Many inspiring lessons, which gained and held students' interest, were observed during the inspection. Particular strengths are the excellent relationships between teachers and students, and teachers' enthusiasm for their subject, which inspires high achievement. Teaching is rooted in very good subject knowledge and planning, which ensures that the most important features are learned and consolidated. Teachers always give praise when deserved, and use a good variety of teaching methods to involve all students. Attitudes and behaviour are often exemplary. Students show considerable respect for their teachers and one another, work conscientiously and are fully involved in classroom discussions. Homework is always set, and of good quality. Marking is regular and thorough, and students' knowledge of their learning and target levels is good.
129. There is a strong emphasis on literacy. Presentation of written work is usually very good, and students show pride in class and homework. A good selection of books in the library is used well. There is no computer in the department and limited use of ICT in lessons because of access difficulties; however, ICT is recommended for homework. The ethos of the department supports and encourages all students and reflects the schools' aims and values. The religious education department makes a powerful and inspiring contribution to students' personal development, including spiritual, moral, social, cultural and citizenship. Meditation and reflection are used well as opportunities for spiritual development. An appreciation of the diversity and richness of other cultures is a prominent feature of examination work. Lessons include the understanding and skills needed to become responsible members of society.
130. Outstanding leadership and management are contributing to rising standards, particularly GCSE and A-level results. Many very effective new initiatives have been implemented to raise attainment, including a revision club. There are excellent enrichment opportunities which include visits to India, Israel and to places of worship of Christian and other faiths in England. Good visual displays help to celebrate students' work and achievement. Excellent performance records include mapping progress from Year 7 onwards. There is a shared commitment to the further improvement of the subject and the capacity to succeed is high. This is a first-class department, which is highly valued within the school and has high capacity for further improvement.

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

Provision for vocational education in Years 10 and 11 was sampled. It is **satisfactory**.

Strengths:

- Teaching is well matched to the needs of lower-attaining students, including those with special educational needs.
- There is a good range of learning opportunities and work experience.
- Teachers have good professional skills, and are committed to improving the work.
- Standards and progress are well monitored.

Areas for improvement:

- Some higher-attaining students could achieve more.
- Accreditation could be extended. The school has plans to do this.

131. The vocational programme has been organised to provide additional learning opportunities for lower-attaining students, and to reduce the pressure on them of the full range of GCSE subjects. Roughly a third of the students in Years 10 and 11 follow it instead of one GCSE subject. Standards are therefore below average, but represent satisfactory overall achievement, and some students do well. Over nine out of ten of the students completing the programme in 2002 passed one or more of the examinations. More advanced forms of accreditation, however, are needed for the more able students. Standards reached on the Young Enterprise scheme are good. Boys and girls perform equally well, and students with special educational needs, including those whose behaviour puts them at risk of exclusion, make particularly good progress.

132. Students follow a well-balanced programme of courses. For example, after identifying the type of company they are to set up as a part of the Young Enterprise Scheme, students undertake an effective audit of their personal skills to identify the best role for them in the company. Lessons often cover more than one learning objective. For example, students in Year 11 used a computer to produce a display which featured a car and, in pairs, learned to drive a car under the supervision of a local driving instructor. In another lesson in the same year, students were seen planning and costing an overseas holiday as a part of their work on number skills. Some students in this lesson used computers to provide a list of the costs.

133. The quality of teaching is always at least satisfactory, and it is good in Year 11. All lessons are well planned, and teachers use questions well to involve students. A particular strength of the teaching is the help and guidance given to students with special educational needs. This helps them to develop self-confidence and make good progress in both the vocational programme and GCSE courses in other subjects. Teachers are confident and relaxed and, as a result, relationships with students are good. Students also receive excellent additional support from teaching assistants. Teachers encourage students to work independently. Assessment of students' work and the monitoring their progress are good. In some lessons, however, teachers have difficulty in keeping students focused on their work and maintaining pace, particularly when lessons involve two very different learning objectives. Students' work shows that some units of work remain uncompleted.

134. This new department is very well managed. There is a strong spirit of co-operation among all teachers and teaching assistants, and the programme makes a valuable contribution to the involvement of all students in education.

CITIZENSHIP

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

Strengths:

- The citizenship co-ordinator has a clear vision for the development of citizenship.
- Year 9 students have a broad and mature understanding of citizenship.
- The re-launched school council is well organised and purposeful.

Areas for improvement:

- No significant weaknesses but assessment procedures are not yet in place.

135. Students in Year 9 have reached good standards for their age in relation to all aspects of the National Curriculum provisions for citizenship. Of the topical events they study, they have a broad knowledge and understanding of the rights, responsibilities and duties of citizens, and the role of the voluntary sector. They show an understanding of the need to take part in community based activities including charitable fund raising, and the need to have responsible attitudes to themselves and others both in and out of school.
136. The whole-school activities, special events, visiting speakers, opportunities to join community programmes or to seek election to the recently re-launched school council, all set a school context and ethos which place citizenship at the heart. Strong areas of citizenship teaching are: geography, English, religious education, personal, social and health education, history, drama, the Year 12 general studies course, and Year 7 tutorial (circle work on roles and responsibilities). A play is being specially written on citizenship issues which will involve the whole school.
137. There are substantial and effective strands of citizenship in personal, and social and health education (PSHE) schemes of work for Years 7 and 8. Year 9 schemes of work include relationships, law and order and the community around us. PSHE has built up links with the community from the medical profession to businesses, such as in work experience. The subject uses 'diary entry format' in Years 7, 8 and 9 to encourage reflective writing. There are many examples of active citizenship within the school such as mentoring, curriculum support, and involvement in various committees. The school council makes a significant contribution to citizenship. A whole school council meeting that occurred during the inspection was skilfully chaired by a sixth former, and proposals were put forward clearly and concisely by committee members. Many students take part in model United Nations conferences.
138. The management of citizenship within the school is based on clear aims, with appropriate priorities and targets. The school is building effectively on its existing strengths.

DRAMA

Overall, the quality of provision for drama is **good**.

Strengths:

- The drama studio and use of hall provide good space for lessons.
- Extensive extra-curricular activities enrich students' personal development.
- A good range of musical plays are produced to a high standard.
- Good teaching by drama specialists ensure that students learn well.
- There are good facilities for drama lessons.

Areas for improvement:

- More opportunities are needed for students to develop a sensitive awareness of place and occasion in their drama.
- More opening activities are needed for students to create mood and atmosphere building to dramatic tension.
- More direct teaching of the basic drama skills of concentration, commitment, control and creativity is needed.
- More practice is needed for non-verbal communication through gesture, movement, facial expression.

139. Standards at GCSE in 2002 showed an improvement on 2001, and the pass rate was high. Overall standards in lessons seen were above average, although learning in some classes has been fragmented by staff absences. Students enjoy their drama lessons and tackle the tasks set enthusiastically, although some of their work suffers from weak concentration, limiting the depth of their performance.
140. Effective specialist teaching enables students to develop a scene through to performance, though some lessons do not have enough warm-up time and need to do more to develop basic techniques. For example, students in Year 9 built stories based on themes of luck and chance. Most learned well as the teacher steered them through exercises to create picture images in a freeze frame, depicting the course of friendships from small children to young adults. Several, however, did not understand the techniques they should have been using, and struck poses.
141. A good range of dramatic styles is taught, and students are introduced to key dramatic terminology. However, some concepts, such as 'the mantle of the expert' are too difficult for lower-attaining students to grasp, and they need more work on basic skills. There was a sharp fall in the numbers of students opting for drama in 2000, and numbers have not fully recovered. Students in Year 11 preparing GCSE coursework based on *The Crucible* had researched the play carefully and knew it sufficiently well to reconstruct the court scene, bringing out the miscarriage of justice at the heart of the play. Their work would, however, have benefited from a warm-up to establish a sense of place and occasion.
142. Resources and accommodation are used well. Upper school musical plays are a strength of the school, and lively rehearsals for *The Threepenny Opera* were in progress during the inspection. Teachers are well qualified and students benefit from the high level of expert teaching they receive outside lessons. For example, the Youth Theatre Project is open to all, with weekly sessions leading to public performances. The anti-bullying 'Walk Tall' project has attracted much attention outside the school, and there is effective support for students with special educational needs and those at

risk of exclusion. Overall, the drama department makes a good contribution to the school community.

BUSINESS STUDIES

143. Provision for business studies in Years 10 and 11 was sampled. GCSE results are well above average in most years, and were very high in 2001, where over nine tenths of students achieved grade C or above. Results fell in 2002 as a result of problems in staffing, but standards during the inspection had recovered to above average levels. Higher-attaining students' work shows good analytic skills across a broad range of issues, some of them complex, and lower-attaining students work steadily to reach a standard that gave them a good chance of achieving GCSE grade C. This represents very good achievement for the broad range of students now taking the subject, and is the result of carefully-planned and consistent teaching. There are particular strengths in the range and relevance of tasks, and in marking and guidance, which make very good use of targets and accurate grading to track and maximise progress. Work in business studies is supported well by the community through the work experience programme, and students are very well prepared for the sixth form.

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

In the inspection, 13 subjects and courses were inspected and are reported on in detail. Work in other subjects and courses was sampled and contributed to the overall picture of teaching and learning in the school.

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2001.

GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	3	100	83	33	23	3.7	2.3
Biology	1	100	52	0	2	1.0	0.8
French	1	100	13	100	78	5.0	1.7
German	1	0	13	100	82	3.0	1.9
Mathematics	7	100	62	29	15	2.3	1.5
Other social sciences	1	0	11	100	74	1.0	1.5

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	14	100	96	79	46	8.7	6.6
Biology	26	100	88	46	34	6.7	5.3
Business studies	7	100	92	100	32	9.1	5.5
Chemistry	17	100	90	65	43	7.5	5.9
Communication studies	18	89	93	33	31	5.6	5.5
Economics	12	100	89	67	36	7.7	5.5
English Literature	20	95	95	35	37	5.5	5.9
French	6	100	89	33	38	7.0	5.6
Geography	15	100	92	53	38	7.2	5.7
German	8	88	91	38	40	4.8	5.8
History	22	100	88	55	35	7.5	5.5
Mathematics	27	93	87	59	43	7.0	5.8
Music	9	89	93	33	35	5.8	5.7
Other social studies	21	100	87	62	34	7.3	5.3
Physics	10	100	88	80	40	8.6	5.7
Religious studies	8	100	92	75	38	7.3	5.8
Physical education	13	100	92	31	25	5.6	5.1
Business AVCE	13	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	11.5	10.5

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

144. The focus of the inspection was on mathematics and chemistry, but biology and physics were also sampled. The inspection covered A-level courses in mathematics and further mathematics, all of which include pure mathematics, statistics and mechanics modules. In addition, the GCSE course for those aspiring to grade C was inspected. Standards and the quality of work have been sustained and developed well since the last inspection.

Mathematics

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

Strengths:

- A-level results are well above average.
- Teaching is good, and builds well on students' existing skills.
- Teachers convey their interest and enthusiasm for mathematics to students.
- There is good provision for the few students across the sixth form who still need to achieve GCSE grade C in mathematics.

Areas for improvement:

- A-level teaching relies too heavily on textbook examples.
- Some marking does not give students enough information on standards.

145. A-level results are very high, and over half of the school's candidates regularly achieve grades A and B. The standard of work in lessons and in students' folders is equally good, though there are significantly fewer students in the current Year 13. Year 12 students, beginning the A-level mathematics course, have been helped by the school produced *Maths Link* document, designed to clarify essential GCSE skills needed. As yet these students lack confidence and the skill of using texts to advance their understanding. Marking and assessment of their work to date is also inadequate to help them progress confidently. In contrast, a small group of further mathematics students in Year 12 have made excellent progress and have competently completed the first modules in pure mathematics and mechanics. Teachers have given in-depth annotation to their marking which has been very effective, in promoting rigour, particularly in mechanics.

146. Overall, teaching and learning are good. Planning is thorough and includes the use of models and comparative techniques, which enable students to consider topics from more than one perspective. Year 12 students were helped to understand inequalities by comparing graphical and algebraic methods. However, in statistics, students do not handle enough primary data, and teachers do not highlight elegant solutions. Teachers often explain complex techniques well by relating them, initially, to simple ideas. This led to rapid development of understanding in the study of partial fractions. Further mathematics students considered the centre of mass, using diagrams and models to extend intuitive ideas to a systematic study. Year 13 students and those studying further mathematics in Year 12 are particularly enthusiastic about the subject. They benefit from the use of appropriate resources; typically exemplified by their appreciation of the power of graphic calculators to help support a reasoned argument. Students enjoy working with teachers and a number are inspired to read mathematics as part of their proposed study at university.

147. The school provides good support to the few sixth form students still wishing to achieve GCSE mathematics grade C. Good teaching with structured individual guidance helps them to analyse what they need to know. They are acquiring confidence, for example in their use of algebraic manipulation, to work well with guidance and independently. This course has a good record of success.
148. The management of sixth form courses is very good. All of the school's mathematics teachers participate with this age group. Students benefit from the collaborative teaching in which learning for different aspects is systematically integrated. The provision of a totally discrete further mathematics course is particularly effective in promoting high standards. The very high A-level standards evident at the previous inspection have been maintained for this popular subject.

Chemistry

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

Strengths:

- Leadership of the subject is good. The course is well planned.
- Results in the A-level examinations taken in 2001 were well above average.
- Teaching is good, and occasionally excellent; lessons are thoroughly prepared.
- Relationships are good; students take pride in their work and enjoy it.
- Numbers taking the subject are growing.

Areas for improvement:

- Examination data could be assessed in more detail.
- Assessment and target setting could be improved.
- Some equipment is dated and needs replacing.

149. A-level and AS results in 2001 were well above average; all A-level candidates obtained a pass grade and two thirds achieved grades A or B. Students' coursework is of similar quality, with very good detail and presentation. Analysis of their observations is particularly thorough.
150. A high proportion of students in both Year 12 and Year 13 are on course to obtain high grades in their examinations. This is the result of thorough planning of the course, good teaching, and their determination to improve. Students concentrated well throughout all lessons observed. They listen well, and make a positive contribution to lessons. They particularly enjoy practical exercises. They also show good ability to recall work from previous lessons. Teachers develop very good working relationships with students, and there is a sense of mutual respect and of working together. Students' response is very good, and from the beginning of Year 12 they clearly enjoy the challenge of the more demanding work. Their pride in their work is shown by the high quality of their written work.
151. Teaching varies from satisfactory to excellent; it is good overall. Detailed planning produces good purpose and pace in lessons. Teachers' very good knowledge and understanding of their subject enables them to add interest to the work with relevant background information. Teachers provide opportunities for students to use their initiative, and to contribute to the lesson. In an excellent Year 12 lesson about electron energy levels, there was a very good balance of theory and practical work. There was also time for a lesson summary to review what had been learnt, and to calculate the energy in a photon of light. Lessons are less effective when insufficient time is allowed for students to complete their practical work and to then consider what it shows. Work

is thoroughly marked, but its standard is not regularly compared with likely examination grades, and students are not given target grades early enough in their course.

152. The acting head of department leads by example in her obvious enjoyment of the subject, and in her relationships with colleagues and students. The organisation of the course is very thorough, although there is insufficient monitoring of standards. The overall quality of resources is satisfactory; textbooks are good, but some equipment is sub-standard. Since the last inspection, there has been an increase in the number of students taking chemistry. The retention rate for the subject into Year 13 is good because of the high quality of teaching, and students' enjoyment of their work. There is good capacity for continuing improvement in the subject.

Physics.

153. Provision in physics is **good**. A-level results are normally well above average, and results in 2001 were very high, with over half the students gaining Grade A. Two lessons were observed. In both, the work was well planned and students concentrated well. Students in Year 12 did not use formulae confidently, but this improves through regular practice, and the work of students in Year 13 is far more accurate.

Biology

154. Provision in biology is **very good**. It is a popular subject, standards are well above average. In the lessons observed, teaching was good and sometimes better. Students in Year 12 enjoyed a practical lesson using chromatography to separate the constituents of chlorophyll. In Year 13, structured teaching helps students to understand the calculations used to predict the proportion of the population carrying the cystic fibrosis gene.

BUSINESS

The advanced vocational course in Business Studies, and Economics and Business Studies at AS and A-level were inspected.

Strengths:

- Standards are high in all courses.
- Teachers have very good subject knowledge and teaching is very good.
- Management of the department is very good and it provides excellent leadership.
- Assessment information is used very effectively.
- There is a very good range of provision, including Young Enterprise.

Areas for improvement:

- Students have too few opportunities to use computers in lessons.
- There is no office style facility to model the world of business and commerce.
- AVCE groups are small.

155. Standards across the subject are high, and achievement is good. This is reflected in a high proportion of A and B grades at A-level in most years, though staffing problems caused a fall in results in 2002. Male and female students succeed equally, although there are more of the former in most classes. Teaching challenges the highest-attaining students but also supports those who encounter problems. It makes a good contribution to students' key skills.

156. Teaching is very good. Teachers are very skilled at questioning both to assess understanding and to encourage students to think for themselves. Very good pace and challenge encourage students to apply their numeracy and ICT skills, for example, when studying break-even analysis and cash-flow. Students work well on tasks set in class and they show a good general knowledge of business theory. However, sometimes they do not participate actively enough in the lesson, and some in Year 12 have limited understanding of basics issues, such as taxation. By Year 13, students apply their knowledge to a more theoretical approach and the highest-attaining students expertly assess the impact of company mergers. Students are skilled in using computers, particularly web sites. However, they are not able to use multi-media presentations or other software in all classrooms.
157. Students use very good resources produced by the department, and they particularly value Young Enterprise activities. The school has extensive links with local industry through the Education Business Partnership. Assessment is rigorous and data is managed very well. Its use ensures that students are clear about their strengths and about how they can improve. The department is managed very well; the head of department provides excellent leadership and a clear vision of the way forward. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

The school's recently established AS and A-level courses were inspected.

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

Strengths:

- Standards are above average.
- Teaching is usually very good and occasionally excellent.
- Students are keen and well-motivated.
- Leadership is good, assessment and network management are good.

Areas for improvement:

- Accommodation is scattered across the school.
- A fifth of resources are out of date.

158. Standards are above average, and overall achievement is very good. Students use their developing expertise in programming languages such as Visual Basic, and have created complex programs, spreadsheets, and a range of databases. They develop a better understanding of the computer systems used in industry through the valuable experience of their teachers. They have a good knowledge of systems analysis and web design and are learning quickly how to use electronic mail. Students use commercial presentation software to compile good quality multimedia presentations.
159. Teaching and learning are very good. There is a good partnership in learning between teachers and students. Teachers are knowledgeable and make the subject matter relevant to students, so gaining their respect. Students use their ICT skills well in a range of other subjects, and it is a key element of the business studies course. In an excellent media studies lesson, the use of multimedia facilities ensured a slick and professional delivery with lots of impact. Students are also starting to use e-mail to send documents to teachers; this helps with homework and develops a key business skill.

160. Teachers ensure that students improve their literacy well, and they develop a good technical vocabulary. Assessment is very good; students know how well they are doing and are encouraged to think for themselves and make considerable intellectual effort to move on. Leadership and management are good.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

161. AS and A-level courses in physical education were inspected.

Physical education

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

Strengths:

- Teaching is very good.
- Students are well motivated.
- Examination results are above average.

Area for development:

- The range of accredited courses could be extended.

162. There are currently four students in Year 13 and 14 in Year 12. There is a high pass rate at AS and A-level, and significant numbers of students achieve A and B grades. This represents good progress from GCSE results. Students often do better at A-level in physical education than in other subjects,

163. Overall standards in Year 13 are good. Students' folders are well organised, and show good understanding of exercise physiology. Students have good practical ability, particularly in rugby, football and golf. In their theory work during the inspection, students considered the meaning and development of athleticism. They recalled aspects of earlier work accurately, and correctly identified phases in the development of sport in the nineteenth century. Students recognise the significance of social control, and understand the link between physical endeavour and moral integrity. They have also produced very good work on coaching for different sports.

164. In Year 12, where the range of ability is very wide, most students are beginning to produce work at the required standard. They understand the term 'lateral flexion' and most have satisfactory understanding of movement analysis. While students can distinguish between types of muscles, several are less confident in talking about what different muscles actually do. The overall standard of practical work is satisfactory, and some students achieve above average standards in tennis and athletics.

165. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Expectations are high and lessons are structured effectively. Planning is thorough, lesson objectives are made clear and teachers' subject expertise is good. The most effective teaching involves the perceptive use of questions and a good pace to lessons. Teachers use varied approaches to sustain interest and help to develop the students' knowledge and understanding. Work is marked constructively, with useful comments, both written and oral, providing helpful advice on how students can improve. Students value their teachers' contribution, and are very positive in their approach to the subject. They apply themselves conscientiously to their work. They make good use of ICT to improve their learning, including word processing, video feedbacks and interactive CD-ROMs.

166. Management is good, and new courses have been introduced since the last inspection. Accommodation, new resources, and good facilities contribute to the standards achieved. Physical education is also timetabled for all non-examination students in Years 12 and 13. However, students can no longer take accredited courses in coaching and refereeing.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

167. Music, art and design and theatre studies courses were inspected fully.

Theatre studies

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

Strengths:

- Standards are good.
- Teaching is knowledgeable, well-informed and very good.
- The subject is well led and managed.
- Students work hard, and make good decisions about character and performance.

Areas for improvement:

- Students make insufficient use of ICT in drama classes.

168. Students reach high standards throughout the course. They develop strong dramatic skills and literacy, and use technical terms and theatrical concepts fluently in spoken and written work. They understand the impact of projection, gesture and body language. They apply all of these skills well in performance and analysis.

169. In Year 12, students' speech is clear, audible and crisply enunciated, with good expression. Their body language is good because they are at ease with themselves and confident in performance. Their timing is often sophisticated, and their written work is above average. The best work is perceptive and gives a personal response from a theatrical standpoint. Students write with intelligence and are thorough in detail. They use examples from texts well and have a good understanding of the impact of key moments in a play. The work of lower-attaining students is sometimes rather generalised, with weak conclusions.

170. In Year 13, students are very well informed, and understand the techniques used by leading dramatists such as Stanislavski and Peter Brook. They write with an intimate knowledge of stage business. Drama studies make an important contribution to spiritual and cultural development as students encounter topics ranging from religion in Catalonian culture to the Suffragette movement. They become engrossed in unpeeling the inner motivations of each character they play as they react to events, planned or unplanned.

171. Teaching and learning are very good. Lessons are well planned, and supported by much extra-curricular work, which included Brecht's *Threepenny Opera* during the inspection. Students prepare for examinations by performing coursework pieces in public. While students could make more constructive use of computers, they use digital and video cameras well in critical analysis of their acting.

172. Leadership and management are good, and the department is staffed by skilful, committed and experienced teachers.

Music

The overall quality of provision in music is **good**.

Strengths:

- Teaching is good, and the best is very good.
- Students are committed to their work and learning is good.
- There are excellent facilities for music technology.

Areas for development:

- There is very restricted accommodation for practice and private study.

173. Standards and examination results are broadly average overall, and higher-attaining students often reach high standards. There has been a satisfactory improvement since the last inspection – numbers have almost doubled for music and a new option of music technology has been introduced. Both courses benefit from the new computer suite and recording facilities, which allow for a wide range of possibilities in composition work. All students acquire familiarity with sequencing software and use it confidently and creatively. Some Year 13 compositions show imagination and skill in working with sampled sounds, whilst others demonstrated considerable sophistication in the use of traditional elements. Another year 13 group combined work in composition, performance and historical studies by producing a group piece imitating the structure of a Baroque concerto movement.

174. The standard of teaching is good overall, and the best is very good. Teachers plan a broad range of interesting activities for students, and develop musical ideas effectively. They understand the potential of the technical resources, and enable students to apply them well. Some particularly successful lessons showed a very good partnership between teachers and higher-attaining students, for example in planning and plotting harmonic structures. Students receive a good introduction to musical styles outside their main interests.

175. Management and leadership are good, and students enjoy a wide range of additional learning opportunities. They do, however, need more practice rooms and provision for private study. More books are required for the library to support A-level courses.

Art and design

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

Strengths:

- Examination results are well above average.
- Excellent teaching is tailored to the needs of individual students.
- Attitudes and relationships throughout the department are excellent.
- Students demonstrate a mature approach and high levels of self-confidence.

Areas for improvement:

- Too much of teachers' time is taken up in preparing materials.
- There are no art books in the sixth form library.

176. Standards are excellent and have improved since the last inspection. The A-level pass rate is high, particularly at grades A and B. Female students tend to achieve higher standards than the smaller numbers of male students taking the course.

177. In Year 12, students adapt quickly to sixth form work. Students are concerned with current issues, such as the plight of the homeless, refugees and environmental pollution. Many show excellent understanding of issues of morality and social responsibility. They strive for originality. Their excellent drawing skills enable them to transcribe accurately and confidently, the images from their 'mind's eye' to paper, canvas, fabrics or 3 dimensional materials. In Year 13, students work long hours on coursework outside of lessons, in order to gain the highest grades. Higher-achieving students work meticulously, paying attention to fine detail. A student working in the style of Tony Hudson, for example, encrusted her portraits of contemporary African tribes people from Lesotho, with beads, threads and other decorative materials, simulating their characteristic enjoyment of rich body adornments. Students co-operate well and discuss their own and each other's work intelligently and sensitively. They take pride in their work and share a healthy spirit of competition, which constantly raises performance. There are examples of exquisite, bold, pen-and-ink drawings; one depicting imminent new life was of a quality rarely seen at school level. Students are not afraid to take risks with unorthodox methods, and delight in accidental effects, which they use creatively to suit their own purposes. Most are equally skilled and confident when working in ceramics, paint, fabrics, glass or willow and paper. They work on sketches and small prototypes for sculptures, scaling up accurately, using a variety of mathematical techniques, to achieve large works. Students use computers very well to research new projects. They scan images and modify them, when analysing the work of other artists, times and cultures, such as Chinese, African and Aboriginal.
178. As in the main school, teaching is excellent. Teachers plan for a good balance between fostering students' own skills and developing their knowledge and understanding of art. All teachers have excellent subject knowledge and high levels of practical expertise. They know their students very well and support them personally as well as academically. In return, students trust, appreciate and respect teachers. Teachers regularly hold individual tutorials with students, negotiating future work, analysing homework, sketchbooks and coursework, in depth, so that students know what they need to do to improve further. Teachers mount and display students' work attractively, which helps students to assess their own efforts against graded pieces. Teachers plan and teach additional history of art lessons very well. They help students to recognise how artists generate their ideas in the context of their own era and recognise other major historical events of the time, which have influenced their work. Teachers create interesting still life groups to focus students' close observational drawing and painting skills. They organise visits to galleries such as the Tate and National galleries, in preparation for AS and A-level work.
179. The department makes a powerful and inspiring contribution to the wider creative life of the school. Recently, a local TV company broadcast a spectacular piece of collaborative, performance art, by staff and students in the visual arts. Students designed and built an impressive, large-scale, model dragon, from timber, courageously combining fireworks and dramatic sound effects. They set fire to the dragon, in a responsible manner, with the co-operation of the local Fire department. Finally, they made an exciting video film, to record the slow demise of their work.
180. Leadership and management are excellent. The head of department has clear ideas for development. Many improvements have been implemented since the last inspection, including bringing planning and assessment procedures and practices, into line with national requirements. As in the main school, teachers have to spend too much time preparing materials, and regularly supplement resources by providing their own books. There are no art books in the sixth form library.

HUMANITIES

181. History, psychology and geography were inspected fully, and work in religious education was sampled. Examination results are above-average overall, and show a strong trend of improvement in history, psychology and religious education.

History

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

Strengths:

- Teaching is very good.
- Standards are high and students achieve well.
- All aspects of assessment are managed and used very well.
- Management is very good and support for newly qualified teachers is excellent.

Areas for improvement:

- Computers are not used in the classroom as a regular part of teaching and learning.
- Students do not have a comprehensive study guide and library facilities could be developed further.

182. Results were well above average in 2001. All students passed, more than half at A or B grade. Staffing difficulties resulted in lower standards in 2002, all students passed but fewer reached the higher grades. All students passed AS in 2002, and many were awarded grade A. The overall trend is upward. Most students achieve appropriately or better in relation to their results at GCSE, and male and female students achieve equally well. Retention rates and standards in the present Year 13 are good.

183. Teaching and learning are very good. The essays of individual students early in Year 12 are already of a high standard, and work in Year 13 shows that students have a good level of knowledge and real maturity in their approach to the subject. In AS classes, higher-attaining students understand complex issues, such as the flaws in the Weimar constitution, while average students have a secure knowledge of events in Germany after 1919. In Year 13, the highest-attaining students can establish the extent to which the uneven distribution in wealth and protectionist policies in the 1920s weakened the economy of the USA. Average students show a good level of understanding of the problems of the agricultural sector. In both year groups, the work of the highest-attaining students already shows a very analytical approach and the ability to use quotations well, but some lower-attaining students depend on narrative rather than analysis.

184. The key skill of communication is developed well in written work, discussion and self and group assessment. Students use ICT very effectively but computers are not available in the classrooms as yet. In both year groups, lower-attaining students are learning to use unfamiliar vocabulary well, although some have problems with spelling and using difficult texts. Teachers focus clearly on literacy to ensure that students improve. Students participate well because of teaching styles used, although study guides are not yet available. Teachers are really knowledgeable and enthusiastic about the subject, and some excellent teaching was observed. Questioning focuses classroom discussion very well, assessment procedures are very good and students are made very clear about examination criteria. Students are enthusiastic about history, and judge their experience to be excellent.

185. Management is very good and provides excellent support for new teachers. Procedures and documentation are very good. Library resources are just adequate, although departmental resources are used well. Provision for history has improved very well since the last inspection.

Geography

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

Strengths:

- Teachers' questioning challenges students to extend their thinking.
- Most students' coursework is very good.
- Fieldwork opportunities are interesting and varied.

Areas for improvement:

- Some teaching and marking need to be improved.
- Students do not read and research widely enough, and make too little use of ICT.
- There are too few opportunities for independent learning.
- Teaching and learning are not monitored closely enough.

186. Standards are above-average by the end of Year 13 and represent satisfactory achievement. The continued high quality of students' individual studies, the updating of course material and efficient organisation of lessons shows satisfactory improvement since the last inspection.

187. Year 13 written work shows good coverage of course units. Students write well, and produce well-drawn and annotated maps and diagrams. Lower-attaining students, however, do not always recall what they have learned in earlier lessons as well as they should. Students have access to texts and computers, but most do too little background reading and research. Some students, however, can extract and use relevant information and order their thoughts to give succinct and accurate answers to questions. These students have a mature approach to their work and a real interest in the subject. Their coursework shows a high level of competence in fieldwork techniques, and in-depth analysis of data. Not all students are successful in drawing together the strands of the enquiry in their conclusions, but they do try. Students make good use of ICT in this work.

188. Most students make the transition between GCSE and AS well, and begin to learn more independently. They work together well and share their ideas; most have done well at GCSE, but they do not always apply their knowledge and understanding to current work. Students listen well and have a good grasp of theoretical models of industrial location. Higher-attaining students evaluate these critically. Most students confidently apply their basic skills to drawing maps, diagrams and constructing graphs. A few are content with brief notes.

189. Teaching is satisfactory overall. Teachers use their good subject knowledge in questioning that probes understanding and challenges students to provide extended answers. Lessons are well planned, and activities ensure the acquisition of skills and learning techniques, for example on classifying data and planning extended essays. Some guidance by teachers, however, does not leave students with enough personal responsibility for their work. Teachers share learning aims with students and consolidate learning at the end of the lesson. In some lessons, however, explanations are not clear enough, and teachers do not check that students are in a position to

understand the subject matter. Comments in marking support students, but do not always provide enough guidance on improvement.

190. Good teamwork among teachers has limited the effects of the maternity leave of the head of department, but management procedures have been interrupted, particularly in monitoring teaching and learning. One teacher is currently on sick leave and a succession of temporary teachers has unsettled students and left work unmarked. Schemes of work accurately reflect course requirements and very good fieldwork opportunities are organised.

Psychology

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

Strengths:

- The quality of students' work is very good and rising.
- Teaching is very good.
- The teachers have very strong subject knowledge.
- Students have a very positive attitude to psychology and learn with enthusiasm.
- Students work productively and at pace.

What could be improved:

- There are too few opportunities for students to use ICT.
- Assessment and tracking of progress need improvement.
- There are too few links between psychology and other departments.

191. Psychology was not inspected during the last inspection, but standards have risen in the last few years and examination results are well above average. Students in both years present their work well. Some illustrate their work with very good graphics, for instance showing the time taken to identify ink colours in Stroop lists. Year 13 students write clearly and accurately, know about abnormality, individual differences and deviation from social norms. They make very good links between what they are learning and their own lives and experiences. For example, discussion of phobias prompted very detailed and honest response from many students. They talk confidently and sensitively about mental illness, for example about studies which suggest that some groups of society are more prone to schizophrenia than others. Year 12 students write cogently about the advantages and disadvantages of the Behaviourist approach to psychology. They understand the four main studies on human obedience.

192. Teaching is very good. Teachers have an excellent relationship with each other, which is necessary as both teach at the school for less than half of the week. They have very good knowledge of the subject and share the syllabus sensibly. They have a relaxed manner with the students, but work does not slacken and the pace of learning is very good. A reasonable variety of methods are used in teaching, for example silent reading, discussion, dictation, preparation of overhead transparency slides, research and class teaching. But some aspects of teaching and learning could be improved. Some handouts are not of good quality and in some lessons there is too little interchange of ideas between teacher and students. Too often, students hand in course work late, adding pressure to a tight timetable.

193. Leadership and management are satisfactory, but rely heavily on the skills of individual teachers, who have little opportunity to observe and learn from one another. Curtains do not provide enough protection from the sun, and classrooms are cramped, with too little storage space.

Religious education

194. Teaching and learning during the inspection were of high overall quality, and at best excellent. Students' work included a broad range of original ideas, imaginatively expressed through collage, drawings, poster, music and songs, story, photographs of clouds, and even plants to illustrate Buddhist doctrines. The teacher and students gave one another positive feedback on the impact of their presentations. This was a powerful, dramatic, outstanding learning experience. Results over the last two years show students gaining grades far above those to be expected from their GCSEs.
195. Although a little religious education is taught through general studies in Year 12, it is insufficient to meet the requirements of the Agreed Syllabus and there is none in Year 13. This does not meet the requirements of the law, but the school is well placed to make the necessary changes to its provision.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English and French were inspected fully, and media studies and German were sampled. Students reach high standards in English and media studies, and broadly average standards in both languages.

English

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

Strengths:

- Results in A-level and AS examinations are above-average.
- Learning is very well supported by teachers' critical guidance.
- Teachers have very good subject knowledge, which they share enthusiastically.
- Students are encouraged to research topics independently and to develop their personal style of writing.

Areas for Improvement:

- Assessment does not identify students' rate of progress clearly enough.
- More books of literary criticism and literary journals are needed in the sixth form library.
- More ICT facilities are needed for students' independent research and recording.

196. AS and A-level results in 2002 were well above average, and higher than in previous years, with a strong showing at grades A and B. Work during the inspection was of similar quality. For example, some Year 13 essays on William Blake reached levels that might be expected from first year university students. Students on the newly introduced AS Language and Literature course used appropriate terminology to compare and contrast the images used in contemporary political poetry with the romantic imagery used by the seventeenth century poet, Robert Herrick.
197. The quality of learning is very good as a result of the opportunities provided by teachers for discussion and debate on authors and their work. Students are encouraged to research independently and share their findings with the whole group. For example, a Year 13 class pooled their knowledge of World War 1, before studying war poets. Teachers skilfully steer students' enthusiasm towards critical analysis of the writing of a range of authors. As a result, some outstanding presentations were prepared, for example, on women authors who have influenced contemporary writers.

Students throughout Years 12 and 13 develop their learning and study skills very effectively.

198. Students appreciate their teachers' support for examination techniques, for example in suggesting ways to strengthen arguments through the use of quotations. They find marking very helpful, particularly in its encouragement of personal style and its clear guidance on improvement. Nevertheless, the consistency of learning could be further improved by systematic assessment. The acting head of English is well supported by a team of highly skilled teachers.

Media studies

199. Students reach above-average standards, and the overall quality of provision sampled was very good. Students study the whole range of modern media, and teachers and students together generate an exciting and adventurous learning atmosphere. Students develop good understanding of the purposes of media techniques, including propaganda, and understand the relationship of media to propaganda. Their folders reflect the breadth of content studied and students' eager response to fresh and exciting areas of study. The use of ICT is excellent, and there are effective links with English.

French

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

Strengths:

- Teachers prepare students well for the examinations.
- Students have a good understanding of literature.
- Students use a wide range of language and some complex grammatical structures in their writing.
- There is a good educational visit to Paris.

Areas for improvement:

- Students are not always active enough in their learning and do not undertake sufficient independent research.
- The range of resources and learning activities is sometimes limited.

200. Overall standards are broadly average in Years 12 and 13 and represent satisfactory achievement. Students in some earlier years have reached above-average standards.

201. In their written work, students re-use vocabulary and expressions very well, especially phrases to introduce their views and opinions. During Years 12 and 13, they benefit from a large amount of practice in French grammar, and make satisfactory progress, for example in the use of present tense irregular verbs. Higher-attaining students use advanced grammar structures such as the perfect infinitive very successfully. However, there are still, in Year 13, some difficulties with the manipulation of tenses, and very basic errors of spelling and grammar in the first draft of written work. Although some students have benefited enormously from time spent abroad on school visits, their ability to understand and speak French is slightly below expectations. Students' understanding of literary themes, characterisation and style is, in contrast, good, and they have a wide range of literary vocabulary in which to express their views, for example on the short stories of Maupassant.

202. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning in lessons is satisfactory. Teachers have a good knowledge of French language and literature. They are very aware of the demands of the examinations and ensure that students are offered a wide range of vocabulary and a solid grammar programme to equip them for these examinations. The marking of written work is excellent with detailed and expert recommendations on how to improve standards. Teachers created very good relationships in the classroom and manage their students well on the whole. Although there is some use of material from the Internet, the range of resources is generally limited, with a lack of stimulating and up-to-date texts from the media and little use of television. Activities in the classroom sometimes lack variety, and there is insufficient attention to involving students actively in their learning, and fully developing independent learning skills. Expectations of accuracy in grammar and punctuation could be higher at times. However, students are encouraged to use computer software to present their grammatical knowledge.
203. Students generally show interest and concentration in their lessons. They are particularly well motivated by the study of literature and engage fully with the themes. They could make the first draft of their work more accurate by paying greater attention to spelling and grammar. A study visit to Paris results in a very useful piece of extended writing.