

INSPECTION REPORT

SOUTHEND HIGH SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

Southend – on - Sea

LEA area: Southend – on - Sea

Unique reference number: 115344

Headteacher: Ms R Alinek

Reporting inspector: Ms S Tweddell
1709

Dates of inspection: 11th – 14th November 2002

Inspection number: 249722

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Grammar
School category:	Foundation
Age range of pupils:	11 - 18
Gender of pupils:	Girls
School address:	Southchurch Boulevard Southend – on - Sea
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Appropriate authority:	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Dr L Barnard
Date of previous inspection:	February 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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1709	Sandra Tweddell	Registered inspector		Results and students' achievements Teaching and learning The effectiveness of leadership and management in the sixth form
14066	Gill Hoggard	Lay inspector		Students' attitudes, values and personal development The school's care for its students
19214	Geoff Price	Team inspector	English	Curricular and other opportunities for students
3670	Mick Michell	Team inspector	Chemistry Physics Biology	
27058	Kathleen Cannon	Team inspector	ICT History	
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Southend High school for girls is an average size selective grammar school with 946 pupils on roll, 224 of whom are in the sixth form. There are currently 11 boys in the sixth form. The intake does not reflect the usual grammar school, as Southend operates a rule which means that the school takes in a broader ability range from the local area. Pupils come from the immediate area, and further afield, including Essex and London. The majority of pupils come from a white European background, but there is also a higher number than in most schools of pupils from Asian homes. A small number speak English as an additional language and all are fluent in English. The number of pupils entitled to free school meals is below average. There are far fewer pupils with special educational needs than in most schools and no pupil has a statement of special educational need. The attainment on entry is well above average. In September 2002, the school was designated a Language College.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Southend High School for Girls is an excellent school. The leadership and management are excellent and the direction set by the headteacher has created a strong work ethic. Students achieve very well and attainment is very high at the end of Years 11 and 13. There is mutual respect between staff and students so that students have high self-esteem and they care for one another. Teaching is very good overall and, as a result, students are eager to learn and their behaviour is excellent; relationships throughout the school also are excellent. Taking into account the costs per student, the attainment on entry and the attainment when students leave, the school gives good value for money. The challenge now facing the school is to implement the plans for the status of Language College.

What the school does well

Students make very good progress in Years 10 to 13 and their attainment is very high. Leadership and management are excellent. Teaching is very good. There is an excellent learning environment and a strong work ethic. Students' personal development and academic progress are monitored exceptionally well.
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What could be improved

Attainment in science in Years 7 to 9.
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The areas for improvement will form the basis of the governors' action plan.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made excellent progress since it was last inspected in February 1996. Attainment has risen significantly, particularly in the sixth form, and higher attaining students are now challenged in all subjects. Attainment in modern foreign languages and English has improved and there is now no underachievement. The provision for music has improved very significantly. The curriculum now is cost effective, statutory requirements for information and communication technology (ICT) are met and ICT is used more effectively. The time given to religious studies has increased in Years 7 to 9, but is still insufficient in Years 10 to 13. Teaching and learning have improved and students now evaluate their work regularly. Assessment is used very well to plan for teaching. Middle managers have clear roles. The good features of the previous report have been maintained and all the other points for development have been tackled successfully.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	2000	2001	2002	2002
GCSE examinations	A*	A*	A*	C
A-levels/AS-levels		A*		

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

The table shows that in both GCSE and A-Level, the school's performance is in the highest five per cent of schools in the country. In comparison with similar schools, attainment at GCSE has been above average, and in 2002 was average. In GCSE, attainment has been very high for the last five years. Attainment at the end of Year 9 has been very high in comparison with all schools for a number of years. Against similar schools at the end of Year 9, attainment in English in 2002 was above average, and in mathematics and science was below average. The trend in performance by the end of Year 9 has been in line with the national trend and by the end of Year 11 has been above the national trend.

The inspection found that attainment is likely to be similar to that of the last few years. Students make good progress in Years 7 to 9 and very good progress in Years 10 to 13. Higher attaining and lower attaining students achieve well because of the targets that are set and regular guidance as to how they should reach their targets. Students for whom English is an additional language are fluent in English and achieve equally well. Attainment in mathematics and science is improving by the end of Year 9 because of rigorous action by senior management, who analysed reasons for lower attainment than in other subjects and have used the information to raise the quality of provision, although more needs to be done in science. The few boys in the sixth form achieve well because they are well integrated into the life of the school and are taught appropriately.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Excellent. Students are very positive about the school and, generally, are avid learners.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Excellent. Students behave well in lessons and around the school.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Students have high self esteem and most relate exceptionally well to adults and to each other. By the end of Years 11 and 13, most are mature and responsible young women.
Attendance	Good and students arrive punctually to school and to lessons.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Teaching is very good overall and over half of all lessons observed were very good or excellent. In the sixth form, almost two thirds of teaching observed was very good or excellent. Teaching of English and mathematics is very good. The teaching of science is good overall. There is a remarkable consistency in the quality of teaching which comes about from the excellent team work amongst the staff and the quality of the monitoring and feedback that staff receive from their line managers. Teachers have a very good understanding of their subjects that they use well to move the learning of students forward. Many lessons are lively, interesting and, above all, challenging, so that students are highly motivated and think deeply about the topic that is being taught. A small number of lessons lack sparkle, but the excellent learning skills of the students enable them to remain motivated. Higher and lower attaining students are taught equally well, although occasionally, the match of work to lower attaining pupils is inappropriate as they need more time to think about what is being taught. Students are effectively encouraged to use their skills of literacy and numeracy in all subjects. Most teachers encourage students to use their skills of ICT.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good and very good in the sixth form. The curriculum meets the needs of all the students and the wide range of extra-curricular activities successfully broadens learning. The time for religious education in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form is insufficient to meet the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Very good. Although there are few students with difficulties in learning, the students who sometimes need extra support for emotional difficulties are dealt with well through the pastoral programme.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	The vast majority of students are proficient in English so do not need support. They are taught well in classes and any individual needs are met well by teachers.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good. The provision for moral and social development is excellent and for spiritual and cultural development is good. The provision is an intrinsic part of the school's ethos, although it is not planned.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very well. This is a very strong feature of the school and contributes to the strong work ethic. Assessment and its use are key strengths

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Excellent. The headteacher is committed to maintaining and improving attainment whilst having a deep concern for the welfare of her staff and the personal development of students. The team-work between senior managers is excellent. They are supportive and challenging, which is ensuring that the school is not complacent about its success but is constantly seeking to improve further.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors are extremely knowledgeable about the school. There is a wide range of expertise on the governing body that is used exceptionally well to support developments. A few come in to review the work of the school, although the focus of the visit is not fully linked to the school development plan. Governors fulfil their role well.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Excellent. Data from examination performance is carefully analysed with the aim of improving performance further. Teaching is regularly monitored and the information used widely to improve its quality. Rigorous self evaluation has started and information from this used to move the school on.
The strategic use of resources	Excellent. Finances are managed prudently and are closely linked to the priorities for development. Governors and senior management ensure that they achieve best value in all their spending.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<p>Their children enjoy school.</p> <p>Teachers have high expectations of their children and their children make good progress.</p> <p>Behaviour is good and their children are helped to become mature and responsible.</p> <p>Teaching is good.</p> <p>The school is well led and managed.</p>	<p>About 20 per cent of those who replied feel that there is too much homework.</p> <p>Some feel that the school does not work closely with parents.</p> <p>Some would like to see more activities outside lessons.</p>

The inspection found that parents are justified in what pleases them about the school, but have reservations about what parents would like to see improved. There is a very wide range of activities outside lessons which includes educational visits and opportunities to take part in sports and arts activities. Homework is set regularly to an agreed timetable and students are given sufficient time to do it. Parents receive an annual report about their child's progress and they also receive an interim report. About 90 per cent of parents attend evenings when they are given information about their child's progress. A few parents feel unable to discuss concerns with staff, although some were given the chance to do so last year through an anonymous questionnaire. Much information is sent to parents about the school and a group of parents has just restarted the Parents' Association.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form is larger than average having 224 students on roll, 11 of them boys. It is selective and most students have attended the main school. A proportion comes from other schools, many travelling long distances to attend. A small number of students from the school go to other schools or colleges as they are more conveniently situated close to their homes. There is a small number of students from minority ethnic groups, reflecting the school population as a whole. There are no students with special educational needs. A wide range of courses is offered, all at AS or A2 level. Attainment on entry is well above average. Students are expected to have gained A* to C grades at GCSE in order to study a course, but care is taken to admit students who have the potential to gain an A-Level, but who have failed to gain the necessary GCSE grades.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The sixth form offers excellent provision to its students and gives good value for money. Students make very good progress to attain very high standards, both academically and in their personal development. The leadership and management are excellent and teaching is very good. In the best lessons, the combination of teachers inspiring students and the students' thirst for learning results in lively debate which takes learning further. The choice of courses and the provision within the courses meet the needs of all students very well. Since the last inspection, there has been excellent improvement in attainment.

Strengths

Teaching is very good and teachers have high expectations of their students.

Students make very good progress and attainment is very high.

Students have excellent attitudes towards their work.

The leadership and management of the sixth form are excellent.

Students take up responsibilities exceptionally well. They have a deep concern for the welfare of others who are less fortunate.

Data from assessment is used excellently to set targets for students and to measure the progress they make towards the targets.

Students receive excellent support and guidance.

What could be improved

A few lessons are lacklustre, occasionally not all students are included in discussion.

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

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

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

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	Very good. Attainment is very high and students make very good progress because teaching is very good.
Chemistry	Very good. Students make very good progress, responding well to the course selected. Attainment has risen considerably since the introduction of the course and is now well above average. Teaching is very good.
Biology	Very good. Attainment is well above average and the quality of teaching very good.
Physics	Very good. Attainment has risen in the last three years and is now well above average. The teaching is very good.
ICT	Very good. Attainment is well above average and students make very good progress. The department is very well managed and teaching is very good.
Music	Excellent. Teaching is very good and much is excellent. The leadership and management are excellent. Students attain exceptionally highly and make very good progress.
Geography	Excellent. The department is very well led and teaching is very good. Students make very good progress to attain highly.
History	Excellent. Attainment is well above average and students achieve very well. They work productively. Teaching is very good.
Religious studies	Excellent. Students make excellent progress to attain very high results.
Psychology	Very good. Attainment is well above average and is rising. Teaching is very good so students have a very positive attitude and work with focus.
English	Very good. Very good teaching challenges students who respond with enthusiasm and so make very good progress.
French	Excellent. Outstanding teaching inspires students and their learning is excellent.
German	Good. Students make good progress to achieve above average standards.

Eight other subjects were sampled: art, technology, product design, Spanish, general studies, business studies, media education and sociology. Teaching in these subjects is never less than good and is often excellent. Key skills are mainly taught through general studies in Year 12 to level 3. It is taught very well and teachers ensure that students use key skills of communication, numeracy and ICT through presentations and research.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Students receive very good guidance and support before they enter the sixth form and throughout and they receive excellent careers advice. They are aware of their minimum target grades. Their progress towards these is regularly monitored and advice given as to how they should improve their work in order to attain or better the grade that is predicted. They are very well supported by the tutorial system.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	The leadership and management of the sixth form are excellent. The headteacher has very high expectations of her students and staff and the excellent management of the head of the sixth form ensures that students attain highly. Leadership strives constantly to maintain and improve standards. Staff are highly successful in promoting equality of opportunity.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
They enjoy being in the sixth form. They are taught well and challenged to do their best.	More help to settle into the sixth form. Suggestions about how to improve work and more support from teachers, especially when they need help with personal difficulties. A wider range of enrichment activities. More consideration taken of the views of sixth formers.

The questionnaire was completed very early in the term before students in Year 12 had time to settle in. This may explain the criticisms raised in the responses to the questionnaire. Inspectors spoke with large numbers of students during the week and found contrary responses to those of the questionnaire. Students indicated that their views are taken into account and they feel very well supported. They felt well prepared in Year 11 for the sixth form and found the induction period helpful, although some were taken aback at the amount of work that was expected of them. The inspection found that students are justified in what pleases them but have reservations about the negative views expressed in the questionnaire. Information about the sixth form is very good and the targets students are set every six weeks or so, indicate how they should improve their work in order to reach their targets. There is a very wide range of enrichment activities. Inspectors could find no evidence to suggest that the views of students are not taken into account.

COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

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

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Students make very good progress and attainment at the end of Years 11 and 13 is very high.

1. Standards of work are very high at the end of Years 9, 11 and the sixth form. In 2002, performance in GCSE was in the top five per cent of all schools in the country, a position the school has maintained since 1998. Attainment was above the average for all grammar schools in 2001 and was in line in 2002. In 2002, the school exceeded its targets. Just over half of all entries, attained A* and A grades and almost all attained five or more A* to C grades.

2. At A-Level in 2001, the average point score in comparison with all post 16 providers was very high. Results in 2002 at A-Level were even better, but there is no national data with which to compare performance. AS results were patchier as many did not reach their predicted grade. However, more than half of all students gained A and B passes and in many subjects, all gained passes at A to E grades.

3. Although students enter with attainment that is well above average, they make good progress overall in Years 7 to 9 and very good progress in Years 10 to 13. Gifted and talented students are recognised and extra provision is made for them; equally, higher attaining students are challenged by the work and so make very good progress. Lower attaining students are supported well in lessons, although very occasionally, they need more time to complete tasks than they are given. There are currently no students with special educational needs. Sometimes students have emotional difficulties, in these cases, the pastoral system comes into play to support them and so they make similar progress to their peers. Students for whom English is an additional language are fluent in English and, as the school respects and values all students equally, they also make very good progress.

4. The reasons for the very high attainment and very good progress are discussed in more detail later in this report. There are many factors involved, the principal one being the very high expectations of the headteacher that permeate the work of the school. The management of the school is excellent, so adults and students feel valued; the administrative systems are of a high quality so the school runs smoothly. Students are very clear about what is expected of them through targets that are set based on their performance in national tests, and for A-Level, at GCSE. Tutors monitor progress towards the targets well, as do subject teachers. Above all, the learning environment is one that is challenging and often exciting.

5. In English, many students have excellent understanding of plot, character and literary techniques. In a Year 11 lesson, they worked in groups of four, taking it in turn to take the part of a character in *Pride and Prejudice* and answering questions posed by the rest of their group. Many entered the role with enthusiasm and showed a deep understanding of the character and events of the novel. In another Year 11 class, students were analysing poetry using one of five themes, such as attitude to the environment or the language, form and style. They were confident and well informed. They were able to think on their feet and respond to challenging questions about their poem, and to develop points in depth. In mathematics, students have a secure understanding of trigonometry and know when to use Pythagoras' theorem. They understand how to use a scientific calculator and when not to use it! Attainment in science is also high. In chemistry, students have a good grasp of using chemical formulae. They understand how the digestive system functions, and in physics, they understand the necessity of accuracy when carrying out experiments. Students are

highly skilled in investigation in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form. In a biology lesson investigating the effect of amylase on the breakdown of starches, they demonstrated their understanding of the need for a control and showed excellent awareness of the number of variables present and their significance. At the end of the lesson, all had completed their investigations and confirmed their hypotheses. In Years 7 to 9, skills in investigation are not so well developed.

6. Students are skilled in applying their mathematical knowledge and understanding to problems that they encounter. Skills of literacy and numeracy are exceptionally well developed and applied effortlessly in all subjects. An example of this is the presentations students make, which are a feature of work throughout the school.

7. At A-Level, attainment has been high in comparison with girls across the country in all subjects for a number of years. Biology, chemistry, geography, media studies, economics, English literature and general studies have been consistently well above average and history has maintained a position in the top five per cent of all schools, except for one year when attainment was above average. In 2002, all students attained grades A to E at A-Level and, in most subjects, well over half gained A and B grades. This is excellent improvement since the last inspection when attainment in the sixth form was below average when compared with all grammar schools.

The leadership and management are excellent

8. The leadership and management of the school are excellent. The headteacher has a passion for education and knows what is needed to make a school excellent. Her expectations are appropriately very high and she is also aware of the need to ensure that her staff and students are valued as people. This successful combination is the reason for the excellent ethos in the school and the high attainment. She is aware of the danger of complacency in a school in which results are high and has ensured that this does not happen by maintaining a culture of inquiry.

9. The leadership and management of the senior staff are also excellent. They are highly successful in meeting the demands of their roles and they work exceptionally well as a team. This enables the headteacher to maintain a strategic overview of the school. The leadership and management of heads of faculty and department are very good, and some are excellent. They too fulfil their roles very well. The administrative systems are excellent so the school runs very smoothly and staff who care for the school take pride in their work. The result of all these features is a strong team spirit amongst all adults who work in the school.

10. Governors know the school very well and they use the wealth of expertise that is represented on the governing body to the best advantage of the school. One governor, for example, works as a biochemist and another as a health and safety executive, so risk assessments are a regular feature of the school's life. Parents bring their considerable skills and knowledge of young people and their high aspirations, and governors on the finance committee have a range of business expertise. A few governors visit the school and sometimes write reports, but these are not yet formalised, for example, by being linked to the school development plan or on a rota of visits over a year with a planned focus.

11. Evaluation of the school's work is exemplary and is part of the striving to improve even further. Teachers' work is regularly evaluated and the information from this shared so that all learn from the best practice of others. Data from assessment is carefully analysed by senior managers and departments and the information is used to make improvements in the provision. Excellent use is made of information about other schools to compare how well the school is doing. Recently, all staff, governors and some parents were asked to complete a

self-evaluation questionnaire and the results were pulled together in a report for all involved in the work of the school. The information from this is currently being used to move the school further forward.

12. Since the last inspection, attainment has risen significantly in the sixth form. This is because of strategic planning and the constant quest for improvement.

Teaching is very good.

13. Many students are avid learners because of the very good teaching. Teaching in Years 7 to 9 is good overall, and just under half of all lessons observed were very good or excellent. In Years 10 and 11, over half of lessons observed were very good or excellent and in the sixth form, the figure was almost two thirds. No unsatisfactory lessons were seen. As the school values all students equally, there is no difference in the teaching of different groups of students. Boys in the sixth form and those who join from other schools are taught as well as the girls who entered the sixth form from the main school. Teaching is remarkably consistent because of the cohesion amongst the staff and the effectiveness of monitoring of teaching.

14. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge which they use well to consolidate and extend the learning of students. They also have very high expectations of their students, although on the odd occasion, this can penalise those who need longer to absorb information. There is usually very strong encouragement for students to be independent and to extend their knowledge for themselves, which makes for excellent preparation for the sixth form and for university. There were many examples of these features coming together. In a Year 10 mathematics lesson covering angles in a circle, the teacher's excellent subject knowledge and high expectations were seen in very careful planning and preparation and excellent coverage of all the major ideas involved. In this lesson, students applied their knowledge of various theorems to come to a very good understanding of circles. In another example, a gymnastics lesson with Year 7 students, the teacher was very clear about the purpose of the lesson and paid great attention to significant details of the tasks. The girls got down quickly to their work and worked productively. The teacher's constant demand for high quality work led to excellent progress, with girls showing poise, co-ordination and fluency of movement. In another example, design and technology in Year 9, the teacher's high expectations meant that she did not have to waste time in repeating instructions and ensured that students worked well independently. Levels of involvement in this lesson were very high and students used equipment such as the sanding machine in a safe and civilised manner.

15. Students are usually challenged by their work, seen often in the probing questions that teachers use to deepen thinking. In a history lesson in the ICT suite, students were individually challenged to use ICT to research the impact of Weimar. Gifted and talented students were given highly appropriate tasks. Homework effectively reinforced the students' understanding of the Second World War. In a music lesson with Year 10 students, the teacher's challenging questions quickly revealed the wide range of musical activity and experience within the group and enabled the teacher to explore individual techniques as the students worked on their individual compositions.

16. The music lesson above was also characterised by enthusiasm which inspired the students, another feature of very good and excellent teaching. In other examples, although the teaching was good and learning also, teaching did not inspire students. The good learning came from students' inherently very good learning skills and attitudes to learning, rather than the motivation engendered by the teaching.

17. Other features of the teaching are thorough planning, sharing the aim of the lesson with students so they are clear about what they are going to learn and using resources that maintain interest and extend learning. Assessment is used well to check the levels students have attained and to take them forward in their learning. Another strength is in ensuring that all are involved in the lesson.

18. These strengths came together in many lessons that were observed. One example was a science lesson. A Year 10 class was using calculations in chemistry. The teacher had excellent subject knowledge and created individual targets for the students. Time was used very well and the teaching approach matched the needs of individual students with questions targeted extremely effectively at individuals. These features were combined with very clear lesson objectives that were shared with students and excellent assessment using small whiteboards to see how much each student understood. Students were fired with enthusiasm and, as a result, complex and related ideas of chemistry were grasped and practised by the students.

There is an excellent learning environment and a strong work ethic.

19. Students know that they come to school to work and that they are expected to achieve their best. This work ethic comes from the very high expectations of the headteacher and staff that are translated into an environment that enables students to apply their learning skills excellently. As a result, students have high self esteem without being over confident.

20. There is an excellent rapport between teachers and students, seen in the lively interchange of views in many lessons. Where adults work in partnership, such as in lessons where there is technical support, they offer an excellent role model of team work and relationships. Teachers respect students and so students respect one another and other adults in the school. The inspection team was impressed by the mature and responsible attitude taken by students, for example, students skilfully drawing inspectors into their conversations at lunchtimes. In discussion, students listen to the views of their peers and teachers, before expressing their own opinion, often adjusting it in the light of the views of others. Students are not afraid to make mistakes and to learn from them as they know they will not be mocked by their peers. On the contrary, examples were seen, particularly in the sixth form, of a very supportive environment for students. During presentations of work by students, all felt for the one taking the lead and showed it through their smiles of encouragement. Relationships between adults in the school are of a very high quality and set the tone for the excellent relationships throughout the school. This includes those who work in the school to keep it clean and tidy, to support at lunchtimes and the office staff.

21. The girls are lively young women who know how to behave well and behaviour in lessons and throughout the school is excellent overall. In the occasional lesson which students find un motivating, only a flicker of boredom is seen in their body language. In these situations, students apply their learning skills to good effect and remain motivated. As a result, all students are enabled to listen and to learn. Litter is picked up when it is dropped and graffiti is rare.

22. Attitudes to learning are also excellent by the end of Year 9 and onwards, cultivated by the ethos of high expectations. Many students, inspired by the high quality of teaching, are eager to learn. They attend regularly and some parents commented that when their daughters are ill, they have difficulty in keeping them at home! Most are keen to take up the many responsibilities that the school offers and to attend the wide range of activities that are offered outside lessons. Their attitudes towards their work mean that most work hard and are happy to research independently.

23. The school has a number of traditions that contribute to the ethos. One is the school's birthday. Students plan in advance for this occasion, and the sixth form takes a lead in organising events for younger students. Year 7 students eagerly anticipate the Treasure Hunt! Several birthday cakes are made and decorated by students; this year, the cake was iced with figures from the major religions of the world to represent world peace. Each form collects to buy a small gift for the school, such as soft toys for the medical room or plants for the grounds. On the day, happy birthday is sung to the school in assembly and all have a piece of birthday cake. This adds to the pride of the school that is evident in all who work there.

Students' personal development and academic progress are developed and monitored exceptionally well.

24. Parents commented that, in a school that focuses on high attainment, they are impressed with the way in which staff are concerned with the personal development of their daughters. Inspectors concur with this view. The tutorial system offers a high degree of support and tutors and teachers know their students very well indeed. Students indicated that they know exactly where to turn if they have problems and they rate the support that they receive very highly.

25. Provision for moral and social development is excellent and permeates the ethos of the school. Students are given many opportunities to take responsibility such as the school council, taking part in charity events and representing their school in competitive events. Staff provide excellent role models through their relationships with one another and their stance towards issues such as drugs. There are many opportunities to appreciate and learn about Western culture, but fewer opportunities to understand other cultures, although some teachers are aware of the need and provide well in lessons and assemblies. There are also opportunities to think about the magic, and the tragedies of the world in which we live, but these are generally unplanned and not yet monitored by senior staff.

26. A key strength and one of the major reasons for the high attainment is target setting. Each student is given a predicted grade for the ends of Years 9, 11 and sixth form, based on national tests. A day is set aside for this in February. Progress towards these targets is regularly reviewed and students are helped to think about how they might improve their progress. The process involves tutors and specialist subject teachers. In the sixth form, the targets are set at the minimum but teachers and students have high expectations and do all they can to exceed these targets. Students who seem to be failing to meet the demands of their targets are mentored by teachers, and sometimes by peers. As a result, students know exactly how well they are doing and more importantly, what they need to do to succeed.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Attainment in science in Years 7 to 9

27. Attainment in science at the end of Year 9 is in the top five per cent of schools in the country, but does not compare well with grammar schools, as there are fewer higher grades. Staff are aware of this, and the department, supported by senior management has put a number of strategies into effect to raise attainment. These include in-service training and working with outside specialist agencies. There have also been difficulties with staffing the department, but this has now been overcome. Attainment is rising as a result, but the strategies need to continue.

28. Students have a very good understanding of scientific concepts but they do not, as a matter of course, evaluate their work with sufficient rigour. They do not, for example, think if the techniques they use are appropriate, bring a healthy degree of scepticism to their results or consider the limitations of their investigations. An area for development is therefore, developing their skills in investigation. ICT is insufficiently used to support learning in the subject; access is sometimes difficult.

29. Teachers in the department are aware of the problem and have sufficient expertise to tackle it.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

30. This is a most effective school with minor areas of development of which staff are aware through their self evaluation. One area that the senior management and staff have been working on and need to continue is;

Raise attainment in science to match that of other subjects by;

- a. Planning lessons to include more investigation
- b. Encouraging students to reflect on their techniques, their results and any limitations in their investigation.
- c. Using ICT to support teaching and learning.

Sixth form

Improve the quality of lessons that are lacklustre by allowing students more time for discussion and having a flexible approach that responds to students needs.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	45
	Sixth form	57
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		35

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 7 – 11							
Number	2	19	16	8	0	0	0
Percentage	4	42	36	18	0	0	0
Sixth form							
Number	9	26	18	4	0	0	0
Percentage	16	45	32	7	0	0	0

The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching. Care should be taken when interpreting the percentages for Years 7 - 11 and the sixth form as each lesson represents 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	722	224
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	20	0

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	0	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	0	0

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	29

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	3
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	7

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	6.1
National comparative data	8.1

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.1
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2002	0	148	148

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	0	0	0
	Girls	146	147	146
	Total	146	147	146
Percentage of pupils At NC level 5 or above	School	99 (100)	99 (100)	99 (100)
	National	66 (64)	67 (66)	66 (66)
Percentage of pupils At NC level 6 or above	School	97 (92)	97 (99)	86 (89)
	National	32 (31)	45 [43]	33 (34)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	0	0	0
	Girls	148	148	148
	Total	148	148	148
Percentage of pupils At NC level 5 or above	School	100 (100)	100 (100)	100 (100)
	National	67 (65)	70 (68)	67 (64)
Percentage of pupils At NC level 6 or above	School	92 (96)	98 (98)	90 (97)
	National	32 (31)	44 (42)	34 (33)

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	2001	0	135	135

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	0	0	0
	Girls	134	135	135
	Total	134	135	135
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	99 (100)	100 (100)	100 (100)
	National	50 (48)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	64.8 (65.4)
	National	39.8 (39.0)

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

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

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

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2002	5	93	98

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Male	Female	All
School	Number of candidates	5	93	98
	Average point score per candidate	27.6	27.9	27.9
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		
		Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	Number of candidates	5	93	98	0	0	0
	Average point score per candidate	27.6	27.9	27.9	N/a	N/a	N/a
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
825	4	0
0	0	0
13	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
20	0	0
15	0	0
3	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
12	0	0
2	0	0
7	0	0
11	0	0
0	0	0

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)	58.87
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16

Education support staff: Y7- Y13

Total number of education support staff	26
Total aggregate hours worked per week	393

Deployment of teachers: Y7- Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	73.3
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Average teaching group size: Y7- Y11

Key Stage 2	N/a
Key Stage 3	25.5

Financial information

Financial year	2001 - 2002
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	£
Total income	2,944,536
Total expenditure	2,959,474
Expenditure per pupil	3132
Balance brought forward from previous year	180,905
Balance carried forward to next year	165,967

Key Stage 4	21.4
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FTE means full-time equivalent.

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	16.9
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	25.6

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	4
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	944
Number of questionnaires returned	378

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	49	44	5	1	0
My child is making good progress in school.	55	40	2	0	3
Behaviour in the school is good.	47	47	3	0	3
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	31	47	17	3	2
The teaching is good.	40	53	2	0	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	22	52	14	2	7
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	44	44	7	2	3
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	77	22	0	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	19	49	19	3	8
The school is well led and managed.	43	47	2	1	7
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	48	46	2	0	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	31	40	12	3	12

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

31. Students achieve very well to attain standards that are in the top five per cent of all schools in the country and of all post 16 providers. This is because of the excellent ethos of the school and the strong work ethic. Students have excellent attitudes towards their work; this is another reason for the high attainment.

32. In 2002, in most subjects, well over half of all students gained A and B passes and all students gained passes at A to E grades at A-Level. In 2001, for which national comparative data is available, the school's performance in comparison with all post 16 providers was in the top five per cent of schools and colleges. This high attainment has been maintained for the last five years. Almost all students reach their target grades and a large number exceed them.

33. High attaining students do very well because they are challenged by their work, for example, students who wish to go to Oxford or Cambridge are supported both academically and personally. Students have the opportunity to attend master classes. A few boys come into the sixth form from other schools and they attain very well. They receive the same excellent support as the girls and are made to feel very welcome in the school. Lower attaining students also achieve very well because of the support mechanisms in the sixth form, although there is the odd occasion when they need more time to grasp what is being taught. Students for whom English is an additional language are mainly fluent in English and also attain highly, as staff treat all of their students equally.

34. Since the last inspection, attainment has risen significantly. In the last inspection, it was below average. Senior management and staff have worked hard and successfully to raise attainment. The ethos of high expectations and care means that students feel valued and have high self esteem which has a direct effect on their work. The strong work ethic results in extremely positive attitudes towards learning. Targets and mapping of progress towards them is another reason for the improvement. All students know what they are expected to achieve and what they need to do to reach the targets. The provision in most subjects is very good or excellent and students respond to the challenge of demanding work.

35. The inspection found a similar picture to that of previous years. In all the thirteen subjects that were looked at in depth, students are achieving very well and their attainment is well above average. Key skills of communication, numeracy and ICT are generally used well in the sixth form. Students are encouraged to make presentations which, in their words, help them to learn well. The presentations demand a high level of research and a confidence in talking in front of a critical audience.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

36. Attitudes in the sixth form are excellent and students say they greatly enjoy sixth form life. They are hugely enthusiastic and comment very favourably on the help and encouragement they receive from staff. About a quarter of those who responded to the questionnaire said they had not been helped to settle into sixth form work, citing the expectations of homework and methods of working as something of a 'culture shock'. In lessons attitudes are always positive. For example, Year 12 girls in a sociology lesson were diligent, hard-working and enthusiastic in learning about the different factors which affect educational achievement. Year 13 geography students, looking at changes to a country's

population structure, responded well to challenging questions and helped each other. Occasionally high attaining and very confident students can dominate lessons, to the detriment of quieter ones.

37. Behaviour in lessons is usually excellent. Students are keen and active learners, which in turn reflects in their behaviour. Around the school it is equally good. They move around sensibly and with care for one another and for adults. For every smile given by an adult, two or three are returned. Personal property is entirely safe and there is very little graffiti or litter. The common room is kept in a good condition due to the efforts of the students themselves. There were no exclusions last year.

38. Relationships are excellent at sixth form level, both between students and with the staff. Opportunities for personal development are very good. There is a very good range of enrichment activities such as the chance to work with younger pupils, run assemblies or work on the sixth form committee. Students take responsibility for organising events for charity and the school birthday celebrations. The committee is relatively new. Students say it has offered them a forum for discussion where their views are taken seriously. This is contrary to the views expressed in the questionnaire where a few felt this was lacking. They quickly learn to work independently, as well as in groups, and to manage their time well. There are easy, good humoured relationships with the very few boys in the sixth form. Students become articulate, mature and personable young adults, with a great sense of their own worth.

39. Attendance in the sixth form is very good at 92 per cent. If they have free time, students are trusted to sign themselves in and out, and the overwhelming majority respect this privilege.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

40. Teaching in the sixth form is very good and, as a result, most students are avid learners. Most students, including the most able, are challenged by the teaching, so make very good progress. Occasionally, a few students need more time than is given to absorb information, but in the main, lower attaining students achieve as well as their peers because of the high level of support given by teachers. Almost all students for whom English is an additional language are fluent in English, and they are taught equally well. The few boys in the sixth form join in lessons with confidence, due to the skill of the teachers in making them welcome and valued as members of the sixth form community.

41. Teachers have an excellent understanding of their subjects that many use well to bring lessons to life. Teachers themselves are often passionate about their subjects and inspire enthusiasm for learning as a result. They understand the requirements of the examination syllabus very well and refer to them frequently. Expectations of students' attainment are very high. These features lead to lessons in which there is a lively exchange of ideas between students and teachers. In one such lesson, Year 12 students were being introduced to *The Great Gatsby*. They had read the text themselves and the teacher was discussing *The American Dream* as a way of setting the context of the novel. From the outset of this lesson, exchanges between students and the teacher were extremely lively. The teacher's knowledge of the text and the period in which it was set was excellent, so the teacher was able to focus on various themes to extend the students' understanding of the novel and its context. Expectations were very high and so the lesson was driven at a crisp pace. All students responded well to the challenge of this lesson and learning was very good.

42. Relationships are such that students feel able to contribute to the many discussions, sometimes tentatively, as they feel valued and know their responses will not be treated with

derision. Teachers also encourage students to develop independence through research, and, as has been mentioned previously, presentations of their findings. In a biology lesson, the teacher had asked students to research aspects of transport of fluids through cell membranes. Students had researched their topics well and had learned much through this method. They showed very supportive attitudes towards one another during the presentations, nervous presenters being helped by smiles of encouragement.

43. Lessons are very well planned so that time is used well. Work is usually appropriate to the different abilities within the class. In the example above, the topics assigned took account of the degree of challenge that each student needed to develop his or her understanding. In a Year 13 religious studies lesson, the teacher took care to direct questions at students which challenged them. In this lesson, the teacher also ensured that the tasks that were given were appropriate for the range of abilities in the class. The use of questions that probe and extend learning is also a feature of the teaching. In a French lesson, the teacher's skills in questioning were a key factor in the students' fluency of French as the students responded with high quality answers. In a few lessons in some subjects, not all students are drawn in, so miss opportunities to extend their understanding.

44. Key skills of communication, numeracy and ICT are taught well through general studies and other lessons. Students are encouraged to use and, therefore, develop their skills.

45. Some lessons are technically highly competent, but are lacklustre and fail to inspire students. At other times, the teacher takes too much control of the lesson, which does not allow students to question or think deeply in order to further their knowledge or understanding. Despite this, students use their excellent learning skills to remain attentive and motivated and their learning is very good as a result.

46. Assessment, and its use, to ensure that students understand and, therefore, make the progress that is expected, is another strength in the teaching. Homework that consolidates or extends the learning in the lesson is set regularly. Although some students commented that they found the quantity a shock when they first started in the sixth form, most manage their time well to meet deadlines.

47. Many of these features came together in lessons that were inspiring and challenging. In a media studies lesson in Year 12, students had been asked to work in teams to produce a critical analysis of extracts of film that they had chosen. The lesson was excellently planned as part of a well thought out unit of work. The teacher was supported by a technician, both of whom had excellent understanding of the subject; this enabled them to intervene appropriately and to ask questions which helped students to realise that they had missed important technical features. The excellent, supportive relationships coupled with very high expectations, created an ethos that fostered excellent learning as it had a high degree of trust. The use of ICT by teachers was excellent. The progress these students had made early in their course was outstanding.

48. Very good teaching is a major factor in the high attainment in the sixth form.

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

49. The sixth form curriculum is very good. The school provides all students with a wide choice of GCE AS and A2 courses and a very good range of opportunities for extending learning outside lessons.

50. Students have twenty-two A-level subjects to choose from when they begin the sixth form. Most students are successful in obtaining the combination of subjects that they want. Product design, sociology, government and politics, ICT, media studies and psychology are all available as well as more standard subjects. Time for religious education is insufficient to meet the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus. There are no vocational courses on offer but almost all students move on to higher education after two years in the sixth form, which shows that the curricular provision meets their needs very well. Students are very positive about the curriculum. They enjoy what the sixth form has to offer and are often enthusiastic about their studies.

51. All Year 12 students in the sixth form receive three weekly lessons of general studies and are entered for the GCE AS level examination. This serves to broaden their learning. Within this programme students also take the level 3 key skills communication course, which further extends their learning. Students have a personal, social and health education lesson every fortnight. This consists of a broad and relevant programme that places emphasis on careers advice, life skills and preparation for university. Outside speakers enliven the provision with talks on topics such as finance at university, ethics and management skills.

52. Very good opportunities are provided for students' personal development. Many students are actively involved in organising aspects of sixth form and main school life, such as assemblies, fund-raising for charities and the 'Listening Line' which gives support to younger students who are having problems. They also organise the running of the sixth form committee and school council and make a major contribution to the smooth running of parents' evenings. Many students extend their experience of the world outside school through working with old people in the area or assisting in local schools, supporting pupils with learning difficulties.

53. All students have many opportunities to enrich their learning outside lessons. A wide and varied programme of additional activities is available to them. The library provides a good base for research and study and is widely used by sixth form students. Over seventy students are developing initiative and resourcefulness through participating in the Sports Leadership Award and the Young Enterprise Scheme. Drama productions and very successful choirs and orchestras give many creative opportunities to students. Sporting activities are well catered for in the fortnightly timetable slot and outside lessons. School exchanges and residential visits to Europe give many students additional opportunities to widen their experience. Many field studies, lecture visits and theatre trips also greatly extend their learning.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

Assessment

54. Arrangements for assessing students' attainment and progress are excellent. Students are given a target grade based on their GCSE results. Every six weeks, progress towards the targets is discussed and students are given guidance as to how they improve their work in order to reach their target. Some, but not all, teachers refer to the targets in their marking. Full and interim reports to parents indicate a very close knowledge both of students

and of their potential achievement. Marking is thorough and gives appropriate guidance as to how work may be improved. The vast majority of students agree that assessments are thorough.

55. The introduction of the new A-Levels under Curriculum 2000 means that the way in which the school calculates the value it has added to students' attainment is no longer accurate. New methods are being developed by senior management, drawing on expertise from outside the school.

Advice, support and guidance

56. Educational support and guidance are very good with a close personal interest being taken in the welfare and progress of each student. Students report a high degree of satisfaction with the advice and induction procedures for sixth form study, including some 'taster' sessions run in the summer term of Year 10. Guidance and advice on the sixth form is very good, ensuring that the majority feel they are on the right courses. A few however, are not altogether happy about the help they have been given to settle into new work patterns, suggesting that a formal arrangement to allow them to discuss this with existing students might be beneficial for Year 11. The careers advice available to students is excellent, and some tutorial time is earmarked for career planning, including preparation of university entrance forms.

57. A very good range of enrichment opportunities is offered, including community service, sports leadership, helping with libraries and charities and working as prefects. Due attention is given to matters of health and safety, and students report they enjoy being in the sixth form

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

58. The inspection found very good partnership with parents and students. Parents think highly of the sixth form and appreciate the contact between home and school. The responses to the questionnaire issued to students indicated a strong satisfaction with the sixth form and many would recommend it to others. Students also suggested strong satisfaction with the teaching.

59. During the inspection, students indicated a high degree of satisfaction with the provision, particularly the care they receive from the tutors and the pastoral system. The results of the questionnaire did not reflect the findings of the inspection, possibly because it was issued early in the term and many students in Year 12 were new to the sixth form.

60. Although about a quarter of the respondents did not think the school helps them adequately with personal problems or treats them as mature adults this was not reflected in the findings of the inspection. Students commented that the situation has greatly improved since the formation of the sixth form committee. Sixth form lessons are characterised by friendly but respectful interaction, and very good relationships with staff. Tutors and staff are available for help and advice, which is particularly well focussed towards choosing the right university course. Attendance is closely monitored and students are required to attend regular tutorial sessions and assemblies. They behave with great maturity in taking on responsibility for signing themselves in and out during the day.

61. The induction week that prepares students for the sixth form, is carefully planned and includes sessions on team building. Students are expected to sign a contract that binds

them to the regulations of the school, particularly about working their best. This is adhered to very well.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

Leadership and management

62. Leadership and management of the sixth form are excellent. The high expectations of the headteacher and senior management team, translated into practice by the high quality leadership and management of the head of the sixth form is the reason for the consistent high attainment and the excellent improvement since the last inspection.

63. The head of sixth form is very effectively supported by the heads of lower and upper sixth, who play a key role in day to day management as well as keeping an overview of their year groups. A development plan for the sixth form is linked to the main school plan, and has appropriate priorities for the sixth form. It is a most useful working document, helping to ensure that priorities are met.

64. Tutors are responsible for the academic and personal development of students in their groups, and they do this exceptionally well, supported by the information from the monitoring of students' progress. Heads of faculties and departments are clear about their roles and meet them extremely well.

65. The governing body has a good knowledge of the sixth form, helped by its informal monitoring. They have taken part in the school self review, but not many completed the questionnaire. A few governors visit and report to the full governing body or to sub-committees. The visits do not always relate to aspects of the development plan.

66. Excellent systems for monitoring the work of the sixth form have led to the improvement in attainment since the last inspection and the sustaining of the high attainment over a number of years. A clear management structure ensures that all are involved and understand the process of school review. Staff with responsibility for monitoring colleagues' work do so rigorously but sensitively. The process of feedback and subsequent review supports the high degree of provision in the sixth form. All have been involved in self review through a questionnaire and staff meetings to discuss the findings. Above all, the teamwork amongst staff resulting from the open management processes contributes most effectively to the excellent learning environment throughout the sixth form.

67. The governing body and senior management team have an excellent grip of the financial matters of the sixth form, helped by the use of external consultants to check and compare for good value. The bursar, appropriately, is a member of the senior management team and is an excellent source of information. He attends governing body meetings and plays a key role in the financial aspects of the school development plan. Grants are used for appropriate purposes and detailed records are kept of transactions. Spending is regularly reviewed to ensure that resources are used wisely. Governors and senior management regularly compare the performance of the sixth form with other schools locally and nationally.

68. Excellent leadership and management are the main reasons for the success of the sixth form. Although the systems for managing the main school and the sixth form are similar, the sixth form has an appropriately distinctive ethos.

Resources

69. Staff in the sixth form are appropriately qualified and use their subject expertise well to promote very good learning. Technical support is effective in ensuring that resources are used to their best, for example, in ICT and media studies.

70. The accommodation is good, offering a range of facilities within the sixth form block and in the main school.

71. The sixth form has a good range of resources to support its work. The library has good facilities for study and these are used extensively by students. Of note, is the careers provision which is extensive and valued highly by students. The careers officer goes out of her way to seek information for students; her work is invaluable. ICT provision is good but in science is not used as a normal part of teaching and learning.

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

72. In the inspection, thirteen 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.

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

GCE AS level courses Some information is not available

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	17	100	n/a	53	n/a		
Biology	39	97	n/a	77	n/a		
Chemistry	28	96	n/a	75	n/a		
Economics	36	97	n/a	53	n/a		
English Literature	55	98	n/a	42	n/a		
French	16	88	n/a	56	n/a		
General Studies	114	98	n/a	46	n/a		
Geography	16	100	n/a	69	n/a		
German	10	100	n/a	50	n/a		
Government and politics	16	100	n/a	50	n/a		
History	38	100	n/a	63	n/a		
Mathematics	31	87	62	42	15		1.51
Media Studies	37	100	n/a	87	n/a		
Physics	17	100	n/a	77	n/a		
Psychology	29	93	n/a	48	n/a		
Religious studies	12	100	n/a	100	n/a		
Sociology	15	100	n/a	67	n/a		
Theatre Studies	17	100	n/a	6	n/a		

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	15	100	96	27	46	6.67	6.57
Biology	31	100	88	71	34	8.0	5.25
Chemistry	13	100	90	77	43	8.46	5.90
Economics	13	100	89	62	36	7.08	5.52
English Literature	45	100	95	44	37	6.84	5.91
French	5	100	89	80	38	8.00	5.59
General Studies	98	98	85	32	30	5.98	4.91
Geography	24	100	92	54	38	7.44	5.74
German	4	100	91	50	40	7.00	5.81
History	17	94	88	47	35	6.71	5.45
Mathematics	31	94	87	55	43	6.77	5.80
Music	4	100	93	100	35	9.50	5.74
Other Social Studies	39	95	87	49	34	6.46	5.30
Physics	11	100	88	73	40	7.82	5.67
Religious Studies	4	100	92	50	38	7.50	5.84
Sociology	7	100	86	71	35	8.00	5.32
Vocational Studies	8	100	76	63	26	7.75	4.36

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

74. The focus was on the three sciences that are offered and mathematics. The school offers courses in mathematics and in further mathematics leading to examinations at Advanced Supplementary (AS) and Advanced (A) Level GCE. The students taking mathematics study a combination of pure mathematics, mechanics and statistics. Those taking further mathematics study modules in pure mathematics, mechanics, statistics and decision mathematics. Lessons in statistics, pure mathematics and mechanics were observed. Attainment in all four subjects is high and students make very good progress. Attainment has been high for a number of years. Lessons in all three sciences were observed in Years 12 and 13. Attainment is high and teaching is very good.

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- Teaching is very good.
- The pupils' attitudes to their work are very positive
- Attainment is well above national averages.

Areas for improvement

- Students are not given enough opportunities to discuss and reflect in lessons.

76. Results in Advanced Level mathematics over recent years have been always above and sometimes well above national standards. This is because the department is very well staffed with fully qualified and experienced teachers of mathematics. They know their subject extremely well and can communicate this knowledge effectively. They work in a department that is well managed and well organised by an experienced and very hardworking departmental leader.

77. Students are admitted to study advanced mathematics courses on the basis of having achieved a grade B or better on the higher paper at GCSE. This policy ensures that almost all students have acquired the necessary prior knowledge to enable them to cope with the rigours of the course. Results for A/S mathematics taken at the end of the first year in the sixth form are therefore significantly better than national norms. In 2002, although there were four students who failed to gain a pass grade, almost two thirds of the thirty four students entered obtained higher grades A and B the vast majority of whom were graded A. Further mathematics students consistently do very well.

78. The standard of work seen in lessons and in the students' folders is well above national norms as might be expected from these examination results. Almost all make good progress and achieve the high levels set for them as targets by their teachers. In pure mathematics they handle the calculus with confidence including the differentiation and integration of logarithmic and exponential functions. Trigonometry, including the use of sum and product formulae, is strong. In statistics, Year 13 students standardise normal probability distributions and use tables to interpret results. Students in a Year 12 mechanics class were seen coming to terms effectively with equations of motion for a particle in a vertical plane. Some, however, had to be reminded of the use of sine and cosine formulae within this context and had clearly not yet committed these and other important formulae to memory. In statistics, these same students were quick to understand how to draw and use stem and leaf diagrams.

79. Teaching overall is very good. Lessons are well prepared and presented, providing the right level of pace and challenge. All aspects of the subject are taught with rigour. Some lessons are, however, unduly dominated by the teacher. Students are not given enough opportunities to discuss their work and contribute their own ideas. This means that it is sometimes more difficult than it need be, especially for those who are relatively less able, to grasp general concepts and see them within a context. An example of this is when students know and understand what standard deviation means but do not immediately recognise how it relates to the spread of a distribution in a rough diagram.

80. Assessment arrangements are excellent. Very good, and in some cases excellent, marking of the students work informs them very clearly of areas of strength and weakness. Frequent end of module tests ensure that the students keep up to date. As the courses progress they are given marking schemes corresponding to those used by the examination boards so that they understand the requirements very well. The students value this aspect of the teachers' work especially. It enables them to focus on improvement. They feel very well supported by their teachers in this respect.

Chemistry

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

Strengths

- Attainment in the subject has risen greatly since the introduction of the current course and is now well above the national average at both A and AS levels.
- Teachers have excellent knowledge of the subject.
- Lessons cover the subject in depth and offer content of real challenge to the students. Students' open investigations demonstrate work of very high quality.

Areas for improvement

- Teachers should continue to broaden the range of teaching and learning strategies used, so as to raise students' self-esteem and confidence still further.
- ICT is not used widely to enhance students' learning.

82. Attainment at GCE Advanced Level in 2001 was well above average and in 2002 the average points score for the school improved still further. At GCE AS level in 2002, the attainment was also very high. Though the 20 students attained the full range of grades there was a significant proportion of them who gained the high grades necessary as a foundation for high performance at the end of Year 13 in 2003. Work examined showed increasing understanding of complex chemistry and good progress, for example, in the students' understanding of the chemistry of alkanes. Students have a clear grasp of chemical calculations and such concepts as electro- and nucleophilic reactions. Though they mostly embarked upon their sixth form courses with high attainment levels they have made very good progress in this subject.

83. The quality of teaching of chemistry is very good overall. No teaching was unsatisfactory and much was very good. All teachers have subject knowledge of a very high order and communicate this knowledge with clarity and expertise. Students respond very well to this and to the very high levels of expectation placed upon them. In one very good lesson, students were embarking on their open investigations. These were of a very wide variety, from the investigation of the proportion of Vitamin C in five different citrus fruits to the actual proportion of aspirin found in aspirin tablets from different sources. All students showed very good appreciation of the process of investigation and the high levels of

experimental technique needed to obtain the results they needed. In another interesting and well taught lesson, students were able to calculate the proportion of nitrogen in different natural and manufactured fertilisers and to relate this data to the needs of farming and world food supply. Students showed varying levels of confidence in their own levels of knowledge, being better at communicating person-to-person than in front of their peers. The department uses a range of teaching strategies to improve their presentation skills, and high attaining students are able to speak with confidence about their impressive understanding of chemical concepts

84. The department achieves well above average standards, which have shown very good improvement. Nevertheless it is not complacent and both the head of department and individual teachers are determined to raise standards further. Because there is a very good co-operative working atmosphere in this very well managed department the teachers are well on course to achieve the improvements they wish to see. They are well supported in what they do by very high quality technical support. The criticisms from the last inspection involving the storage of chemicals have been tackled.

Biology

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

Strengths

- Attainment in the subject at both A and AS levels is well above average.
- Teachers have excellent knowledge of the subject.
- Lessons cover the subject in depth and offer content of real challenge to the students.
- The students respond with real enthusiasm to the subject.

Areas for improvement

- Teachers should continue to broaden the range of teaching and learning strategies used.
- ICT is not used widely to enhance students' learning.

86. Attainment at GCE Advanced Level in 2001 was well above average and in 2002 the average points score for the school improved. At GCE AS level in 2002 the attainment was also very high with large numbers of students attaining the high grades necessary as a foundation for high performance at the end of Year 13 in 2003. Work examined showed increasing understanding of complex biological areas such as cell biochemistry. Students have a clear grasp of the process of photosynthesis, which will act as a good foundation for the significant proportion of them who wish to study biology and allied subjects at university. Students have made very good progress in this subject, albeit mostly from very high attainment levels when they embarked upon their sixth form studies.

87. The quality of teaching of biology is very good overall with some excellent features. All teachers have subject knowledge of a very high order and communicate this knowledge with clarity and enthusiasm. Students respond very well to this and to the very high levels of expectation placed upon them. In one excellent lesson, students were required to investigate the effects of temperature variation and external carbon dioxide concentration on ventilation rates in locusts. They enjoyed being given very clear targets about what data they were to collect, but minimal guidance as to how exactly to go about the investigation. As a result the progress they made in the collection of data, both individually and as a class, gave them copious real data for further analysis in following lessons. In another lively and interesting lesson, where the students were investigating homeostasis, the teacher asked open questions which were cleverly targeted at individual students using very good knowledge of their rates of progress. As a result, by the end of the lesson, all students were able to

construct flow diagrams to illustrate negative feedback and its relationship to the keeping of constant temperature. Teachers within the department are keen to broaden the range of teaching and learning strategies they use. Good examples were seen, one involving the dissection of a mammalian heart and the other where Year 12 students were required to make presentations on various aspects of transportation in cells, following their own preliminary research. Though their research and presentation skills varied widely, their support for each other was very good and the teacher's skills and determination to improve these aspects of the students' work were very evident.

88. Though the department achieves well above average standards it is well managed and not complacent. Both the head of department and individual teachers show laudable desire to raise standards further. They are well supported in what they do by very high quality technical support. By sharing ideas and by widening their range of teaching and learning styles still further the teachers are well on course to achieve the improvements they seek. Thus, although standards are already high, the department has very good capacity to improve further.

Physics

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

Strengths

- Attainment in the subject has risen greatly since the last inspection and is now well above average at both A and AS levels.
- Teachers have excellent knowledge of the subject.
- Students are placed in situations of considerable challenge in lessons and respond very well to the high expectations teachers have of them.

Areas for improvement

- Teachers should continue to broaden the range of teaching and learning strategies used.
- ICT is not used widely to enhance students' learning.

90. Attainment at GCE Advanced Level has risen significantly since the last inspection when it was below average for selective schools. In 2001 A-Level performance was well above average and in 2002 the average points score for the school improved still further, with all of the 14 students entered attaining a grade C or better. At GCE AS level in 2002, the attainment was also well above average. Though the 16 students attained the full range of grades, a significant proportion gained the high grades necessary as a foundation for high performance at the end of Year 13 in 2003. Work examined showed increasing understanding of complex concepts, for example, in the students' understanding of the nature of electric current and in the elastic properties of solids. Work on electromagnetic radiation shows a very good grasp of Snell's Law, the nature of refraction and concepts such as critical angle and total internal reflection. Though they mostly embarked upon their sixth form courses with high attainment levels, students have made very good progress in this subject.

91. The quality of teaching of physics is very good overall. All teaching was good or better. All teachers have subject knowledge of a very high order and communicate some really difficult physics, such as concepts involving relativity, dynamically and with clarity. Students respond very well to the teaching they receive. In one very good lesson, students carried out an investigation involving the phased oscillation of two pendula. They showed very good appreciation of the process of investigation and the high levels of experimental technique needed to obtain the results they needed. In another well taught lesson concerning the effect of temperature on resistance, students showed a capacity to explain this effect at

an electronic level, demonstrating very high levels of understanding. The department has embarked on a new Advanced Level course, which offers significant levels of challenge to both students and teachers.

92. The department is now achieving well above average standards. Nevertheless it is not complacent as shown by the decision to change the course better to match the needs of the students in the school. Both the head of department and individual teachers are determined to raise standards even further. There is a very good co-operative working atmosphere in this well managed department and the teachers are well on course to achieve the improvements they wish to see. They are well supported in what they do by very high quality technical support. The criticisms from the last inspection involving the storage of radioactive sources have been tackled.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

93. Sixth form students are now able to enter for examinations at AS and A-level. These were introduced into the school in 2001, and an increasing number is taking this option. 18 Year 12 students are currently following the AS examination course and 2 have continued from last year towards a full A-level examination. The results of the AS examination for 2002 indicate that they are well above the national average.

Information and communication technology

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

Strengths

- The first examination results are well above the national averages.
- There are good improvements in the use of information technology to support learning.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good.
- The subject is very well managed

95. Students are achieving very well to attain high standards in information and communication technology at both AS and A-Level. They have good computing skills at the commencement of their sixth form studies. They extend these well, for example, by taking lesson notes using word processors, which they later develop and refine. They make effective use of the Internet in researching a range of topics such as the use of computers in banking. They have good knowledge of how to manage their work and the resources available to them, and the resulting essays are thorough, detailed and well presented. In a project on a commercial toy factory, one student deduced that the company lost a great deal of money because it had insufficiently researched the consumer market. By Year 13, they examine industrial planning, such as the recovery of commercial information lost through natural disasters or acts of terrorism such as the destruction of the World Trade Centre in 2001. This supports their social and moral awareness, and is highly relevant to their future careers. All students are competent and confident users of computers, and many have very good typing skills.

96. The quality of teaching is very good overall and staff have a very good knowledge of the subject. Lessons are well planned and taught with the aid of interactive whiteboards, and the students respond very well to the teachers' high expectations by engaging in challenging debates. The quality of marking is very good, and sometimes contains suggestions for

specific research. Estimated examination grades are also given to each completed piece of work, which allows students to reconsider their targets.

97. The subject is very well led. All departmental documentation, schemes of work and programmes of study have been fully revised, and the head of department very effectively monitors both the teaching and development of information and communication technology throughout the school and across the curriculum. Assessment procedures are excellent and are used very well to ensure that attainment is as high as possible.

98. Accommodation and resources are good, with the ratio of computers per student being above the nationally recommended numbers. There are two technicians who maintain the network and hardware. In all areas, attractive displays of students' work are complemented by well presented notices and posters. Sixth form students make good use of the pre- school and after school computer clubs.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

99. Music and media studies are taught at AS and A-Level. Music was the focus, but lessons were observed in media studies in Years 12 and 13. In these lessons, the teaching was very good and excellent and students were making very good progress. The lively, informed discussion led by the teacher and technical assistant inspired students and led them to gain a deep understanding of technical aspects of communication by film.

Music

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

Strengths

- The standards of both provision and attainment have improved very significantly.
- Teaching and learning are excellent overall.

Areas for improvement

- The success of the department is leading to a situation where accommodation will be inadequate for the numbers taking the subject.

101. Standards have improved very significantly since the last inspection.

102. Although numbers taking music have been small, all students have attained highly. In 2002, all candidates for AS music gained A or B grades and most gained Grade A. At the time of writing, no reliable national statistics are available but these results overall must be outstanding by any reasonable criteria. The current cohorts of students are expected to do equally well. Such excellent standards are not easily won and the department justly deserves the considerable accolades received from the examining board.

103. The excellence of teaching and learning which has led to these outstanding results is manifest in the lessons observed as well as in the substantial quantities of work undertaken by the students in their own researches, evident in their folders. Teaching at A-level is excellent. Uncompromising in its demands and challenges in the high expectations laid upon students, it is characterised by enormous energy and enthusiasm for the subject and balanced by a caring and unstinting commitment to students' success. In turn, they respond with equal enthusiasm and an insatiable curiosity for learning in an environment that is concerned with the essential practicality of music-making. In each and every lesson observed, all students were expected to participate in singing and/or playing a wide range of

music of different genres, styles and periods, often challenging their already advanced and multi-talented skills. In one lesson, the four students sang four-part madrigals as well as playing complex contrapuntal Baroque music. They compared and contrasted a wide variety of features contributing to the nature of the music: instrumentation or voicing; structure and form; nuances of vocal or instrumental technique; harmonic and contrapuntal conventions. Whilst evidently challenged by the high demands laid upon them by both the music and their teacher, the students evidently delighted in meeting the challenge and growing in their understanding of the music.

104. All these students enjoy the advantages of instrumental tuition and/or voice training. They also take full advantage of the department's refurbished resources and are currently learning to master those several techniques involved in managing the new recording facilities in the studio. The increased numbers of A-level students and the potential for groups of comparable or greater size is already making considerable demands upon resources in general and ICT in music in particular. The school's main computer suite is equipped with music software (Sibelius 1.3) to complement and expand the opportunities available for preparing and refining arrangements, compositions and performances.

105. All the A-level music students participate in a wide range of extra curricular activities alongside many other members of the sixth form. They frequently take part in performance as both within the school and the surrounding community. In these contexts they give a strong lead to younger members of the school community just as they have benefited from the strong and committed leadership of their teachers and the head of department in particular.

HUMANITIES

106. The focus of the inspection was geography, history, religious studies and psychology. Attainment in all these subjects is high and students make very good progress.

Geography

107. Overall, the quality of provision in geography is **excellent**.

Strengths

- Standards at A/S and A-Level and examination results;
- Students' achievement.
- Teaching, learning and management.
- Relationships.

Areas for improvement

- Further increasing the level of student contribution in lessons.

108. Standards overall are very high with results in A-Level examinations in 2002 being very high. Over three quarters of the cohort gained an A/B grade. All students who took the examination gained a pass. Retention rates are very high and numbers taking geography in the 6th form are rising dramatically with 40 students in the current Year 13 and 50 in Year 12. AS examinations results in 2002 were also very high.

109. Although the great majority of students accepted for 6th form geography have at least a B grade at GCSE, the department is flexible and considers any potential entrant on merit. In 2002 four students were entered for the Advanced Extension Award and two gained merits.

110. There is a close correlation between AS and A2 results. A small number of boys enters for the examinations and attains as highly as girls. Work seen in lessons and books confirms that students' attainment is well above average in both AS and A2. Even given the very high standards reached by students at GCSE, the excellent results at AS and A-Level represent very good achievement. Apart from a small dip, attributed to staffing difficulties in 2001, these very high standards have been maintained for at least the last four years.

111. Students have a good knowledge of both physical and human aspects of geography and are able to make links between processes and resulting patterns. This understanding is supported by well-developed skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT. Students build well on skills learned in Years 7 to 11 to produce high quality coursework and investigations. Students' knowledge of ICT skills gives them the confidence to make appropriate choices as to when and how it should be used. The good use of formulae and data analysis in work such as sand dune studies gives added depth and validity to the investigations.

112. Overall, teaching is very good. Lessons are well planned and presented with an enthusiasm that communicates itself to students and helps to challenge and motivate them all. No one is overlooked. Very good knowledge allows teachers to enliven lessons and promote high levels of interest and concentration. Students produce work using a variety of written and presentational styles and all is assessed regularly and with an accuracy that allows the student to have a very clear idea of their progress. Teachers monitor academic progress very well. Good questioning requires students to think for themselves in finding solutions, maintains a high momentum and continually reinforces students' knowledge and understanding. A few students do not contribute despite the environment of very good relationships and respect that exists in lessons.

113. Students are encouraged to work in pairs and groups and this often results in high quality presentations in which students use a variety of audio visual aids and take the teacher's role with confidence and skill.

114. Key skills such as communication are appropriately introduced and assessed and extension work stretches the highest attainers. Students learn very well. They have very positive attitudes to the subject and use their initiative in preparing and presenting their work. They demonstrate great maturity in the way they work cooperatively with teachers and each other and this helps continuity in movement from GCSE to AS and then A-Level working.

115. The subject is well led and managed. In recent years a more appropriate syllabus has been introduced and subject guidance and methodology of the department is carefully monitored, targets are set and the workload is fairly distributed. Since the last inspection, improvement has been very good with significant improvement in teaching and learning and, consequently, the level of examination success.

116. This is a successful department staffed by enthusiastic and expert teachers, with the capacity to continue the success in training geographers not just teaching geography.

History

117. Overall, the quality of provision in history is **excellent**.

Strengths

- There is high quality teaching by subject specialists.
- Examination results are consistently in the top five per cent of all schools.
- Relationships between staff and students are excellent.
- There are effective systems for assessing the students' achievements and setting examination targets.

Areas for improvement

- In a few lessons, the teacher takes too much control.

118. An increasing number of sixth form students is choosing to take AS and A-level history, and the standard of their work is consistently well above average. All history students have a past record of high achievement in the subject through their GCSE examinations. In the A-Level examinations over the last three years, the students achieve well above average A to B grades in both examinations. Higher achieving students study for a certificated Extension Award examination, and of the five students entered for this in 2002, three gained distinctions and two gained merits.

119. The students display a positive interest in history, which is partly due to the infectious enthusiasm of committed teachers. For example, the people's increasing dissatisfaction with the Tsar and the situation in Russia between 1905-1917 are very well examined by Year 12 students, who role-play as the social groups of the time, presenting their grievances in well-considered and prepared arguments. By Year 13, they have a good range of knowledge, and use primary and secondary sources well to develop their individual themes on, for example, the social and economic history of Britain in the 17th and 18th Centuries. Relationships and the standard of behaviour are very good, and students are happy to discuss their work with visitors.

120. The quality of teaching and learning is very good, and this is reflected in the good gains made by students in their understanding of historical events. Teachers have a very good knowledge of their subject, which is evident in their skilled and challenging questions and debates. Lessons are well planned and teachers make good use of available resources, such as primary sources, speeches and letters, together with works of art from the era being studied. Students with additional learning needs or who are gifted and talented are well catered for by grouping arrangements and the provision of extension work. Teachers set high standards and there are good opportunities for debate through their skilled question and answer techniques. However, sometimes lessons are directed too much by the teacher. Nevertheless, the quality of the students' work is high, and they complete essays and theories as homework. Students make efficient use of the internet for research. The quality of marking is very good, with positive and challenging comments encouraging students to expand their ideas or consider and compare differing viewpoints.

121. History gives good support to the students' spiritual, social and moral awareness. For example, they consider the plight of slaves in 19th Century America, and they examine the life and work of Martin Luther King. All students have the annual opportunity to visit the battlefields in and around Ypres in northern Belgium, which allows them to reflect on the sacrifices made by all combatants.

122. History is very well managed by a committed and experienced specialist. Since the previous inspection staffing levels have improved and the department now also offers politics

to sixth form students as an extension of history. The quality of teaching and learning is well monitored and this information is used extremely well to direct the setting of examination targets from Year 9 onwards. The department has maintained the good standards reported by the previous inspection, and continues to increase its examination successes.

Religious Studies

123. Overall, the quality of provision in religious studies is **excellent**

Strengths

- Very good teaching
- Well above average standards of attainment in public examinations
- Very good staffing
- Very good progress since the last inspection.

Areas for improvement

- Attract more students to study religious education at AS and A2.

124. The number of students who have been entered for the AS/A2 over the last two years is small. Nevertheless, in comparison to similar schools, attainment is well above average. In 2001, thirteen students took religious studies at AS level. Ten gained A grades and three B grades. Nine of the students went on to take A-Level. Five gained A grades, 2 gained B grades and 2 C grades. The results are a little down in 2002, although half the students gained grades at A or B.

125. The standards of work seen during the inspection, in the lessons and in students' folders is similarly well above average. Students discuss with fluency and confidence many issues surrounding the central concepts of John's Gospel. This knowledge and understanding includes the meaning and purpose of the 'signs' and the purpose John might have had in writing the Prologue. The work in the students' folders indicates their ability to understand and process the content of the more philosophical side of the course. This work includes the familiar arguments for the existence of God. The students' skills are strong, particularly their ability to research and to assess and respond to many of the scholarly viewpoints on the areas under investigation.

126. The behaviour and attitudes of the students are very good. They are well behaved and they concentrate on the work in hand. Sometimes sustained concentration is lost and one or two of them engage in chatting. They quickly return to their work however so learning is not significantly affected.

127. Overall teaching and learning are very good. Lessons are well prepared and the teachers are knowledgeable in the subject matter. Occasionally the pace could be faster and the learning more strongly consolidated at the end of the lesson but otherwise expectations are high. In this respect, significant demands are made on the students both in the lessons and in their homework projects. The students respond well to this and so their learning is very strong. In particular they are encouraged to think for themselves and to evaluate ideas from more than one point of view. Homework is set and information technology is used in their work. Differentiated work in the form of texts of varying complexity, enable the different abilities in the classes to achieve the best they can. Overall the achievement of the students is excellent.

128. The leadership and management of the department are excellent. The documentation of the department is very well developed and includes policies on citizenship, equal opportunities, gifted and talented, assessment, recording and reporting, and special

educational needs. The staffing is excellent as they are all specialists in their field. The accommodation and resources are very good. Progress since the last inspection has been very good as attainment has gone up very significantly in the A-Level results.

Psychology

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

Strengths

- Attainment is well above average at A-level and at AS level – the trend over the last few years is upwards.
- Teaching is very good overall – the teachers' expectations are very high and they use an excellent range of teaching methods.
- The students have a very positive attitude towards psychology – they work productively and at a good pace.

Areas for improvement

- Use of ICT is not as well established as it should be.
- Occasionally, the teachers could do more to ensure that students take an active part in all parts of the lesson.
- Opportunities for the teachers to work together and support one another in terms of classroom practice are limited.

130. Psychology is a popular subject, but it was not inspected during the last inspection, so no comparison can be made with the previous findings. Overall, A-level results are very good. This year, 40 per cent gained A grades and 80 per cent gained A*-C grades. Comparing actual grades gained with grades predicted by GCSE scores shows that 60 per cent students did better than expected. This evidence supports the finding of the inspection that the psychology department is doing well at extending individuals' learning. A-level results have improved steadily over the last few years.

131. Results on the newer AS level course are broadly similar. Some 23 per cent of students gained A grades and 84 per cent gained A*-C grades. Comparison with predicted grades suggest that learning for this new examination is still bedding in, with 54 per cent of students gaining higher predicted grades. There is no apparent difference between the attainment of boys and girls.

132. Year 13 students' work demonstrates good understanding of developmental psychology and there is very strong analysis of aspects of social psychology. Students know about aggression, anti-social behaviour, media influence, prejudice and attribution theory. In lessons, they demonstrate very good understanding of, and notable compassion towards, Kohlberg's moral dilemma. They discuss with confidence how children move gradually from heteronomous to autonomous morality. Year 12 students made confident presentations about different aspects of psychology like behaviourism, depression and psychoanalysis. They discuss the strengths and weaknesses of different experimental set-ups, including in terms of ecological validity. Students in both years present written work very neatly, often with excellent use of highlighting and special formatting to make important sections stand out. The best files include short notes that students have written to themselves sometime after they completed the original work, outlining new ideas or increased understanding.

133. Teaching is very good overall. Although the teachers have quite different styles, both have excellent relationships with the students. Both expect the highest standards of learning and of behaviour. Aims of lessons are almost always achieved and work progresses at a fast pace. Students respond well, working productively and demonstrating interest in and

commitment to the lessons. Teachers' subject knowledge is strong. They demonstrate a real enthusiasm for psychology that rubs off on the students. A very wide range of teaching methods is used in lessons, for example presentations led by students, video, dictation, class discussion, worksheets, research and group work. Occasionally, teachers could do more to ensure that all students are actively following the lesson by asking questions of all, rather than just taking the answers offered by more confident students.

134. Leadership of the subject is very good, offering suitable support to less experienced staff. Resources available for psychology are satisfactory, with a good range of textbooks and videos, some specialist texts and a small range of periodicals available in the library. However ICT resources are limited. The psychology classroom is adequate, but feels cramped by the number of tables required for the size of groups. The window blinds are shabby and do not keep out the sun in a number of places, which distracts teachers and students. The two teachers working within the department have only limited opportunity to observe one another. This limits the amount of sharing of good ideas and teaching practices that can occur.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

135. English language and literature are taught at AS and A-Level; the focus of the inspection was literature. Lessons in English language were sampled, the teaching was very good and students are making good progress. French and German are studied to AS and A-Level in the sixth form and both languages were inspected. Languages are becoming increasingly popular in the school, which has recently become a language college. Spanish is offered as a one year accelerated course to GCSE level. Teaching is very good.

English

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

Strengths

- Students achieve very high examination results
- Attainment in work seen is consistently very high
- Very good teaching and learning enable students to achieve very well
- Students have excellent attitudes towards their work.

Areas for improvement

- Teachers do not always try to draw less forthcoming students into class discussion
- In a few lessons teachers do not focus clearly on objectives for learning

137. Results in the 2002 English literature A-level GCE examinations were very high. Close to three-quarters of those entered achieved either A or B grades, which is almost twice the national average for 2001. Results have been consistently very high in recent years. Set against their levels of attainment on entry to the sixth form students achieve very well in English literature by the end of Year 13. Value added data, which measures the progress that they make over time, indicates that most students achieve examination results that are at, or in many cases above what they were expected to attain. Students achieve very well to maintain high levels of attainment.

138. The inspection found that standards of work are consistently very high. Most students actively participate in class discussion. They develop their arguments clearly and confidently and show very good grasp of the texts. Having read U A Fanthorpe's poem *Rising Damp*, Year 13 students were able to draw parallels with other poems, build hypotheses and modify their ideas as the discussion developed. A few students are less inclined to join debates and

so do not develop this aspect of their work so well. Written work is equally good. Students analyse poetic texts perceptively, as seen in the very good essays on Wordsworth and Yeats. They write enthusiastically about prose texts such as Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*. Essays on Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* show very good understanding of underlying dramatic themes.

139. Students have excellent attitudes towards their work. They are enthusiastic about the texts that they study and read widely to improve their background knowledge. They are resourceful when working together in groups and show themselves to be imaginative and determined. They respond very well to challenge and enjoy the brisk pace of lessons.

140. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers have excellent knowledge of their subject. In a lesson on F Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, the teacher was able to inject a wealth of background detail to make the lesson stimulating. As a result, students enjoyed learning. Just occasionally teachers lose sight of learning objectives and students become less secure in their work. Teachers rightly have very high expectations of students. They encourage them to take responsibility and become fully involved in lessons. Relationships between teachers and students are very good so that learning thrives in a supportive atmosphere.

141. The head of department gives a very good lead to sixth form teaching. Examination work is carefully planned and specifications reviewed to ensure that students have the best possible chance of success. There has been good improvement in learning since the previous inspection.

French

142. Overall, the quality of provision in French is **excellent**

Strengths

- Teacher knowledge and expertise, with lessons taught in French throughout.
- The extensive range of teaching approaches.
- Examination results, which are high and improving.

Areas for improvement

- To arrange work experience opportunities in France

143. All students at A-Level achieve a pass grade. Results show a rising trend in the percentage of A and B grades. The 2001 results were well above average, with 80 per cent achieving the top grades. The 2002 results show a similar pattern

144. The inspection found that attainment is high and students make very good progress. In a Year 13 class, students were able to discuss politics in depth and compare politics in France and England, taking into account views of politicians, policies, parties and outcomes. They also had insight into politics in countries beyond Europe. Individual presentations were evidence of independent research, including the use of the Internet and web sites. Points were argued, at times quite heatedly. Students spoke and discussed issues with confidence and fluency, using specialist vocabulary. Everyone was involved and showed a maturity beyond their years. Ad hoc questions from peers and the teacher extended the ideas even further. Students are secure in their understanding of complex texts and know how to pick out salient points required to gain high marks. Written work is of a very high quality, showing use of extensive vocabulary, a wide variety of verb tenses and idiomatic language. As with spoken French, students express themselves accurately and work is planned down to the finest

detail, with opinions, reasons, arguments and, above all, interest. Students are able to write for a variety of audiences.

145. For Year 12 students, the transition from GCSE to the demands of the AS course has passed smoothly. This is a credit to the teaching in the sixth and lower down the school. In a lesson on the topic *loisirs*, students discussed leisure activities in depth, using sophisticated language. They spoke like native French speakers, with fluency and intonation. There was obvious enjoyment on the part of both students and the teacher, who drove the learning forward at breathtaking pace. In another lesson, the students had questioned other students about eating habits and researched foods from a variety of regions. They made good use of materials from the Internet and written sources. Towards the end of the lesson, work comparing data proved to be most interesting, as a result of the teaching, very good understanding on the part of the students and their good numeracy skills. In both year groups, student files were well ordered.

146. Students are fully aware of the course requirements and marking criteria. Grammar is taught in context, with many types of exercise to consolidate their skills. A particular strength was a set of worksheets used for homework, which provided questions at three levels, so that everyone could work at their own level. Not only that, the teacher in one lesson made it clear that all could attempt and indeed were expected to attempt the highest level, which required reflection. The very high expectations result in high quality work and the teachers are always on hand to advise if needed. There is regular testing, which ensures that new vocabulary and verbs are learned and adds to the element of accuracy required for high grades. There were examples of drafting and re-drafting of work. It was evident how topics had been introduced and taught step by step. Homework is regularly set and marked, providing diagnostic and encouraging comments, to enable improvements to be made and targets set. Students are very enthusiastic about their studies, and in lessons there is a thirst for learning, made evident from the work ethos and the type of questions the students ask.

147. Teaching is excellent. The strengths of the teaching lie in the teachers' own linguistic skills, their subject knowledge and the fact that French is spoken throughout lessons. This gives students a role model for improving fluency and intonation and gives them confidence in their teachers. There is constant challenge of *évaluez, justifiez*. Students rise to the challenges and expand their answers almost by second nature. Homework is challenging. This encourages independent learning. It provides the opportunity to consolidate, to use initiative and to improve any areas of weakness. A wide variety of methodology is used. This has the advantages of motivating, involving every student, providing opportunities for the students to act as mature adults, for example, when they do presentations and interviews. The teachers are well qualified. They make time for all their students and organise exchange visits to France.

148. Leadership and management are excellent. There is a driving force leading this highly successful department. There is a clear development plan. Subject guidance is regularly updated and courses are suited to the abilities of the students. A different examination board is now being used, with students' interest in mind. Resources are carefully chosen and many authentic materials are available. Teaching is regularly monitored, with formal feedback and targets for improvement.

149. Since the last inspection, results have improved year by year. They are now well above average, with a high proportion of A and B grades. Lessons now provide challenging tasks and this is raising attainment.

German

150. Overall, the quality of provision in German is **good**

Strengths

- Teacher subject knowledge and expertise.
- The use of German by the teachers in lessons.
- Work experience in Germany.

Areas for improvement

- Develop methods to increase student confidence in Year 13, in listening and speaking skills.
- To extend the variety of teaching approaches.

151. At A-Level attainment is broadly average and results are improving. All students are achieving a pass grade. In 2001, 50 per cent of students gained grades A and B. Numbers are too low to make comparison with national data valid. Retention rates from AS level in 2001, are very good, which is evidence of the popularity of the course.

152. From scrutiny of work and lesson observations, attainment in German has improved and is above average. However the two year groups were in complete contrast. The Year 13 students, despite having successfully completed the AS course in Year 12, showed little real confidence. They struggled with specialist vocabulary on the topics of *Abortion* and *The Press*. They showed little imagination or individuality, tending to rely on the teachers for ideas. Students were able to read the texts with understanding and fluency but, when asked questions, had difficulty in manipulating the language at the level of difficulty required for the A-Level examination. Responses were minimal and often a repeat of vocabulary from the question, with very little expansion of ideas. In the listening task, students had difficulty in understanding and picking out the relevant details for the answers. Coursework is an important feature of this year's course and there is emphasis on written accuracy, essential amongst other things to gain the higher grades.

153. By contrast, the Year 12 students were able to respond confidently and maturely. They were quite argumentative at times and keen to air their views on the topic of *Holidays without parents*. In another lesson, paintings from different periods served as stimuli for discussion about styles, colours and themes, and students spoke about their own preferences, giving reasons for their opinions.

154. In both years, students take pride in their files, maintaining them carefully. There are notes on grammar, with many types of exercise to consolidate and practise; for example, the use of conjunctions and the effect these have on word order, verb conjugation and adjectival endings. The topic sections contain subject specific vocabulary, with many authentic texts for comprehensions and are evidence of the way teaching is sequenced to build up a descriptive written account, an interview or a presentation. Homework is regularly set and marked, so that students are aware of their strengths and weaknesses and know what steps to take to improve. The students are positive about their studies and the fact that most of last year's Year 12 is continuing their studies is proof of this. The students who had the opportunity to sample work experience in Germany were obviously enthused and are eager to talk about their experiences.

155. Teaching and learning are good overall. In the four lessons seen, teaching was never less than satisfactory and some good and very good teaching was seen. The best lessons provided challenges and good questions resulted in students giving extended answers. Resources in the lesson on paintings made the students think about what they saw and read, with the result that they had enough information to build up a discussion and talk about their own feelings. Teaching approaches are somewhat limited, particularly in Year 13. At times,

the pace was slow and too much time spent on translating. In a listening task, the students seemed lost and were unsure about the focus of the listening activity, so that the teacher was giving the answers rather than the students. Lessons are taught in German much of the time, which gives the students very good role models on which to improve their own fluency.

156. Subject leadership and management are good. The very recently appointed subject leader has successfully prioritised action to ensure high attainment. Subject guidance has been updated and new resources purchased to support teaching. There has been a change in examination board in the best interest of the students. There has been some monitoring of lessons, but an area for development is to look at the effectiveness of different approaches to teaching and learning, so that teaching drives the learning and students become less dependent on the teachers.

157. Since the last inspection, good improvements have been made. A-Level results are improving and students respond well to the challenges they are offered.