

INSPECTION REPORT

HIGHDOWN SCHOOL

Reading
Berkshire

LEA area: Reading

Unique reference number: 110044

Headteacher: Tim Royle

Reporting inspector: Marion Thompson

2626

Dates of inspection: 14 –18 October 2002

Inspection number: 249711

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: Community

Age range of pupils: 11 – 18

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Surley Row
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Appropriate authority: Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Trevor Keable

Date of previous inspection: 17 November 1997

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2626	Marion Thompson	Registered inspector		What sort of school is it? How well are pupils taught? How well is the school led and managed?
14404	Alan Rolfe	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development How well does the school care for its pupils or students? How well does the school work in partnership with parents? Links with the community Efficiency and finance
3758	Tony Barringer	Team inspector	English Drama Sixth form: English	English as an additional language Literacy
30576	Peter Bannon	Team inspector	Mathematics Sixth form: Mathematics	Numeracy
3937	John Seed	Team inspector	Science Sixth form: Chemistry Overview: Biology, Physics	
31688	Brian McGonagle	Team inspector	Art; Media Studies Sixth form: Art	Resources
2632	Roger Holmes	Team inspector	Design and technology Overview: Design and technology; general studies	The school's results and pupils' achievements
8873	Charlotte Evers	Team inspector	History Sixth form: History	Educational Inclusion Curriculum
20767	Jerry Royle	Team inspector	Information and communication technology (ICT) Sixth form: ICT / ICT GNVQ / ASVCE Overview: Business Studies	
19026	Brian Downes	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages Sixth Form: German Overview: French / modern foreign languages in commerce	Personal, social and health education (PSHE) Sixth form: Key skills
7315	Geoffrey Kinder	Team inspector	Music Sixth form: Music Overview: Music / music technology / Performing arts	Accommodation
18755	Roger Whittaker	Team inspector	Physical education (PE) Overview: PE / Leisure and tourism	Staffing
10448	Michael Elson	Team inspector	Religious education (RE); Citizenship Sixth form overview: RE	
21785	Veronica Kerr	Team inspector	Sixth form: Psychology Overview: Sociology	Special educational needs / Creative Education Off-site (CRED) / increasing flexibility

8632	Derrick Beer	Team inspector	Geography Sixth form overview: Geography / Business	
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Highdown School is a mixed comprehensive, taking boys and girls aged between 11 and 18. There are currently 1085 pupils on roll in the whole school, making it average sized. Numbers have increased steadily since the last inspection. The sixth form has 181 students, and like the main school, has become increasingly popular. It offers a broad range of GCE A-level and some vocational courses.

Most pupils and students are white; almost 20 per cent of pupils are from ethnic minority heritage, mainly Asian or Caribbean, and the proportion of pupils with English as an additional language is higher than in most schools. A small number of pupils are at the early stages of learning English.

The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals (14.2 per cent) is close to the average. Other socio-economic indicators are close to the average. In most years, pupils' attainment on entry to the school has been a little below average, and covers the whole ability range. In some year groups there have been slightly more pupils who have not reached the level expected for their year group than in most comparative schools. The sixth form accepts students with a wider range of attainment than is usually the case, and attainment on entry is below the average.

The school has piloted a number of national strategies, for example in literacy, science and numeracy. Over the past year the school has had a number of difficulties in recruiting staff, which have been successfully resolved.

At the time of inspection 203 pupils (19 per cent of the school roll) were registered as having special educational needs; of these 27 (2.5 per cent of the roll) were the subject of a statement of special need. These proportions are close to the national averages. All types of special need are present and there are pupils with statements in all the main school years and in the sixth form. A large proportion of these pupils experience emotional and behavioural difficulties.

A unit for visually impaired (VI) pupils is attached to the school. The VI unit is a local education authority provision, which moved from another school in September 2001. The unit has places for eight pupils, of which seven are currently filled.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a good school with many very good features. It has made rapid and sustained improvement since the last inspection. The school continues to gain the confidence of the local community and promotes a strong culture of improvement and inclusion. The good quality of education it provides ensures that pupils attain well in public tests and examinations in relation to their prior attainment. Standards attained in GCSE in 2001 are around the national average and are above average in relation to the attainment of higher grades. The sixth form provides a good education: students representing a wide range of abilities and prior attainment are accepted into the sixth form and make good progress. Results are comparable to other schools and good in relation to the starting point on entry. Pupils and students experience good and, frequently, very good teaching throughout the school, particularly in the sixth form. Provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good and they make good progress. Very good leadership and management have led to a school-wide commitment to raising standards and to the promotion of a culture of improvement. All the resources allocated for the support of pupils with special educational needs and the VI unit, including those provided by the local education authority for the specific support of statemented pupils, are used effectively and efficiently. The school and the sixth form provide good value for money.

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

What the school does well

- Leadership by the headteacher is excellent. Leadership and management overall are very good and subject departments are led effectively.
- Pupils and students make good progress in the school and the sixth form, particularly the higher and lowest attaining pupils.
- Teaching is good, and frequently very good, particularly in the sixth form.
- Provision for moral, social and cultural development is very good.
- The school has forged strong and purposeful links with the community. It continues to gain the confidence and support of parents.
- The provision for pupils with special educational needs, including those with visual impairment, enables them to make good progress and to achieve well. The successful inclusion of these pupils in the school enriches the lives of all pupils.

What could be improved

- The attainment of some of the highest attaining pupils.
- The attainment of some pupils of lower abilities.
- The quality of the provision for religious education.
- Accommodation for whole school activities, functions and events.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in November 1997. Since then it has made very good progress. Over the last five years, the school has improved its performance in the national tests for 16 year olds from below average to around average, and attainment in five A*-C grades at GCSE examinations has risen. Results in the sixth form now represent good progress for students in relation to their starting points. The proportion of teaching and learning judged to be good or better has risen significantly. There has been very good improvement in the special educational needs provision since the last inspection. Most notably, specialist teaching is much better and the deployment of learning support staff has been considerably improved. The school has made substantial improvement in most areas of its work and no areas have declined significantly.

Good progress has been made on the key issues identified in the last report. The programme of work for pupils in Years 7 to 9 is now well planned, making good use of analyses of pupils' performance. A wide range of teaching styles is used. The programme of learning for information and communication technology (ICT) is now good, the statutory requirement for the provision of religious education is now met and systems to monitor and support the performance of teachers are in place and operating effectively. The school still does not meet the statutory requirement for a daily act of collective worship.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved 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	C	C	C	C
A-levels / AS-levels	C	C	C	

Key

well above average A

above average B

average C

below average D

well below average E

In the national tests taken at the end of Year 9 in 2001 for English, mathematics and science, results were overall close to the national average and a little lower in science than the other two subjects. Results have not improved as quickly at this stage as in most schools but considering their starting points pupils are making good progress, with boys performing relatively better than girls. From the work seen in school, pupils are working at the expected levels in English, mathematics, science, design and technology, geography, history, ICT, music, physical education, art and design and religious education. Standards in modern languages are higher.

Results at GCSE have risen faster than in most schools, particularly for the number of pupils achieving five or more A*-C grades. This is now above the national average and much higher than in similar schools. Results for those pupils who do not achieve A*-C grades are not quite so impressive and this is where the school could still improve.

Over the last five years girls have performed relatively better than boys at GCSE. Results in 2001 were close to the national average in most subjects, below average in science and above average in art and design, French, German, geography and vocational subjects. Standards of work in the school match this picture apart from science, where work in class is better than examinations, and art and design which is broadly in line with the national average.

Results in the sixth form have stayed much the same over recent years. They represent good progress, with the great majority of students achieving better results than would be expected from their GCSE results. The best performance in 2001 came from history, sociology and communication studies. No courses under-performed significantly considering the starting points of its students.

During Years 7 to 9, pupils with special educational needs make rapid gains in their literacy skills. This improvement in literacy forms the basis for good progress throughout the wider curriculum and results in pupils achieving higher standards than are indicated by their attainment on entry. Pupils attain satisfactory standards of literacy and numeracy, and pupils with English as an additional language make good progress.

All the pupils attached to the VI unit are successfully following National Curriculum programmes of study. The older pupils in Years 10 and 11 are all in line to achieve success in GCSE examinations. Overall, the attainment of pupils with visual impairment matches that of similar pupils who are not visually impaired.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Good. The majority concentrate well, work hard, and make positive contributions to classroom discussions.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good. Most pupils behave well in classrooms and around the school. A minority have poor attitudes to learning.
Personal development and relationships	Good. Relationships are good and have a positive impact on pupils' learning. Many pupils are involved in raising funds for charity.
Attendance	Satisfactory. Attendance is broadly in line with national averages. However, unauthorised absence is above national averages.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

Most of the teaching and learning observed in lessons in the main school was good, and almost three in ten lessons were very good or excellent. They were less than satisfactory in very few lessons.

The teaching of English, mathematics and science is good overall in Years 7 to 11, with a higher proportion of very good and excellent teaching in Years 10 and 11. The teaching of literacy and numeracy is satisfactory. Teachers know their subjects well and in many lessons use their expertise to make lessons lively and interesting. However, lack of specialist teaching in religious education is having an adverse effect on standards and pupils' progress. Pupils of all ethnic groups respond to good teaching by working hard and making good progress. Teachers have a close knowledge of how well pupils understand their work and use this to plan appropriate lessons and provide support to pupils so that they build on previous knowledge. The management of challenging behaviour is a strength in this school.

The teaching and learning of pupils with special educational needs is very good and often excellent in withdrawal groups and they make good progress. In mainstream lessons, they are supported well by learning support assistants. Teachers manage pupils with special education needs skilfully and sensitively. Pupils with visual impairment spend almost all their time in mainstream lessons and are very well taught. They make good progress.

Teaching in the sixth form is consistently good, and very good or excellent in almost half the lessons. Students respond well to the high level of challenge and the opportunities to work independently.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good in Years 7 to 9 and in the sixth form, where the range of courses available is well matched to students' needs. In Years 10 and 11 provision is satisfactory, but the range of vocational courses offered is somewhat narrow and the option system allows too many pupils to drop modern foreign languages.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Very good. Pupils with special educational needs have full access to the curriculum through well-planned support in the learning support department and mainstream classes. Very good support is provided for pupils with visual impairment so they can participate fully.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Good. This important aspect of school provision is well managed and pupils make rapid gains in language learning, which support their work across the curriculum.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural, development	Very good. The very good provision in most of these areas makes an important contribution to the pupils' and students' personal development and helps to foster an understanding of the world and to create an ethos of mutual respect and inclusion. Spiritual development is good.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Good in the main school and very good in the sixth form. The school tries to ensure all pupils benefit as much as possible academically and as members of the school community.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good overall. Excellent leadership and management by the headteacher, very effectively supported by the deputy headteachers and assisted by the leadership group, provide a strong focus on improvement in the work of the school and a clear direction for future development. Middle managers provide good leadership and management. Arrangements for the professional development of all staff are good.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governors fulfil their role of setting the strategic direction of the school and monitoring its work very well. They provide active and constructive support. All statutory requirements, apart from daily collective worship, are met.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good: the school is aware of what it needs to do to secure improvement. At all levels there is a clear understanding of how to use monitoring and assessment data.
The strategic use of resources	Very good. Spending is closely linked to the school's priorities for development and there are very good systems to ensure that funds are used effectively.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<p>A high proportion (more than 90 per cent) of those who responded:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ would feel comfortable approaching the school with any problems; ▪ believe the school expects their child to work hard and make progress; ▪ feel the school works closely with parents; ▪ believe that their children like coming to school; ▪ believe that teaching is good. <p>Around 90 per cent :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ think the school helps their children to become mature and responsible; ▪ believe their child is making good progress; ▪ believe the school is well led and managed. 	<p>Of the parents who responded, around 20 per cent thought that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ they had insufficient information about how their child is getting on; ▪ the school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.

Around three hundred parents responded to the questionnaire, an unusually high number. The vast majority was very supportive of the school. The inspection team agree with many of the positive views expressed about the school. The inspection team feel the information to parents about how their child is getting on is very good and that the range of activities offered outside lessons is very good.

At the parents' meeting, the view was expressed that the homework timetable was not clear and was not always adhered to. Pupils receive the right amount of homework, but inspection findings confirm parents' views on the homework timetable.

ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form of this 11-18 comprehensive school is of average size and has 181 students. The numbers have increased steadily over the last five years, as the school has become increasingly popular. Twenty-two students are from ethnic minority backgrounds. The sixth form provides a wide range of A-level and AS courses, and a few vocational courses. Nearby local colleges provide more vocational courses. About 77 per cent of students in Year 11 continue their education full time at age 16. Around 47 per cent of Year 11 elects to enter the school's sixth form. The school is now attracting about 11 per cent of sixth form students into the sixth form from other local schools. The school allows students into the sixth form for two-year courses with a minimum of four A*-C grades at GCSE, if it is felt they would benefit from the course. Students with a broad range of abilities are represented within the sixth form.

HOW GOOD IS THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form provides a good quality of education and is cost effective. Students make good progress and often achieve better results than would be expected from their previous attainment. Results are similar to those in most schools but students represent a wider than average range of ability. Teaching is good, and frequently very good or excellent in almost half of the lessons. Students are supported well, particularly through the careful monitoring of their academic work. They are encouraged to improve the quality of their academic work and to develop into mature, independent young adults within a supportive environment.

Strengths

- Students make good progress and often achieve better results than their GCSE grades would predict.
- Teaching is good, and frequently very good or excellent.
- Careful monitoring and target setting help students to improve.
- The sixth form provides good opportunities for students' personal development.
- A broad range of A and AS classes is provided.
- Leadership and management of the sixth form are very good.

What could be improved

- Procedures for registration.

THE QUALITY AND 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	Good. Whilst results in recent years have been below the national average, standards of attainment currently in both Year 12 and 13 are at least in line with national expectation. Teaching is consistently good or better and assessment is very good. Students in Year 12 have made significant progress in the six weeks they have been on the course.
Chemistry	Good. Students are achieving in line with or better in relation to their prior attainment. Students are taught well in good accommodation and their progress is carefully monitored. More ICT resources are needed.
ICT	Good. This is the first year the course has been taught and attainment is at the expected level. Students are making good progress and the quality of teaching and learning is good.
Music technology	Very good. This is a newly introduced course, which attracts a wide range of students. In 2002, results were good and teaching was at least good and often very good.
Art and design	Satisfactory. Results in 2002 showed some improvement over the previous year. Standards of work seen are broadly in line with the national average. Learning and teaching are satisfactory overall but assessing and recording systems currently lack rigour.
History	Very good. Results are in line with the national average. Teaching is very good and students respond very well.
Psychology	Very good. Teaching and learning are very good and students make consistently good progress. Results have usually exceeded expectations. Uptake has increased dramatically and standards are rising.
English	Very good. Results are around the national average. Teaching is very good. Oral work is well above average.
German	Satisfactory. Few candidates follow the course. They make good progress and teaching is good. Standards are around average, but constrained, particularly in oral work, by small group sizes.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are supported and guided	Tutors know the students very well and make good use of assessment information to ensure that they make good progress. They are sensitive to students' situations, listen to their views carefully and support them in achieving their goals. Guidance for the next stage of life is very effective. Students are given responsibility for their own decisions in a supportive environment; except in the case of registering their attendance, this works effectively and helps students to mature.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form.	Very good. The drive for improvement and inclusion in the main school is also manifest in the sixth form but it also has its own ethos and identity. Students perform well in public examinations in relation to their prior attainment and their progress is carefully monitored. Financial management is very secure and the sixth form is cost effective.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Choice of courses▪ Course information▪ Helpful and constructive advice▪ Help to settle well in sixth form▪ Teachers are accessible for help▪ Students enjoy being in the sixth form	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Information about progress▪ Careers advice▪ Assessment of work▪ Activities and enrichment courses

The school has established some very good links with the community and partner institutions, and these links have a positive impact on students.

Links with higher educational institutions complement students' careers guidance, and provide students with a good insight into higher education. The school's links with business and commerce enable students to experience mock interviews, whilst links with the community provide students with good social experiences; for example, students experience working with disabled people at a local special school.

Overall, students' views of the sixth form are positive. In the questionnaire completed by approximately 83 per cent of students, a high proportion agreed that teaching is good and that teachers are helpful and accessible should they have any problems. They are helped to study and research independently, and students feel that their work is thoroughly assessed and constructive comments are designed so that they know what to do to improve. Students feel their chosen courses are suited to their talents and aspirations, information about courses is clear, accurate and helpful, and they receive helpful advice. They feel that they are treated as responsible young adults.

A significant minority of students expressed concerns about the limited range of activities and enrichment courses provided by the school, and the availability of careers advice from the careers service in the students' questionnaire. These views were not supported by a significant number of students in discussion with inspectors. Discussions with students and

head of the sixth form indicate the provision for careers is very good. There are good links with the careers service and institutions of higher education. Regular interviews and guidance ensure students have a clear picture of their progress and future career opportunities.

COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

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

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS

The school's results and pupils' achievements

- 1 When they come into school at the age of 11, pupils' attainment in the national tests, which they took at the end of primary school, varies from year to year but is generally a little below average. A significant number have done particularly well but even more have not reached the level expected for their age.
- 2 Results in the 2001 National Curriculum test for pupils at the end of Year 9 for English, mathematics and science were close to the national average overall, indicating that pupils make more progress than in most schools at this stage. However, over the five years up to 2001 the school's performance has not increased as quickly as the national trend and results have not quite met the school's targets.
- 3 Over this same period boys have performed slightly above their national average, whilst girls have performed slightly below theirs. Results for 2002 are below average overall. The percentage of pupils obtaining the average levels in English was in line with the national average. For mathematics it was below the national average and it was well below in science. The percentage of pupils obtaining the higher levels was in line with the national average; these pupils did well. Compared with similar schools, attainment was average in English and mathematics and well below in science. Attainment in mathematics and science was adversely affected by staffing difficulties, which have subsequently been resolved. In science, attainment was further affected by the building programme which is now complete.
- 4 Standards of work seen in the school up to Year 9 match this picture for English and mathematics with pupils reaching the standards expected for their age. This is also the case for science, which is better than the 2001 results indicate and partly reflects the department's new accommodation and more stable staffing. In other subjects up to Year 9, standards are at the expected levels in design and technology, geography, history, ICT, art, music, physical education and religious education. In modern languages they are higher. Pupils are making good progress in most subjects and appropriate progress in the rest. Pupils with special educational needs make very good progress as a result of the specialist support they receive. The small number of pupils who are at the early stages of learning English receive intensive support on entry to the school, and many pupils have progressed to being confident language users. They are well represented across all levels of attainment and most pupils make good progress.
- 5 The school has improved its performance in GCSE examinations considerably. The proportion of pupils achieving five or more passes at grades A*-C in 2001 was above the national average and well above the performance of similar schools. The school's average points score, which takes into account all grades awarded, not just grade C and above, has also risen faster than the national trend, reflecting good improvement overall. This measure is now close to the national average but is not as high as the five A*-C measure. This is because pupils of the lower abilities do not make such good progress as the higher ability pupils. As a result, a smaller proportion achieves five or more grades A*-G than in most schools and this brings the points score down. Although in many subjects a larger proportion of pupils than usual achieved a grade, not as many go on to achieve the higher grades of A and A*. This also reduces the points score and means that the highest achieving pupils are not achieving as well as they might.

- 6 Results at GCSE for 2001 were close to national averages for most subjects. They were well above average in art and design, French, German, geography and vocational subjects. They were below in science. The standards of work seen in the school are now better in science and often above expectations for pupils' ages. This is a result of better, more sustained, teaching and accommodation which provides pupils with the opportunity for practical work. In other subjects they reflect the GCSE results described above. Pupils are making at least satisfactory progress in all subjects through Years 10 and 11 and progress is good overall in mathematics, science, art and design, geography, history, modern languages and music. Pupils with special needs make very good progress. In several subjects more able pupils make relatively better progress than less able pupils, partly because GCSE courses suit them better. In a few subjects, including modern languages, the most able pupils are not stretched enough and do not achieve the very highest grades. The attainment of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds was in line with that of other pupils.
- 7 In 2002, the percentage of pupils obtaining five or more A*-C grades was lower than in 2001. The percentage of pupils obtaining one or more A*-C grades increased slightly. Comparisons with national figures were not available when the report was published. All pupils who took GNVQs obtained at least a pass.
- 8 Throughout the school, standards of numeracy are in line with national expectations. Pupils are usually able to progress well in all subject areas by using required skills at a level sufficient to promote good learning.
- 9 In science, average Year 7 pupils plot simple line graphs to show energy transfers and able Year 11 pupils plotted and interpreted a graph to demonstrate how the rate of chemical reaction is affected by the temperature at which the reaction takes place. In geography, modern foreign languages and ICT, pupils demonstrate standards of numeracy at least in line with their ability in the subject. In other curriculum areas they are in line with their ability. In physical education, however, the inability to appreciate the size of a 45° angle hindered the progress of some pupils learning to shoot in basketball.
- 10 Levels of literacy on entry are below average. A significant minority of pupils join the school with reading ages well below their actual age. In 2002 there were 25 pupils out of 177 in Year 7 with a reading age of lower than eight years. These pupils are seen individually for intensive support with reading and receive assistance in lessons. This support is sustained, when necessary, with a reduced number of pupils through Years 8 and 9. For the larger number of pupils with less severe reading problems, there is ample support, ranging from paired reading with senior pupils in tutor time, to catch-up sessions with the learning support department and booster classes in the English department. Pupils' progress is carefully monitored in relation to National Curriculum levels, and the great majority make good progress throughout Years 7, 8 and 9. This improvement in literacy forms the basis for good progress throughout the wider curriculum and results in pupils achieving higher standards than are indicated by their attainment on entry.
- 11 All the pupils attached to the VI unit are successfully following National Curriculum programmes of study. The older pupils in Years 10 and 11 are all in line to achieve success in GCSE examinations. Overall, their attainment matches that of similar pupils who are not visually impaired.

Sixth form

- 12 Results in the sixth form are close to the national average. This represents good progress considering the starting points of students when they join the sixth form. The great majority do better than would be expected from the GCSE results and only very few do less well.

- 13 Work seen during the inspection was at the expected level for the course in mathematics, chemistry, history, ICT, modern languages, music technology, art and design and religious education. Standards are above average in English, design and technology and psychology. They are even higher in geography. Students are making good progress and achieving well throughout the sixth form.
- 14 In 2001 the most successful sixth form courses were history, sociology and communication studies. In English literature, design and technology, physics and religious education students also performed above the national average. Results in art and design, chemistry and mathematics were lower than in most schools and in biology were well below. In 2002, students attained well given their previous results.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

- 15 Pupils' attitudes, behaviour and personal development are all good and have been maintained since the last inspection. Overall, attendance is satisfactory, broadly in line with national averages; however, unauthorised absence is above the national average.
- 16 Discussions with pupils in all year groups indicate that they have positive attitudes to learning. They say that they enjoy coming to school, all identify favourite subjects, and most pupils participate in the wide range of extra-curricular activities provided by the school. Most pupils are interested in what they are doing and take an active part in their learning. They listen carefully to their teachers' instructions, maintain concentration for appropriate periods of time and make positive contributions to classroom discussions. For example, in a Year 11 history lesson where pupils were studying Britain during World War II, pupils showed very positive attitudes; they worked well and tried very hard, and as a result made very good progress in the lesson. Most pupils take a pride in their work and are willing and able to talk about it and explain their ideas to inspectors.
- 17 The attitudes of pupils with special educational needs to all aspects of school life are very good. Pupils and their parents accept the recognition of learning difficulties without embarrassment and welcome the help and support provided. Pupils are actively involved in monitoring their own progress and take evident pleasure in success. Hard work and determination to overcome difficulties are outstanding characteristics of these pupils. Many give up their recreational time to attend extra lessons.
- 18 Visually impaired pupils make remarkable gains in self-confidence and independence, enabling them to cope with all the demands of a large and complex secondary school. They do not allow their impairment to interfere with their obvious determination to take full advantage of all aspects of school life.
- 19 Behaviour in the school is good. Most pupils observe the school's code of conduct and respond effectively to the system of rewards and readily accept the principle of sanctions as an appropriate response to poor behaviour. In almost all lessons, behaviour is at least satisfactory, and is often good or better. For example, in a Year 9 history lesson where pupils were considering slavery in America, pupils were very well behaved throughout the lesson, demonstrated very mature attitudes, concentrated well and shared their opinions and findings with each other, and therefore made very good progress in their learning. Nevertheless, in a minority of lessons, behaviour is unsatisfactory, and on occasions disrupts the learning of others. This is linked to the quality of teaching and teachers' inconsistent application of behaviour management strategies. Outside lessons pupils of all backgrounds interact well together. Before and after school, at lunchtimes and breaks, they chat and socialise together without any signs of rowdy or boisterous behaviour. Generally, pupils treat school equipment with care and respect.

- 20 The behaviour of pupils with special needs observed in learning support was always exemplary. In mainstream classes, when the lessons are well structured and they are provided with appropriate work, their behaviour matches the good standards observed in all pupils. Pupils are very tolerant of each other's weaknesses and mainstream peers consistently show patience and understanding. These constructive relationships, which are skilfully fostered by teachers, contribute much to the high standards of behaviour evident in the school.
- 21 Bullying is an occasional problem but the school has in place an anti-bullying policy that makes clear bullying will not be tolerated, and both parents and pupils have indicated that these procedures are effective. Inspection of the school's exclusion records indicate that both permanent and temporary exclusions are high in comparison with schools of similar type and size and that almost half of excluded pupils last year were from ethnic minority groups. However, the use of permanent exclusion has been as a result of repeated violent conduct towards staff and pupils, and temporary exclusions are generally 'one off' and justified in the circumstances. The school has procedures to ensure pupils receive appropriate work to complete whilst temporarily excluded and to reintegrate them back into the school. A major element of the school's improvement plan is to improve behaviour management and reduce the incidence of exclusions. During the inspection relationships between different ethnic groups were good and pupils treated each other with respect.
- 22 Pupils make good progress in their personal development. Relationships between staff and pupils are good; so too are relationships between pupils. These relationships have a positive impact on pupils' learning. One example of this was in a Year 10 science lesson when pupils were engaged in practical work looking at the reaction of metals with acids. Pupils showed a keen interest in the lesson, worked very well in groups, discussed sensibly with each other and concentrated well on their work, and therefore made very good progress in the lesson. Pupils are developing their understanding of other people's cultures and beliefs, and are encouraged to reflect on the impact of their actions on others, mainly through their studies in religious education and personal, social, citizenship and health education (PSHE). For example, in a Year 8 PSHE lesson, pupils from a tutor group whose behaviour had been unsatisfactory were asked to consider what was wrong with their behaviour. Pupils were able to reflect and identify why their behaviour was deemed unacceptable and discuss together in small groups how to improve. Pupils in all year groups show a willingness to assume additional responsibilities, undertaking a range of duties as classroom monitors, and serving on the school council. Year 8 pupils operate a 'Buddy System' for Year 7 pupils, whilst pupils in Years 10 and 11 operate the SMILE initiative, which is a pupil-to-pupil mentoring system. Pupils receive training from the Education and Welfare Service to help them provide the service, and take these duties seriously. Many pupils are involved in raising funds for charity, and, similarly, pupils take on considerable responsibility through the music department, to help produce whole school musical shows, such as the 'Brazilian Show' and the musical 'Grease'. Prefects are portrayed as good role models and are attached to tutor groups in Years 7 to 9, to give help and guidance to younger pupils.
- 23 Particular emphasis is given to the personal development of pupils with special needs. All make significant gains in social skills, study skills, personal confidence and the many other abilities that are necessary for independence, both in the mainstream school and adult life.
- 24 Attendance is satisfactory. Overall, attendance is broadly in line with national averages whilst unauthorised absence is above national averages. Good alternative arrangements are made for some disaffected pupils in Year 11, who respond well to working in a more adult, work-related environment. Registration is undertaken morning and afternoon and meets statutory requirements.

Sixth form

- 25 Students' attitudes to learning in the sixth form are positive. Students have settled well into the sixth form routines and show a good level of interest and commitment to their studies. They value the support of their teachers who, they say, are readily available to give guidance and support. They are developing very well their ability to work independently, whilst demonstrating the ability to work co-operatively in pairs and small groups. Students' responses to the student questionnaire, whilst generally supportive, contained some negative views. However, neither discussions with a significant number of students during the inspection nor evidence collected supported these negative views. In discussions, students indicated that courses are available to meet their needs, they received constructive advice about the sixth form, they feel that they are treated as responsible adults and they enjoy being in the sixth form. Students use their own initiative to identify and raise funds for charitable causes.
- 26 Overall, attendance in the sixth form is satisfactory. However, the school's official attendance data show attendance below 90 per cent. This is primarily due to the school's registration procedures. There is no formal registration in the sixth form; students are responsible for signing in on arrival. The head of sixth form indicates that official records are not amended even when it is known that some students are in school but have not signed in. These procedures have health and safety implications, and the school should review these procedures to ensure the school have accurate information of the number of students who are in attendance.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS AND STUDENTS TAUGHT?

The teaching of pupils aged 11-16

- 27 In the main school, teaching and learning are good, and better in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9. In around three in ten lessons, teaching was very good or excellent. There was very little teaching that was less than satisfactory, around one lesson in 20, most of which was in Years 7 to 9.
- 28 In Years 7 to 11, in English, mathematics and science and most other subjects, teaching and learning were good. In history in Years 10 and 11, teaching and learning were very good. In physical education, religious education and art and design throughout the main school, teaching in lessons was satisfactory. The most striking and unusual feature of teaching in this school is consistency: all aspects of teaching are good overall in Years 7 to 11. Whilst some individual teachers or departments have aspects of teaching they need to develop, there are no aspects of teaching which are general weaknesses across the school.
- 29 The good lessons in school are characterised by clear aims and objectives which are reviewed at the end of the lesson. Pupils understand what they are trying to achieve and respond well to the work set. Teachers have a good level of subject expertise which they use to stimulate and involve pupils and to develop the skills and expertise demanded by their subject. Pupil management is very effective and lessons have a calm and purposeful ethos which allows pupils to work hard and with concentration. In most lessons boys and girls are equally involved, but in a small minority of lessons, girls are rather passive and teachers encourage them to be more involved. A strong feature in many departments is the way in which the close knowledge teachers have of individual children's ability and progress is used in a sensitive manner to support them in their learning. One example of this was a Year 11 science lesson on the carbon cycle where the teacher used knowledge of the pupils to target appropriate questions and to check understanding. Pupils felt confident to respond and concentrated well. Basic skills are competently taught and teachers' planning demonstrates high expectations of

pupils' learning. A broad and appropriate range of teaching methods is used to develop pupils' knowledge, understanding and independence. Good use is made of time and resources, and there is a very effective professional partnership between teachers and learning support assistants which allows all pupils to take an active and successful part in lessons. Good pupil management, particularly with pupils demonstrating challenging behaviour, is a particularly strong feature of the school. The quality of teaching is a major contributory factor to the good progress made by pupils.

- 30 The teaching and learning of the small number of pupils with English as an additional language are good. Teachers throughout the curriculum are familiar with the nature and level of pupils' problems with language. Language support staff are particularly skilled in helping such pupils. Some departments, such as English, have had detailed in-service training in this area. Pupils are enabled to become engaged and involved in the full range of planned activities.
- 31 The teaching of literacy across the curriculum is satisfactory. In response to the whole school initiative on literacy across the curriculum, staff in departments have incorporated the use of writing frames and other techniques to help pupils to develop their written work. History, in particular, has concentrated upon encouraging extended writing. As well as the provision of key words in almost all departments, the setting of tasks closely matched to pupils' level of attainment is increasingly practised.
- 32 Teaching is satisfactory overall in art and design, religious education and physical education, although there are many examples of good and very good teaching. In the lessons that were satisfactory, there were a number of strong features, for example good subject knowledge, good relationships and pupils made reasonable progress. In art and design, some opportunities were missed to explore and extend pupils' understanding, and pupils had experience of a fairly narrow curriculum and did not have sufficient access to new technology. In lessons taught by non-specialists in religious education, a lack of subject expertise inhibits pupils' learning and attainment. In some subjects, for example religious education and physical education, teachers need to have a better understanding of how pupils are currently performing to help them plan work better. In a small number of otherwise good lessons, in modern foreign languages and history for example, the activities set do not sufficiently challenge the highest attaining pupils, or do not consistently meet the needs of lower ability pupils. The setting of effective homework is satisfactory overall and supports pupils' work in school. Relationships and pupil management are good in almost all lessons, and the homework set supports learning.
- 33 In a few lessons, mostly in Years 7 to 9, the teaching was unsatisfactory or poor. In these lessons, the purpose of the lesson was not always clear to the pupils, the tasks set were not sufficiently challenging or able pupils were held back from further learning until all children understood, and expositions sometimes lacked clarity. On occasions this led to misbehaviour, which was not managed effectively by the teacher. Time was wasted and pupils made inadequate progress.
- 34 Many departments have made progress in developing speaking and listening initiatives but this aspect needs further work. The overall standard of oral work is above average and should be exploited to the full in lessons across the curriculum. A great emphasis has been properly placed upon the development of reading, especially for those with special educational needs. Only in English, geography and history is reading being widely used for research and the extension of learning. Many well-stocked subject areas in the library deserve to be used more. The development of writing is satisfactory.
- 35 Numeracy is taught effectively in mathematics lessons. The generous time allowance for this subject in Years 7 and 8 is being used effectively to develop a clear understanding of the rules for arithmetical operations. In a typical mathematics lesson, the most able pupils in Year 8 were engaged by the teacher, in lively discussion and testing with calculators. This helped the pupils to develop a good understanding of how the rules work.

- 36 In other subjects, teachers use terminology correctly and follow the guidance provided by the mathematics department in areas such as graph plotting and setting out calculations. Pupils are able to work consistently in their areas across the curriculum. Overall, the teaching of numeracy across the school is currently satisfactory. The difficulty in replacing the numeracy co-ordinator has meant that there has been no significant guidance in this area since the initial high quality training given to all staff by the head of mathematics in autumn 2001.
- 37 The very good and excellent lessons are distinguished from the generally good lessons by their highly challenging nature, pushing pupils to the limits, and excellent pupil management, which motivates the most challenging pupils. They also involved pupils in being open to new experiences and to revealing emotions. Another strong characteristic was the support and encouragement to pupils to appraise the quality of their own work, which helps to develop an understanding of how to improve. One example was a Year 11 music lesson in which pupils were rehearsing for their GCSE performances; the quality of the performances was good and pupils gave sensitive appraisals of their own and other pupils' work. They also allowed themselves to enjoy and be moved by their appreciation of the beauty of the performance. Another example was a Year 11 mathematics lesson where lower attaining pupils were learning how to solve problems on ratio and proportion. The lesson was very well planned, and a good working environment was generated very quickly, through the use of short, relevant, but demanding activities. Difficult behaviour, in one student, was managed with tact and humour and, through the use of earned praise, the pupil was thoroughly engaged in the lesson and encouraged to try even harder. Clear objectives, excellent pupil management, challenging activities, a demanding pace, and very good relationships enabled this group of pupils to work with interest and strong motivation to solve difficult problems and make excellent progress in their learning.
- 38 The teaching of individuals and small groups withdrawn to the learning support area is never less than very good and often excellent. It is characterised by tremendous enthusiasm that produces a quite remarkable response in pupils who work at great pace and intensity for the whole of each lesson. In-class support provided by learning support assistants is always good and often very good. Teachers and learning support assistants staff work together as fellow professionals to create an effective learning environment for all the pupils in each supported class. Learning support assistants also take particular responsibility for the support of pupils who have emotional and behavioural difficulties. The skill and commitment brought to this work are of great benefit to the pupils learning to control their behaviour and contribute much to the very good order evident in the school.
- 39 In many subjects pupils with special educational needs are in small sets, where work of suitable difficulty and challenge is provided. All teachers show sensitivity to the problems experienced by pupils with special needs and some are very skilled in providing good learning opportunities for pupils who have weak literacy skills and who struggle to retain knowledge. The provision for pupils in unsupported mainstream classes is usually good, except in modern languages and geography.
- 40 Visually impaired pupils spend almost all their time in mainstream lessons. They are supported in a variety of ways. Teachers have been given excellent guidance on the problems experienced by each individual pupil and understand well how to help them overcome their difficulties. Special teaching materials are prepared in advance for each lesson. In-class support is provided according to the pupil's particular needs and the nature of the lesson. Pupils also have ready access to laptops, 'talking' computers and calculators. All are taught keyboard skills. This sophisticated range of support strategies ensures that these pupils learn effectively and make good progress.

- 41 Most teachers know their subjects well and good subject knowledge enables them to use their expertise to stimulate and involve pupils and to develop the skills and understanding demanded by their subject.

Sixth form

- 42 Teaching in the sixth form is good and a significant proportion (almost half) is very good or excellent. It is a significant factor in the good progress made by students who develop a mature and responsible attitude to their own learning. This process is supported by the emphasis given to enabling students to explore and develop their own ideas, through activities such as brainstorming. This was illustrated in a well-structured planning session seen in a Year 12 history lesson on fascism where students collected together their ideas and presented them. Students are encouraged to undertake their own research and independent learning and to reflect carefully on their own work. Teachers use a range of methods to support this self-evaluation process; for example, a video was used to good effect in a Year 13 music technology lesson, providing instant feedback and helping to extend and develop discussion. A video diary encouraged students in a Year 12 art class to reflect more deeply on their own work. Self-evaluation is given a strong emphasis in the sixth form, and helps students to identify what they need to do to improve the quality of their work.
- 43 Students respond well to the high expectations placed on them in most lessons by achieving standards which are good for their abilities. In the best lessons, students are pushed to the limits of their ability in exploring complex ideas and concepts, and sometimes taking the risk of exposing their views and feelings to public view. In a Year 12 English lesson, for example, students made considered and mature responses, sensitively expressed, to other group members about a poem by Wordsworth.
- 44 Another strong feature of the sixth form is that challenging work is made manageable by teachers' close knowledge of students' abilities and learning from previous lessons. This knowledge is used to plan lessons carefully, using a wide range of teaching methods, to make the lesson accessible. Work is carefully staged so that students build their confidence and feel encouraged to continue. Students in a Year 12 psychology lesson on minority influences persisted in their efforts to understand a topic they found difficult because the work built on their prior learning and attainment in history and psychology lessons and because the activities were planned well. The result was that by the end of a fairly gruelling session, they understood the main concepts.
- 45 Teachers have expertise in their subjects and demonstrate their enthusiasm in the way they teach; students respect their skills and respond by becoming interested and motivated. Lessons are usually brisk and students listen attentively, and participate freely in discussions and debate in most subjects. The only exception was in a travel and leisure GNVQ lessons in Year 12 where non-specialist teaching did not provide students with the support needed. Students are sometimes too constrained in German because group sizes are too small for them to develop conversational skills. Relationships in lessons are excellent, and most students acknowledge and appreciate the time and commitment given by the teachers.
- 46 Nine subjects were inspected in detail, whilst others were sampled. In subjects inspected in detail, the quality of teaching and learning was very good in psychology, history, and English, and good in mathematics, ICT, music technology and German. A fuller picture of the strengths and areas for development in teaching and learning in these subjects can be found in the subject sections of the report. Where subjects were sampled, teaching was good overall. The quality of teaching that sixth form students enjoy, and the commitment of their teachers, are significant factors in students attaining their potential in the sixth form.

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

- 47 The breadth and balance of the curriculum are good for Years 7 to 9, and satisfactory for Years 10 and 11. The curriculum overall reflects the school's aims and values, and effectively promotes pupils' development and progress. It prepares them successfully for their next stage of education. Curriculum planning, which was criticised at the time of the last inspection, has improved, and is satisfactory. The quality of schemes of work is now generally good.
- 48 The curriculum offered in Years 7 to 9 meets the requirements of the National Curriculum. Most pupils in Year 7, and about a third in Years 8 and 9, take two modern foreign languages. All take a course in drama in Years 8 and 9. A numeracy strategy is in place and there are good opportunities to explore all aspects in mathematics lessons throughout the school. Staff in all of the departments have been made aware of the need to develop pupils' numeracy skills within their subject areas and to follow conventions such as those for drawing graphs and setting out calculations. Some subjects, for example science, geography, modern foreign languages and ICT, also provide good, planned opportunities for the development of numeracy, but this is not consistent across the school.
- 49 The school policy for literacy is in place and regular meetings of thirty minutes are held for departmental representatives. All curriculum areas have information and materials about writing frames. Various conventions have been established, such as that for spelling to highlight identified weaknesses. Implementation is satisfactory overall, but inconsistent. The reading policy is implemented particularly well in English, geography and history where pupils read widely for research and the extension of learning.
- 50 The school's arrangements for Years 10 and 11 allow students to select, in addition to the compulsory core subjects, a group of subjects which most effectively meet their interests and needs. This provides most students with an appropriately balanced curriculum. The arrangements, however, allow students to decide not to take a modern foreign language if they prefer not to, and not necessarily because it is not a suitable course for them. This has resulted in a much larger proportion than usually seen choosing not to take a modern foreign language. This unsatisfactory arrangement is currently being reviewed. The school has provided good opportunities for individual students to take GCSE examinations in courses not in the school curriculum, as, for example, in Russian, in 2002. The time allocated to teaching, of 25 hours per week, is in line with national guidelines.
- 51 The provision of alternative curriculum opportunities for pupils in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory. The school offers vocational GCSE (for Year 10) or GNVQ courses (for Year 11) in applied business and in ICT. There are, however, no opportunities for pupils to take vocational courses in design and technology or in art and design, which might benefit lower attaining pupils. A small number of pupils participate in courses off the school site, such as CRED (creative education) and ECOS (education for children out of school). These courses provide good opportunities for the pupils who take part in them.
- 52 At the last inspection provision for ICT across the curriculum was judged to be inconsistent. Although a recent audit of subjects has shown significant improvement and a lot of good practice, for example in geography, music, English, and design and technology, there are still some subjects where it is not fully used, for example in art and design where access to new technology is limited. The mathematics and physical education department make limited use of ICT and use is unsatisfactory. The resources for pupils with special educational needs are good, using a range of programs to support pupils' learning in mathematics and literacy. The intranet in the school is well established with a range of resources to support and complement learning.

- 53 The school does not have a co-ordinator for the gifted and talented pupils, although an appointment is imminent. Although individual departments make broadly satisfactory provision in the curriculum for these pupils, there is no overall school policy in place to monitor and ensure the quality and consistency of provision, and there is room for further improvement. Provision for gifted and talented students is a main strand of the school improvement plan.
- 54 There is a very good range of extra-curricular activities, academic, artistic and cultural, and sporting. Pupils in Year 7 have a weekend residential early in the school year, which helps them to get to know each other and to settle in to the school. Pupils have opportunities for fieldwork in geography and history. The school involves pupils in national competitions, as, for example, in the UK Junior Mathematics Challenge for Years 7 to 9. A wide programme of visits, including London museums, art galleries, theatres, and geography and biology field trips are available. The school is also involved in a series of exchange visits to France and Germany and trips to Paris, Amsterdam, Barcelona and New York.
- 55 There has been very good improvement in the special educational needs provision since the last inspection. Most notably, specialist teaching is much better and the deployment of learning support assistants has been considerably improved for pupils on the register for special education needs. Pupils with special needs have full access to the curriculum. Withdrawal for specialist teaching is carefully organised so that pupils' entitlement to the full National Curriculum is not compromised. In Years 10 and 11, the curriculum has been carefully modified to meet special needs. Pupils follow courses that are relevant, manageable and enjoyable. The care with which individual work in the special needs department is designed to support the curriculum is a strength of the department. Identification of pupils with special needs is thorough and detailed and the very thorough individual education plans provided by the learning support department provide appropriate guidance for work in the mainstream classroom.
- 56 Provision for pupils with visual impairment is very good. The VI unit has comprehensive records of the medical and educational histories of all the pupils in their care. The information is used to ensure that support enables pupils to access the full range of curricular opportunities.
- 57 Pupils with special educational needs enjoy and benefit from the same range of opportunities as their mainstream peers. In addition, pupils who have emotional and behavioural difficulties, or who lack maturity, are given a great deal of individual help to develop their understanding of right and wrong and to improve their social skills.
- 58 Provision for pupils with English as an additional language is good. The teacher with responsibility for pupils for whom English is an additional language works for the local education authority's equality services and devotes one day per week to pupils in Highdown School. Pupils are effectively identified on entry to the school and are tested to distinguish between specific language problems and other possible special needs. Very detailed records are kept of pupils' progress which is constantly monitored. There is very productive co-operation between equality services and departments in school. Pupils make good progress. Staff in all departments are well informed about pupils at different stages of their acquisition of English. All learning support assistants receive training in appropriate teaching methods, as do newly qualified teachers. Pupils joining the school with little or no English receive intensive support. Many pupils are now confident language users and no longer need assistance. Such pupils are well represented across the whole range of levels of attainment. This important aspect of the school's work is well managed.

- 59 To raise teachers' awareness of opportunities for pupils' personal development in their subject areas the school held an audit of the curriculum. This led to improvements in the schemes of work. At the last inspection provision for pupils' spiritual development was unsatisfactory. Since then there have been significant improvements and provision is now good. The school has actively sought to become a community of mutual support. It has created a climate in which individuals value each other. The spirit is inclusive and integrates all, whatever their gifts or impairments. The culture is one of respect for the beliefs and feelings of all pupils in the school and beyond. In the main, tutors do not use 'Thought for the Day' effectively. Pupils rarely experience collective worship, largely because there is no appropriate building in which it can be held. Religious education has been added in Years 10 and 11 and pupils now follow a GCSE course learning about Christianity and Islam. The improvements are substantial but opportunities continue to be missed, particularly in the daily act of worship, where the school does not meet statutory requirements
- 60 Provision for pupils' moral development has also been improved by the addition of religious education in Years 10 and 11 and is now very good. The school has a well-understood code of behaviour. The rights and wrongs of life feature in many lessons and help pupils to gain a mature sense of morality. Moral issues arise and are discussed in different subjects. The programme of personal, social, citizenship and health education is a carefully planned and structured sequence of topics that develops moral awareness. These lessons also promote moral responsibility. They have been strengthened by the addition of citizenship. Pupils in Year 7 told inspectors that they valued discussion of issues of right and wrong. The addition of religious education in Years 10 and 11 has provided pupils with the opportunity to consider moral issues from an informed religious point of view. By also adding drama to the curriculum the school has made a significant improvement to its provision for moral development.
- 61 Provision for pupils' social development has been improved by the addition of citizenship and is now very good. The headteacher and senior management of the school share a vision for pupils of personal initiative and social responsibility. The programme of personal, social, citizenship and health education includes units on key skills necessary to become an independent and motivated learner. Opportunities for collaborative learning occur in some subjects, such as history, but not in others, such as mathematics. Pupils learn to work together by working in pairs or groups. They appreciate the range of extra-curricular activities, including sports, that develop their social skills. Pupils benefit from the experience of being prefects because they make a varied and valued contribution to the life of the school. An annual production such as 'Grease' provides opportunities for many pupils to develop socially. The school council is being re-established as a practical expression of the school's commitment to the development of the skills of citizenship. The introduction of citizenship has made good provision very good.
- 62 Provision for pupils' cultural development is very good. The school itself is a resource of ethnic and cultural diversity that enriches pupils' experience. The leadership creates a climate of respect for all races and cultures. The library reflects a school that acknowledges the riches of diversity. Drama provides further opportunities for development of sensitivity and cultural diversity. Music is a source of personal enrichment, particularly for those who choose to follow and accept the discipline of an examination course. In Year 7, pupils are pleased to learn about the range of cultures expressed in religions, from Christianity and Judaism to Buddhism. In Years 10 and 11 pupils now have the experience of learning about the contribution of religion to their own and other people's cultural traditions. They learn about the similarities and differences between Christianity and Islam, although at this stage the majority do not make enough progress to be entered for the examination. The introduction of religious education and drama has helped to make good provision very good.

- 63 The management of the PSHE course is good. A curriculum has been carefully prepared which provides a progressive course across all years in the school and contains the essential elements of health education, sex education and drugs awareness. Teaching of PSHE is carried out mainly by form teachers in tutor time. The quality of teaching is good. Teachers carefully prepare for the lessons and ensure that they are familiar with the material they are asked to teach. As a result, pupils' personal and social development is good.
- 64 The emphasis of work with pupils in the VI unit is on independence and the right of these pupils to lead normal and fulfilled lives. Their positive attitudes and the cheerful way they cope with school life are clear evidence of success. The comprehensive records of the medical and educational histories of pupils kept by the visual impairment unit are used to ensure that support enables pupils to access the full range of curricular opportunities.
- 65 Careers education is good. A coherent programme begins in Year 7 and all pupils in Years 7 to 9 receive a half term of careers education each academic year as part of the citizenship programme. These sessions are delivered by the form tutors who receive regular training sessions. The programme of events in Year 9 includes visiting speakers to talk about a range of job opportunities. Careers advice is also part of the options programme in Year 9 in order to help pupils make an educated choice of subjects to pursue to examination level. The school works closely with the careers advisory service and all pupils in Year 10 receive a one-to-one interview on careers advice. These interviews vary in length and are adjusted to meet the needs of the individual. Pupils in Year 11 follow the Associated Examination Boards Life Skills course, a course that covers a variety of skills and how to manage a career. The school has received the advanced level Quality Award for Careers, a prestigious award for recognition of the work that the school does for careers education. The programme in Years 10 and 11 includes work experience for pupils in Year 10. In order to get an appropriate placement for pupils, parents are involved at an early stage and are encouraged to help find suitable positions for their children. Parents are also encouraged to take part in the 'Take your daughter to work day.' Good links are made with local businesses with visiting speakers and visits to companies.
- 66 The school has established very good links with the local and wider community, and these links have a very positive impact on pupils' learning. The local police, fire service and community health organisation make a positive contribution to the school's PSHE programme, for example giving talks on drugs education. Links with local business and commerce offer pupils a wide range of opportunities, many participating in competitions, including young chef, mock trial, public speaking and multi-media arts events. In addition, all pupils in Year 10 are provided with work experience placements. There are effective links with local colleges, which include ICT training for parents. The school provides mathematics classes to Year 7 parents, designed to assist parents to support their children's work at home.
- 67 The school has very good relationships with partner institutions. They have established very good transitional arrangements from Year 6 to Year 7, co-ordinated by the manager of Year 7, and include the special educational needs co-ordinator and the educational welfare officer. Both curricular and pastoral links are very strong and the arrangements ensure that pupils settle well into appropriate tutor groups and that teachers are well aware of students' academic progress and specific needs. Parents and tutors are involved in an open evening and a useful information pack is provided. The school has good procedures to ensure that pupils settle in, including a 'Buddy System' that involves Year 8 pupils providing advice and support to tutor groups, at lunch and break times, and before and after school. Early in the term there was a Year 7 'Bonding Weekend'. Virtually all of Year 7 accompanied by staff, the education welfare officer, and Year 8 buddies attended. The weekend consisted of a mixture of literature, numeracy, social and team building skills. Discussions with pupils indicate that the

weekend was a great success. These links are further strengthened by secondary teachers teaching in primary schools, for example modern foreign languages and mathematics teachers, and the provision of ICT training for primary teachers.

- 68 The school has very good links with other secondary schools, particularly at sixth form level. These links ensure that pupils are aware of the diversity of choices available to them post 16, including employment. Pupils are provided with good quality information on their achievements to date, and the choices available to them relative to their personal ambitions. All pupils have the opportunity of a personal interview with the head of sixth form to discuss and consider their future options. A number of pupils have access to good alternative provision in Year 11, working in partnership with the local education authority and a national company.

Sixth form

- 69 The curriculum for Year 12 and 13 provides overall good breadth and balance. It promotes students' development and progress well, and prepares them successfully for their next stage of education. It is largely based around traditional AS and A-level courses. The range of subjects offered, which has been expanded since the time of the last inspection, is good. Students have a free choice as to which subjects they wish to study in the sixth form, and the timetable is constructed so that virtually all are able to have their choices met. Students may choose to take vocational courses in foreign languages in commerce, business, and ICT. This is a very small range, but is based on the school's experience that when more were offered few students chose to take them. Key skills are taught through the A-level curriculum and students have good opportunities for personal development through a well-planned Life Skills programme. There are good links with the community through, for example the Young Enterprise Scheme in which students set up business ventures, and the Engineering Education Scheme.
- 70 There is a good range of extra-curricular activities – academic, artistic and cultural. Some students travel abroad, as, for example, on art trips to Paris and New York and work experience in Germany. There are good opportunities for students to be involved with local community activities. Students are involved in fund-raising activities for charity. Some, for example, participated in a parachute jump to raise funds for MIND. A significant minority of students feel that the school does not provide sufficient opportunities for extra-curricular activities. The school, however, encourages the students to organise their own activities whenever possible, as a part of their personal development.
- 71 Students in the sixth form enjoy much of the provision available to the rest of the school. They also have many opportunities specific to them. The sixth form has its own accommodation and has a social life of its own. Students say that the school treats them as responsible young adults. The tutors provide students with very good personal and academic monitoring. Students receive very good advice on their future education and careers. Provision for religious education comes through Faith Days on which visiting speakers come to talk about topics such as 'Religion and Medical Ethics'. The range of subjects available to students reflects the expectations of contemporary life. The quality of tutorial provision promotes not only success in examinations but also students' own personal development.
- 72 Careers guidance is good overall. There is a separate co-ordinator for sixth form careers who liaises with the careers advisor in the main school. All students meet the careers officer or the head of vocational studies during Year 12, during which time students' work reviews are monitored and adjusted accordingly. Representatives from local businesses visit the school to speak to students. On these occasions students can make arrangements to visit work places. Although there is no planned work experience, students are encouraged to work in the community on a voluntary basis.

The school has good links with Reading and Surrey Universities and representatives visit the school to give advice on aspects of applications procedures. This is also well supported by the school and separate sessions are organised to assist and support students completing applications. Advice is given to students about financial concerns and information about 'gap years'. Good support is given to students about interview techniques. As part of the careers programme in Year 13, students attend mock interviews conducted by representatives from the local Rotary Club. These interviews are carried out on a formal basis. Students are debriefed at the end of the interview and given advice and pointers for improvement. The advice from the local careers service for students in Year 13 has been limited during the past two years, their services being diverted to other areas; however, the advice and support given by the school for students who wish to enter the work place is good and appropriate contacts are made with various business institutions.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

- 73 The school provides a friendly and welcoming environment in which pupils are happy, secure and can learn and develop. Pupils are provided with a good level of educational and personal support. There are good procedures for monitoring and promoting good behaviour and attendance. The provision for pupils with special educational needs, including those with visual impairment, enables them to make good progress and to achieve well. The successful inclusion of these pupils in the school enriches the lives of all pupils.
- 74 The school has in place a health and safety policy that meets statutory requirements. The school's health and safety manager co-ordinates the departmental risk assessment programme. Whilst heads of departments have received guidance on risk assessment, they have not yet received formal training. There are good procedures to ensure the health and safety of pupils on residential and educational visits, including risk assessment. Overall, first aid arrangements are satisfactory. Arrangements for child protection are satisfactory, although the child protection policy does not contain guidance on the procedures to be followed should allegations be made against staff. A senior member of staff is the designated teacher and has received appropriate training; heads of years attend case conferences as required. The designated teacher provides periodic advice and guidance to staff on child protection matters; however, staff have not received formal training to maintain and update their knowledge and understanding of child protection procedures.
- 75 The school's pastoral system is well organised; form tutors and heads of year know their pupils well and are responsive to pupils' needs both inside and outside the classroom. Pupils are valued by staff and continuity of care is enhanced by staying with their form tutors throughout their time in the school. Pupils say that this has increased their confidence in approaching staff should they have any problems of either a personal or an academic nature and that appropriate advice and guidance would be forthcoming. Overall, the pastoral system provides pupils with a good level of academic and personal support. This enables pupils to concentrate on their lessons and has a positive impact on their learning. The high level of exclusions in 2001 was appropriate and reflected care to maintain a safe environment for all pupils.
- 76 Pupils with special educational needs, who are fully integrated into tutor groups, enjoy the same high standards of care and concern with general welfare that are provided for all pupils. In addition, the special educational needs staff and the pastoral system give considerable extra support to pupils whose problems make them less able to cope with the demands of life in a large and complex secondary school. The special needs bases act as a haven for pupils who may be experiencing problems at any time of the school day.

- 77 The degree of extra support given to pupils with visual impairment is subtly varied according to age and need. As pupils become more mature, they are gently pushed into assuming more responsibility for themselves. The confident and competent way that pupils conduct themselves is impressive. Support is not confined to problems resulting directly from visual impairment; pupils experiencing difficulties of any sort can always turn to the unit staff with confidence.
- 78 The main school has good procedures for monitoring and promoting good attendance. Form tutors monitor registers on a daily basis and pursue reasons for absence. If no reasons are forthcoming they advise the head of year, who then makes further enquiries, involving parents should that be necessary. Heads of year meet with the education welfare officer on a weekly basis at which time they discuss and agree appropriate action to be taken in relation to instances of poor attendance. Some pupils who are identified as having poor attendance records are targeted for first day contact if absent from morning registration. The education welfare officer makes contact with parents and makes home visits when necessary, with a view to improving attendance. Pupils are awarded certificates for good attendance and this has motivated some pupils to improve their attendance.
- 79 The school has good procedures for monitoring and promoting good behaviour. The school has in place a comprehensive behaviour management policy, which makes clear that the basis for promoting good behaviour is founded on the quality of relationships in the school, including those between staff, pupils and parents. The policy is supported by a clear code of conduct, displayed in each classroom, and high expectations of pupils' conduct in classrooms. The policy also provides a system of rewards and sanctions. The merit system is popular with pupils, many of whom say it encourages good behaviour. They readily accept the principle of sanctions as an appropriate response to instances of poor behaviour.
- 80 A major change in the school management of behaviour is the replacement of the referral system with a 'back-up' system, whereby teachers can call senior staff for support if pupils' behaviour is disrupting lessons. Disruptive pupils are withdrawn by senior staff and counselled about their behaviour and are either returned to class, or work with the senior member of staff on back-up call. Tutors monitor the behaviour of pupils in all lessons, and take early action to correct poor behaviour, involving parents at an early stage. Heads of year and key stages maintain records of pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning, all of which are recorded on pupils' records held on a central database. The deputy headteacher monitors the back-up and withdrawal system, and evaluates incidents in relation to ethnicity, gender and year groups, with a view to identifying pupils at risk from exclusion. The school has in place good procedures to discourage bullying and oppressive behaviour, and generally these procedures are effective. Overall, the school's procedures are successful in promoting good behaviour, and this has a positive impact on pupils' learning.

Assessment

- 81 The use of assessment to inform curriculum planning was identified as a weakness at the last inspection. The school's marking and assessment policy has been revised and both elements of the policy allow an indication to be given to pupils and to teachers of each child's level of attainment and effort. A two-digit reporting system is used in Years 7 to 9 that allows attainment in relation to National Curriculum levels to be shown. For example, a score of 48 represents a pupil working close to level 5. A score of 49 would indicate the same level of attainment but the odd number indicates that the pupil is not working to potential. This procedure is used across the school but more work needs to be done to ensure consistency.

- 82 The use of assessment data in target setting is clearly in place. National test scores from primary schools are used to set targets for the level of attainment to be reached by the end of Year 9 and the end of Year 9 national test scores are used to set predicted and ambition grades for GCSE and other national tests. Tutors monitor the progress of their pupils on a regular basis and the data is available to all staff through the school's information management system. The use of assessment in teaching is good overall, with particularly good practice evident in English. The tracking of pupils' progress has improved, although this is variable in quality. There is still room for improvement in this respect, particularly with regard to lower achieving pupils in large mixed ability groups in Years 7 to 9.
- 83 The assessment of progress and attainment of pupils with special needs is outstanding. All the learning within the department is automatically assessed within the lesson plans. More formal testing is done regularly and the results are used to evaluate progress and modify teaching where required. Progress across the wider curriculum is monitored by frequent contact with subject teachers and by the careful records kept by learning support assistants who meet regularly to discuss the progress of individual pupils. Attainment of pupils with statements of special educational needs is monitored closely, both to ensure that the requirements of statements are met in full and that the teaching of these pupils is modified according to changing need.
- 84 The progress of visually impaired pupils is monitored almost lesson by lesson. At the first sign of problems, remedial action is taken. Pupils may be withdrawn for 'catch up' sessions, or modifications to the work arranged with subject teachers.

Sixth form

- 85 The school has good procedures for student induction to the sixth form. Students are assigned to tutor groups and for the first two weeks all have morning tutorials at which time any domestic, personal or academic problems can be discussed, in confidence if necessary.
- 86 Students have indicated that the school's induction procedures have helped them to settle into the sixth form and the level of pastoral support enables them to concentrate on their studies.
- 87 Students are provided with a good level of academic support; they say that their work is assessed quickly, and constructive comments on provide good guidance on how to improve their work. This contradicts the view expressed by some students in response to the questionnaire. Tutors maintain good records of students' academic progress that are used to produce termly work reviews, and to set targets for future development.
- 88 Observations of the academic monitoring process in the sixth form, together with the perceptions of sixth formers, confirm that the monitoring of learning and the setting of appropriate targets is done well and complements the self-review process undertaken by students.
- 89 The recorded attendance levels in the sixth form are below 90 per cent. However, discussion with the head of sixth form indicates that this does not reflect the actual attendance levels, which are much higher. This is as a result of students failing to sign in, and therefore on occasions even when students are in attendance they do not appear on the official attendance records. There is a need for these procedures to be revised to ensure accurate records of student attendance are available at all times, in order to ensure their health and safety.

- 90 Overall, advice, support and guidance for students are good. Students say that when they were in Year 11 they received good quality information and guidance about opportunities for continuing their education post 16, primarily from the head of sixth form, who works closely with the careers advisory service. Students were given good quality information about what courses are available and the qualifications that can be obtained. There are open evenings for parents and pupils, at which time they attend an interview with the head of sixth form to look at predicted GCSE results, consider future career ambitions and discuss appropriate courses to match these ambitions. They were also encouraged to attend careers days at other educational establishments and compare prospectuses. On results day, the head of sixth form interviews all students to check results and revise options if necessary. Most students consider that the advice and guidance they received prior to entry to the sixth form was helpful and appropriate.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

- 91 The school's partnership with parents is very good, and has been maintained and extended since the last inspection. The parents at the parents' meeting were supportive, and knowledgeable about the school, and approximately 30 per cent returned the parents' questionnaires. Overall, parents consider the school to be good. The majority of parents are pleased with the progress their children make in their learning, the quality of teaching, the expectation that their children will work hard and the standards of behaviour in the school. Parents also indicated that their children enjoy coming to school, that the school is helping them to become more responsible and mature, that the school works closely with parents and the school is well led and managed. Evidence from the inspection mostly confirms these positive views of the school. A minority of parents expressed some concerns about the school, including the amount of homework their children receive and the information they receive about their children's progress. Inspectors found no evidence to justify these concerns; they consider that the school's homework provision is appropriate, although the homework timetable is not consistently adhered to. Homework makes a positive contribution to pupils' learning, and pupils' annual reports are of a good quality and provide parents with good quality information about their children's progress.
- 92 Parents' involvement in the life of the school is very good. The school works hard to involve parents in their children's learning. There are regular events for parents, including study skills evenings to help parents support their children, mathematics workshops, ICT training and topic evenings, all of which have attracted very good levels of support. The school provides parenting classes and support for parents with disaffected pupils. Form tutors and heads of years indicate they have good relationships with parents and receive strong parental support when required. Very close contact is maintained with the parents of visually impaired pupils throughout their lives in school. The school utilises its links with parents to provide some work experience opportunities. There is an active Parents' School Association, which organises social and fund-raising events. The association has raised substantial funds that have been used to provide additional learning resources. Overall, the school's links with parents have a positive impact on pupils' learning at home and at school.
- 93 The quality and range of information provided for parents are very good. The school prospectus and governors' annual report are presented well and provide a wide range of information about the school and its activities. Pupil planners provide an effective means of two-way communication between parents and the school. In addition, parents receive a parents' handbook, regular newsletters and letters about specific events, that keep them well informed about the school and its activities. This was very apparent at the pre-inspection parents' meeting. Parents are invited to one parents' evening a year at which time they can discuss their children's annual report; however, there are a number of other meetings for parents relating to specific events, for example, the Year 7 'meet the tutors' evening. Attendance at all these meetings is good. Pupils' annual

reports are very good. They give parents an overview of the areas of study, information on pupils' strengths and weaknesses, predicted grades and helpful advice on how pupils can improve their learning.

- 94 In addition to the routine involvement of parents in the education of their children, the special educational needs staff maintain particularly close and regular contact (sometimes daily) with the parents through telephone calls, home visits and meetings in school.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED

- 95 Leadership and management are very good.
- 96 The headteacher came into post shortly after the last inspection, following a period of interim leadership. At that time the school had a number of serious issues to resolve. He has provided outstanding leadership in developing and promoting a shared vision and direction for the school, based on an uncompromising focus on developing a culture of improvement and inclusion. This is developed strongly through all aspects of school life and organisation. This view is shared by the staff of the school, by the governors and by many members of the local community. It is strengthened by the management style of devolved responsibility, giving members of the school community a sense of involvement in and accountability for the school's development. The popularity of the school and the sixth form is increasing and the strong support from parents was demonstrated in the high level of returns from the parents' questionnaire. The headteacher, ably assisted by the deputy headteachers and the leadership group, is continuing to work hard to establish and maintain a purposeful ethos. This has been achieved within a context of staffing issues and serious teacher recruitment difficulties.
- 97 Having established a sense of direction for the school, the headteacher instigated an audit of strengths and weaknesses which led to substantial changes in the leadership group structures, line management and school organisation. These arrangements work effectively and staff now have delegated responsibility and accountability within a clearly defined framework.
- 98 The new structure for the governing body is also working effectively and it has a clear strategic and monitoring role. The governing body fulfils its responsibilities well. Governors articulate a clear and strong vision of where the school is going and the values it represents, and promote the school effectively within the community. They have a close knowledge of the strengths and areas for development of the school, based on good quality information and shared views about the school's priorities. Governors are very active in the school; as well as the usual committees, a governor is available to the school, on a rota basis, once a week. They are fully involved in school improvement planning and the exclusions process and ensure good attendance at governing body meetings. They provide the headteacher with a very good and appropriate level of challenge and support. They have ensured that all statutory requirements, apart from the daily act of collective worship, are met.
- 99 The governing body through the designated governor, the headteacher, the senior staff and all teaching and non-teaching staff share the commitment of the learning support department to maximise the achievement of pupils who have difficulties with learning. Leadership and management of the work within the department and of the whole school provision are very good.
- 100 The school has recently appointed a number of new middle managers as well as those who are longer established. Because of recruitment issues some have been appointed on an unconventional basis, for example as a shared role, or part-time. All are hard working and wholly committed to school improvement and these arrangements are

generally working effectively. Middle managers provide good leadership, with the head of music and mathematics providing outstanding leadership, and the heads of English and geography and the key stage co-ordinators providing very good leadership.

- 101 The head of the VI unit and one of the support staff were in post before the unit was moved; they are very experienced and highly skilled. The integration of the unit into the school has been managed very well. Management and leadership of this provision are very good. Schemes of work, development planning and day-to-day management are generally good and the assessment of pupils' progress is often very good and effective in improving teaching and learning.
- 102 Monitoring was of concern at the time of the last inspection. Monitoring by the leadership group is now firmly established. The school evaluates its performance through detailed analysis of whole-school performance data, line management links with departments and a rolling programme of in-school inspection and review led by the headteacher. Occasionally, this is supported by external review. This ensures that there is a clear view of the strengths and areas for development within the school, which provides a firm basis for further planning and action. It also provides good quality information, which departments and governors use to inform their own development planning.
- 103 A performance management system is in place and is generally operating effectively. All teachers are observed teaching and have agreed targets. The work of departments is regularly reviewed through self-evaluation, analysis of results and sampling of work. Some heads of departments have understood and implemented their responsibility for monitoring and classroom observation well, whilst others need further guidance and support in order to become fully effective. This is recognised as an area for further development in the school improvement plan, and is particularly important given the large number of newly appointed teachers in the school.
- 104 The school's philosophy of strong leadership and devolved responsibility is illustrated through the school improvement planning process. Based on sound information and clear priorities, it is drawn up in partnership with the school community. Middle managers have responsibility for their own actions. The current plan has appropriate priorities, is detailed and costed and is being implemented effectively. There is clear evidence that progress is being made. The school has a clear view of its longer-term vision, priorities and targets, but these are not set out in detail.
- 105 New technology is used well to support the administration of the school; for example, information about pupils' performance is available to all teachers through the intranet.
- 106 Very good progress has been made since the last inspection. The school has a growing reputation, strong leadership, and the confidence and support of the governors and the school community, including parents. Effective systems are in place to continue to promote the culture and ethos of improvement.

Teaching resources

- 107 Learning resources are satisfactory overall and good in some subject areas, for example in ICT where provisions for computers is well above the national average. Resources are good in English and music/music technology and support learning. In mathematics, however, resourcing is just adequate and teachers are building up worksheets from scratch. There is also a limited range of books on mathematics in the library and little use is made of ICT or graphical calculators. In art and design resourcing is just adequate to meet the needs of pupils. There is a need to extend the range of media and materials that is available to pupils and to improve the provision of modern technology. The library is well resourced and has a ratio of nine books to each pupil. A recent overhaul of the library took place just 18 months ago, during which old stock was

replaced by new stock. Approximately 50 per cent of the books were replaced. The library has been given an increased budget for books this year, which will be used to increase the range of books available for pupils' use. The information management systems effectively analyse the usage of books in terms of groups and gender. The absence of individual textbooks for pupils in religious education on the GCSE course hampers pupils' learning.

- 108 The learning support department is adequately resourced with learning materials. There is particularly good use of ICT and access to both hardware and software is good. Many of the learning resources produced within the department are of high quality, imaginative and very effective.
- 109 The VI unit has all the recognised specialised equipment to support pupils, including, for example, 'talking' computers and a 'hot spot' fuser to produce raised diagrams.

Accommodation

- 110 Whilst noting the distinctive nature of the accommodation with its mix of modern and very beautiful old buildings, the last inspection reported that not all areas were ideal for effective delivery of the curriculum. Many of these problems have been dealt with since then. Good new science and music accommodation has been built, a sixth form block has been provided and the swimming pool refurbished. Old buildings, such as the barn, offer an interesting environment to work in despite the lack of heating. The accommodation for the core subjects of English, mathematics and science is now good, as it is in several other curriculum areas. It is never less than satisfactory except for the inside accommodation for physical education which is becoming 'tired' and is just adequate. Improvements have been made to the design and technology area. The major unsatisfactory feature is the continuing lack of an assembly hall and the provision of this is now a major priority for the school. At the moment, the pupils cannot be brought together in large numbers which impedes the development of the school's ethos and cohesion; there are many unsatisfactory ramifications arising from the lack of a single space to house public examinations and there is no suitable space for big-scale shows and concerts to be given, which is critical for a school so strong in the performing arts.
- 111 The condition of the main modern teaching blocks is deteriorating, and they now require significant maintenance to keep them usable and safe. The outside areas are attractive and extensive, offering a good range of outdoor physical education facilities. However, the maintenance of these is contracted out and there are some unresolved disputes with the company resulting in essential maintenance not being done, for example on the tennis court surfaces. Difficulties of appointing caretaking and cleaning staff have been largely resolved. Cleaning is not contracted out and the staff, appointed by the school, do a good job. Litter, which on such a scattered site could become a problem, is kept to a minimum by the vigilance of all the maintenance staff and the respect the pupils have for their school.
- 112 Both teaching and office spaces devoted to special educational needs are adequate and in central locations. Further development of the provision would benefit from these areas being more conveniently sited. The teaching and office accommodation provided for the VI unit is good. Accommodation is unsatisfactory in religious education. The room used by the specialist is good, but non-specialists teach in ten different rooms, which constrains the resources which can be used.

Staffing

- 113 There have been significant changes to the teaching staff since the last inspection. A large number of newly qualified and other staff have joined the school during this time. This means that the match of teachers and support staff to the demands of the curriculum is now satisfactory through Years 7 to 11 and good in Years 12 and 13.

However, in religious education non-specialists teach the majority of lessons in Years 7 to 11 and this has a detrimental effect on learning and attainment. Some heads of department are relatively inexperienced and strategies to ensure additional support are needed. The overall quality of technical support is satisfactory. The school receives good support from a committed team of pastoral support staff and learning support assistants, and the administration staff provide a very good service. The appointment of a bursar has been key to improving the school's efficiency. Procedures to improve teaching have been a focus for staff development. This process is very well co-ordinated. Teachers have given freely of their time to enhance whole school and departmental training events. The school's successful professional development is linked to performance management objectives and school and department development plans. The school now has a monitoring and evaluation programme for teaching. This has helped in raising standards. There are very good centrally co-ordinated systems for the induction of newly qualified teachers. There is now a need to monitor and develop the consistency and quality of monitoring and support these teachers receive within the department. The professional development of all the staff in the school is good and contributes well to their effectiveness. The school has achieved the Investors in People Award.

- 114 There are enough well-qualified specialist teachers of special educational needs but insufficient non-teaching staff to provide all the in-class support needed by pupils. The non-teaching staff all have relevant previous experience. They receive appropriate training opportunities, play a full part in all aspects of work, and are a most effective and dedicated group of professionals.
- 115 During its first year in this school, the VI unit has been understaffed. This deficiency is about to be rectified and will result in a satisfactory level of teaching and non-teaching staff. They provide very good support to pupils. In religious education, the major weakness in provision is the mismatch between teachers' knowledge and the demands of the curriculum. This is particularly true in Years 10 and 11.
- 116 All staff have had in-service training in aspects of literacy. The development of the literacy policy is well managed and is led with great commitment and drive.

Efficiency and finance

- 117 Overall, the school's financial planning and management are very good.
- 118 The governing body is appropriately involved in the school's strategic financial planning. Governors have established a finance committee to consider strategic financial matters. The governing body has established appropriate financial limits for delegated authority, and a register of business interests. These arrangements ensure that the governors are appropriately involved in the development and monitoring of the school's budget and school improvement plan. Overall, the governing body has a good knowledge of the school's finances.
- 119 The school improvement plan clearly identifies educational priorities; these are appropriately costed, and there is a clear link to the school budget. Completion dates and success criteria are provided. Generally, curriculum planning is restricted to the current financial year; however, asset management planning extends over five years. All the resources allocated for the support of pupils with special educational needs and the VI unit, including those provided by the local education authority for the specific support of statemented children, are used efficiently and effectively.
- 120 Overall, internal financial control is very good. The headteacher and bursar work well together to ensure effective financial administration of the school. The bursar has a very good knowledge of the school's finances, and manages the school's finances very well. She has been responsible for some major spending decisions, including the school's new catering contract, that have made substantial savings, together with enhanced

provision. The bursar ensures effective control of devolved budgets and ensures that specific grants are used for their designated purposes. The principles of best value are effectively implemented.

- 121 The latest audit report contained two minor recommendations for improvement to the school's financial procedures, and these have been implemented.
- 122 Overall, the school's administration and day-to-day financial control are effective, and allow staff to concentrate on their teaching and managerial roles.

Sixth form

Leadership and management

- 123 Leadership and management of the sixth form are very good.
- 124 The school's philosophy of devolved responsibility allows the head of sixth form considerable autonomy. Over the last five years, numbers entering the sixth form have grown in line with the increase in numbers of pupils in the main school. The range of courses available has been extended steadily to meet students' needs and preferences. Students perform well in public examinations in relation to their previous achievement. This success is supported by a very effective system for monitoring students' academic progress. Students appraise their own performance and work with subject teachers to set specific, realistic targets for improvement, which are reviewed with form tutors. Review in tutorial sessions is undertaken in a pragmatic and sensitive manner and students' views are given due weight and consideration. They have a clear view of how well they are performing and what they need to do to improve. They are also given support in achieving their future aims and ambitions.
- 125 The sixth form is deliberately accommodated separately from the main school and has its own rules and set of expectations. Students are given considerable autonomy and responsibility and the environment and ethos created encourage them to develop into mature and responsible adults, whilst still providing a good level of care and support. However, the system of students taking responsibility for registering themselves is not working effectively and has health and safety implications.
- 126 Staff are well qualified and have appropriate development opportunities. Resources are generally good, and accommodation is picturesque but just adequate in terms of condition. The barn, used for large groups, is very cold and draughty.
- 127 The sixth form provides a wide range of opportunities for students to develop independence through the taught curriculum and a range of enrichment and extra-curricular activities. The Life Skills programme engages students in arranging visiting speakers to provide information sessions on topics of interest to sixth formers. Support is also sought from the community; for example, the Rotary Club provides useful opportunities for students to benefit from mock interviews, which help students consider how they present themselves.
- 128 Relationships in the sixth form are characterised by mutual respect and students appreciate their teachers' hard work and commitment. The sixth form provides a stimulating and caring environment for the transition from student status to young adult.
- 129 Use of finances is appropriate and the sixth form provides good value for money.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

In order to raise standards and the quality of education further, staff and governors should:

- (1) Raise the attainment of some of the most able pupils by:
 - implementing the strategy for gifted and talented pupils as planned;
 - monitoring planning and teaching more consistently at department level to ensure that lesson objectives and teaching methods provide an appropriate level of challenge for these pupils.
- (2) Raise the attainment of some of the less able pupils by:
 - introducing more alternatives to GCSE courses to meet their needs in Years 10 and 11;
 - monitoring planning and teaching more consistently at department level to ensure that lesson objectives and teaching methods provide an appropriate level of challenge for these pupils.
- (3) Improve the provision for religious education, particularly for GCSE courses in Years 10 and 11, by:
 - providing better support for non-specialist teachers or providing specialist teaching;
 - improving the quality and use of assessment information to improve pupils' learning;
 - reviewing resources and accommodation.
- (4) Improve the accommodation for whole school activities, functions and events by:
 - continuing to pursue funding for a school hall.

In addition to these points, the school should look for ways of meeting the statutory requirement for a daily act of collective worship, and ensure consistent monitoring of lessons at departmental level.

Sixth form

In order to raise standards and the quality of education further, staff and governors should:

- (1) Change the arrangements for registering students' attendance to ensure records are accurate.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 - 11	124
	Sixth form	45
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		46

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

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

Number	9	29	43	37	4	2	0
Percentage	7	23	35	30	3	2	0

Sixth form

Number	3	17	15	10	0	0	0
Percentage	7	38	33	22	0	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	904	181
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	135	9

Special educational needs

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	27	1
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	198	5

English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	87

Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	49
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	36

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	7.5
National comparative data	8.1

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	1.5
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2001	98	100	198

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	47	70	69
	Girls	59	63	54
	Total	106	133	123
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	54 (69)	67 (64)	62 (51)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	33 (33)	41 (39)	30 (20)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	54	70	64
	Girls	61	64	59
	Total	115	134	123
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	59 (70)	69 (68)	63 (52)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	34 (31)	36 (41)	27 (18)
	National	31 (31)	42 (39)	33 (29)

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	2001	83	77	150

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	45	68	76
	Girls	40	66	71
	Total	85	134	147
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	53 (47)	84 (82)	92 (88)
	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	36.4 (38)
	National	39.0 (38.9)

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

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

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

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	19	26	45
	Average point score per candidate	12.7 (12.5)	15.4 (15.1)	14.3 (13.9)
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	18	17.5

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS examinations			For candidates entered for Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All	Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	17	24	41	2	6	8
	Average point score per candidate	12.8	14.9	14.0	12	7	7.2
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.9	17.4	9.8	11.4	10.6

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

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

Ethnic background of pupils

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 pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
798	41	4
26	3	
27		
5		
4		
21		
13		
65	5	
1	1	
1		
34	10	
30	2	
10	5	
6		
8	19	1
36	1	

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	61.8
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.5

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	25
Total aggregate hours worked per week	567

Deployment of teachers: Y7– Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	74.8
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Average teaching group size: Y[] – Y[]

Key Stage 3	24.7
Key Stage 4	21.5

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2001-2002
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	£
Total income	3,077,447
Total expenditure	3,142,991
Expenditure per pupil	2,940.12
Balance brought forward from previous year	147,029
Balance carried forward to next year	81,485

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	15.5
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	16.0

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

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1085
Number of questionnaires returned	286

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	47.1	46.5	4.5	0.6	1.3
My child is making good progress in school.	41.9	47.5	4	1.7	4.5
Behaviour in the school is good.	37.4	50	3.8	1.7	6.8
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	25	62.5	9	2.4	0.6
The teaching is good.	50.3	41.9	3.1	0	4.5
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	39.1	43.3	10.8	2.7	3.8
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	49.6	46.8	2	0.6	0.6
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	46	47.9	2.7	0	3.1
The school works closely with parents.	46.5	47.2	3.4	1	1.7
The school is well led and managed.	43.3	44	5.9	0.6	5.9
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	32.8	56.9	4.5	0.6	4.3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	37.9	42.3	9.5	1.3	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

- Teaching is good overall and often very good.
- Assessment is very good.
- Management is very good.
- Boys' results in GCSE English language in 2001 were above the national average for boys.

Area for improvement

- Girls' results in GCSE English language and literature.

130 Pupils' general standard of attainment at the end of Year 9 is in line with that expected nationally. The percentage of pupils achieving at least level 5 in national tests at the age of 14 in 2001 was below the national average. For those achieving at least level 6 it was average. When compared with all schools and similar schools, the average points score was close to the national average. Boys' performances were in line with their own national average, whereas girls were below theirs. Results in 2002 showed an improvement, especially in girls' performance.

131 The overall standard of attainment at the end of Year 11 matches national expectation.

132 In the GCSE for English language in 2001 the percentage of pupils achieving grades A*-C was marginally above the national average, whereas for English literature it was below. The performance of boys in language was well above their own national average but that of girls was below theirs. Boys' results were in line in literature although girls' were below. Results in language were less good in 2002 but were better in literature.

133 Taking into consideration pupils' levels of literacy on entry, which were below average, they make good progress by the age of 14 and maintain that progress by the end of Year 11. Pupils with English as an additional language make good progress and reach appropriate standards for their ability.

134 The overall quality of speaking and listening throughout the main school is above that found nationally. Pupils listen attentively both to staff and to fellow pupils. They generally answer questions willingly and fluently. Working in pairs and small groups, pupils share ideas freely and arrive at sensible, agreed conclusions. Pupils in Year 11, for example, working on the closing stages of *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck, fed back articulately to the whole class showing good knowledge of the structure and themes of the novel. High attaining pupils in Year 7 preparing autobiographical writing gave confident and lengthy accounts of events in their lives, several of which were both coherent and entertaining. By the age of 14 most of the pupils use standard English and read aloud confidently with lively variation in intonation, pitch and pace. In talk with adults pupils are confident and courteous.

135 In other subjects across the curriculum pupils generally listen attentively. The overall standard of speaking is above average and most of the pupils are fluent and articulate. Discussion is encouraged in mathematics, design and technology, geography and music but is weak in ICT. Group work is effectively used in science, geography, history and music but not in mathematics and modern foreign languages. Pupils make longer spoken contributions in history. There is some encouraging use of speaking and

listening but this aspect of literacy is at an early stage of development in several departments.

- 136 The overall standard of attainment in reading is similar to that found in most schools. A substantial minority of pupils, however, join the school with reading ages well below their actual age. Very good provision is made for them through: withdrawal, for those finding most difficulty; paired reading with senior pupils; catch-up sessions with learning support staff; and booster classes in the English department. As a result of this intensive programme of support, these pupils make good progress throughout Years 7, 8 and 9. The reading comprehension levels of most of the pupils equip them to understand and enjoy a wide range of literature throughout the school. During Year 7, pupils are taught to make use of the excellent library, which is regularly used for lessons. One class of low attaining pupils in Year 8, for example, with assistance from language support staff, enjoyed seeking books for research projects and making the most of the excellent facilities. By the age of 14 pupils have studied in detail various works of literature and identify accurately features such as plot, characters and themes. They discuss and write about texts, showing sound grasp of writers' intentions and use of language. During discussion of a poem by Monisa Alvi, high attaining pupils in Year 10 made clear that they had read the text closely, with mature and sensitive understanding of the cultural and social resonance of the poem. By the age of 16, most of pupils acquire the appropriate language of literary criticism and, in the main, use it accurately.
- 137 In other subjects the standard of reading comprehension of most of the pupils is adequate for them to understand textbooks and course materials. Key words of technical terms are clearly displayed in almost all departments but are not uniformly used well. Pupils read for research and to extend knowledge in geography and history. Not all departments take full advantage of the excellent library.
- 138 By the end of Year 9, the standard of pupils' written work is in line with that found nationally. Pupils write effectively for a variety of audiences and purposes. Their work is usually carefully presented. In response to stimulating and lively teaching, pupils write with enjoyment. High attaining pupils in Year 7, for example, wrote interesting assignments about their experiences which were mainly well planned and accurate in detail. Low attaining pupils in Year 7 find difficulty with paragraphing, sentence structure and expression of ideas, but they do write enthusiastically. Most of the pupils throughout the main school draft their work thoroughly but, even by the end of Year 11, a minority do not read their first version carefully enough and, consequently, fail to correct errors. The best work of high attaining pupils at the age of 16 reaches the highest GCSE grades. Such writing is often in response to literary texts. Assignments on such novels as *To Kill A Mockingbird* and *Of Mice and Men* were based on detailed and mature textual analysis and were well planned, carefully crafted, coherently argued and accurate in expression.
- 139 Written work is generally carefully presented across the curriculum. Writing frames and other aids for pupils to plan writing are used in some subject areas. There is much good, extended writing in history. Marking is generally in line with the whole school policy but, occasionally, it is not sufficiently diagnostic and lacks targets for improvement. The school literacy policy has not yet been fully implemented in everyday classroom practice.
- 140 The quality of teaching throughout the main school is always satisfactory and is good in almost all lessons. In almost half of lessons it is very good. Teachers have very good knowledge and understanding of their subject. Lessons are well planned and prepared, fitting closely into schemes of work. A stimulating range of teaching methods is used, with a wide variety of language activities in most lessons. This contributes to pupils' enjoyment of their work and encourages them to sustain concentration. Because pupils are clear about tasks and know exactly what is expected of them, they behave well. Teachers' skilful use of open-ended questions and group work encourages pupils to

engage in discussion. They are confident that opinions and ideas will be treated with respect and, consequently, they are ready to speculate and explore ideas. Pupils with special educational needs and those from different ethnic backgrounds are thoroughly integrated into classes. Class teachers and support staff work very efficiently together. Tasks match very closely pupils' level of attainment. Detailed records of pupils' progress are kept and are used efficiently in planning tasks at an appropriate level. The great majority of lessons are conducted at pace and with great energy. Relationships in lessons are mutually respectful because pupils know how much teachers care about their development. Behaviour is, on the whole, very good but rare examples of misbehaviour are managed firmly and effectively. Pupils' work is marked conscientiously and consistently, with much positive comment and helpful target setting.

- 141 The curriculum meets statutory requirements. Departmental documentation is clear, helpful and thorough. The literacy strategy has been successfully integrated into schemes of work. Teachers share the same vision and expectation of pupils' behaviour and attainment. The department is very well managed and is led with great energy and vision.
- 142 There have been several important improvements since the last inspection. The most significant is in the quality of teaching, which is now good and was then only satisfactory overall. Other improvements follow from the better teaching. Oral work is even stronger than before, and handwriting and presentation of work are neater. Great attention has been given to more accurate spelling and it is now a key element in the literacy strategy. Lastly, the assessment of pupils' work is now very good and is based upon detailed information from feeder schools, and results of a range of accredited tests, as well as internal assessments.

DRAMA

Overall, provision for drama is **very good**.

Strengths

- Teaching is good.
- Pupils' response is positive and committed.
- In the 2001 GCSE, over two-thirds of pupils achieved A*-C grades.

Area for improvement

- Sensitivity in evaluating the work of others.

- 143 By the age of 14, the overall standard of pupils' work is somewhat above average. This is a considerable achievement bearing in mind that they do not begin the subject until Year 8. Pupils in Year 9 respond enthusiastically and work effectively in pairs and small groups. They control body language and gesture well and are acquiring sound skills in movement and spatial awareness. Some high attaining pupils work at a high level of intensity and react creatively with others, whilst remaining consistently in role. The general quality of oral work is above average. Pupils listen attentively in groups and invent lively improvised dialogue. As an audience, however, when watching and evaluating classmates' presentations, pupils occasionally make unhelpful comments which lack sensitivity.
- 144 In Years 10 and 11, the overall standard of work of pupils following the GCSE course matches expectations. There is, however, a wide range of levels of attainment and some high attaining pupils are working at the level of good GCSE grades. Within classes, boys and girls, pupils with special educational needs, those from different

ethnic backgrounds, and some for whom English is an additional language, all work together successfully and enthusiastically. Pupils in Year 11 were sensitive to others in their exploration of movement, body language and gesture. They worked at pace in planning and developing presentations. Almost all pupils understand the importance of remaining in role, but a few forget the position of the audience when speaking and moving.

- 145 The quality of teaching is never less than good and often better. Lessons are very well planned and prepared. They follow closely the excellent schemes of work which ensure continuity and progression throughout the main school. Organisation in the studio is always good and relationships are mutually respectful. Teaching is creative and stimulating with lessons conducted at a brisk pace and containing a lively mixture of activities. Pupils respond positively to the relaxed yet purposeful working atmosphere. They appreciate the expertise of the teaching and enjoy the energy and pace of lessons.
- 146 The drama studio provides adequate accommodation. The subject is not available in Year 7, which means that a valuable year for establishing basic skills and experience is lost. Departmental documentation is very thorough. Drama makes a valuable contribution to the cultural life of the school through productions and clubs. The subject is well managed with great enthusiasm and energy. Because this is a new subject, there is no comparison with the previous report.

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths

- Standards in lessons are now at least in line with national expectation.
- Achievement throughout the school is good.
- Teaching is usually good. It is often very good and occasionally excellent.
- Assessment is very good. Pupils are taking high levels of responsibility for their own learning.
- Leadership and management of the department are outstanding.

Areas for improvement

- Results in GCSE examinations.
- Implementation of the department's plan to widen teaching styles to make more use of resources and group work.

- 147 At the end of Year 9, the proportion of pupils who gained at least the basic standard expected of 14 year olds in the 2002 National Curriculum tests was close to the national average. This continued a trend of slightly deteriorating performance since 1999, when results were above the national average. Since 1999, results for girls have been below those for boys, whereas previously they were above. In 2002, teacher assessments overestimated the performance of girls in the National Curriculum tests. Results are below those in English and better than those in science. Results, overall, in 2001 were above those for similar schools. Considering standards on entry in Year 7, which are slightly below the national average, these results generally represent sound progress.
- 148 The proportion of pupils who gained grades in the range A*-C in the GCSE examination in 2001 was close to the national average. However, whilst boys performed better than in schools nationally, girls' results were below their national average. In 2002, results overall were below the national average. Considering prior attainment in the national tests, this represents barely satisfactory progress in Years 10 and 11, particularly for girls. Pupils performed worse in mathematics than in most subjects. Whilst the proportion of pupils who gain a grade in the range A*-G is regularly below the national

average, the weakest pupils are entered for the Certificate of Achievement course which is suitably challenging for their ability.

- 149 By the end of Year 9, the standard of work of a larger than expected proportion of pupils is at least at the level expected of 14 year olds. Good teaching throughout Years 7 to 9 helps pupils to think mathematically, to explain their methods to others, to present their work logically and to check answers thoroughly. The highest attaining pupils show a good understanding of how numbers can be represented using indices, with a base number multiplied by itself a number of times to equal the original number. Impressively, they demonstrate good progress by extending this understanding in using fractional and negative indices. Pupils of average ability are achieving well. In a very good lesson, they calculated equivalent fractions so that they could add and subtract them easily. They were confident in changing 'top heavy' fractions to mixed numbers, combining whole and fractional parts, because the teacher told them that if they are frightened of top heavy fractions, the fractions will sense this and come back to haunt them. The teacher's high expectations for all pupils ensured that each member of the class contributed to the discussion, including a girl who has a low attendance record and a boy with English as an additional language.
- 150 Lower attaining pupils, including a substantial number with special educational needs, do at least as well as could be expected. They calculate fractional parts of quantities accurately and the best check whether their answer is reasonable. Pupils in lower classes know rules for multiplying numbers expressed in index form, but do little work to use their mathematics in real-life situations.
- 151 Throughout Years 7 and 8, pupils are grouped in sets by their ability. Progress is good, because they learn good habits of study. Homework is regular, but short, and a review of homework provides a meaningful starting point for most lessons. Pupils are encouraged to grade their own work after its accuracy has been checked during class discussion. The programme of work from the commercial scheme used by the department embraces the philosophy of sharing ideas, with pupils coming to the board to explain their reasoning, and also exploring the flaws in methods used to provide wrong answers.
- 152 In a lesson with Year 8 pupils in a below average group, most pupils showed a sound appreciation of Pythagoras' theorem to help them test whether the triangles they had constructed contained a right angle. They combined this with the more practical approach of measuring angles with a protractor to confirm their findings. Whilst the attainment levels of this class were higher than could be expected from their standards on entry to the school, the extended whole class discussion in this particular lesson frustrated some of the more able pupils who were ready to consolidate their learning individually. The most able pupils in Year 8 showed great enthusiasm and a desire to master completely the rule for ordering the sequence in which arithmetic operations, particularly those of addition and subtraction, should be done. The teacher demonstrated remarkable patience and skill, listening to the well-argued opinions of most pupils, including using evidence from testing on basic and scientific calculators, before leaving them to mull over the issues before the next lesson.
- 153 In a minority of lessons pupils make less than satisfactory progress. This occurs where certain pupils, particularly the most able, are held back because whole class discussion does not move the class forward or where management of pupils is poor. However, in the great majority of lessons, all pupils make good progress, not only in being able to follow procedures for arriving at correct answers, but also in developing a good understanding of and enthusiasm for mathematics.
- 154 Although the attainment of the previous year group was below the national average, the current Year 11 are on course to attain typical national standards. In a good lesson with the top set, the class showed a good understanding of the merits of three different algebraic methods of solving quadratic equations as well as recognising how a graph

could also help estimate the solutions. The teacher's high expectations and clever questioning allowed all of the pupils to consolidate their ability to solve difficult equations and provide alternative methods to test the accuracy of their answers.

- 155 Pupils in middle sets work hard. In a very good lesson, they developed a good grasp of direct proportion. As a result of the teacher's very good use of real-life examples, such as minimum charges for taxi fares and call-out charges for plumbers, pupils became aware of situations where direct proportion does not occur. Pupils in a below average set made outstanding progress. They also learned about direct proportion. They learned to be very proficient with one method and built up confidence by occasionally using a ratio method to check their results. They worked at levels well above what could be expected from prior attainment.
- 156 Whilst progress is usually good in Year 10, the advantage of having an extra class in Year 11 allows teachers to spend more time with individual pupils. The weakest pupils, most of whom have special educational needs, work at suitable levels to obtain a Certificate of Achievement.
- 157 Pupils usually have good attitudes to mathematics. They listen attentively and politely to others and most are willing to explain their methods in front of others. However, because of the heavy focus on discussing mathematics as a whole class, they currently have little opportunity to work in small groups or enhance their learning using resources other than calculators or number lines. All pupils are building confidence in their abilities in mathematics and, in the best lessons, talk confidently and sometimes heatedly about their ideas. Most of the pupils are well prepared with equipment and homework. Pupils take responsibility for grading their work and accept that an honest attempt at homework is an essential requirement for lessons the next day. In the best lessons, where teacher expectations are high and the work is very challenging, pupils show great enthusiasm for mathematics. Only occasionally, where the work is not sufficiently challenging and management of pupils is poor, are the attitudes of pupils less than satisfactory.
- 158 Teaching is almost always at least satisfactory. It is usually good, and in one third of lessons, it is very good or excellent. Teachers work very hard, skilfully questioning, to engage their classes to produce and test ideas. They have high expectations, know their pupils' capabilities well and have very good relationships with their classes. Occasionally, however, the pace of lessons slows where teachers are less skilful in moving the lessons forward where some pupils struggle. In some lessons, girls are a little too passive. Whilst they demonstrate understanding with written work, they often say little, if the teacher does not direct questions at them individually. Overall, teaching has improved considerably since the last inspection. The department intends to widen the scope of teaching styles further. Having been largely successful in promoting a positive image for mathematics by talking and thinking about mathematics, there will be more emphasis on using resources, including computers, and promoting group work where beneficial.
- 159 Curriculum time for mathematics is generous in Years 7 and 8. The department makes full use of this in taking extra time to explore ideas and promote real understanding to build on the techniques and processes they use to calculate and solve problems. Pupils at all ages benefit from the chance to attend homework club on one lunchtime each week and all are made fully aware that teachers are available for help after school. While no particular pupils are identified by the school as gifted and talented, the mathematics department provides opportunities for the most able to participate in mathematics challenges at a national level. The most able pupils in Year 11 are given the opportunity to study for GCSE statistics outside of normal timetabled time. Results are regularly impressive. In 2002, all but one of the 22 pupils entered attained a grade in the A*-C range.

- 160 Leadership and management of the department are outstanding. This is the main reason why standards currently seen in lessons are significantly better than those in recent examinations. After a sustained period of instability, the department is now fully staffed. The head of department, who is a very good classroom teacher, has been in post for little over a year. Her boundless energy and enthusiasm for the subject have had a profound effect on standards of attainment and teaching. Most of the teachers are new to the school. Whilst some are part-time teachers and some are newly qualified teachers, they have responded as a team, to the clear direction provided by the head of department in quickly promoting a high work ethic in lessons. Most are good or very good teachers. They have been given good guidance in handling whole class interactive teaching and the department meets regularly to discuss pupils' progress and how best to improve teaching. The head of department has prioritised ruthlessly to embrace regular homework reviews and pupils' taking more responsibility for their own learning, and class discussion is crucial to improvement. The next planned phase is rightly to widen the scope of their methods.
- 161 As part of the plan to help pupils take more responsibility, the head of department, supported by the relevant class teacher, holds one evening class for the parents of each Year 7 group. Attendance has been good. In one such session seen, the parents warmly welcomed the opportunity to experience at first hand the way in which their children are taught. Parents receive high quality information about their children's progress. Reports give levels of attainment in specific areas of the subject and there is also practical advice on how to improve in areas that need developing.
- 162 Overall, the department has made good improvement since the last inspection.
- 163 Whilst the school has had a worthwhile whole staff training day in autumn 2001, on numeracy across the curriculum, the numeracy co-ordinator has not been replaced since leaving. As a result, there is currently no check on the extent to which numeracy is used in all subjects, or whether methods and terminology are used consistently. However, there are plans in place to give numeracy across the curriculum more emphasis in the near future.
- 164 Currently, numeracy is taught well in mathematics lessons. Standards of numeracy are around the national average. Across the school, this teaching is satisfactory overall. There are good opportunities to develop data handling skills in science. Pupils in Year 7 use line graphs to study energy transfers and the most able pupils plot and interpret graphs to compare the rates of chemical reactions with temperature. Graph plotting and interpreting is used to enhance learning in geography, and in ICT pupils use algebraic formulae to create spreadsheets. In French, pupils practise the four rules of mathematics to demonstrate their knowledge of number in a foreign language. However, in other subjects teaching is less effective. In physical education, a lack of appreciation of the size of an angle of 45° , hindered the progress of pupils playing basketball.

SCIENCE

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

Strengths

- GCSE results have improved since the last inspection.
- The quality of teaching is good.
- The progress of pupils is carefully monitored.
- The accommodation is good and all lessons are taught in laboratories

Areas for improvement

- Raise the National Curriculum tests results for all and the GCSE results for girls.
- Provide more data logging equipment for pupils to develop their ICT skills.
- Provide more opportunities for teachers to observe each other teaching.
- Ensure that all teachers write comments on pupils' work which help pupils move forward.

165 The results obtained in the national tests for 14 year olds in 2001 were below the national average but at least as good as similar schools. The proportion gaining level 6 and above was above the average of those schools. Boys have performed significantly better than girls in recent years. The 2001 results improved on those of 2000. The proportion gaining level 5 and above in 2002 was significantly below that of 2001. The teacher assessments matched the test results for the boys but not for the girls. The GCSE results in 2001 were well above the national averages in dual award science and in line with those for single award science. Boys performed significantly better than girls. The proportion gaining at least a grade C in a science was above those of similar schools. Pupils did not perform as well in science as they did in their other subjects. In 2002 the proportion gaining A*-C grades was a little below that of 2001 in dual award science and above that obtained in the single award. During the past two years there have been considerable staffing problems arising from long-term absences and recruitment difficulties. During this time the department was also completely refurbished. These have had an adverse effect on standards.

166 By the end of Year 9 standards are average. They are above average by the end of Year 11. Pupils entered the school with attainment levels in science that were a little below average. Younger pupils make satisfactory progress which becomes good for the older ones. By the end of Years 9 and 11 pupils have a sound knowledge and a secure understanding of the subject matter across each of the attainment targets. There was no evidence of differing attainment levels of boys and girls either in lessons or in samples of pupils' work. Skills required in practical work develop well throughout. Younger pupils soon learn how to work safely and to observe and measure accurately. By the end of Year 9 their predicting and recording skills are at the levels expected. By the end of Year 11 planning and analysis skills are at expected levels. Their evaluation skills are a little below average except for higher attaining pupils. Higher attaining pupils in Year 9 produce word equations and write formulae for compounds, and explain sex determination in terms of X and Y chromosomes. Most Year 9 pupils have a sound knowledge of terms such as consumer, producer food webs and chains. A group of lower attaining Year 9 pupils gave examples of predators and prey creatures and a few, with prompting, constructed simple food chains. Higher attaining Year 11 pupils explain factors affecting rates of chemical reactions in terms of collision theory and some of them understand activation energy. Most Year 11 pupils accurately plot and interpret distance-time graphs and calculate velocities. Lower attaining Year 11 pupils describe how creatures adapt to different environments with many of them using correct terminology. They are also aware of the gravitational forces on different planets and in one lesson competently accessed the Internet to find out more about the universe.

- 167 Pupils have the numeracy skills to enable them to process their experimental results and they display them in various graphical forms. Standards of presentation are above average and they increasingly use correct terminology.
- 168 Pupils with special educational needs, including the visually impaired, make good progress. They are taught well, mainly in smaller groups. Teachers are well aware of their difficulties and give them extra help whenever possible. In many lessons there is very effective additional support.
- 169 Most of the pupils have positive attitudes to learning. They arrive promptly to lessons and quickly settle. The quality of relationships with their teachers promotes confidence. They willingly respond and put forward ideas. In groups they co-operate very well, working safely and productively. However, there is a small number of pupils, mainly older boys, who do not listen carefully, show little interest and need frequent reminders to keep on task.
- 170 The quality of teaching and learning is good. There has been a significant improvement in the quality of teaching since the previous inspection. It is always at least satisfactory, and good or better in two thirds of lessons and very good or excellent in almost half the lessons seen. It is slightly more very good and excellent lessons with the older pupils. Teachers know pupils extremely well and most exploit this to question them skilfully. Occasionally questioning is not sufficiently targeted to focus individuals on the objectives or to check understanding. Many teachers give pupils a short task at the start of the lesson to immediately focus them. Teachers know their subject well and make it comprehensible, often by using examples familiar to pupils. Lessons are usually planned well with a range of appropriate activities. However, in two lessons use of samples and models could have aided a better understanding. Pupil-teacher relationships are good, promoting confidence in pupils. Teachers use much praise and encouragement, successfully helping pupils to respond well to their high expectations of behaviour and effort. Class management is good and practical work is managed in a safe and orderly manner. Teachers use support staff very effectively and discuss lesson plans with them in advance. In an excellent lesson with Year 11, the well-prepared pupils readily put forward ideas as to how the investigation should be conducted. The teacher cleverly developed these ideas by skilful questioning and sensitively corrected misconceptions. Pupils then worked safely and in a focused manner in groups to carry out the practical investigation. They were fully engaged throughout, working safely and discussing sensibly. They knew what they had to do and what they were trying to find out. The teacher moved round the class asking individual challenging questions. Teachers mark work promptly and regularly. Many write informative comments which are much appreciated by the pupils in helping them to move forward. However, this is not consistent across the department.
- 171 New courses have been introduced since the previous inspection. For older pupils there is a dual award modular GCSE course and a Certificate of Achievement course. Both are suiting the needs of pupils well. The national strategy is being implemented for the younger pupils. The assessment procedures have also improved. They are regular, thorough and comprehensive. Much use is made of the information, including setting targets for individuals. Pupils in all years know how they are progressing and what is expected of them. Reports to parents are detailed and informative. Strengths and weaknesses are identified and strategies for improvement are suggested.
- 172 A head of department has very recently been appointed on a part-time basis. Leadership is satisfactory and she has already identified areas for improvement and implementation has started. Raising standards is a priority. She manages the department well. The teachers are appropriately qualified. One third of them are part-time appointments. They are deployed effectively making good use of specialisms. A team spirit is evident with much mutual day-to-day support. The newly qualified teacher is well supported. Teachers are observed teaching but there are not enough opportunities for them to see each other teaching. This could disseminate the good

teaching practice throughout. The technical support is adequate and the technicians are well organised, work hard and feel part of the team. The accommodation has been completely refurbished and it is now good, enabling all lessons to be taught in laboratories. There are enough resources, apart from data capture and logging equipment. Consequently, pupils are not able to gain 'hands on' experience to develop their ICT skills.

- 173 The manner in which the department has successfully addressed the issues highlighted in the previous inspection report is indicative of its capacity to improve further.

ART AND DESIGN

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

Strengths

- Teachers possess good subject knowledge that informs their teaching.
- Planning before lessons is good; preparation is thorough.
- Clear objectives are set for pupils; they know what they must do.
- Relationships between teachers and pupils are good.

Areas for improvement

- The pace of some lessons is too slow and this has a negative impact on learning.
- Insufficient use is made of visually exciting material at the start of lessons.
- Undue emphasis is placed on traditional art and craft activities.
- The current curriculum is too narrow and provides little opportunity for design activities in a more vocational, work-related context.

- 174 Pupils enter the school in Year 7 with a level of attainment in art and design that is below the national average. Basic drawing and painting skills are weak in Year 7, but pupils make good progress, and achievement is good through Year 8 into Year 9. Standards are around the national expectation. In Years 10 and 11 pupils make satisfactory progress. They settle more readily to their work and are reasonably productive, working mainly with a limited range of two-dimensional and three-dimensional media and materials. Most pupils work well to improve their ability to manipulate three-dimensional materials such as clay. Relationships between teachers and pupils are good from Year 7 through to Year 11 and most pupils respond positively to the set tasks and behaviour is generally good. Pupils with special educational needs are absorbed well into all teaching groups and they make satisfactory progress. There is a need, however, for much greater learning support for these pupils in art and design lessons.
- 175 In 2001 teacher assessments for pupils aged 14, at the end of Year 9, were well above the national average figures. On the basis of evidence seen during the inspection, these are overly generous as most of the pupils are working at a level that is broadly in line with national expectations. There is little evidence that these pupils have, as yet, acquired the capacity to think and learn for themselves, or to analyse and comment on their own and others' work in sufficient depth.
- 176 In the 2001 GCSE examination in art and design, pupils' attainment was well above the national average. The number of girls that achieved the highest grades A*-C was well above the number of boys that achieved grades A*-C in the school. The performance of all pupils in art and design was better than their performance in all of their other school subjects. Overall there has been a slight fall in the number of pupils achieving the highest grades from 2001 to the 2002 examination.

- 177 On the basis of work seen during the inspection, most pupils are currently producing work of a standard that is broadly in line with national expectations, with a significant minority working above. This slight variation in attainment can be attributed to the appointment of a head of department and a newly qualified teacher at the start of this term, both of whom are at the early stages of settling into a new role within the school.
- 178 In Year 7, pupils' direct observational drawings are weak. They have not yet gained control over the use of line and tone to describe, accurately, objects in front of them. In one lesson seen during the inspection, pupils found the exercise of drawing their own faces very challenging. Some lost interest which led to an inevitable increase in chatter during the lesson. Most remain heavily reliant on their teachers at this stage. On the whole, girls work with much greater concentration and application than boys. In Year 8 there is evidence of some improvement, but basic skills in drawing and painting remain weak. By Year 9 there is evidence of improvement in the standard of work produced. In one lesson seen, pupils applied themselves readily to the task of making a small clay figure. The lowest attaining pupils continue to struggle to gain control over basic drawing, painting and craft techniques, while the highest attaining pupils are working just above the national expectations. Oral skills are developed through exchanges between teachers and pupils during lessons. Written skills are in evidence in the pupils' visual diaries and sketchbooks when they comment on their own and others' work.
- 179 In Year 10 pupils work with dry media such as pencils, coloured pencils, chalk and charcoal. Pupils also work with clay to produce three-dimensional objects that are based upon their observations of tree forms. Some continue to struggle to gain control over clay and find working in three dimensions challenging. The majority of middle attaining pupils are producing work of a standard that is in line with the national average. By the time that pupils reach Year 11, the content of lessons is largely determined by the GCSE examination syllabus. Most pupils work with a limited range of media and materials within a very narrow fine art/craft model of the curriculum at present. Only a few were seen to employ photography and ICT as means of extending the range and variety of their work and to communicate ideas and express feelings. Girls work with much greater concentration than boys at this level and produce much more interesting objects in both two and three dimensions.
- 180 Teaching ranges from satisfactory to good from Year 7 to Year 11 and is satisfactory overall. Teachers possess good subject knowledge and are technically competent to teach basic skills in drawing, painting and craftwork. Planning is good and satisfactory use is made of reproductions of the work of artists such as Archimboldo at the start of lessons. Objectives are clearly set for pupils at the start of lessons and consequently pupils know what they are expected to do. The procedures for setting and marking homework are just satisfactory at the moment, but they are under review and are currently being updated by the new head of department. Criteria for assessing pupils' work at the end of Year 9 are also under scrutiny and effort is being made to bring these teachers' assessments more into line with national figures. During the inspection, attention was drawn to the fact that one Year 9 and one Year 8 group have timetabled access to facilities in the computer suite. However, overall access for pupils from Year 7 to Year 11 remains unsatisfactory and there is a need for all pupils to have much greater access to computers, digital cameras, scanners and printers in the art studios.
- 181 Leadership and management are satisfactory. The head of department has only been in post since the start of this term and has already made a good start to updating and improving inherited systems and procedures relating to homework and assessing, recording and tracking systems. Greater use will be made of objective data in future when setting realistic targets for individual pupils. With the creation of the new darkroom and with increasing focus on the use of modern technology, the head of department has already set out to broaden and extend the range of activities on offer to pupils to include problem solving in a design context.

- 182 The art studios themselves are in need of refurbishment, with particular attention being needed for much better storage facilities for pupils' work and for paper and materials. Displays in the art rooms and in the corridors are good, but much greater use could be made of available space throughout the school. The department has a good range of extra-curricular activities, from trips to New York and Paris for the sixth formers, to preparing costumes and props for the 'Brazilian Extravaganza'. There is evidence of good improvement since the last inspection.

CITIZENSHIP

- 183 The heads of Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 have overall responsibility for citizenship. Each conducted an audit to identify where the curriculum already covered elements of citizenship. Elements not covered, such as the diversity of identities and the political aspects of life in the United Kingdom, were added to the programme of PSHE. Teaching takes place in tutor groups and tutors will report attainment and progress as part of their comments to parents.
- 184 The programme of study for pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 includes various elements of citizenship and the lesson observed during inspection offered evidence of a good beginning. The importance of charities was taught well, with active involvement of pupils. Working in groups they formulated reasons why their project deserved funds and then the spokesperson for the group reported back to the rest of the class. The lesson showed that planning has been good and that tutors have been given appropriate resources for teaching. The activity allowed pupils to develop their skills in putting their own views and listening to those of others as part of the democratic process.
- 185 Citizenship has been introduced into the programme of PSHE in Year 10 and this will follow through into Year 11. New elements include the topics 'Power, Politics and the Media' and 'Globalisation'. Opportunities for participation and research activities also occur. Careful planning became evident during inspection but no observation of lessons or analysis of work took place. The school has not yet decided whether to adopt an accredited course in Years 10 and 11, and if so which one, because textbooks needed to support such a course are still being published. Pupils already have the benefit of a range of visits from representatives of organisations such as the Citizens Advice Bureau, the Inland Revenue, the police and the Samaritans. The commitment to re-establish a school council is recognised as an important way of adding to existing opportunities for involvement of pupils in a variety of responsible activities.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

Overall the quality of provision in the department is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- Teaching is good overall and very good in the sixth form.
- Pupils are enthusiastic and usually work well.
- There is a strong sense of purpose in the department and it is moving forward well.
- Management is good.

Areas for improvement

- Sharing the best practice in teaching, particularly the use of questioning and organisation of project work.
- Broadening the curriculum for Year 10 and 11 to include work-related courses.

186 When pupils join the school many of them have a fairly sketchy knowledge of the subject, particularly in their understanding of how different materials behave and how they can be worked. They make good progress during Years 7 to 9 and most have reached the expected standard by the end of Year 9. During this period they have met a wider range of materials and techniques for working them. They have also developed their ability to design, often to achieve visual effects, but also considering purpose and function.

187 In Years 10 and 11, pupils follow a good range of specialisms within the subject. Overall, their performance at GCSE is close to the national average, but there is considerable variation between the different specialisms and between different teaching groups. In the GCSE examinations in 2001, 52 per cent of pupils achieved grade C or better. Results for 2002 show a similar picture overall and have the same variation between specialisms. This variation is partly due to the prior attainment of pupils in the group; for example, pupils following the resistant materials course tend not to have done so well in their assessments at the end of Year 9 as those pupils taking systems and control. It is also affected by the suitability of the courses for the pupils and by the way teachers manage the courses

188 Higher ability pupils make relatively better progress than lower ability pupils. They respond well to the demands of GCSE work and make good progress. Lower ability pupils make satisfactory progress but a significant number struggle with the project work and their design folders are often incomplete or rushed. Overall, boys do relatively better than girls at GCSE, although they perform much the same in Years 7 to 9.

189 Students' results in AS and A-level examinations for the last two years are in line with expectations, considering their previous performance at GCSE. Standards of work seen in the sixth form are good and students are likely to do well in their examinations. The course the students follow has been chosen well so that they can all make good use of their different experiences at GCSE. More students are joining the course each year as its reputation grows. They are making good progress as a result of very effective, well focused teaching and are on track to achieve well at AS and A-level.

190 Teaching is good in the department. Staff are experienced and have considerable expertise in the specific areas of technology, so that the department can offer a wide range of specialist courses. Virtually all lessons are managed effectively so that pupils work safely and productively. Lessons where pupils are continuing with their project work are organised effectively by many teachers who set the pupils clear, short-term targets and check their progress rigorously. As a result, these pupils make better progress than those in groups where they are left alone to their own devices. Teachers have good relationships with pupils and often encourage them to do good work by the effective use of humour.

191 Many teachers make very effective use of questioning and discussion to check that pupils are understanding the work and to extend their ideas and imagination. This

aspect of teaching has been extended by the department's participation in development work for the national Key Stage 3 curriculum project. This was demonstrated very clearly in a Year 10 graphics lesson in which the pupils used their initials to create a logo. The teacher encouraged the pupils to think carefully about the effect they could achieve by his lively introduction and well-chosen examples. The pupils' work was focused very effectively on choosing and evaluating different effects by having pre-printed letters available in different fonts. Towards the end of the lesson pupils displayed their ideas to the class. Because of the model set by the teacher, the discussions they had had with him during the lesson and the level of confidence that had been established, they were able to discuss their designs very effectively. They used the correct technical vocabulary fluently and explored ideas imaginatively. This discussion helped all the pupils extend their thinking and made the lesson very successful.

- 192 The department has improved since the last inspection and is well placed to continue moving forward as a result of the head of department's effective leadership and the support of other teachers in the department. Schemes of work and other documentation are well organised. The curriculum is planned well. There is a good range of GCSE courses but no work-related courses, which would meet the needs of some pupils more effectively in Years 10 and 11.

GEOGRAPHY

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

Strengths

- The quality of teaching, planning and preparation.
- The clear and effective leadership of the department.
- The effective use of display material in teaching.
- The positive and enthusiastic response of the pupils to the subject.
- The increasingly effective use of ICT in teaching and learning.

Areas for improvement

- The monitoring of learning and the tracking of pupils' progress in large mixed ability-teaching groups in Years 7 to 9.
- The consistency of marking and assessment of pupils' work across the department.

- 193 Teacher assessments showed that the standard of attainment at the end of Year 9 was above average in 2001. In lessons seen, standards were in line with national expectations. Pupils show that they have developed a clear sense of place in their studies and are able to use a range of texts and other sources of information to construct their answers. More able pupils give fluent and detailed answers in both written and oral form whilst less able pupils show the extent of their learning through the use of writing frameworks and annotated diagrams. The 2002 teacher assessments indicate that the standard of attainment has been maintained. The GCSE results in 2001 were significantly above national expectations. During lessons observed standards were around the national average. Pupils demonstrate their understanding of distributions and the means by which change takes place over time. More able pupils construct answers drawing on new information as a means to develop concepts learned in earlier years. Less able pupils show their knowledge and understanding through the use of structured questions and data response exercises. The 2002 results indicate that above average standards have been maintained. A-level results in 2001 were excellent. Students displayed an understanding of the complexity of the issues involved in such topics as globalisation and global warming. They showed a critical sense in seeking and identifying bias in sources of information and ensuring that their answers were balanced. Discussions were conducted in articulate and confident manner. The 2002 results indicate that the standards have been maintained.

- 194 Teaching in Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory overall. Good lessons included: a Year 8 class in which pupils worked in groups to examine and comment upon volcanic lava; a Year 7 lesson where pupils worked on map reading and interpretation; and Year 9 pupils developing their understanding of weathering processes through carefully developed stages to build understanding. In these lessons pupils worked with confidence and a sense of purpose, instilled through clear instruction and appropriate timing by the teacher.
- 195 Teaching in Years 10 and 11 is good and very good in Years 12 and 13. The pace of lessons was good overall and especially in Years 10 and 11 and at A-level. A Year 11 lesson on flood hydrographs, a Year 10 lesson developing a case study on the population characteristics of Japan and a Year 10 lesson on population with a class following a modified curriculum, were all conducted at a pace that challenged the whole class. A Year 13 lesson on the Global Economy was introduced by means of a power point presentation and the ensuing group work was managed sensitively, with the groups constructed in a way that ensured that students' capabilities were complemented within the groups. Teachers set clear time limits on tasks, reminded pupils regularly of the focus of the task and ensured that all members were contributing. Students were able to demonstrate their key skills through reading for understanding that was checked by carefully targeted questions. The manipulation and graphical representation of population data displayed good use of skills in numeracy and confident use of the school intranet in working on coastal scenery showed well-developed skills in ICT.
- 196 Teachers' knowledge of their subject is good. Responses to questions are handled confidently, frequently with reference to wall displays and atlases to enable pupils to build their own understanding. All teachers showed an enthusiasm for their subject that communicated to pupils, especially when personal experience of places was recounted to pupils. Confident use of ICT and assessment techniques are two areas in which significant progress has been made.
- 197 Pupils were enthusiastic about their work, responding positively to challenges placed before them. They were confident in expressing their ideas. They were able to use geographical terms appropriately to present their work. This reflected the high expectations of the department.
- 198 The department is led and managed very well. Good teamwork is evident and the clear expectations of pupils are evident not only in class but also in the marking and assessing of work. The school's marking and assessment policy is implemented and helpful comments, setting targets for improvement, are frequently given. There are, however, some inconsistencies evident within the generally good practice observed. The departmental schemes of work are clear; lesson plans ensure that pupils receive their entitlement to the curriculum whilst leaving room for teachers to develop lessons in their own way.
- 199 Monitoring of progress in Years 10 and 11 and at A-level is very good. In Years 7 to 9 it is satisfactory although lower ability pupils in large classes do not always make sufficient progress. The construction of the teaching groups and the deployment of in-class support make the monitoring of learning and the tracking of progress a challenging task for teachers. Where support was available, pupils made much better progress and this was particularly notable in the case of pupils for whom English is an additional language.
- 200 The development of the geography section of the school's website is a particular strength. The detailed knowledge of individual pupils and the sensitive approach by teachers produced a very inclusive and positive atmosphere in the classroom.

HISTORY

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

Strengths

- The quality of teaching is good overall, and occasionally excellent.
- Teachers manage pupils very well and expect them to work to the best of their ability.
- The behaviour and attitudes of most pupils are very good.

Areas for improvement

- The attainment of the most able pupils.
- The monitoring and evaluation of the teaching to ensure the spread of existing very good practice across the whole department.
- The comments written on pupils' work to help them to see how to improve still further.

- 201 By the end of Year 9, pupils' attainment overall is broadly in line with that expected nationally. This is a similar standard to that reported at the time of the last inspection. Most pupils begin Year 7 with a level of attainment that is close to the national average. In 2002, teachers assessed their pupils' work at the end of Year 9 as broadly in line with the national average. The overall standard of work seen during the inspection was of a standard similar to that expected nationally. The vast majority of pupils make good progress in Years 7 to 9. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress, although most attain below average standards. Most pupils make satisfactory progress in gaining new knowledge and understanding about the past. The higher attainers especially develop skills well. These include skills such as using sources for evidence and explaining why there may be different views about past events. These skills were identified as weak at the last inspection. This is no longer the case. However, in a few lessons the most able were not sufficiently stretched.
- 202 The proportion of pupils gaining grades A*-C in the GCSE examinations was above the national average in 2001. The results in 2002 were a little lower than those of 2001, but still in line with the (provisional) national average. Overall the progress most pupils make in Years 10 and 11 is good. The overall standard of work seen during the inspection was in line with that expected, and many of the pupils have the potential to gain the highest grades.
- 203 Pupils in Years 7 to 9 have good knowledge and understanding about the past. Most pupils in a class in Year 7, for instance, defined correctly terms such as neolithic, henge, and barrow as part of their work on the Neolithic period. Pupils in Year 9 demonstrated good understanding of aspects of the lives of black slaves in America in the 19th century. Most pupils use evidence well to support a hypothesis about the past. Pupils in Year 9 selected relevant key points from sources to deepen their understanding of the lives of slaves. Most pupils write well, and the highest attainers produce extended pieces which are well planned and structured.
- 204 Pupils in Years 10 and 11 have good knowledge and understanding of the topics they are studying. They successfully explain causes and effects of past events and use historical sources well to provide evidence. The highest attaining pupils evaluate evidence successfully in making judgements and developing their own views. Pupils in Year 11, for example, used sources to evaluate the role of General Haig in World War I; the highest attainers understood that conflicting views of Haig exist. The written work from the highest attainers is of a high standard. The lower attainers, taking the Certificate of Achievement course, understood well the different work that women did during wartime, and explained in simple terms how life changed for women as a result of war. They frequently understand more than their low literacy levels allow them to record adequately in writing.

- 205 The quality of teaching overall is a strength of the department. It is usually good in Years 7 to 9, never less than satisfactory, and very good in Years 10 and 11. It is occasionally excellent. This is an improvement since the last inspection Teachers know their subject well and communicate effectively and with enthusiasm, so that pupils acquire good knowledge and understanding about the past. Teachers usually return to the aims of the lesson at the end to check what pupils have learned. This does not, however, happen consistently enough. The work set is usually suitable for the abilities of the pupils. In groups with a range of ability levels, the teachers provide activities which allow all pupils to make progress. The task of producing a booklet for primary school pupils about Henry VIII's break with Rome was one which all pupils in a class in Year 8 could attempt with some success. The work set for pupils in examination classes in Years 10 and 11 gives them good opportunities to learn what makes a good examination answer.
- 206 In the very best lessons the teachers make the learning process interesting, and the majority of pupils respond by working hard, and learning well. Pupils in a Year 7 class approached very positively a challenging task in which they were asked to find evidence to evaluate theories about why Avebury was built. The teacher managed the group work very effectively so that at the end of the lesson pupils were able to evaluate the theories successfully. In a minority of lessons the teacher attempted to cover too much, which led to the work being rushed or incomplete. Pupils' work is marked regularly, but the comments do not often give them clear guidelines as to how to improve.
- 207 Teachers use an appropriate range of teaching methods. Group and paired work, individual work and whole class teaching are used successfully. Teachers are confident in using ICT as a resource for teaching and learning, and use it well. A group of pupils in Year 10 used ICT very competently to create a timeline of events leading to Hitler's rise to power. For a small number of pupils, however, over-confidence in their ability to use ICT led to them not listening to instructions properly and making some errors in completing the work. Teachers make very effective use of their learning assistants to support pupils with English as an additional language.
- 208 Teachers expect their pupils to work hard and behave well. They ensure that there is a good working atmosphere in the classroom. Most of the pupils have a positive approach to their work, and concentrate and behave well, and these are important contributory factors to their usually good progress in lessons. A small minority have a poor attitude to their own work and so learn less well.
- 209 The leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory. There are two temporary, joint heads of department, with responsibility for Years 7 to 9 and Years 10 and 11 respectively. One teacher is relatively new to teaching. They receive very good support from two previous heads of department who now have other roles within the school management, but still teach in the department. They are aware of strengths and weaknesses of the department and have begun to implement strategies for improvement. The lack of formal monitoring and evaluation of teaching means that the very excellent practice in some lessons is not sufficiently well disseminated across the whole department.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

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

Strengths

- Teachers' subject knowledge and the good management of the subject.

- The procedures to assess pupils' progress.
- Teachers' good management of pupils.
- The use of the Internet to support learning.
- The planning to ensure good progression.

Areas for improvement

- Develop the use of control technology.
- Provide wider opportunities for pupils to develop speaking skills.
- Encourage more girls to opt for GCSE.
- Develop pupils' understanding of the use of ICT in its wider sense at Key Stage 3.

- 210 ICT is taught as a discrete subject throughout Years 7 to 9. In Years 10 and 11 pupils can choose to do a GCSE ICT course. In Year 10, pupils are studying the applied GCSE ICT course and in Year 11 the GCSE business communication course. The number of girls on the examination courses is few.
- 211 Teachers' assessment of 14 year olds in 2002 showed that standards were slightly above the national average. In the 2002 GCSE office application examination, 30 per cent of the pupils achieved A*-C grades with all pupils achieving the A*-G grade. These results are lower than the previous year's results. There are no national figures available for comparison. In the GNVQ intermediate examination all the pupils were awarded a pass, with nine of the 16 pupils achieving a merit.
- 212 Pupils enter the school with a range of skills in ICT but with the benefit of regular lessons they make good progress and by the time they are 14 years old reach the expected level. Pupils' understanding of the communication element is well established, producing documents using the word processor and desktop publishing techniques to design posters with added art graphics. Pupils in Year 7, in their 'Myself' topic, quickly gain knowledge of a multi-media presentation using the *PowerPoint* program, and by the time they reach Year 9 are confident users of a range of techniques, such as sound and animated graphics to present their work with an awareness of a particular audience. Pupils have an understanding of the use of a spreadsheet, entering the data and using simple formulae for mathematical calculations. Pupils' understanding of data handling is not so well established as the other elements. However, some pupils do have an understanding of its use and how to select specific information very quickly. An example of this was seen in the Year 9 topic 'East Shore Radio'. Here higher attaining pupils were able to select and filter records played and then present them in graph form. Although pupils are developing a basic understanding of control technology using the *Logo* program (a simple control program), pupils have not had the opportunity to use more sophisticated programs therefore this element is unsatisfactory. The school is aware of this and there are plans to include this element into the Year 9 programme of study. Pupils' knowledge of the use of ICT in its wider sense is too narrow as few pupils are able to give examples of where it might be used.
- 213 The overall attainment of 16 year old pupils is at the level expected for this point in the course. Pupils' knowledge of the communication element is developed further. Pupils in the business communication group have good keyboard skills, most being able to touch-type with accuracy. Pupils are beginning to appreciate the benefits of using ICT in a business, using a variety of techniques to present their work, for example, producing business letters with the mail merge facility, flyers and business cards with a logo of their own design. Pupils have developed an understanding of interview techniques seen in a Year 11 group. Here pupils discussed the advantages and disadvantages of an interview, clearly stating their opinions and word-processing their thoughts. Pupils have developed an understanding of the use of a spreadsheet, successfully using formulae to calculate expenditure in a holiday budget topic. In a mobile phone topic, pupils have

developed an understanding of data handling, creating fields and filtering information. Pupils in the Year 10 applied GCSE group are making good progress, developing a clear understanding of the need for security on systems, and presenting their findings using a multi-media presentation. Pupils' knowledge of the use of ICT beyond the school is better, explaining where different applications might be used and evaluating the advantages of using ICT. Pupils at both key stages use the facilities of the Internet with confidence and understand the benefits when researching information for topics and projects. Pupils with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language make good progress and achieve realistic targets. They also benefit on occasions from additional help from learning assistants. Attainment has been maintained since the previous inspection.

- 214 The overall quality of teaching is good, a proportion very good. One lesson observed was unsatisfactory. Teachers have good subject knowledge and this enables them to explain topics clearly and effectively. Pupils respond well to this, are keen to start their work and make good progress. Although teachers use the projector effectively to demonstrate procedures, not all the computer suites have appropriate screens. Learning would benefit from the use of interactive screens. In better lessons the aim of the session is clearly explained to pupils, with time targets. The outcome of this approach is that pupils have a clear understanding of the task, and are anxious to improve, leading to a good level of learning. Although lessons end with a plenary session to ascertain pupils' learning, there are few opportunities for pupils to develop their speaking skills by explaining their work to the rest of the class. Lessons are well planned and build on pupils' knowledge with supportive worksheets to support pupils' learning, enabling them to progress to the next stage of learning. Teachers have good discipline, dealing sensitively and firmly with any unacceptable behaviour. Pupils respond well to this approach and their learning is accelerated. Where teaching is less effective the objective of the lesson is not made clear and pupils are inappropriately organised to be able to see the demonstration. The outcome of this is that pupils are unsure of the task and become restless, and learning is slow. Progress is helped by appropriate homework to consolidate learning or preparation for the next lesson. Teachers circulate well during lessons, keeping pupils on task. The quality of assessment is good, contributing well to pupils' progress. Teaching has improved since the previous inspection.
- 215 The management of the subject is good. Although the head of department has only had responsibility for the subject since the beginning of the term, he has a clear vision about the need to maintain and raise standards and the need to support newly appointed teachers. With the recent development of examination courses for pupils and the opportunity for all pupils to receive regular lessons in Years 7 to 9, the subject is well placed for future development.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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

Strengths

- The quality of teaching and learning is good and has improved since the previous inspection.
- Standards are above average and have risen since the previous inspection.
- Leadership and management by the head of department are good.
- Pupils behave well and show good attitudes to work.
- Relationships between pupils and with their teachers are very good.

Areas for improvement

- The curriculum is unsatisfactory in Years 10 and 11.
- Teaching needs to provide work that is better suited to the needs of high attaining pupils and those pupils with special educational needs.

- 216 Teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 indicate that attainment is above average. Results at A*-C in French in the 2001 GCSE examinations were well above the national average. Results at A*-G were slightly below average. The average points score was above that found nationally. Results in German were also well above the national average both at A*-C and A*-G, resulting in an above average points score. In both French and German there were fewer grades at A* and A than is usually found. Results for boys and girls do not show any wide differences. A relatively small number of pupils study modern languages at GCSE. Results have risen since the previous inspection.
- 217 Inspection evidence indicates that standards are above average, both at the end of Year 9 and at the end of Year 11. Boys and girls achieve equally well. In general, pupils achieve well. However, occasionally the highest attaining pupils and those pupils with special educational needs do not make sufficient progress. This is because teachers do not always plan their lessons well enough to provide work that is tailored to the particular needs of these pupils. There are no significant differences in attainment across the four aspects of the subject – reading, writing, speaking and listening. Attainment has risen since the previous inspection, especially in Years 10 and 11 where it was found to be below average at that time. There are no significant differences in attainment between the two languages taught.
- 218 By the end of Year 9, pupils answer questions about such topics as the human body and illness, the subjects they learn at school, facilities in the local area and about their families. Most pupils are able to listen carefully to the teacher, to cassette tapes and to other pupils when they are speaking. They understand instructions from the teacher in the language being taught. Pupils answer questions in the language being taught and they try hard with pronunciation. In Year 9, pupils carry out conversations with two or three exchanges. Most can talk about their likes and dislikes, in school subjects for example. Although achievement is satisfactory, the minority of high attaining pupils do not achieve as well as they might because teachers do not ensure often enough that they practise longer and more sophisticated conversations, with a variety of language and a range of tenses. Pupils develop their reading skills mainly through reading textbooks and worksheets to find the answer to questions. Most pupils understand simple, authentic texts and use language dictionaries by the end of Year 9. In their written work, most write short paragraphs from memory. There are examples of extended writing which incorporate a range of tenses, but opportunities to write in a range of styles are more limited than they could be and this restricts attainment in writing for high attaining pupils.
- 219 By the end of Year 11, the small number of pupils studying for GCSE build on their understanding of the topics covered in earlier years and add others such as descriptions of their family and friends, their everyday routine and their personal and social life. Most pupils are able to carry on conversations with others, about their pastimes and hobbies for example. Most pupils are able to write accurately with correct tenses, verb endings and agreement of adjectives. In general, however, pupils do not

write with a range of styles to produce poems, letters, accounts or stories and this limits opportunities for high attaining pupils to develop more advanced writing.

- 220 The subject makes a satisfactory contribution to pupils' literacy development. In many lessons there is work on spelling, punctuation and basic grammar. However, there are limited opportunities for writing for some pupils. Pupils use basic arithmetic to do calculations and to work out the costs of meals and clothing. Interesting work was seen during the inspection where Year 7 pupils set each other simple sums to do, using all four arithmetic operations. This makes a good contribution to numeracy development. There is good use of ICT to refine and edit work and to produce pictorial and written pieces of work for display. Older pupils make good use of ICT for research and for homework.
- 221 The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. Teaching was reported as poor for pupils in Years 10 and 11 at the time of the previous inspection. Only one unsatisfactory lesson was observed during this inspection so there has clearly been a considerable improvement in teaching, especially for older pupils. Where teaching is at its best, lessons are carefully planned to provide a range of challenging work and the teaching methods used give good variety so that pupils are kept both busy and interested. This was seen in a Year 9 French lesson, for example, where the teacher made very good use of the overhead projector, song, mime and word reinforcement activities to teach some new vocabulary. This was conducted at a brisk pace and strong learning was the result. Pupils' work is regularly marked and corrected, and teachers make good use of this form of assessment to give pupils advice about how to improve their work. Teachers control their pupils well and this is achieved with patience and good humour. As a result pupils' behaviour and attitudes to work are good. Pupils of all ethnic groups and those who are visually impaired work very well together and very good relationships are a strong feature of the lessons. Homework is set regularly and enables pupils to consolidate their learning. In a number of lessons teachers do not provide a wide range of work suited to the needs of the range of attainment found in classes. This applies particularly to pupils who have special educational needs and high attaining pupils. In the one lesson where teaching was unsatisfactory, up to half of the lesson was conducted in English, with the result that pupils were not learning the foreign language well enough. The pace of the lesson was also unsatisfactory because the teacher did not have adequate control of a small number of pupils and time was constantly wasted in trying to maintain full control.
- 222 The curriculum is unsatisfactory for pupils in Years 10 and 11 because most pupils who could usefully study a foreign language are not doing so. The subject makes a good contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. There are opportunities in lessons for pupils to reflect on the lifestyles of people in other countries. There is a strong moral dimension in lessons and pupils are taught right from wrong. Pupils show respect for others' feelings by not laughing or being rude when they make mistakes. There is provision for social development by taking turns and working together. The study of people from other countries provides an in-built cultural element. The head of department has shown good leadership and management in establishing clear priorities for the subject, but there are still curriculum issues to be resolved. At the time of the previous inspection, there was a lack of direction for the subject and this has clearly improved considerably. Taking this into account together with the rise in standards and improvements in teaching, the subject has made very good progress since the previous inspection.

MUSIC

The appointment of a new head of music a year ago has led to a dramatic improvement in the quality of the provision for music. Provision is now **very good**.

Strengths

- Standards of attainment much improved in all years.
 - The quality of teaching now generally good or better.
 - The pupils' enthusiasm for the subject.
 - Outstanding subject leadership and management.
 - Accommodation and resources.
- Areas for improvement
- Stronger integration of the Year 7 to 9 curriculum with GCSE requirements.
 - More practical music tasks set for homework.
 - To encourage more pupils to learn a musical instrument.

- 223 Standards are much improved since the last inspection and are now close to the national average. This is largely due to the outstanding leadership and management of the subject. By the end of Year 9, attainment is at least in line with national averages with a significant minority above. By the end of Year 11, standards are mostly in line with course expectations, with a few above. Others are below because their musical skills are currently below the standard required, especially in musical literacy. The last report noted that GCSE results were below the national average and this trend continued with 2001 results below national averages for A*-C grades and well below for A*-G, many getting no grade at all, and boys outperforming girls. They were far better in 2002, with much improved results for the girls and all pupils obtaining a grade.
- 224 In Years 7 to 9 pupils' performing and composing are often of a good standard, well played and imaginatively conceived. Pupils are developing good understanding of basic harmony, using electric keyboards. Vocal work, both conventional singing and more experimental approaches, is good in all years, boys as well as girls participating well. Years 8 and 9 have benefited from very good teaching this last year. Standards in the GCSE groups are more varied because pupils' music education in the preceding years has been limited in quality. In Year 10 there has been a remarkable increase in take-up, but many pupils do not yet have the developed musical skills found in the more selective smaller groups typical of most other schools. In all years pupils work well at their own level of achievement and pupils with special educational needs make good progress. The curriculum caters well for the more able musicians and they do very well. Relatively few are yet learning a musical instrument and to do so would benefit them further, but financial considerations may be deterring some. Standards in the jazz band and orchestra are high and in instrumental lessons are generally satisfactory for the time pupils have been learning.
- 225 The quality of teaching overall is good and often better. Parents see it as 'inspirational' and at its best this is so. In Years 7 to 9 it is generally good with some very good and excellent features and in Years 10 and 11 it is always good with some excellent features. Basic music skills and understanding are well taught, as is music technology. Planning is generally very good and in most lessons activities are challenging and their pace is stimulating. Teaching methods are usually good and in the best lessons are excellent, as in a Year 7 class where pupils about to create a group vocal composition were being skilfully prepared, shedding their inhibitions whilst retaining their self-control. There is very good on-the-spot verbal feedback to pupils so that they know how to improve or develop their work. Such homework as is set is often written and more practical tasks should be devised. The teaching meets the needs of all pupils very well so that they effectively acquire knowledge and understanding. Most classes, especially in Years 7 to 9, are very lively in the best sense and pupils respond enthusiastically to given tasks. Pupils analyse each other's work very well, and appraisal of their colleagues' performing in an excellent Year 11 lesson was particularly sensitive. The music rooms are a constant hive of purposeful activity at break and lunchtime. Instrumental teaching in the lessons seen was good in woodwind and adequate overall.

- 226 There is a readiness in many lessons to recognise beauty in pupils' work, and multi-cultural education is well served. The week-long Brazilian project that involved the whole school last summer is a striking example of this. Leadership and management of the department are outstandingly good. Accommodation is now very much improved although there is intrusive sound transmission from the en-suite practice rooms into the main music area and the adjacent science rooms. Resources are generally good, especially for music technology. With so many now opting to do GCSE music, the main priority for the department is to ensure that pupils are as well prepared as possible in Years 7 to 9 for the demands of the Year 10 curriculum.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- The department provides an ethos of care for the pupils.
- Social and moral development is good.
- Extra-curricular provision and take-up is good.

Areas for improvement

- There is insufficient data on pupils' attainment on entry to the school and on entering GCSE courses.
- Pupils' self-assessment is not sufficiently developed.
- Monitoring and development of teaching and learning is in need of further development.
- The development of pupils' literacy, numeracy and ICT skills is restricted by lack of opportunities.

- 227 Standards of attainment in physical education at the end of Year 9 are in line with national expectations. In physical education, attainment at GCSE A*-C grades in 2001 was above national averages. The results in 2002 show a reduction in pupils gaining A*-C grades so that the percentage is below national expectations. School predictions for 2003 show a continuation of this trend. This is due to a very able group of pupils, who chose physical education as one of their options, gaining good results in 2001. Standards of work seen are in line with predicted grades. Comparison of pupils' standards of achievement on entry to the course and the standards achieved in the GCSE examinations now show that pupils make satisfactory progress through Years 10 and 11. Pupils, in core physical education lessons, reach standards in line with national expectations. Pupils through Years 7 to 11 make satisfactory progress.

- 228 By the end of Year 9 pupils make satisfactory progress. In the course of the year, they develop competence in basic passing and catching in rugby and netball. Some pupils are now able to transfer these techniques into the game situation through good decision making. Their development of knowledge and understanding is enhanced by their ability to work co-operatively in pairs and small groups, when developing basic techniques through Years 7 to 9. However, activities do not always develop pupils' knowledge and understanding of physical education vocabulary, nor do they allow pupils to develop their observation and assessment skills. They are not always clear about what they can do and how to improve. A significant number of pupils are unable to catch a ball when put under any pressure of time or space. By the end of Year 11, most pupils are now making satisfactory progress. The continued progress in the development of basic techniques, as in swimming, enables them to transfer these basic techniques into survival and life saving skills. Where progress is not as good, some pupils fail to transfer their ability to perform basic techniques to more advanced skill practices. This was observed in a badminton lesson where pupils' inability to perform a basic forehand shot restricted the development of different serves. A minority of pupils' progress is

restricted by disruptive behaviour, which causes them to lose concentration and so move off task. While the learning of pupils with special educational needs is well planned for, the progress of some higher attaining pupils is restricted by a lack of consistency in setting challenging tasks and insufficient attention to their knowledge of what they can do well and what they need to do to improve.

- 229 The overall quality of teaching is satisfactory. In some lessons the teaching was good and in one case very good. The strengths of the teaching include good knowledge of the subject, good organisational skills, positive interaction with pupils and a commitment to an ethos of care for their pupils. There is good planning for pupils with special educational needs, which means that they are able to learn at the same pace as other groups of pupils. However, strategies to extend the more able pupils do not yet provide a sufficient level of challenge. Assessment procedures for monitoring pupils' progress are in place. There is now a need to develop the use of assessment as part of learning so that pupils are aware of what they can do and how to improve through observation, evaluation and assessment skills. Pupils' progress is restricted by a lack of opportunities to develop their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills within the physical education context. In lessons where teaching is less than satisfactory, learning was restricted by a loss of time at the beginning of lessons, pupils were moved onto tasks before they were ready because the teacher was not focused on the intended learning outcomes of the pupils and the management of some poor behaviour was not effective. Pupils' attitudes to learning are good. The vast majority enjoy physical education and participation levels are good. There are good strategies for involving non-performers in learning. Most pupils concentrate well and therefore remain on task. They are able to work as individuals, but also co-operate well when working in pairs and small groups. The behaviour of most pupils is good. Pupils develop good relationships with other pupils and the teacher.
- 230 Leadership and management in physical education are good. The head of department has a clear vision for future development. This means that development planning is focused on learning. More planned opportunities for self-assessment, consistent strategies to improve pupils' knowledge, understanding and use of physical education terminology and secure data on pupils' attainment on entry to the school and on entry to the GCSE course would raise standards faster. In spite of these shortcomings, the department has made good progress in developing some aspects of assessment procedures since the last inspection. The quality of teaching in the department is uneven, and it is important for the head of department to monitor teaching and learning more closely to enable him to identify areas which need support. The department has a philosophy of care for pupils, which emphasises social and moral development. Teachers are well organised and the subject handbook provides effective guidance on schemes of work, lesson planning and safety matters. In general, the quality of accommodation and resources supports learning. However, some learning areas are in urgent need of maintenance and general upkeep so that pupils can use them more effectively for learning. The physical education curriculum meets statutory requirements. The physical education provision for Year 12 and 13 students is unsatisfactory. Many students have other timetabled lessons at the same time and attendance by the other students is poor. The department recognises the importance of extra-curricular activities, which enhance learning. The department has a philosophy of open access with elite teams and performers emerging in order to achieve good levels of results in inter-school matches and competitions. The department is making good progress in developing its links with the local community in order to raise standards.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- Teachers manage pupils and students well.
- Pupils show productivity and pace in their learning.

Areas for improvement

- Most teachers lack subject knowledge.
- Teachers do not use what they know of pupils' understanding to plan their teaching, or to help pupils to self-assess.

- 231 At the end of Year 9 most pupils reach the expected level or above in relation to the agreed syllabus. Girls do better than boys, with half reaching level 6 or above. In 2002 the first Year 11 candidates were entered for the GCSE examination. All those who entered achieved a grade and two in three achieved the higher grades of A*-C. Not all pupils were entered, as a result one pupil in four ended Year 11 with a GCSE grade and one in five achieved an A*-C grade. This was a significant improvement on previous years. In the sixth form results are above average. Six candidates took the A-level religious studies examination in 2001. All achieved a pass grade (A to E) and half achieved higher grades (A or B). The grades were above average and amongst the best in the school. In previous years all candidates achieved grades A to E but since 2001 no students have taken A-level. In 2002 five students have begun the AS course and are making satisfactory progress.
- 232 Observation of lessons and analysis of pupils' work show that attainment by the age of 14 is at or around expected levels specified in the agreed syllabus. All pupils, including those with special educational needs, make satisfactory progress. Pupils describe and compare different aspects of the religions they study. They express religious meanings in various ways through story, statement or picture. In their study of Buddhism they explain the difference that Buddhist belief and practice make to individuals and communities. Pupils use accurate religious vocabulary. They are not so good at using what they have learned to raise questions or suggest answers in relation to their own lives. Pupils do not learn enough about themselves from their study of religion.
- 233 Attainment by the age of 16 is at the standard expected. Pupils make satisfactory progress. They know the beliefs and practices of Christianity and Islam. They understand similarities and differences between the two religions, for example about marriage. They apply Christian and Muslim ideas to life and compare them with their own point of view. Written work is presented well but is sometimes of insufficient length, especially in explanation and evaluation. Whilst some pupils are heading for grades A*-C in the examination, many others are unlikely to be entered. In some lessons pupils show a high level of personal maturity but in other lessons their attitudes are negative and their behaviour is unacceptable, particularly when taught by non-specialist teachers.
- 234 Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. The most obvious strength of the teaching is that teachers manage pupils well. Another strength in some lessons is the high level of specialist knowledge. This allows pupils to explore the fundamental beliefs of a religion and to see similarities and differences between religions. In Years 7, 8 and 9, pupils benefit from good planning of lessons and good use of time. As a result pupils work productively and with pace. In Year 11 some pupils regularly receive GCSE grades on their written work. This is a simple but effective use of assessment as a tool for learning. In the sixth form students learn well. The teacher's subject knowledge, planning of lessons and management of students are good.
- 235 In Years 7 to 9, a number of lessons are taught by non-specialist teachers; in these lessons the range of activities is narrow and over-reliant on textbooks and work sheets. Teachers assist pupils to learn independently and they reach average standards. In Years 10 and 11, lessons taught by non-specialists are less satisfactory, particularly if

pupils are being entered for the GCSE examination. Pupils lack opportunities to develop basic skills, because activities are narrowly focused on textbooks and work sheets. They have few opportunities to work in pairs and groups, and do not move from listening and reading to speaking and writing. Insufficient use is made of assessment information, and pupils are not aware of their progress against the level descriptions of the agreed syllabus, so they cannot set themselves targets to improve their learning.

- 236 A key issue in the report following the last inspection was that the school should allocate sufficient time for the statutory programme of religious education to be taught properly. As a result pupils in Years 10 and 11 now receive one lesson a week and study the GCSE course. This is an improvement in learning opportunities and meets statutory requirements, but in practice most pupils do not learn enough to be entered for the examination. In Years 7, 8 and 9 the programme of study is broad and relevant but lacks balance. The emphasis is on what pupils learn about religions and not enough on what pupils may learn about themselves from the study of religion. Arrangements for measuring pupils' attainment have improved since the last inspection but assessment is not yet used to guide curricular planning.
- 237 The school continues to make appropriate provision for students in the sixth form.
- 238 Leadership and management are good given the circumstances. The leadership ensures clear educational direction. The aims and values of religious education reflect very well the aims and values of the school. Action taken to comply with the law and to meet the school's own targets for religious education has been good. The shared commitment to improvement and the capacity to succeed in the long term are also good. Accommodation is unsatisfactory. The room used by the specialist is good but non-specialists teach in ten different rooms. The practical difficulties of such an arrangement partly explain the inadequacy of learning resources in lessons. There are insufficient textbooks for pupils on the GCSE course.
- 239 Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. The school now provides all pupils with their statutory entitlement. One consequence is that now six non-specialists teach 20 out of 38 lessons. This suggests the need for another specialist teacher. Pupils in Year 11 explicitly drew inspectors' attention to teachers' lack of subject knowledge in religious education. It is now the quality of the school's provision that needs improvement.

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

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

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

GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Biology	1	100	52	0	2	1.00	0.79
Mathematics	4	50	62	0	15	0.75	1.51
Other Social Studies	4	75	74	0	11	1.50	1.47
Physics	1	0	52	0	4	0	0.90

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	8	100	96	0	46	5.0	6.57
Biology	6	67	88	0	34	2.67	5.25
Chemistry	5	60	90	20	43	2.80	5.90
Communication Studies	11	100	93	36	31	6.55	5.53
Design and Technology	9	100	91	33	30	6.00	5.38
English Literature	7	100	95	57	37	6.57	5.91
French	1	100	89	100	38	10.00	5.59
Geography	3	100	92	100	38	9.33	5.74
German	4	75	91	25	40	4.00	5.81
History	11	91	88	55	35	6.73	5.45
Mathematics	13	46	87	15	43	2.77	5.80
Other Social Studies	6	83	87	17	34	4.67	5.30
Physics	5	100	88	40	40	6.00	5.67
Religious Studies	6	100	92	50	38	7.00	5.84
Sociology	8	100	86	50	35	6.50	5.32

Intermediate vocational qualifications

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		Average point distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Business	4	100	n/a	100	n/a	12	10.45

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

- 240 The focus on this area was mathematics and chemistry, but biology and physics were also sampled. In biology the GCE A-level results in 2001 were well below average. They improved in 2002. In physics the 2001 GCE A-level results were above average and similar ones were obtained in 2002. In both subjects most students performed as well as or better in relation to their prior attainment levels.
- 241 Parts of two lessons were seen in biology and both were taught well. The Year 12 students derived much benefit from the teacher's very good knowledge of the examination board requirements. Students developed examination question answering techniques well. In the lesson with Year 13, students gained much understanding of anaerobic respiration. The teacher's lively approach and clear exposition, using good knowledge of the subject, ensured that good learning took place.
- 242 Two lessons were seen in physics. The lesson with Year 13 students was taught satisfactorily. Students gained a secure understanding of the terms associated with stress and strain. In the Year 12 lesson the teaching was good. The teacher cleverly drew out information from students, making them think and apply their learning. By the end of the lesson they confidently explained the behaviour of thermistors and super conductors. In both subjects most students are performing as expected in relation to their prior attainment. Their attainment is carefully monitored

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- Standards are improving. Currently students are working at levels slightly above the national average.
- Students are making good progress. Year 12 students are particularly confident learners so early in the course.
- Teaching is consistently good or better.
- Assessment is very good.
- Leadership and management of the department are outstanding.

Areas for improvement

- Results at GCE A-level.
- The use of resources, particularly computers.

- 243 The GCE A-level results in 2001 were below the national average. From an entry of 13 students, only three students gained grades in the range A-C, with one student at each grade. Only three other students passed the examination, all at grade D. These results continued the trend of falling numbers completing the course and deteriorating grades since 1998, in which year almost half the 24 entrants attained grades in the range A-C. From 1998 until 2001, out of 69 entrants only 14 have gained grades A or B. This is less than half the proportion nationally.
- 244 In 2002, only four students were entered. One student gained grade A, one grade C and the other two students attained grade D. Whilst the overall pass rate of 100 per cent was above the national average and the percentage of grade A in line with the national average, this represents disappointing retention figures at the end of Year 13. Over the years since 1998, mathematics has been more popular for male students, with entries outnumbering those for female students in the ratio 2:1. Success rates for male and female students have been broadly even.

- 245 In 2001, four students sat GCE AS-level examinations. Only two students passed the examination, one at grade D and the other at grade E. These results were well below the national average. However, the current Year 13 students performed well in GCE AS-level examinations in 2002 at the end of Year 12. There were 15 entrants. The results were impressive, being above the corresponding national standards for both the higher grade and overall pass rate categories for 2001. Only three female students entered, but their performance overall matched that of the male students.
- 246 The Year 13 students continue to make good progress. They are achieving well compared to predictions based on overall GCSE results and the standard of their work is slightly above what is normally seen. In a good lesson in pure mathematics on numeric methods to solve difficult equations, they appreciated that formulae methods for solving cubic equations are unwieldy. They learned to use two numeric methods that home in on solutions and understood why one does this more speedily than the other. The most able students also discovered that some of the formulae used in iterative methods do not converge on the solution and are beginning to understand why. The good use of coloured markers and the teacher's skill in talking through ideas with the students as partners helped develop a thorough understanding. Only when the ideas were clearly understood, did the teacher label them as particular numeric methods. Whilst a minority of students realised that some rearrangements of formulae did not lead to solutions, the lesson could have been enhanced by requiring all students to think this over in preparation for the next lesson.
- 247 Some students in Years 12 and 13 are studying further mathematics. They have lessons together and the arrangement works well. This is providing very good motivation for all of them and the standard of their work overall is in line with students studying AS further mathematics. In a good lesson on the conservation of momentum, students responded well, moving their learning forward to study the effects of spheres impacting at an angle. They listened intently and offered ideas enthusiastically. In particular, one Year 12 female student showed particular initiative in explaining her initial thoughts to the class. The teacher's sensitivity and accurate assessment of the students' ability, together with the use of two footballs to demonstrate such a possible collision, helped the students develop a good understanding of the concepts involved.
- 248 Students in Year 12 are making impressive progress in all aspects of their studies. In a challenging lesson in discrete mathematics they follow the relevant algorithm accurately to determine a minimum path. The teacher's determined approach and skill in teasing out contributions from all of the students led to a thorough analysis and solution of the problem. The class was so determined to see the solution through that the lesson continued ten minutes after normal school time.
- 249 In a lively revision lesson in mechanics, on the first module of work, Year 12 students demonstrated a good knowledge of projectiles. They sketched graphs to help them appreciate the mathematical implications at maximum height and when projectiles reach the ground. They used velocity and distance formulae correctly and separate horizontal and vertical motion accurately. In this lesson, female students actively engaged in discussion about the principles involved. The teacher's careful planning to cover motion in one, two and three dimensions ensured a very good pace throughout.
- 250 Teaching is consistently good or better and has improved in the recent past. All teachers have very good specialist knowledge that enables them to respond quickly and confidently to questions the students ask. The teachers know their students' abilities and attitudes well. Teachers set demanding work, including homework, for all students and expect the students to show the highest levels of commitment. This is necessary because the time allocation within the normal timetable allows just sufficient time to cover the work required. Teachers intend to make better use of ICT in the future and this will enhance learning in certain aspects of the work, particularly where graph plotting is required.

- 251 Students learn well in all aspects of the subject. They are very committed to achieving their potential and quite rightly hold their teachers in high regard. They complete homework to the best of their ability and enjoy mathematical discussion both in and out of lessons. Students have a very good working knowledge of their own abilities and their target grades are realistic yet challenging. They are willing to read up and move forward independently, but this is not easy in mathematics and the most productive learning is in the classroom, interacting with the teacher and each other.
- 252 Whilst teaching in recent years has usually been good, the appointment of an outstanding head of department has given a new lease of life to advanced studies. The head of department permanently displays boundless energy and enthusiasm for the subject. This has had a significant effect on the recruitment of students to the subject and their attitudes to study. The opportunity to study further mathematics as well as the introduction of discrete mathematics has greatly motivated both of the current cohorts of students. They are proving to be more successful than in previous years and the results of students in Year 13 already indicate a clear reversal of recent trends. Following a dip in performance for several years after the last inspection, there has been good improvement recently.

Chemistry

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

Strengths

- Numbers taking the subject are increasing and almost all are achieving in line with, or better in relation to, their prior attainment.
- Students are very well taught and they have great confidence in their teachers.
- The progress of students is very carefully monitored.
- The accommodation is good.

Areas for improvement

- A few students, mainly girls, are passive in class and teachers need to question them more to check understanding.
- More data-logging equipment is needed to provide more opportunities for students to develop their skills in ICT.

- 253 The GCE A-level results for the five students in 2001 were below the national averages. In 2002, six of the seven students gained at least a pass grade. In both years almost all achieved as well as or better than expected when their prior attainment was taken into account. During the past two years the department has encountered a number of serious difficulties which have affected the standard of teaching and learning. There have been staffing shortages. Since the last inspection the department has been completely refurbished and many lessons were taught in rooms lacking specialist facilities. This has had an adverse effect on standards, particularly in investigative work.
- 254 The standards achieved by the current students are average. Most are achieving as expected in relation to prior attainment and making satisfactory progress. During the first few weeks of the course Year 12 students are competently identifying groups in organic compounds. They correctly name and write structural formulae. They can apply oxidation numbers. The skills they need in investigative work are at expected levels. In one lesson they were applying themselves well, making predictions and observing and recording in detail. In another lesson they soon learned how to carry out a reflux operation safely and successfully. By the end of one lesson, Year 13 students were calculating equilibrium constants and using correct units. This was as a result of clear, measured delivery and exposition by the teacher. In the lesson following, the students carefully and safely carried out an investigation to measure an equilibrium constant.

They knew what they were doing and what they had to find out. They clearly explained the theory behind the investigation. Their note-taking skills are well developed

- 255 In the four lessons seen, the teaching was good in two of them and very good in the other two. The teachers know each student extremely well and skilfully question them to check understanding. Lessons are very well planned. Objectives are made very clear at the start and learning is summarised at the end. Teachers know their subject very well. They adopt a lively and enthusiastic approach. Delivery is clear and measured, with emphasis on exact terminology. Investigative work is managed very well. A particularly strong feature is the quality of marking. It is promptly done, on a regular basis. The comments clearly identify areas of weakness and suggest how improvements can be made. Individual tutorials are arranged outside lesson times to ensure that students make the expected progress. All of the above contribute to the good learning that takes place.
- 256 The subject is well led and managed. The two teachers are appropriately qualified. The full-time teacher does almost all of the teaching but frequent discussions take place regularly between them. Beneficial relationships with the local university have been established and students have carried out extended investigations there. The refurbished accommodation provides good facilities. Students have ready access to the available ICT resources. However there is a shortage of data capture and logging equipment to enable students to develop their skills further in ICT.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTORY

- 257 No courses in this area were inspected in detail. Design and technology was sampled.

Design and technology

- 258 Standards in the sixth form are above average. The course the students follow has been chosen well so that they can all make good use of their different experiences at GCSE. More students are joining the course each year as its reputation grows and there are many more students in Year 12 than in Year 13. They are making good progress as a result of very effective, well-focused teaching and are on track to achieve well at AS and A-level. Students are enthusiastic and this contributes to the good progress they make. Teaching in design and technology in the sixth form is very good.

BUSINESS

- 259 No courses in this area were studied in detail.
- 260 Business is taught at Key Stage 4 and at A-level. A sample of lessons in AVCE business found teaching to be satisfactory and student response good, especially where learning was related to the experiences of business that the pupils encountered in their daily lives.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

The focus was on AVCE ICT. Overall, the quality of provision in ICT is **good**.

Strengths

- Teaching is good, based on strong subject knowledge and computing skills.
- Students have a positive attitude to the subject.
- There are increased opportunities for students to pursue an ICT examination at an advanced level.

Area for improvement

- Provide more detailed information about the course.

261 This is the first year that an examination course has been offered for students in the sixth form. The present AVCE course only started at the beginning of the term. From work seen, observation of lessons and discussion with students, their attainment is at the level expected at this point in the course. The initial part of the course is an introductory module, dealing mainly with communication skills; these skills are well established. Students are confident users of the word-processing application, presenting a variety of documents to include invoices, minutes of meetings, business letters using the mail merge facility and instructions to operate a video recorder with a particular audience in mind. Desktop publishing techniques are used effectively to produce balanced documents to advertise places of interest, with added graphics downloaded from the Internet. Students are developing an understanding of security issues, viruses and the protection of documents of a sensitive nature. Students have sound knowledge of the modelling element, using a spreadsheet to track their own work. Students who sat the GCSE office application examination have good knowledge of the formulae for mathematical calculations. Students have knowledge of data handling but this element is not as well established as others. The ICT key skills sessions are at an early stage; however, students are making good progress and are developing sound understanding of desktop publishing skills, producing flyers to suit the reader.

262 Students' attitude to the subject is positive, showing a good level of interest. They settle to work quickly, are focused during lessons and persevere when tasks become challenging. They do, however, seek help when required and value the advice readily given by the teacher. Students are confident to discuss their work and contribute to lively discussions on how to present a document. In discussion, all the students felt that they were well advised about the course though they felt that the booklet about the course needed to be more detailed. They did, however, comment that they felt they were being suitably challenged.

263 The quality of teaching is good and students learn well as a result. Teachers have good subject knowledge and computing skills, and use their expertise effectively to guide students and maintain a good pace in lessons. The well-focused questioning during the exposition of lessons and plenary sessions contributes well to students' progress and the pace of the learning. On the occasions when students are working individually, teachers circulate well, discussing the work and contributing positively to their learning. The relationships between students and teachers are good. This was noticeable in a Year 12 ICT key skills session. Here students felt at ease to freely contribute to the discussion; however, at times this was dominated by a few students and lacked intervention by the teacher.

- 264 Although the head of department has had responsibility for the subject for only a short period, he has a clear understanding of the requirements of the course and is leading it appropriately. Resources and accommodation for students are good, with easy access to computer suites that have the appropriate software. However, the main teaching rooms lack a suitable computer screen to project and demonstrate to a whole class and, as a consequence, the image has to be projected onto the wall and part of the ceiling.
- 265 Computer studies were inspected. An AVCE ICT is offered to students in the sixth form. This the first occasion that the school has offered an advanced level ICT course and the response has been good, with 26 students opting for the course. The majority of students in the sixth form have the opportunity to study an ICT key skills course. Teaching and learning are good. The attitudes among students to learning are also good.

HOSPITALITY, SPORT AND LEISURE AND TOURISM

- 266 No subject in the area was inspected but sports and leisure and tourism were sampled. In sports, the department provided a one-hour timetabled lesson per week for Years 12 and 13 combined. Because of some students being timetabled at the same time for AS and A-level lessons, all students were not able to attend. Participation for the rest was voluntary and take-up was poor.
- 267 Leisure and tourism is in its first year of this course. There were three students in the lesson observed. This was a satisfactory lesson. It was taught by a non-specialist and the teaching did not identify appropriate outcomes to take account of the varied attainment levels of the pupils and so, for parts of the lesson, students were working at inappropriate levels. However, standards of work seen were in line with national expectations.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

- 268 There is no provision in this area.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS, AND MEDIA

Visual and performing arts, and media

- 269 The focus was on music technology and art and design, but music and performing arts were also sampled.
- 270 Two Year 12 music AS classes were observed. Only one student was entered for music last year and gained an E grade. This year the group is much larger but very varied in ability and musical experience. The best students have appropriate levels of skill and knowledge for the course but at this very early stage, others have much ground to catch up on, especially in aspects of music theory. The teaching is satisfactory to good, but does not always sufficiently cater for the wide range of musical understanding in the group.
- 271 Two Year 12 performing arts AS lessons were observed. The course is an excellent new initiative this year; it contains elements of music, drama and dance and is taught jointly by music and drama staff. The more technically demanding aspects of the music-only course are not required and attainment in the music element is above average. The lack of some students' drama experience in previous years is reflected in their attainment which is more varied than their standards in music, from below to above average. No dance was seen. Performing arts students are very committed, and the teaching is very good overall and often excellent. As drama becomes more fully

developed in the school this course will become an even more valuable alternative option to 'pure' music for some at least.

Music technology

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

Strengths

- A new and popular initiative; examination results (AS) already good.
- High quality teaching with effective use of specialist music technology staff.
- Resources and accommodation.
- Committed approach of most students.

Area for improvement

- To encourage the more passive students to contribute to discussion in a more lively way.

272 This is a new initiative, started when the present head of department took up her post in September 2001. Its success has led to a higher percentage of students studying music technology now than in the other post-16 courses offered by the department at both AS and A2 levels. Ten students were entered for the AS exam in 2002 and results were good, all gaining grades A-E with three at grades A or B.

273 The standard of work of current students is well in line with course requirements. The smaller Year 13 group was seen analysing a well-chosen short extract from a British film comedy. They were able to discuss with good insight the use of camera angles, sudden changes of shot and the way the soundtrack, natural sounds and music, contributed to the dramatic effect. This was a very effective preparation for their own film score composing. Their work in folders contains well-written musical analyses which are perceptively marked and annotated by the teacher.

274 Two Year 12 classes were seen. A visiting instrumental teacher, who is a guitarist and has skills and experience in music technology, provides valuable expert assistance to the class teacher. In one lesson the students were creating tracks using a sequencer to produce a blues. Many showed an idiomatic feel for the style with good bass lines, and appropriate drum and piano tracks. Some were adding further instrumental parts and within the given remit, the best were particularly imaginative or stylistically advanced. Tasks were suitably simplified for students with special educational needs who then experienced success in the activity. In the other class, students analysed old and new jazz recordings and made perceptive analytical comments, both in terms of musical aspects and recording technique.

275 Teaching is at least good and often very good and the students benefit from the expert knowledge of their teachers and the assistant's practical experience of the music business. As well as this, the high quality of the teaching is characterised by very good lesson planning that provides challenging activities and stimulating pace, a range of effective teaching method, very good use of specialist support staff, and excellent assessment, both in verbal feedback and in written form. Particularly in Year 12, students can be rather passive in discussion sessions but probing questioning is usually rewarded by a livelier response. The very warm relationships between teachers and students add much to the learning. The students are mostly very committed and their behaviour is impeccable.

276 The resources for music technology are extensive, with a good supply of computers and appropriate software, hard-disk 8-track recorders and other sophisticated equipment. Some of this is located in the en-suite practice rooms, which allows students to use them when other class lessons or rehearsals are taking place in the main teaching space. Students make the most of these facilities, spending a lot of non-

lesson time working independently at the computers or practising. The course is rightly attracting good numbers, with many who would not be well served by a more narrow traditional music course. Leadership and management are very good.

Art and design

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

Strengths

- Teachers possess good subject knowledge and are competent to teach skills in drawing, painting and craft.
- Teachers are familiar with the GCE examination assessment requirements.
- Teachers provide good support for individual students.
- There are good working relationships between teachers and students.

Areas for improvement

- Students work with a narrow range of art and craft materials.
- Insufficient use is made of modern technology, photography and ICT at present.
- There is a lack of exploration of ideas and experimentation on a large scale.
- The setting of targets for individual students is lacking in rigour at present.

277 The GCE AS-level examination results for 2002 showed improvement over the previous year's results. While attainment by boys remained static, girls' attainment showed significant improvement. The GCE A-level results for 2001 were significantly below the national average, but there has been some slight improvement in the number of students achieving grades A or B in the 2002 examination.

278 The standard of work that students are currently producing is broadly in line with the national average, and a small minority of students are working just above. In the lessons seen, most students were working tentatively on small pieces of paper on a flat tabletop. Only one or two were working with card to create interesting three-dimensional models of interlocking shapes. There was little evidence of sustained exploration of concepts and ideas or of experimentation with a wide range of media and materials. Most students have begun to make a reasonable effort to monitor and review their own work on a regular basis. Achievement is just satisfactory at the moment.

279 Although students in Year 12 are only at the beginning of their two-year course, most are making satisfactory progress. They apply effort to their work and are quite productive, but their pace of working remains slow. Most show that they are acquiring the capacity for greater independence in their way of working and thinking, but a significant few remain overly-dependent on the work of other artists to provide source material for their own work. In one Year 12 lesson seen during the inspection, very good use was made of a video camera. The students were presented with folders of completed work belonging to last year's students. They were then asked to record their own views and opinions on the content of these folders. This led to very interesting discussion and a frank exchange of views. The video recording meant that, some time later, these students were able to sit and watch themselves and critically evaluate the quality of their own comments. In this instance the video camera was employed as a highly effective learning tool.

280 Students in Year 13 make satisfactory progress, but much of the work that they are producing is rather predictable, as many of the tasks that are set do not sufficiently challenge them. Most employ traditional processes such as drawing and painting, while others work with tracing paper to make collages. At present, two students are making good use of basic photography skills in their work to create an assemblage of various images of the human face. The majority apply effort to their work and by this stage

display greater independence in their manner of working. They are reasonably productive but the pace of working remains slow.

- 281 Teaching ranges from satisfactory to very good and is satisfactory overall. Teachers are well informed and are familiar with the requirements of the AS and A-level specifications. Planning is good and teachers come to lessons well prepared. Discussions with students are designed in such a way that all are involved in communicating clearly with other members of the group. Management of students is satisfactory and teachers spend most of the lesson time offering advice and support to individual pupils when required. At present, students are not provided with sufficient opportunity to extend their range of art and craft activities to incorporate problem-solving in a design context, by making much greater use of photography techniques, computers, digital cameras, scanners and printers. However, a new darkroom will be available soon which means that students will be able to produce their own enlarged black and white images. These can then be used as highly personal starting points for further development into large paintings or objects in three dimensions.
- 282 Leadership and management are satisfactory. A new head of department has recently been appointed and has already begun the process of updating procedures and systems for assessing, recording and tracking students' work over time, and for providing accurate and informed feedback to students. Target setting, based on detailed analysis of students' past performance, is also under review at present. The new head of department is fully aware of the need to broaden the curriculum on offer and has already taken steps to ensure that they are given greater access to modern technology in the form of photography and ICT.
- 283 Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory. Results in the GCE A-level examinations over the past two years have been disappointing and attainment was well below the national average. However, on the basis of work seen during the inspection, standards are slowly improving and might improve even further with the introduction of photography and ICT activities into the curriculum.

HUMANITIES

- 284 The focus of the inspection was on psychology and history. In addition, geography, sociology and religious studies were sampled. In geography and sociology, very good teaching and learning are resulting in students making very good progress and achieving standards above the national averages. Relatively small numbers have taken religious studies and results are around the average. Good teaching ensures that these students always achieve standards that are at least as good as predicted by their prior attainment. In 2001, results in geography were above the national average and half the students gained higher grades (A or B).

History

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

Strengths

- Teaching is very good.
- Teachers have high expectations of students.
- Careful, thorough marking, with detailed comments, helps students make good progress.
- Teachers provide an appropriate variety of teaching and learning styles.

Areas for improvement

- More challenging work for the very highest attainers.
- The arrangement of seating to stimulate more productive discussion sessions.

- 285 The GCE A-level examination results in 2001 were well above the national average at grades A and B and above at grades A to E. This continued the pattern of the previous two years. In 2002 the results were a little lower, but generally represented the students' prior attainment. Students make satisfactory progress overall from their GCSE work, but the higher attainers often make good progress. All students who took the AS examination in 2002 gained 'pass' grade, but the proportion gaining grades A or B was below average.
- 286 The standard of work seen by students currently taking history in Years 12 and 13 is in line with that expected nationally. They demonstrate good knowledge and understanding of the topics they are studying. Students in Year 13 successfully summarised the main features of a fascist regime in the 1930s; the highest attainers made valid links between different fascist states. They use text sources very competently to gather the salient points of an issue and collate their findings. Students in a Year 13 group explained their findings well in short oral presentations. The highest attainers write essays which are well researched and carefully argued. The essay work from the lower attainers is often more narrative and descriptive in style, lacking the depth of analysis needed to achieve the highest grades. Most make very good notes which provide a good basis for revision, ensuring that key points are highlighted, and using bullet points to good effect.
- 287 Students in Year 12 show sound knowledge and understanding of the events they are studying. A large minority could not, however, define confidently words such as suffrage, in frequent use in the topic being studied. Some students studying the background to Italian Unification were unsure about the areas of Italy ruled by Austria in the mid-19th century. The highest attainers, however, demonstrated very good understanding of what factors made Italian Unification more or less likely by 1848, and linked different factors together well. Students use evidence confidently to form their views about the past, as, for instance, in the work of a group of students explaining political cartoons about the women's suffrage movement in the late 19th century. A sample of essays recently completed by students ranged in standard from below to above average. Those from the lower attainers lacked a clear structure and were largely narrative rather than analytical in approach. Several contained misspellings of words such as parliament and citizenship.
- 288 Teaching is very good overall and is contributing to students' good progress in both Years 12 and 13. Teachers have very good subject knowledge, which they communicate effectively. The work set is appropriately challenging for the vast majority of students, and is matched well to the requirements of the examinations. Teachers sometimes, however, miss opportunities to set very demanding work for the very highest attainers. Work is marked to examination criteria, and the usually detailed comments on marked work provide students with clear guidance and targets to improve their answers in the future.
- 289 Teaching methods ensure that students have a variety of ways in which to learn. They have good opportunities to work independently; they do not rely too heavily on their teachers. Group work is well organised and ensures all students participate in the work. Short whole class sessions in which teachers outline the key points of a topic ensure that all students have a good set of basic notes. Teachers expect students to use ICT for research, both in and outside lessons. Teachers rightly emphasise students' oral contributions to lessons, and give them good opportunities to make oral presentations of their work. Students in Year 13 working on the background to the 1867 Reform Act researched key individuals involved in the Act (using the Internet) and presented their findings articulately to the whole class. Students work hard, and they come to lessons prepared for work, thus enabling the teachers to move on to new work effectively. Students' work as independent learners is helped by the good provision for history in the library. The good ICT provision enables them to make effective use of the Internet for research.

- 290 The head of subject for Years 12 and 13 is newly appointed to the post, temporarily, and has been in the school for a term and a half. He also has a joint responsibility within Years 7 to 11. He has identified the need to ensure the highest attainers reach the very top grades as a priority, and is investigating appropriate strategies to achieve this.

Psychology

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

Strengths

- Very good teaching based on good knowledge and understanding of both the subject and the demands of the examination.
- Very effective learning, resulting in very good progress and good standards.
- Very good leadership and management.
- Very good assessment of students' progress and the use of that assessment to monitor the effectiveness of teaching.

Area for improvement

- The rapidly increasing popularity of the subject is resulting in large class sizes. This is compromising the quality of teaching.

- 291 Psychology is a recent addition to the sixth form curriculum. Students were first entered for A-level in 2001 when a small group attained moderate results. In 2002, ten students took the examination; all passed and a third gained higher grades (A or B). There are now 19 students in Year 13 and 44 in Year 12. Evidence gathered during the inspection confirmed the maintenance of the standards achieved in 2002. The work in students' files, observation of lessons and the examination of test materials indicated that all the students in Year 13 are in line to pass the examination and approximately a third should gain higher grades. In Year 12, there is a wide range of prior attainment with many students starting the course from a relatively weak performance at GCSE. At this early stage of the course, all students are predicted to pass AS-level but a smaller percentage is in line for a higher grade.
- 292 Teaching and learning are consistently very good. Both teachers have very good relationships with their students and analyse accurately their strengths and weaknesses. This strong basis is used to plan lessons that are imaginative and constantly make students think through concepts for themselves. The use of the excellent film *Twelve Angry Men*, to stimulate ideas about how a minority can influence the majority, worked exceptionally well. Students, guided by minimal contributions from the teacher, were able to construct a set of hypotheses that almost exactly matched the relevant section in the textbook. Students were understandably pleased, were motivated by their success, and had clearly gained a secure grasp of difficult concepts. Students in a Year 12 lesson had to explain short sections of a well-prepared work sheet on 'memory' to the whole class. This approach to learning helped the students to improve understanding and consolidate their knowledge about memory. Teachers have very precise knowledge of the demands of each part of the examination and this is used well to enable each individual to maximise his or her performance.
- 293 Leadership and management are very good. The chosen syllabus suits the needs of students well and the two teachers work closely together to ensure that work is presented logically and completely. Each teacher is very careful to include links to parts of the syllabus taught by the other. Students' work is constantly assessed using examination criteria. The results of assessment are used well to set appropriately high targets for students and to check on the effectiveness of teaching.

- 294 Classes in Year 12 now contain more than 20 students. This limits the amount of individual tuition and support that teachers can give. It also compromises the teachers' ability to use strategies that encourage active learning. Any further increase will result in teachers having to use more didactic methods. They may have to resort to 'lecturing' rather than 'teaching'.
- 295 This increasingly popular and successful subject is making a significant contribution to the quality of sixth form provision.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

- 296 The focus was on English. In modern foreign languages the emphasis was on German although work in French was sampled. Only a small number of students study foreign languages in the sixth form. In 2001 they all passed at AS and A-level. The results were good in relation to pupils' performance at GCSE. Teaching is good and teachers have particularly good subject knowledge for work at this level.

English

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

Strengths

- Teaching is very good, with high academic standards.
- Students are well motivated and articulate.
- Results for A2 level in 2001 were above the national average.

Areas for improvement

- Over half of candidates for A2 level in 2002 achieved lower grades.
- Standards and achievement.

- 297 In GCE A2 level examination in 2001, results were above the national average, both in the percentage of students achieving grades A or B and in their average points scores. Results in 2002 were less good, with over half of the group achieving grades D or E. The overall standard of work seen in scrutiny of written work and in lessons is above average. Oral responses in both Years 12 and 13 are well above average. The major reason for this is there are well-planned opportunities for students to reflect upon in their lessons and evaluate texts in pairs and groups. Students in Year 12 have successfully adapted to the increased rigour of the AS-level course. In their study of Wordsworth's poetry, for example, students were mature and sensitive in their understanding of the background to the poet's writing, and had come to terms with his beliefs and views of nature and society. Students read widely and use ICT to further their research. Some oral contributions are outstandingly perceptive and reflect the very supportive and collaborative working relationships throughout the sixth form. The same class in Year 12 was similarly enthusiastic in its their work on the poetry of Owen and Sassoon in preparation for study of a novel about World War I. Their written work is, on the whole, well planned, carefully presented and accurate in expression. Note-making is better than average. Students in Year 13 are very committed and enthusiastic. The very good teaching they receive is critical in creating their positive attitude. Lessons have a sense of an adult tutorial approach. During a lesson on 'American Prose and Poetry in the Twentieth Century' students were imaginative in their grasp of the political trials in the USA in the 1950s. Discussion was of a high academic level. Written work is thoroughly researched, well prepared and firmly based in the text being studied.

- 298 The overall quality of teaching is very good, with some being outstanding. Teachers set very high academic standards and students respond well to the challenge. Relationships are excellent because students appreciate the expertise of teachers and the great care and professionalism of their lesson preparation. In one excellent lesson in Year 12, for example, the detailed structure of the lessons ensured that students were involved actively at every stage either in discussing, reading or writing. Classroom management was excellent and led to the total involvement of all students. Lessons are conducted at great pace and with great energy. Teachers use questioning skilfully to draw students out and to insist upon detailed answers justified by references. A wide range of teaching methods is used. In a Year 12 lesson, for instance, a sequencing exercise helped students to become familiar with an important text.
- 299 Sixth form courses are very well organised. The good recruitment and retention of students in courses demonstrate the department's excellent reputation amongst students. Assessment of students' work and progress is thorough. An outstanding feature of classes in Years 12 and 13 is the positive relationship between staff and students. Management of the subject in the sixth form is very good.

Modern foreign languages – German

The focus of the inspection was on German.

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

Strengths

- Teachers have good subject knowledge.
- The quality of teachers' planning and preparation for lessons is good.
- There are very good relationships between students and with their teachers.

Areas for improvement

- The numbers of students who opt for languages in the sixth form are small.
- The quality of students' oral work is not as high as in other aspects of the subject.

- 300 The number of students who opt for languages at A-level is too small to make comparisons valid against national averages. In 2001, there were four entries in German and all students passed and one student obtained a higher grade. There were no AS-level entries in 2001.
- 301 Evidence seen in lessons and in students' files suggests that standards in Years 12 and 13 are broadly in line with those expected for the course. Male and female students and those from ethnic minority backgrounds do equally well and achievement overall is good in relation to performance at GCSE. Students can understand the gist of authentic spoken and written German and can select important details from it. Inspection evidence indicates that the quality of spoken German is below that which could be expected and spoken responses are often brief and lack confidence for work at this level. Nevertheless, students are able to discuss issues about society in Germany with reasonable confidence. They can, for example, talk about aspects of youth culture in Germany. The quality of students' written work is variable and shows the legacy of a lack of regular structured opportunities to develop extended writing styles in Years 10 and 11. Students write at length about such topics as global warming, for example, but often have problems with the order of words in sentences.
- 302 The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers prepare lessons carefully and ensure that relevant and up-to-date material is available for lessons. Teachers have good subject knowledge, particularly of the technicalities of grammar needed to prepare for examinations, and students are given plenty of helpful prompts to aid their preparation. Teachers make good use of ICT to access relevant and up-to-date

information and this adds to the authenticity of the work provided. Students also use ICT for research and for preparation of homework assignments. Students' work is regularly marked and corrected, and teachers make good use of marking to give students help on how to improve their work. There is a happy, relaxed but business-like atmosphere in lessons, and very good relationships between students and with their teachers are a feature of the subject. Students of German are attentive and show interest in the subject. They develop good individual and research skills. Students work hard and show sensible and mature attitudes to the subject. Help and advice are readily available when students need them and this is a significant factor in the progress they make. The small groups at A-level present particular problems when discussions take place in lessons, and teachers need to give thought to how to improve the quality of discussion without them always taking the dominant role in the discussion. The deployment of the German language assistant is not making best use of his time at present, with regard to oral work with students.

- 303 Students have very good opportunities for work experience in Germany. This adds considerably to their personal, social and cultural development as well as to their language skills and knowledge of the country. The management of the subject is good. There are clear policies in place and the scheme of work provides a progressive programme across the two years of the sixth form.